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Performance Practice, Musical Structure, and Social Function of Gonrang Sidua-dua in Simalungun Society

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the presentation form, musical structure, and social function of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* in Simalungun society. A qualitative ethnomusicological study with a phenomenological approach was conducted in Simalungun Regency, including Raya, Pematang Siantar, Nagori Dolok, and Tumbukan Galih. Data were collected through field observation, interviews with three key cultural practitioners and musicians, and documentation of musical practices. The analysis focuses on the *Sayur Matua* repertoire and examines the interaction among *Sarunei Bolon*, *Gonrang* Indung, *Gonrang Tikkah*, *Ogung*, and *Mongmongan*. The findings indicate that the musical structure is organized through inter-instrumental coordination rather than isolated instrumental roles. In the *Sayur Matua* repertoire, *Sarunei Bolon* carries the main melodic line, *Gonrang* Indung provides a rhythmic foundation, while *Gonrang Tikkah* responds to the melodic movement of *Sarunei Bolon* through varying rhythmic patterns, including question-and-answer interactions. The study also finds that the social function of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* has weakened as its performance has become less frequent, regular ensemble practice has declined, and intergenerational transmission within the community has become limited. Interviews further indicate that younger generations have limited involvement in learning and performing *Gonrang*, while its practice is increasingly maintained in educational contexts. These findings show that changes in performance practice, musical interaction, and social participation are interconnected. The implications for cultural sustainability therefore concern the continuity of musical practice, intergenerational transmission, and the integration of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* into contemporary social contexts, rather than the preservation of musical form alone.

Keywords: *Gonrang Sidua-dua*, Presentation Form, Musical Structure, Social Function, Simalungun

1. Introduction

Gonrang Sidua-dua is a traditional musical ensemble of the Simalungun people in North Sumatra and one of the two principal forms of the *Gonrang* ensemble, alongside *Gonrang Sipitu-pitu* or *Gonrang* Bolon. The relationship between these two forms should be understood cautiously because available historical accounts do not present a single, uncontested trajectory of development. Harvina (2016), drawing on the account of Simalungun cultural figure Taralamsyah Saragih, reports that *Gonrang* Dagang, another designation for *Gonrang Sidua-dua*, was known in the earlier development of Simalungun musical culture, while *Gonrang* Bolon developed subsequently. This account differs from a linear interpretation in which *Gonrang Sidua-dua* is simply derived from *Gonrang Sipitu-pitu*. Field evidence from the present study, particularly interviews with Simalungun cultural practitioners, instead indicates that the two ensembles are closely related in musical organization while differing in their practical use, scale, and performance context. One informant, Putra Jaya

Damanik, associated the use of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* with the practical needs of communities, including geographical conditions and the ease of transporting the ensemble compared with the larger and more complex *Gonrang Sipitu-pitu*. Thus, in this study, the relationship between the two ensembles is treated as a process of musical and social adaptation rather than as an established linear historical succession.

This historical relationship is important for understanding the position of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* within Simalungun musical practice. *Gonrang Sidua-dua* consists of two *Gonrang* accompanied by *Sarunei Bolon*, *Ogung*, and *Mongmongan*, and its organization allows it to be used in a range of communal and non-ritual contexts. The historical and ethnographic accounts therefore suggest that changes in ensemble organization cannot be separated from changes in the social contexts in which the music is practiced. Rather than viewing the reduction in the number of *Gonrang* only as a technical simplification, this study considers it as part of a broader process through which musical practice responds to social and practical conditions.

The analysis is informed by Alan P. Merriam's conception of music as a cultural system involving sound, behavior, and concept (Merriam, 1964). In this study, these three dimensions are operationalized through specific empirical materials. The **sound** dimension refers to the observable and analyzable organization of musical materials, including rhythmic patterns, melodic phrases, instrumental roles, repetition, and inter-instrumental coordination. These data are examined primarily through observation, audio-visual documentation, and transcription of the *Sayur Matua* repertoire. The **behavior** dimension refers to the ways musicians perform, interact, participate, rehearse, and organize musical activity within particular social contexts. This dimension is examined through observations of ensemble performance, spatial arrangement, interaction among performers, frequency of performance, and patterns of participation and transmission. The **concept** dimension refers to the meanings, values, understandings, and cultural expectations that musicians and community members attach to *Gonrang Sidua-dua*, including ideas about when, where, why, and for whom the music should be performed. These data are derived primarily from semi-structured interviews with cultural practitioners and musicians.

Using these three analytical dimensions, the study connects musical structure with musical behavior and cultural interpretation. For example, the rhythmic interaction between *Sarunei Bolon* and the *Gonrang* is analyzed as sound, the coordination and participation of the musicians as behavior, and the meanings attached to the ensemble's social and cultural functions as concept. This framework allows the presentation form, musical structure, and social function of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* to be examined as interconnected dimensions rather than as separate descriptive categories.

This analytical perspective is particularly relevant to the contemporary condition of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. Field observations and interviews indicate a decline in the frequency of performance, a reduction in regular ensemble practice, and weakening intergenerational transmission. Cultural practitioners also reported that younger generations have become less involved in learning and performing *Gonrang Sidua-dua*, while opportunities for community-based practice have become more limited. These changes raise questions about how the ensemble's musical organization is maintained, how its performance behavior is changing, and how its cultural meaning and social function are being reinterpreted in contemporary Simalungun society.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the presentation form, musical structure, and social function of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* by examining the interrelationship between sound, behavior, and concept. By combining musical analysis with ethnographic evidence concerning performance practice and cultural understanding, the study seeks to explain how changes in musical organization are connected to broader transformations in the social life of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with an ethnomusicological and phenomenological approach to examine the presentation form, musical structure, and social function of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* in Simalungun society. Fieldwork was conducted from October 2025 to January 2026. The research began with preparation and literature review in October 2025, followed by preliminary field observation in November 2025. The main stage of data collection was conducted in December 2025 through field observation, interviews, and audio-visual documentation. Data analysis and interpretation were conducted in January 2026. This sequence allowed data collection and interpretation to develop in relation to the conditions encountered in the field.

The research was conducted in several locations in Simalungun, including Raya, Pematang Siantar, Nagori Dolok, and Tumbukan Galih. These locations were selected because they represent different social contexts in which *Gonrang Sidua-dua* has been practiced and encountered. Field observations focused on the context of performance, spatial arrangement, instrumental configuration, interaction among musicians, patterns of participation, and the relationship between musical practice and social activities.

The study involved three principal informants selected purposively based on their direct knowledge and experience with *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. The first informant was Fredy Purba, approximately 49 years old, a teacher, cultural practitioner, and Simalungun musician who served as a principal informant concerning *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. The second was Putra Jaya Damanik, approximately 62 years old, a Simalungun artist and cultural practitioner with experience as a *Sarunei Bolon* player in the *Gonrang* ensemble. The third was Juli Sipayung, 25 years old, a teacher, artist, and experienced *Sarunei Bolon* player from Raya, Simalungun. Their different backgrounds provided complementary perspectives on musical practice, instrumental interaction, performance contexts, social functions, cultural meanings, and intergenerational transmission. Interviews were conducted as semi-structured, two-way conversations. The questions addressed the position of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* in Simalungun society, performance contexts, instrumental roles, changes in musical practice, social functions, participation, transmission, and perceptions of cultural continuity. The flexible structure allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions, clarify statements, and relate interview responses to observations made during fieldwork. Interviews were used not only to obtain information but also to clarify the meanings and interpretations attached by cultural practitioners to observed musical practices.

Field observations were conducted in several performance and musical activity contexts, including customary events, cultural celebrations, communal activities, and group rehearsals. Observation focused on the form of presentation, number and roles of performers, spatial organization, interaction among musicians, musical coordination, participation of younger generations, and patterns of transmission. The observations were conducted naturalistically, allowing the researcher to examine *Gonrang Sidua-dua* within the social situations in which it actually occurred rather than through an experimentally controlled setting.

Data collection involved four complementary forms of empirical material: field observations, interviews, audio-visual documentation, and musical documentation. Field observations produced records concerning performance contexts, musician participation, social interaction, and musical behavior. Interview data provided informants' explanations, experiences, interpretations, and evaluations of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. Audio-visual documentation captured performances, instrumental configurations, musical interactions, and social contexts. The documentation enabled the researcher to return to the observed musical and social practices during analysis and to compare them with information obtained through interviews.

The musical data were organized around the documented *Gonrang Sidua-dua* repertoire, particularly the *Sayur Matua* repertoire. Musical analysis examined the interaction among *Sarunei Bolon*, *Gonrang* Indung, *Gonrang Tikkah*, *Ogung*, and *Mongmongan*. The documented materials included musical transcriptions of the *Sayur Matua* repertoire, sections of *Sarunei Bolon*, *Ogung* and *Mongmongan* patterns, and several *Gonrang Tikkah* patterns. These materials provided the basis for examining rhythmic organization, melodic movement, instrumental roles, repetition, and inter-instrumental coordination.

