



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XLI No. 62

December 1990



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Patricia Matusky. (1990). Music Styles among the Kayan, Kenyah-Badang and Malay Peoples of the Upper Rejang River [Sarawak]: A Preliminary Survey. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XLI (62): 115-156

MUSIC STYLES AMONG THE KAYAN, KENYAH-BADANG AND MALAY PEOPLES OF THE UPPER REJANG RIVER [SARAWAK]: A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

Patricia Matusky

A two-year music research project, begun in 1984, continued with an additional research trip during the last part of December, 1985 in the Belaga area of Sarawak's Seventh Division.* The results of the earlier research trip have been reported and appear in an issue of the Sarawak Museum Journal from 1986.¹ The second documentation trip was undertaken during and immediately following the 1985 Christmas holiday season, focusing on the performing arts of specific ethnic groups living up- and down-river of Belaga town.² As in the earlier trip, our immediate goal was to record in written document, photography, and on audio and video tape as many of the genres of music and musical instruments still used and performed today. We re-visited the Kayan longhouse known as Uma Apan (at Kaki Menjawah) where the headman, Kesting Nyipa, was present (unlike our previous visit in 1984).³ The Kenyah-Badang longhouse at Long Dungun was another important place of research, and finally we were able to record some popular music and dance genres at the Malay kampung in Belaga town.

The Christmas holiday is an occasion when time is set aside for religious celebration as well as for special events such as marriages and other feasts which are carried out with much reverence, joviality and enthusiasm. We were fortunate to have been able to travel by long boat from Belaga as far as the Uma Apan (just below the Bakun Rapids), even though the level of the Rejang River was quite low at that time of the year.

**MUSIC STYLES AMONG THE KAYAN,
KENYAH-BADANG AND MALAY PEOPLES OF THE
UPPER REJANG RIVER [SARAWAK]:
A PRELIMINARY SURVEY**

by

Patricia Matusky

A two-year music research project, begun in 1984, continued with an additional research trip during the last part of December, 1985 in the Belaga area of Sarawak's Seventh Division.* The results of the earlier research trip have been reported and appear in an issue of the *Sarawak Museum Journal* from 1986.¹ The second documentation trip was undertaken during and immediately following the 1985 Christmas holiday season, focusing on the performing arts of specific ethnic groups living up- and down-river of Belaga town.² As in the earlier trip, our immediate goal was to record in written document, photography, and on audio and video tape as many of the genres of music and musical instruments still used and performed today. We re-visited the Kayan longhouse known as Uma Apan (at Kaki Menjawah) where the headman, Kesing Nyipa, was present (unlike our previous visit in 1984).³ The Kenyah-Badang longhouse at Long Dungun was another important place of research, and finally we were able to record some popular music and dance genres at the Malay *kampung* in Belaga town.

The Christmas holiday is an occasion when time is set aside for religious celebration as well as for special events such as marriages and other feasts which are carried out with much reverence, joviality and enthusiasm. We were fortunate to have been able to travel by long boat from Belaga as far as the Uma Apan (just below the Bakun Rapids), even though the level of the Rejang River was quite low at that time of the year.

Christmas day itself is a time of leisure and change from the usual work day of farming, hunting, fishing and various domestic chores necessary for the well being of the longhouse inhabitants. On Christmas day many people of the longhouse celebrate the birth of Jesus, each according to his particular faith and, following religious services which may take place at or near the longhouse, the remainder of the day is spent hosting or visiting friends and neighbors, and consuming special cakes and drinks which have been prepared for the holidays.

* This research was supported by a continuing grant from the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, and by additional aid from the Sarawak Museum in Kuching.

Upon our arrival at the Uma Apan we learned that on the day before Christmas a wedding would take place, and that we could attend the event as well as record the ceremony on video and audio tape. As will be noted in the following discussion, the wedding ceremony and the ensuing celebration was complete with much traditional music, dance and costume. After the Christmas holiday we traveled down river to Belaga town where we had the good fortune to speak with the *penghulu* of the Malay *kampung* (Encik Awang Othman Awang Rahman) and to find that the *zapin* and other dance traditions were still performed there. Most dances were still remembered and danced by a gentleman in his early 80s. He was kind enough to perform the *zapin* and *pancak lang* dances while the music was provided by two women musicians also of the older generation. Later in this brief exhibition of music and dance which had been arranged by the Malay village headman, two younger female musicians carried on the drumming and singing while a younger male dancer joined in for other dances popular among the young people of the Malay village. After our brief stay at the Malay village, we continued a short way down river of Belaga town to stay a few days at the Uma Badang at Long Dungan. Here a great number of traditional music and dances genres were performed as well as vocal and instrumental music for specific occasions. Finally, at both the Uma Apan and Uma Badang we were able to collect some samples of music played during the hill rice (*padi bukit*) growing cycle.

Our brief research trip to the Upper Rejang River area in late 1985 yielded additional data to that already collected from the same general geographical area in the previous year. Using both audio and video tape for recording the many musics performed, we were able to collect approximately six hours of recorded tape, the contents of which are listed in the Appendix 2 of this report. As in the past, copies of these tapes have been deposited in the Library of the University of Malaya, while the original video tapes are held at the Kompleks Budaya Negara (Ministry of Culture, Kuala Lumpur) and the original sound tapes are currently stored in the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana, USA).

KAYAN GROUP

As in past music documentation endeavors at the Uma Apan and among other groups in the Upper Rejang River area, an abundance of dance forms accompanied by specific music pieces was found. Dances such as the *ngajat lasan* (danced by a man or a woman), the *datun julud* (usually danced by a small group of women), the *ngajat pahlawan* (danced by two men), and the ever present *ngajat asal* (always danced by two older women), are accompanied by music played on two *sapeh* with the possible addition, at the Kayan and Kenyah-Badang longhouses, of the *jatung 'utog* xylophone. In this ensemble one *sapeh* provides a continuous drone, while the second *sapeh* (and, if present, the xylophone playing in unison with the second *sapeh*) plays the melody. During both research periods in 1984 and 1985 we found that much *sapeh* dance music had been recorded on audio tape, and while the dancers were live in the performances we recorded, the music was, in fact, provided by a battery-powered cassette tape player (usually the property of the *tuai rumah*).