

Chong Pek Lin, 2021

***Kenyah Multipart Dance-Songs Applied to Music Education*** (pg 149-174)

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**Abstract**

With the growing stature of world music pedagogy over the past few decades, teachers are eager to introduce their students to many different music cultures, but they are constrained by time as they also need to build music literacy and performance skills.

The Kenyah are one of the minority indigenous communities of the East Malaysian state of Sarawak, situated on the island of Borneo. This paper discusses the benefits of *belian dado'* (Kenyah dance-songs) as teaching materials in the classroom. While illustrating the characteristics of an Asian folk tradition, they can easily be used to demonstrate standard musical concepts as they are compatible with Western musical syntax.

Differing distinctly from the composed songs ubiquitous in Malaysian schools, *belian dado'* are overwhelmingly pentatonic, feature multipart choral singing and are accompanied by simple dance movements. Instruments such as the *jatung utang*, played in ensemble, are also effective at developing an intuitive understanding of harmony. Evolving over the past seventy years in remote villages, these traditions face extinction due to rural-urban migration and the impending mass displacement of the population with the construction of hydroelectric dams.

Consideration of Kenyah *musicking* practices may suggest new approaches to the inculcation of performance skills. For instance, singing in harmony is a skill Kenyah children acquire early in life through community-wide participation in a multipart choral tradition, whereas in most school programmes chordal harmony is only introduced at advanced stages.

Kenyah multipart traditions are excellent materials to include in school music programmes, especially in Malaysia, as the indigenous cultures of East Malaysia are underrepresented in the present curriculum. Research in urban schools indicates that, despite being unfamiliar with the language and context, children of various ethnic backgrounds appreciate the Kenyah melodies as well as the delineated meanings of the songs.

Key words: Borneo, Sarawak, Kenyah, multipart choral singing, music education, Malaysia.

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