Data analysis was conducted through several interconnected stages: data organization, repeated reading and viewing, initial coding, comparison across data sources, thematic interpretation, and theoretical integration. First, field notes, interview materials, audio-visual documentation, and musical transcriptions were organized according to research location, informant, performance context, and type of musical material. The researcher then repeatedly reviewed the materials to identify recurring statements, observed practices, musical patterns, and contextual information relevant to the research questions.

Second, the data were coded according to empirically emerging themes rather than being immediately assigned to Merriam's three dimensions. Initial codes included instrumental interaction, rhythmic coordination, performance context, participation, rehearsal, transmission, social function, cultural value, changes in musical practice, and perceptions of continuity. These codes were compared across interviews, observations, audio-visual materials, and musical transcriptions to identify patterns and differences.

Third, the empirically derived themes were interpreted through Merriam's concept–behavior–sound framework. The **sound** dimension was derived from observable musical materials, including rhythmic patterns, melodic organization, instrumental roles, repetition, and coordination among instruments. The **behavior** dimension was derived from observed and reported practices, including performance, rehearsal, participation, interaction among musicians, and transmission of musical knowledge. The **concept** dimension was derived from informants' explanations concerning the meanings, values, appropriate contexts, and social functions associated with *Gonrang Sidua-dua*.

This procedure ensured that Merriam's framework functioned as an analytical framework rather than as a set of predetermined categories imposed on the data. The three dimensions emerged from the empirical patterns identified during the initial coding and were subsequently used to interpret relationships among musical sound, musical behavior, and cultural understanding.

The analysis further examined the relationship among the three dimensions as reciprocal rather than linear. Cultural concepts were examined in relation to musical behavior and sound. For example, informants'

understandings concerning the appropriate social context of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* were compared with observed performance practices and ensemble organization. Behavioral practices were then examined in relation to musical sound, particularly the ways in which interaction and rehearsal among musicians supported the coordinated realization of rhythmic and melodic patterns. Conversely, musical sound and performance practices were examined as processes through which cultural meanings and social relationships could be expressed and reinforced.

For instance, Putra Jaya Damanik described *Sarunei Bolon* as the principal melodic carrier and explained that *Gonrang* responds to the *Sarunei Bolon* through a question-and-answer relationship. He also noted that musicians previously practiced together more regularly, whereas contemporary musicians more often meet when a performance takes place. These accounts were considered together with the observed and documented musical interactions, allowing the analysis to connect musical structure with performance behavior and cultural understanding rather than treating each dimension independently.

Analytical credibility was established through triangulation across data sources and research methods. Source triangulation involved comparing the accounts of the three principal informants with observations of musical practices and audio-visual documentation. Methodological triangulation involved comparing interview data, field observations, audio-visual materials, and musical transcriptions.

For example, statements concerning the weakening of regular ensemble practice were compared with observations concerning musician participation and rehearsal practices. Similarly, explanations concerning instrumental roles were compared with the documented musical interaction and transcription of the *Sayur Matua* repertoire. This comparison allowed the researcher to distinguish individual perceptions from patterns supported by more than one source of evidence.

Where different accounts or observations occurred, they were not automatically reduced to a single interpretation. Instead, differences were retained as part of the analytical process and considered in relation to the informants' backgrounds, performance contexts, and experiences. Through this process, the final interpretation was based on the convergence and divergence of interview, observational, documentary, and musical evidence.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Presentation Form of Gonrang Sidua-dua

Gonrang Sidua-dua is presented as an ensemble that brings together several instruments with different but interconnected functions, namely *Gonrang* Indung and *Gonrang Tikkah* as rhythmic instruments, *Sarunei Bolon* as the melodic instrument, and *Ogung* and *Mongmongan* as structural and accentuating instruments. This presentation form demonstrates that the overall musical texture is not produced by a single instrument independently, but through relationships among the performers. An interview with Putra Jaya Damanik revealed that each instrument has its own role in constructing the musical patterns, while performers are required to be sensitive to the playing of other instruments. According to him, performers must understand when to enter, hold, follow, and respond to the playing of other musicians. Thus, ensemble coherence is established through the ability to listen and adjust one's playing collectively, rather than solely through individual technical mastery.

This relationship can be observed more concretely in the interaction between the *Sarunei Bolon* and the Gonrang. Putra Jaya Damanik explained that the *Sarunei Bolon* serves as the main melodic carrier, while the *Gonrang* patterns follow and respond to the Sarunei's playing, particularly through a question-and-answer relationship. This pattern demonstrates that the melodic role of the *Sarunei Bolon* does not function independently, nor does the rhythmic role of the *Gonrang* merely provide an accompanying background. Rather, the two establish a responsive musical relationship in which *Gonrang* performers listen to the direction of the melody and adjust their rhythmic playing accordingly. The interview data are consistent with the musical documentation of the *Sayur Matua* repertoire, which demonstrates the relationship between the melodic sections of the *Sarunei Bolon* and the rhythmic patterns of the *Gonrang* in forming the ensemble's musical unity.

These findings provide a more concrete basis for understanding the communal musical concept of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. The communal concept does not simply mean that several people perform music together; rather, it is evident in the way musicians construct musicality through listening to one another, understanding the roles of other instruments, and adjusting their playing during performance. Putra Jaya Damanik emphasized that communication among performers is an essential part of the presentation and that weakened interaction among musicians makes the ensemble presentation incomplete. The learning process of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* also takes place through observation, direct practice, and guidance from more experienced musicians. Consequently, musical knowledge involves not only the memorization of playing patterns but also an understanding of

musical sensibility and performance context. These findings indicate that the communal dimension is embedded in the interactional practices and shared musical experiences through which the different parts of the ensemble function as an integrated whole.

Therefore, the statement that no single instrument absolutely dominates the musical flow should be understood in terms of functional interdependence**, rather** than as an absence of differences in instrumental roles. The *Sarunei Bolon* occupies an important position in determining the melodic direction, while the *Gonrang* responds to it and establishes the rhythmic framework that supports the musical flow. *Ogung* and *Mongmongan* provide structural markers and rhythmic accents that contribute to musical organization. Because each instrument performs a distinct function, the overall presentation depends on coordination among these different roles. Thus, the communal character of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* can be observed through the functional relationships among instruments: the importance of one musical function does not eliminate the dependence of the ensemble on the functions performed by the other instruments.

The distinction between historical and contemporary presentation forms can also be observed in changes in patterns of performer participation. According to Fredy Purba, in the past *Gonrang Sidua-dua* occupied a stronger position in the social life of the Simalungun community and was performed in contexts of popular entertainment and non-ritual social activities. Its presentation was relatively flexible and took place in social spaces such as celebrations, community activities, and places where people gathered. In these contexts, ensemble performance formed part of broader social activities that enabled community members to participate directly in an atmosphere of togetherness. Interview data also indicate that earlier presentation practices were supported by collective rehearsal and shared experience among musicians, allowing musical relationships to be established before performances took place.

