

## ***Traditions in Contemporary Works: An Innovation in the Music Scene***

How many of you think that traditional or folk songs are cool? How many of you have ever listened to the folk songs from Java? Sumatra? Kalimantan?

It is a fact that Indonesia has a myriad folk songs and musical ensemble, but they are not that popular among the youth these days. The modern generation prefers more sophisticated genres of music, such as, pop, rock, or anything 'hip' and doesn't sound 'traditional'. Not many of them are willing to listen, let alone learn how to play the traditional ensemble. Even children don't get much exposure to national folk songs for more and more mothers are sending them to international preschool and kindergarten.

A few years back, there were a few local musicians who were willing to ignore the demands of trend. In a bid to revive and spread the love of traditional music which is essentially our identity as a nation, they thought up a quite innovative solution. They created songs which incorporate traditional instruments with a much more modern genre, usually jazz, to sort of rekindle the love affair of Indonesians with their roots.

Here are two of the most prominent groups which experimented with the musical styles and succeeded in capturing the public's interest.

### **Guruh Gipsy**

Gipsy is a band made up of Chrisye, Keenan Nasution, Odink Nasution, and Adjie Bandi. The band formed a collaboration with Guruh Soekarnoputra (the son of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno), who was extremely eager to promote Indonesian cultural heritage, and named the newly formed group Guruh Gipsy.

Back in the 1970s, Guruh had this seemingly crazy idea of marrying Balinese gamelan with Western music. Crazy, it was, but brilliant because the effort really paid off. In 1973, the band Guruh Gipsy was invited to play in New York.

The songs of Guruh Gipsy are mostly ethnic-contemporary. The strange yet magical

combination between European classics and Indonesian traditional ensemble is really prominent in one of their songs titled “Chopin Larung”; with the sound of sea waves breaking on the shore, followed by the rhythm of Balinese unique tone, and a stunning solo piano playing in the middle of the song.

The song manages to evoke images of Indonesian beauty of nature and peaceful village. It's truly a wonderful piece of composition. Guruh Gipsy proved that traditional music from a particular ethnicity can attract the general public with a little innovative touch.

Guruh Soekarnoputra has also contributed to most of Chrisye's songs. That explains the lyrics of some of his songs, which are heavily peppered with cultural references. One example is “Zamrud Khatulistiwa” which relays the bountiful natural resources and the richness of cultural varieties across our land. Another one is “Kala Cinta Menggoda”, a pop love song with traditional Javanese touch. Near the end of the song, Waljinah, a famous Javanese (*sinden*) singer, sings several lines in Javanese language.

Today, Guruh Gipsy's album can be considered a rare object. Their album sales in the past might not have been successful, but in terms of artistic styles, their music are said to have inspired the generation after theirs since then.

### **Karimata**

Active from the late 1980s to early 1990s, Karimata was one of Indonesian jazz pioneer. The name is taken from the island in Kalimantan west coast, Indonesia. By its name, we can guess that this jazz-fusion band has traditional influences.

The famous conductor, Erwin Gutawa was the bassist for Karimata. In their fifth album “Jézz”, which also happened to be their last one, Karimata collaborated with several international jazz musicians. They are Lee Ritenour (American jazz guitarist), Bob James (American jazz pianist), Phill Perry (American singer and songwriter), Don Grusin (American songwriter and keyboardist), and Ernie Watts (American saxophone player and jazz musician).