In contrast, contemporary practice demonstrates changes in the way the ensemble is formed and prepared. Fredy Purba explained that groups performing *Gonrang Sidua-dua* as a complete and continuous ensemble have become increasingly difficult to find. Musicians performing at an event are often recruited from different areas and do not necessarily belong to a permanent ensemble. In many cases, musicians no longer rehearse together regularly and may meet only when a performance is about to take place. This condition reduces opportunities to develop shared musical experience and results in weaker interaction among performers compared with earlier presentation practices.
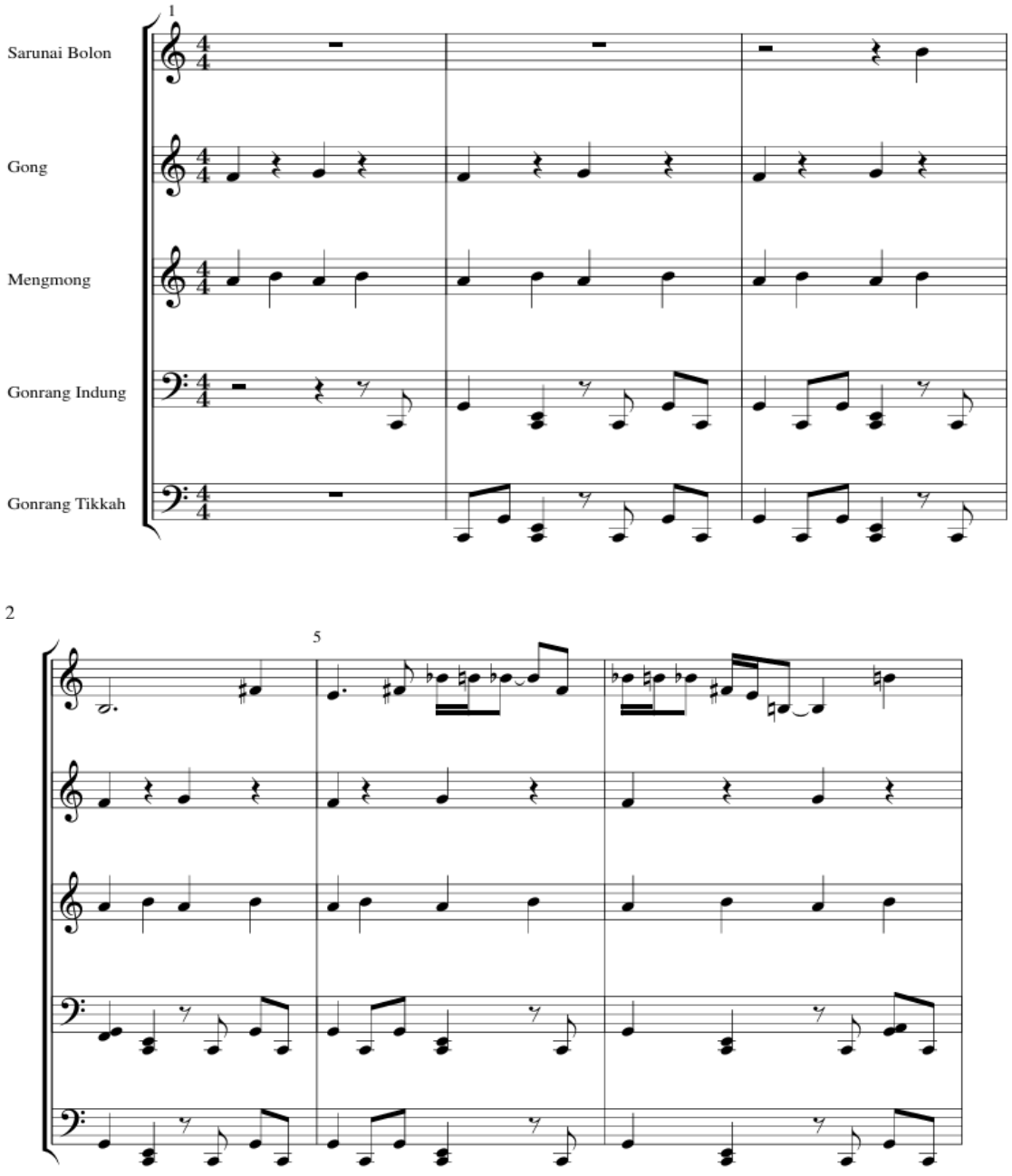
This change is further supported by Putra Jaya Damanik, who stated that musical relationships among performers are currently not as strong as they were in the past. According to him, musicians previously rehearsed together more frequently and therefore developed a mutual understanding of one another's playing, whereas today they more often meet only when they are scheduled to perform. Juli Sipayung similarly indicated that the transformation involves not only the frequency of performance but also the understanding of performance rules, instrumental relationships, and social context. He explained that although *Gonrang Sidua-dua* is more flexible than *Gonrang Sipitu-pitu*, there remains an understanding concerning performer positioning, relationships among instruments, and the manner in which the music should be presented within its social context.
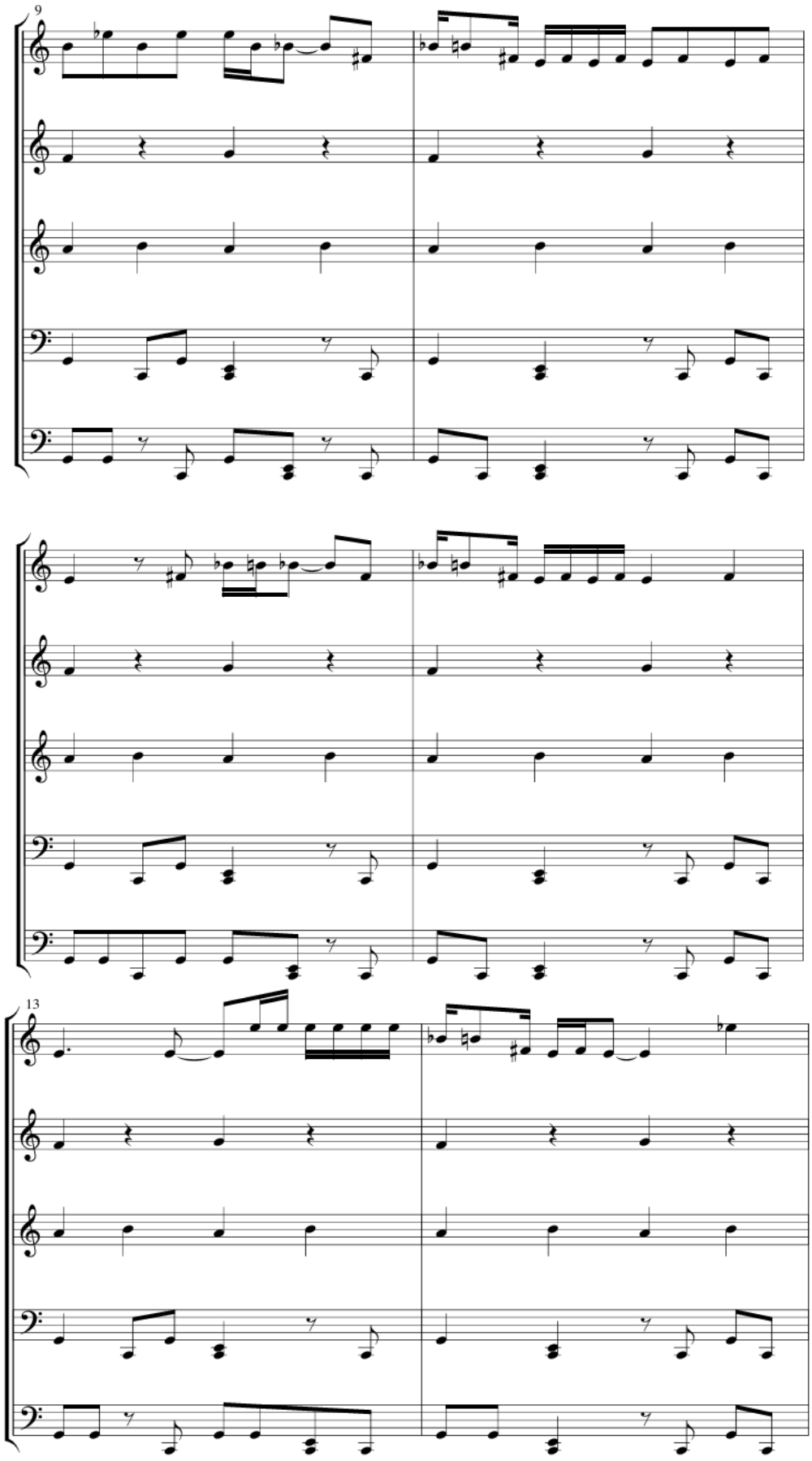
This comparison demonstrates that the transformation of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*'s presentation form is not limited to a decline in performance frequency but also involves changes in how musical relationships are established. In the earlier context, the coherence of the presentation was supported by collective rehearsal, shared experience, and an understanding of the social context of the music. In contemporary practice, limited collective rehearsal and the use of musicians who do not always belong to a permanent ensemble mean that musical interaction increasingly depends on individual performers' ability to adjust during performance. Thus, changes in the presentation form can be identified through changes in patterns of participation, interaction, and ensemble formation, rather than merely through the assertion that *Gonrang Sidua-dua* is "performed less frequently."
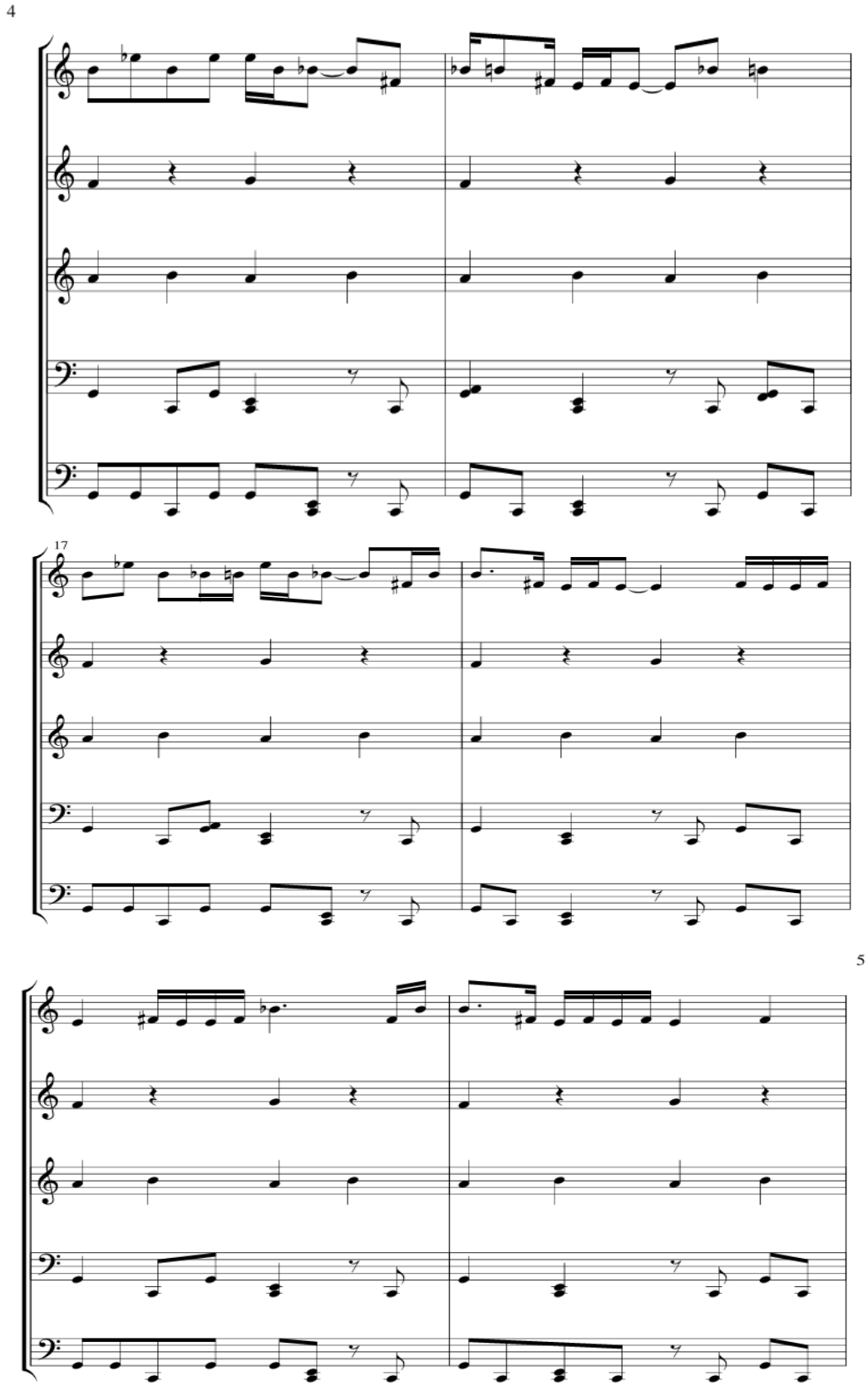
From the perspective of Merriam's framework, these findings demonstrate that the relationship among concept, behavior, and sound is not linear. Concepts concerning how *Gonrang Sidua-dua* should be performed influence musical behavior, including the need to understand the performance context, follow the roles of other instruments, and rehearse collectively. These behaviors are then realized in sound through the responsive relationship between the *Sarunei Bolon* and *Gonrang* and through coordination with the supporting instruments. Conversely, the experience of producing music collectively can also reinforce performers' understanding of instrumental relationships and the meaning of collectivity within the performance. Thus, the presentation form of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* demonstrates a reciprocal relationship among cultural concepts, musical behavior, and sound organization, with ensemble practice serving as the space in which these three dimensions continuously shape one another.
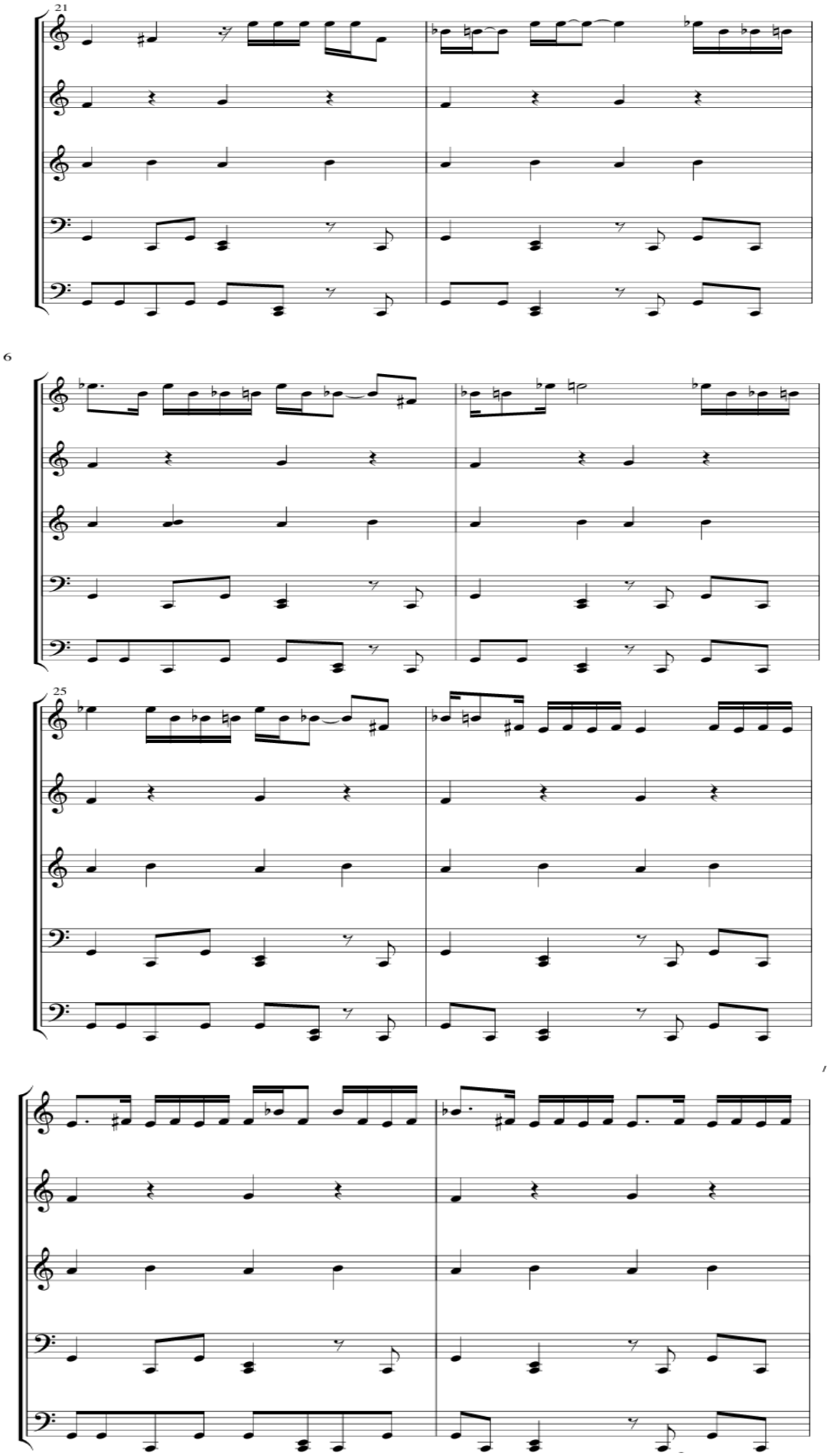
3.2 Musical Structure of Gonrang Sidua-dua

The musical structure of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* is examined through the *Sayur Matua* repertoire, focusing on meter, tempo, rhythmic organization, repetition and variation, melodic phrasing, and the interdependence among instrumental parts. The transcription shows that the repertoire consists of 31 measures organized in a 4/4 meter and performed at approximately 91 beats per minute (BPM). Within this metric framework, the five principal instruments *Sarunei Bolon*, *Gonrang* Indung, *Gonrang Tikkah*, *Ogung*, and Mengmong perform differentiated but coordinated functions. The musical organization is therefore characterized by the coexistence of a relatively stable temporal framework and varying rhythmic and melodic activity across instrumental layers.




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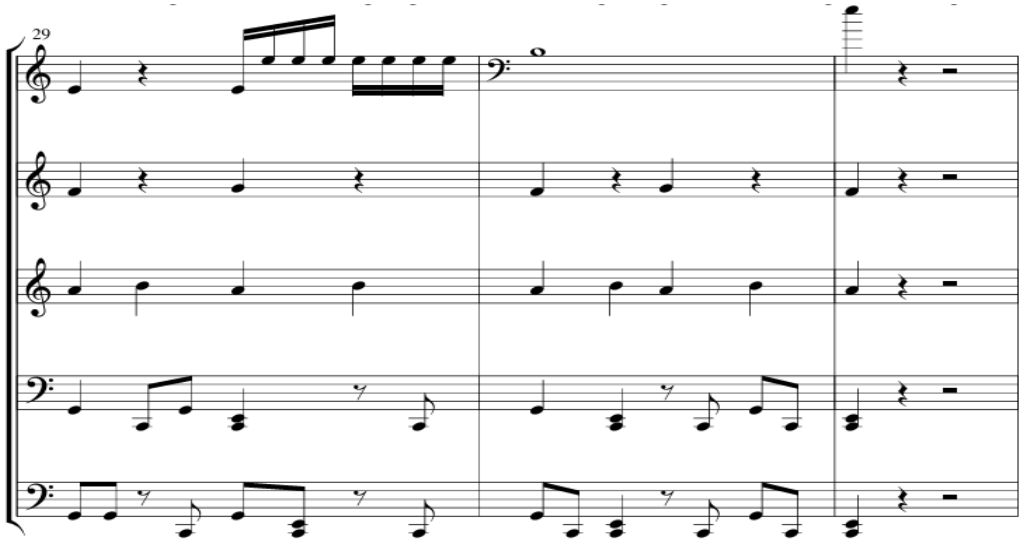


Figure 1. Transcription of the Gonrang Sidua-dua Ensemble in the *Sayur Matua* Repertoire

Figure 1 presents a transcription excerpt from the *Sayur Matua* repertoire and should be read as analytical evidence of how the musical parts are organized temporally and interactively within the *Gonrang Sidua-dua* ensemble. The transcription shows that the ensemble is organized within a regular metric framework, while individual instruments contribute different rhythmic and melodic layers. The repertoire consists of 31 measures and is transcribed in a 4/4 meter, with a performance tempo of approximately 91 beats per minute (BPM). Within this framework, the instruments do not simply repeat identical patterns; rather, they maintain differentiated but coordinated rhythmic functions that enable the ensemble to sustain a continuous musical flow.

The rhythmic organization can first be observed through the relationship between the *Gonrang* Indung and *Gonrang Tikkah*. The *Gonrang* Indung provides a relatively stable and repetitive rhythmic foundation, whereas the *Gonrang Tikkah* contributes a more responsive and varied rhythmic layer. This relationship creates complementary rhythmic activity rather than duplication. In the transcription, the rhythmic density of the *Gonrang Tikkah* is produced through shorter note values and strategically placed rests, allowing its pattern to occupy rhythmic spaces around the more stable foundation of the *Gonrang* Indung. Thus, the interlocking character of the ensemble is produced by the coordination of differentiated rhythmic patterns rather than by the simultaneous repetition of the same figure.

The temporal stability of the ensemble is further demonstrated by the *Ogung* and Mengmong. Their patterns remain relatively constant throughout the repertoire, from the opening measure through measure 31. Mengmong produces a regular pulse corresponding to quarter-note values in the transcription, while *Ogung* provides additional accents at selected metric positions. Although rests are notated in the *Ogung* part, the sustained and resonant character of its sound means that the instrument remains perceptually present beyond the exact point of attack indicated in the notation. The interaction between *Ogung* and Mengmong therefore establishes a continuous temporal framework within which the more variable melodic and rhythmic instruments operate.
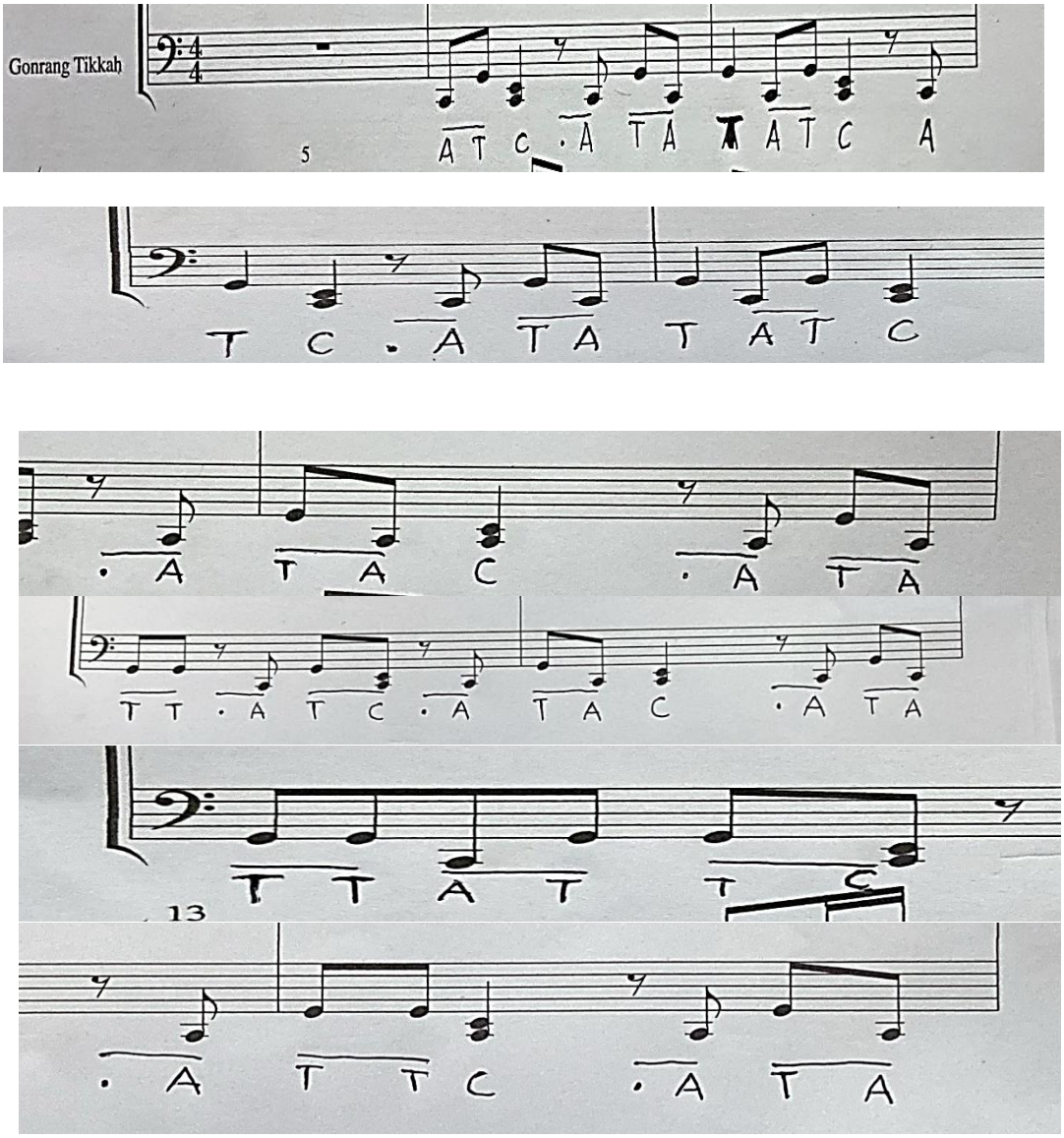
The *Sarunei Bolon* introduces another layer of temporal interaction. Importantly, the melodic instrument does not begin simultaneously with the rhythmic ensemble. The transcription shows a two-measure rest at the beginning of the *Sarunei Bolon* part, while the rhythmic instruments establish the initial temporal orientation of the performance. This opening configuration indicates that the melody enters after the ensemble's pulse has already been established. The entrance of the *Sarunei Bolon* can therefore be understood as structurally dependent on the rhythmic framework rather than functioning as an independent melodic opening.

The transcription also demonstrates that repetition in *Sayur Matua* does not mean exact musical uniformity. The ensemble maintains a stable metric and temporal framework while allowing variation within particular instrumental layers. The *Gonrang* Indung maintains greater rhythmic consistency, whereas the *Gonrang Tikkah* and *Sarunei Bolon* provide greater variation. The melodic line of the *Sarunei Bolon* contains repeated patterns, ornamental gestures, changes of register, and movements that create tension and resolution, while the rhythmic instruments maintain the temporal continuity necessary for these melodic developments. The resulting texture is therefore produced through the simultaneous presence of stability and variation across instrumental layers.

Figure 1 consequently provides evidence for understanding the cyclic character of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* not

simply as repetition from beginning to end, but as a process in which a stable temporal framework supports recurring and varying musical events. The 4/4 metric organization, the recurring rhythmic foundation, the relatively constant *Ogung*–Mengmong patterns, and the differentiated interaction between *Gonrang* Indung, *Gonrang Tikkah*, and *Sarunei Bolon* collectively establish a recurring temporal structure. Within this structure, variation can occur without disrupting the continuity of the ensemble.

The figure therefore demonstrates that inter-instrumental coordination is central to the musical organization of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. Musical coherence does not result from one instrument independently controlling the entire performance. Instead, coherence emerges from the temporal relationship among relatively stable rhythmic patterns, responsive rhythmic figures, melodic phrases, and structural time markers. This relationship also corresponds to the performers' practical understanding of ensemble playing: musicians must recognize when to enter, sustain, follow, and respond to other instrumental parts. The musical structure visible in the transcription can therefore be connected directly to the interactional practices observed in performance, rather than being treated as an abstract formal property of the notation.
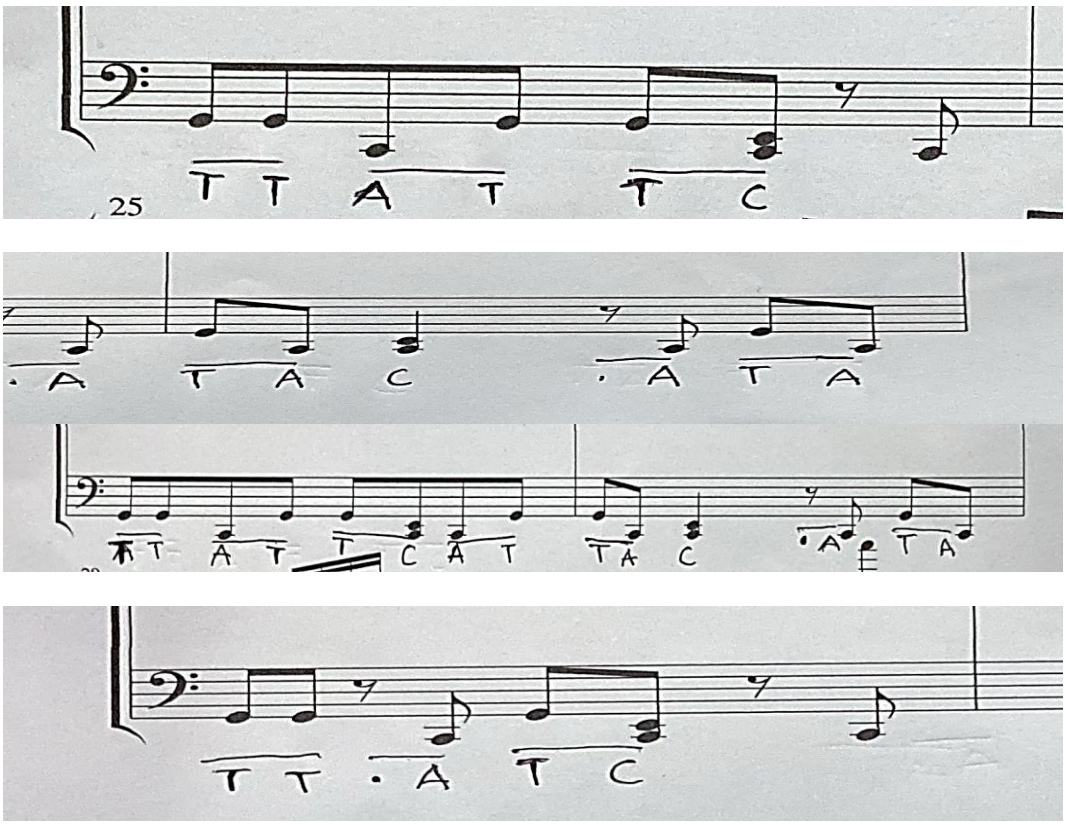




Figure 2. Rhythmic Response of Gonrang Tikkah to the Sarunei Bolon Melodic Phrase

Figure 2 illustrates the rhythmic organization of the *Gonrang Tikkah* and its responsive relationship with the *Sarunei Bolon*. Rather than functioning as a fixed accompaniment, the *Gonrang Tikkah* changes its rhythmic pattern according to the melodic and formal characteristics of the *Sarunei Bolon*. The transcription identifies four principal rhythmic patterns in the *Sayur Matua* repertoire. The first and second patterns correspond respectively to the question and answer phrases in the verse, while the third and fourth patterns correspond to the question and answer phrases in the chorus. This distribution demonstrates that rhythmic variation is structurally related to changes in the melodic phrase rather than occurring randomly. The repetition in the *Gonrang Tikkah* is therefore better understood at the level of recurring rhythmic cells and functional phrase types. Within the rhythmic patterns, combinations of short strokes and rests recur as recognizable units, while their placement and density change according to the corresponding melodic phrase. For example, the second pattern is described in the transcription as "Tin–Tin–A–Tin, Tin–Cak," combining right-side strokes, a left-side stroke, and a simultaneous stroke at the end of the phrase. The final *Cak* functions as an accent that marks the closure of the answer phrase. Thus, repetition provides a recognizable rhythmic vocabulary, whereas variation occurs through changes in density, accentuation, and phrase placement.

The temporal relationship between the *Gonrang Tikkah* and *Sarunei Bolon* is particularly evident in the question–answer organization. In the question phrase, the *Sarunei Bolon* tends to develop melodic tension through ascending movement and sustained tones, and the *Gonrang Tikkah* responds with a more active and articulated rhythmic pattern. In the answer phrase, the *Sarunei Bolon* moves toward resolution, while the *Gonrang Tikkah* produces a denser and more conclusive rhythmic response. The rhythmic part therefore does not reproduce the melodic line; instead, it interprets changes in melodic direction and phrase function through accent and rhythmic density.

A similar relationship appears in the chorus. The third *Gonrang Tikkah* pattern accompanies the question phrase of the chorus and is characterized by stronger accents, including repeated left-side strokes, followed by a flowing rhythmic figure identified in the transcription as "Tin–Tin–A–Tin, Tin–Cak." This pattern intensifies the musical energy of the sustained and ascending *Sarunei Bolon* phrase. The fourth pattern then functions as the rhythmic response to the chorus answer, continuing the question–answer relationship at a different formal level.

These patterns are better described as **complementary melodic–rhythmic interaction** than as heterophony. Heterophony would imply simultaneous variants of a shared melodic line, whereas the transcription of *Sayur Matua* shows different musical materials performed by the *Sarunei Bolon* and *Gonrang Tikkah*. The *Sarunei Bolon* carries the melodic phrase, while the *Gonrang Tikkah* responds to its formal and

expressive characteristics through rhythm, accent, and density. The relationship is therefore one of rhythmic interpretation and coordination rather than simultaneous melodic variation.

Accordingly, the interlocking character of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* should not be defined simply as the mechanical alternation of identical rhythmic cells. It emerges from the temporal coordination of different instrumental functions: *Gonrang* Indung maintains a relatively stable rhythmic foundation, while *Gonrang Tikkah* introduces responsive rhythmic figures and *Sarunei Bolon* articulates the melodic direction. The resulting texture depends on the alignment of these parts within the same metric framework. This relationship demonstrates that repetition and variation operate simultaneously: the rhythmic vocabulary remains recognizable, but its realization changes according to the melodic phrase and formal position within the repertoire.
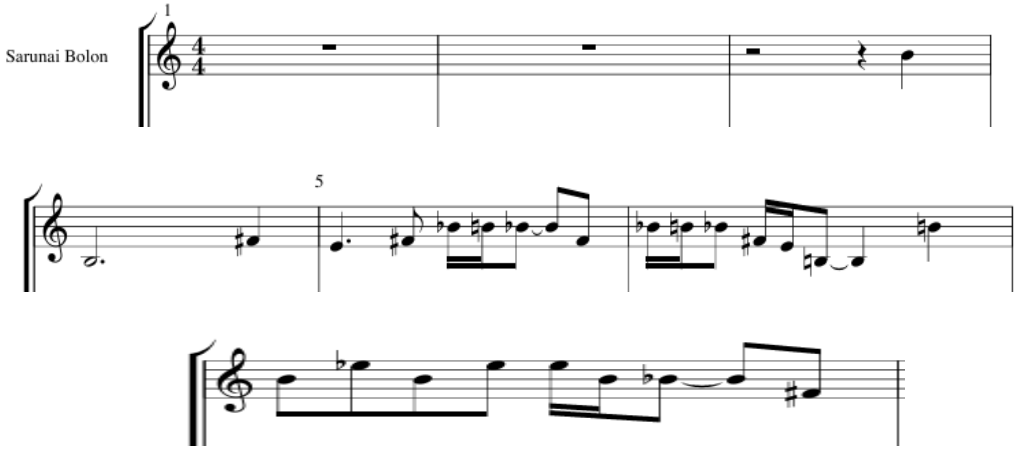


Figure 3. Melodic Phrasing and Contour of Sarunei Bolon in the *Sayur Matua* Repertoire

Figure 3 demonstrates that the *Sarunei Bolon* melody in the *Sayur Matua* repertoire is organized through recurring question–answer phrases rather than through a continuous and undifferentiated melodic line. The melodic organization begins with two measures of rest before the *Sarunei Bolon* enters, allowing the rhythmic instruments to establish the temporal framework of the ensemble. The first melodic phrase appears in measures 4–7 as a question motif, followed by an answer phrase in measures 7–12. This organization establishes a clear relationship between melodic phrase boundaries and the temporal framework already established by the *Gonrang* and other rhythmic instruments.

The contour of the first question phrase is characterized by a predominantly ascending movement. The sequence in measures 4–7 contains repeated and rising pitch movements that progressively direct the melody toward a higher register. The use of sustained tones and ties within this phrase prolongs selected pitches and delays melodic resolution. Thus, the ascending contour is not merely a succession of higher pitches; it is reinforced by duration, producing a phrase that remains structurally open and leads toward the subsequent answer. The combination of ascending movement, relatively dense note values, and sustained tones provides a concrete basis for identifying this passage as a question phrase.

The answer phrase in measures 7–12 contrasts with the preceding question through a change in melodic direction. The documented pitch sequence—Fis–Bes–B–Fis–E–Fis–E–Fis–E–Bes–B–Es—contains alternating upward and downward movements, but overall the phrase moves toward a lower register and produces a stronger sense of resolution. Although eighth- and sixteenth-note values remain present, the melodic direction differs from the predominantly ascending contour of the preceding phrase. The contrast between the two phrases therefore results from the combination of pitch direction, phrase position, and rhythmic density rather than from a completely different melodic vocabulary.

The recurrence of the melodic material is also significant. Verse One and Verse Two employ relatively similar melodic structures, indicating that repetition operates at the level of phrase organization. However, the performance is not necessarily identical in every realization. The thesis documentation indicates that differences in the player's breathing can affect the duration and notated value of sustained sounds even when the basic melodic structure remains similar. Consequently, recurrence in *Sarunei Bolon* should be understood as structural repetition accompanied by performative variation, rather than as mechanically identical reproduction.

The relationship between *Sarunei Bolon* and the *Gonrang* rhythmic cycle becomes clearer when the melodic phrases are considered together with their rhythmic responses. The Sarunei does not establish the temporal framework independently; its entrance follows two measures of rhythmic activity by the ensemble.

Once the melody enters, the *Gonrang* Indung maintains a relatively stable rhythmic foundation, while *Gonrang Tikkah* responds to changes in the melodic phrase. Thus, the ascending question phrase in the Sarunei is accompanied by a more active and articulated rhythmic response from *Gonrang Tikkah*, whereas the answer phrase is associated with a denser and more conclusive rhythmic response. The melodic contour and rhythmic organization therefore operate as coordinated layers rather than as independent musical processes. A similar melodic process occurs at the chorus level. The chorus begins at measures 21–25, with the initial phrase functioning as a question. Its contour again tends toward an ascending movement, with the documented sequence Fis–Bes–B–E–Es–B–Bes–B directing the melody toward a higher register. The phrase is further intensified by sustained tones, which prolong the melodic tension before the subsequent answer. The recurrence of ascending motion at this later formal level indicates that the question–answer principle is not limited to the opening verse but operates as a recurring organizational strategy within the repertoire.

The chorus answer then occurs from approximately measures 25–29 and provides the corresponding resolution. Here, the melodic movement tends toward a descending direction, reducing the tension established by the preceding question phrase. The answer therefore mirrors the earlier verse organization at a larger formal level: an ascending question is followed by a descending or resolving answer. This recurrence provides coherence across different sections of the repertoire while allowing changes in register, rhythmic density, and performance articulation.

The melodic organization shown in Figure 3 should therefore not be interpreted simply as a melodic "contour." The transcription demonstrates a recurring structural relationship among **pitch direction, phrase boundaries, duration, and ensemble rhythm.** The *Sarunei Bolon* establishes melodic tension through ascending movement and sustained tones, while the subsequent answer phrases redirect the melody toward resolution. At the same time, the *Gonrang* provides the temporal foundation within which these melodic phrases occur, and *Gonrang Tikkah* responds to changes in melodic direction and phrase function. The resulting structure is therefore one of coordinated melodic and rhythmic organization rather than an isolated melodic line.
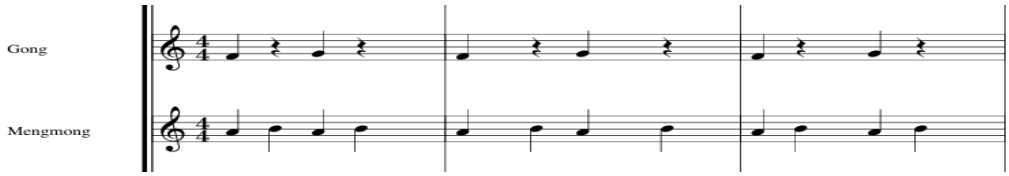


Figure 4 Structural role of Ogung and Mongmongan

Figure 4 shows how these instruments contribute to temporal stability and structural layering within the musical system.

From an analytical perspective, the structure of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* can be understood as a cyclical and interaction-based system, characterized by repetitive rhythmic cycles, interlocking patterns, and collective timing. Musical coherence is achieved through shared understanding among performers rather than written notation.

3.3 Social Function of Gonrang Sidua-dua

The transformation of the social function of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* is evident not only in participants' perceptions but also in the changing presence of the ensemble within contemporary social practice. The fieldwork was conducted from October 2025 to January 2026, with preliminary observation in November and the main data-collection stage in December 2025. Observation focused on social and cultural contexts in which *Gonrang Sidua-dua* could potentially be performed, including customary events, cultural festivals, communal activities, and art-group rehearsals. Interviews were conducted with musicians, cultural practitioners, community members involved in customary activities, and younger members of the community.

A significant empirical finding was that no complete *Gonrang Sidua-dua* ensemble was encountered during the observation period in the Simalungun community events examined. In particular, the researcher did not find the ensemble being used in observed customary ceremonies, family celebrations, or other community activities during the fieldwork period. This observation should not be interpreted as a statistical measurement of all Simalungun events; rather, it indicates that the ensemble had very limited visibility within the social contexts directly examined during the research period. The absence of the ensemble from these observed contexts provides an empirical basis for discussing the reduction of its social function, rather than treating decline as a general assumption.

The interviews further clarify what this reduced presence means from the perspective of cultural

practitioners. Fredy Purba, a Simalungun musician and cultural practitioner, described a substantial difference between the past and present position of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. He explained that in the past the ensemble was closely connected to community life and was used as entertainment in social activities, whereas it is now rarely performed and is no longer commonly used in everyday community life. He also reported that community members increasingly choose music associated with Batak Toba, Karo, or modern musical forms because these are perceived as more attractive and more compatible with contemporary entertainment preferences. At the same time, he observed that younger people show considerably less interest in learning *Gonrang Sidua-dua*.

The weakening of transmission is also reflected in the changing organization of musical practice. According to Fredy Purba, *Gonrang* players are now relatively few and are predominantly older musicians. He further noted that regular ensemble rehearsals that previously supported musical continuity are no longer common, while learning within the community has become increasingly limited. In his view, schools have become an important site for teaching Gonrang, but this educational setting does not fully replace the role previously played by everyday community practice.

Putra Jaya Damanik provides a complementary perspective by emphasizing the transformation of the ensemble's original entertainment function. He explained that *Gonrang Sidua-dua* was historically associated with community entertainment and was less strictly regulated than *Gonrang Sipitu-pitu*. In contemporary practice, however, "the context is beginning to disappear," and the ensemble may be performed without sufficient attention to its original structure and function. He also reported that musicians previously rehearsed together and developed mutual understanding through repeated interaction, whereas contemporary players often meet only when a performance is scheduled. This reduction in shared practice affects not only musical coordination but also the social relationships through which the music was traditionally learned and performed. The younger generation is not completely absent from the tradition, but participation appears uneven and weaker than in the past. Putra Jaya Damanik stated that young people remain interested in *Gonrang Sidua-dua* to some extent, but that this interest is not strong or evenly distributed. He associated this condition with the greater attraction of modern and more popular forms of entertainment. Juli Sipayung similarly reported that the younger generation's understanding of the cultural meaning and performance conventions of *Gonrang* has weakened. Importantly, these statements concern the perceptions and experiences of the interviewed practitioners; they should therefore be understood as qualitative evidence of changing participation and preferences rather than as a quantitative measurement of youth interest across the entire Simalungun population.

Juli Sipayung also provides evidence concerning the transformation of social meaning. He maintains that *Gonrang Sidua-dua* continues to function as a marker of Simalungun cultural identity, but that this function is weaker because its practical use has become increasingly restricted. He observed that some people still recognize *Gonrang* as part of Simalungun culture, while others no longer understand its cultural values and meanings in the same way. He further noted that contemporary performances may treat *Gonrang* primarily as ordinary entertainment without sufficient attention to its cultural context. Thus, the evidence indicates a distinction between symbolic recognition and active social use: *Gonrang Sidua-dua* remains recognizable as a cultural identity marker, while its role as a regularly practiced medium of social interaction has diminished. The reported preference for other musical forms should likewise be understood as a participant-based finding rather than an assumption that external traditions have simply "replaced" *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. Fredy Purba reported that community members increasingly use music associated with Batak Toba and Karo as well as modern music. The field materials characterize these forms as being perceived by participants as more attractive, contemporary, or appropriate to current entertainment preferences. This suggests a change in musical selection within social events, but the available data do not establish that external musical traditions have completely displaced *Gonrang Sidua-dua* across all Simalungun communities. Instead, the evidence points to a contraction of the social spaces in which *Gonrang Sidua-dua* is selected and practiced. These findings can be interpreted through Merriam's concept–behavior–sound framework in a reciprocal rather than linear manner. Changes in concept are visible in the changing ways community members understand the appropriate social role and value of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. These understandings influence behavior, including decisions about whether to use the ensemble in community events, whether musicians rehearse together, and whether younger people participate in learning. Changes in behavior subsequently affect sound, because reduced collective rehearsal and the increasing use of temporary or separately recruited players can weaken the interactional conditions through which the ensemble's musical structure is realized. At the same time, changes in musical practice can feed back into social meaning: when *Gonrang* is performed less frequently or without its contextual conventions, opportunities for community members to experience its cultural meanings also become more limited. This reciprocal relationship provides a more precise interpretation of Merriam's framework than a simple sequence in which declining behavior automatically produces changes in sound and

concept.

The transformation of social function can therefore be understood as a shift from embedded communal practice toward more limited and context-dependent cultural recognition. The available evidence does not indicate that *Gonrang Sidua-dua* has disappeared. Rather, it remains recognized as part of Simalungun cultural identity and continues to be taught and practiced in certain institutional settings, particularly education. However, its presence in the everyday social contexts examined during the fieldwork was limited, while interviewees consistently described reduced participation, weaker intergenerational transmission, less frequent collective rehearsal, and changing musical preferences. The central transformation is consequently not the disappearance of the tradition itself, but the narrowing of the social environment in which the tradition is actively practiced, transmitted, and given meaning.

3.4 Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the transformation of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* should not be understood simply as a process of musical decline. Rather, the case demonstrates how changes in musical practice emerge through the interaction of social context, musical competence, cultural values, and changing patterns of participation. This interpretation is consistent with the broader ethnomusicological understanding that traditional music is not a fixed cultural object but a practice continuously negotiated within changing social environments (Merriam, 1964; Nettl, 2015). The particular contribution of the present study is to show how this process operates in a Simalungun ensemble whose musical structure remains recognizable even as the social conditions supporting its performance have narrowed.

3.4.1 Musical change as social adaptation

The transformation of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* confirms, but also complicates, the argument that musical change is closely related to broader social and cultural change. Previous scholarship on Indonesian traditional music has demonstrated that changes in musical forms and practices may emerge through modernization, institutional transformation, technological change, cultural contact, and changing aesthetic preferences. Becker's study of Javanese gamelan, for example, demonstrates that changes in the social and political environment can affect both musical structures and the functions assigned to traditional music. Rather than simply disappearing, gamelan traditions have responded to changing social values through processes of adaptation and negotiation between inherited practices and contemporary expectations.

A similar process can be identified in *Gonrang Sidua-dua*, but with an important difference. The present findings indicate that the contemporary transformation is not primarily characterized by the introduction of substantial new musical materials into the repertoire. The *Sayur Matua* analysis shows that the basic organization of the ensemble remains identifiable through the differentiated roles of *Sarunei Bolon*, *Gonrang* Indung, *Gonrang Tikkah*, *Ogung*, and Mengmong. The more substantial transformation occurs in the conditions under which this musical structure is practiced: collective rehearsal has weakened, fixed ensemble groups are increasingly uncommon, and musicians may be recruited separately for particular performances. The transformation is therefore located not only in **what the music sounds like,** but also in **how the musical knowledge required to produce that sound is socially organized.**

This finding extends the understanding of musical change by shifting attention from musical products to the social infrastructure of musical practice. Brinner's analysis of Javanese gamelan similarly emphasizes that musical competence is acquired and realized through interaction among musicians, including systems of communication, ensemble roles, and shared knowledge. In the case of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*, the weakening of collective rehearsal reduces opportunities for precisely this kind of interactional competence to develop. The reported increase in “pemain cabutan” therefore represents more than an organizational change; it affects the social conditions through which performers learn to listen, anticipate, respond, and coordinate with one another.

The case also supports Kartomi's broader argument that musical contact and transformation should be understood as processes rather than as simple replacement of one musical system by another. In the Simalungun context, the presence of Batak Toba, Karo, and modern musical forms does not demonstrate that *Gonrang Sidua-dua* has been completely displaced. Rather, the findings indicate a change in the circumstances under which different musical forms are selected for social events. *Gonrang Sidua-dua* therefore remains part of the cultural repertoire of Simalungun society while occupying a narrower practical space.

3.4.2 Transmission, competence, and the social environment

The findings further contribute to discussions of traditional music transmission. Studies of Indonesian traditional music have shown that transmission is closely connected to the social environment in which music

is learned and practiced. Irawati's research on Kêlèntangan music among the Dayak Bênuaq, for example, demonstrates that musical transmission involves not only the transmission of musical material but also interactions among different cultural actors and the transmission of non-musical knowledge. Similarly, research on Indonesian traditional music has emphasized that the weakening of traditional social environments can interrupt the informal processes through which younger generations acquire musical knowledge.

The *Gonrang Sidua-dua* case supports this understanding but adds an important distinction between institutional transmission and community-based transmission**. The field findings indicate that *Gonrang*** continues to be taught in educational settings, while transmission through routine community practice has become increasingly limited. This means that the tradition has not completely lost its transmission mechanism; rather, the location and social conditions of transmission have changed. Knowledge that was previously embedded in repeated communal participation is increasingly separated from the everyday social contexts in which the music historically functioned.

This distinction is important because learning the musical pattern alone does not necessarily reproduce the complete cultural competence required for *Gonrang Sidua-dua*. The musicians interviewed in this study emphasized the importance of listening to other performers, understanding when to enter and respond, recognizing performance contexts, and developing shared experience through repeated practice. The findings therefore support an understanding of transmission as the acquisition of both musical knowledge and social knowledge. In this respect, the weakening of collective practice may be more consequential for sustainability than the loss of any single musical pattern.

The present case thus extends previous studies by showing that institutional education can maintain aspects of a traditional musical system while simultaneously revealing the limits of institutional substitution. A tradition may continue to exist in classrooms, cultural programs, or formal performances while becoming less embedded in ordinary community life. The distinction between being taught and being socially practiced is therefore central to understanding the contemporary condition of *Gonrang Sidua-dua*.

3.4.3 Cultural identity and changing social function

The findings also complicate the relationship between traditional music and cultural identity. The reduction in the practical use of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* does not correspond to a complete disappearance of its identity function. Interview evidence indicates that community members and cultural practitioners continue to recognize *Gonrang* as part of Simalungun cultural identity, even when it is no longer regularly used in social activities. The tradition therefore occupies an intermediate position between active practice and symbolic recognition.

This finding is important when compared with scholarship on traditional music in Indonesia, where music may function simultaneously as an aesthetic practice, a marker of collective identity, and a medium for transmitting cultural values. Recent research on Indonesian traditional music likewise emphasizes that cultural identity can persist through changing musical forms and contexts rather than requiring complete preservation of earlier practices. The *Gonrang* case supports this broader understanding but demonstrates a particular tension: cultural recognition may remain relatively stable while opportunities for actual musical participation decrease.

The case also resonates with recent research on Gondrang Sipitu-pitu within the Simalungun community. Nelson, Purba, and Ginting identify modernization, religion, and external cultural influences as factors contributing to changes in the structure, function, and performance of Gondrang *Sipitu-pitu*, while important elements of its rhythmic, melodic, and ensemble organization remain recognizable. The present study extends this discussion by examining *Gonrang Sidua-dua* not only as a transformed musical form but also as a practice whose social environment has become increasingly restricted. Taken together, these cases suggest that musical transformation in Simalungun cannot be explained solely through changes in repertoire or instrumentation; it must also be examined through changes in the social contexts that determine when, why, and by whom music is performed.

3.4.4 Beyond preservation: rethinking cultural sustainability

The findings have implications for the concept of cultural sustainability. A conventional preservation-oriented approach may emphasize documentation, archiving, formal education, or the maintenance of musical repertoire. These activities are valuable, but the *Gonrang Sidua-dua* case indicates that they do not by themselves guarantee the continuity of a musical tradition. The ensemble's musical principles remain identifiable in transcription and in the knowledge of experienced practitioners, yet its social function has narrowed because the community contexts that previously sustained regular performance and transmission have weakened.

This finding is consistent with broader scholarship on traditional music transmission in Southeast Asia, which emphasizes that continuity does not necessarily mean maintaining an unchanged form. The recent comparative literature on island Southeast Asia, for example, demonstrates that traditions can undergo substantial transformation while still being transmitted and recognized as traditions. The important issue is therefore not whether *Gonrang Sidua-dua* remains exactly the same, but whether the community continues to provide meaningful contexts in which its knowledge, performance, and cultural significance can be reproduced.

The *Gonrang Sidua-dua* case consequently extends the sustainability discussion from the preservation of **musical content** toward the preservation of **social conditions of practice**. Sustainability in this context involves the continued availability of performers, opportunities for collective rehearsal, intergenerational learning, socially meaningful performance contexts, and community recognition of the music's function. Documentation and institutional education can support these processes, but they cannot fully replace the social relationships through which the music is learned and experienced.

From Merriam's perspective, this finding also supports a reciprocal rather than linear relationship among concept, behavior, and sound (Merriam, 1964). Cultural concepts influence decisions about where and why *Gonrang* is performed; these decisions shape musical behavior such as rehearsal, participation, and transmission; and those behaviors condition the realization of the ensemble's musical sound. At the same time, repeated musical practice can reproduce social relationships and reinforce cultural understanding. The weakening of practice therefore affects not only the production of sound but also the opportunities through which cultural concepts are experienced and transmitted.

Overall, the case of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* confirms existing ethnomusicological arguments that traditional music changes in relation to social and cultural transformation, extends them by demonstrating that the weakening of transmission and collective musical competence can occur even while musical structures remain recognizable, and challenges a simple displacement model in which modern or external music automatically causes traditional music to disappear. The evidence instead points to a more complex process of narrowing social space, changing transmission mechanisms, and redefinition of cultural meaning. *Gonrang Sidua-dua* remains culturally recognizable within Simalungun society, but its continuity increasingly depends on whether musical practice can be re-embedded in meaningful social relationships and intergenerational contexts.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the presentation form, musical structure, and social function of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* are structurally interconnected and function as an integrated system within Simalungun society. The presentation form, which is based on collective ensemble performance, becomes the foundation for the realization of its musical structure. The structure itself is characterized by cyclic rhythmic patterns, interlocking coordination, and functional roles among instruments, which depend on continuous interaction among performers.

The findings further show that changes in the presentation form directly affect the stability of the musical structure. The decreasing frequency of performance and the weakening of ensemble interaction have limited the realization of its structural system. As a result, the musical structure of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* cannot be fully sustained in its original form.

In terms of social function, *Gonrang Sidua-dua* has experienced a shift from an active medium of social interaction to a marginal cultural practice. This transformation indicates that the function of music is closely related to patterns of social participation and cultural context.

Overall, the study confirms that the transformation of *Gonrang Sidua-dua* occurs through the interrelation of presentation, structure, and function, where the weakening of one aspect leads to changes in the others. This condition reflects a declining integration between musical practice and social life within Simalungun society.

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