

## Transformation of *Ngerebeg Mekotek* Tradition into Bala Tektek Music Composition

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### Abstract

This article outlines the procedure for composing a musical piece influenced by *Ngerebeg Mekotek*, a Balinese ritual. The authors employed the Panca Stithi Ngawi Sani method. The authors gathered data via literature review, observation, and online research. The outcome is a musical piece titled *Bala Tektek*, incorporating diverse musical elements through transformation. It underscores aesthetic elements and accentuates musical significance in relation to religious and social values. *Bala Tektek* embodies a spiritual significance of averting misfortune and invoking strength, while its social connotation reflects themes of struggle, unity, and solidarity.

Keywords: *Bala Tektek*, transformation, *Ngerebeg Mekotek*, meaning

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### 1.0 Introduction

The musical composition *Bala Tektek* represents a creative interpretation of the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual, a traditional ceremony held in the village of Munggu, Mengwi District, Badung Regency, Bali Province. This ritual is performed every 210 days, specifically on Saturday (Saniscara) Kliwon during the Kuningan week in the Balinese calendar. It is characterised by the participation of thousands of male villagers, typically ranging in age from approximately 14 to 60 years, who are organised into groups that engage in symbolic combat using wooden sticks and the apex is shaped as a wooden pyramid, formed by binding poles together, which one or two individuals climb to reach the summit (Dwyarthi, 2025). The interaction of wooden elements produces rhythmic, percussive “tek tek tek” sounds, which are believed by the local community to ward off misfortune and dispel malevolent spirits (Astini et al., 2023; Handayani, 2024). Complementing this sonic element is the *Balaganjur* ensemble, whose dynamic, powerful, and energetic musical character (Arsana, 2014) appropriately accompanies a ritual that symbolically enacts warfare. The interplay between the percussive wooden-stick rhythms and the *Balaganjur* instrumentation creates a distinctive auditory texture that serves as the primary inspiration for the composition of *Bala Tektek*. This piece integrates traditional *Balaganjur* elements with Western musical influences, particularly through the incorporation of stick percussion derived from the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual. The resulting work, entitled *Bala Tektek*, embodies a hybrid musical form that reflects both cultural heritage and contemporary innovation. Aji et al. (2024) showed how community participation in traditional activities strengthened collective engagement in cultural and environmental initiatives. This finding aligns with

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the transformation of *Ngerebeg Mekotek* into *Bala Tektek* music composition, where active involvement in tradition similarly fostered cultural continuity and adaptive creativity. The *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual, featuring wooden sticks as its primary symbolic and performative element, is depicted in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. The ritual process of *Ngerebeg Mekotek* done by The Balinese in Munggu Village, Mengwi, Badung, Bali  
(Source: Shutter stock/Gekko Gallery, 2023)

To date, no study has examined the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual as a source of inspiration for artistic creation, particularly musical composition. Existing research primarily adopts a cultural perspective, as seen in the works of Rasna and Juniartini (2021) and Riantini et al. (2022), who explore the ritual's meaning and philosophy, and Purnawan et al. (2022), who discuss its functional transformation. Although Garwa (2021) composed *Ngider Bhuwana*, inspired by the *Ngerebeg Kuningan* ritual in Bangli, this differs in form and context from *Ngerebeg Mekotek* in Mengwi. Thus, while previous studies provide cultural insights or engage with ritual-inspired music, none have focused specifically on *Ngerebeg Mekotek* as a foundation for musical creation. This study therefore addresses a significant gap by exploring its transformation into the composition *Bala Tektek*.

This study aims to address the gap in existing research by examining the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual as a source of artistic creation. It focuses on three core aspects: (1) the concept of transformation applied in the creative process, (2) the musical elements employed as a medium for message delivery, and (3) the meanings or messages intended to be communicated. Together, these components provide a framework for understanding the development of *Bala Tektek* as a musical composition that reinterprets the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual into an artistic form. Each aspect will be discussed in detail in the subsequent sections of this article.

It is highly essential to develop artistic creations from tradition or local wisdom as sources of inspiration. Diverse traditional practices, when processed and interpreted with a contemporary sensibility, can result in unique combinations that produce *glocal* works—globally relevant yet rooted in local culture. By integrating various traditional and modern elements, it is hoped that the resulting works will align with contemporary aesthetics, ethics, realities, and cultural tastes (Prasetya et al., 2024). The use of Balinese gamelan—in this case, *Balaganjur* music that accompanies the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual—is arranged and composed through a combination of traditional and Western musical approaches, with the aim of creating a more universal musical atmosphere.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Transformation

Transformation is a process of changing something into a new condition or state (Nurgiyantoro, 1998). It can also be understood as a new creation or a shift into a different form in terms of both function and structure (Land in Rusmana, 2018). This transformation process involves selecting, modifying, adding, or omitting elements to obtain the most appealing parts (Sedana in Fransciska, 2018). In the context of artistic creation, transformation refers to the process of changing ideas, emotions, experiences, or realities into a new and meaningful artistic form. Such changes may still retain references to the original object or may result in forms that no longer resemble the source (Pamardi et al., 2018). One form of transformation is *alih wahana* (intermodal transformation), which involves adapting or converting an existing art form into a new artistic medium (Damono, 2012).

Transformation has been explored by previous researchers. Several examples include the transformation of *wayang* (shadow puppet) stories into Indonesian fiction novels (Nurgiyantoro, 1998); the transformation of *Jemblung* art: A case study of *Jemblung on the way* (Sinatrya dan Denis Setiaji, 2025); the adaptation of *wayang* narratives into dramatic forms such as *Konglomerat Burisrawa* and *Semar Gugat* by Nano Riantiarno (Anwar, 2019); the transformation of the *Siat Sampian* ritual in Bedulu Village, Gianyar, Bali into a dance titled *Anggruwat Bumi* (Fransciska, 2018); the transformation of eagle sounds in the oral tradition of *Doak* in Jambi into a musical composition titled *Impresi Doak* (Sidik and Ferry Herdiyanto, 2022); and the transformation of the *Megoak-goakan* tradition in Bali into a *Balaganjur* composition titled *Teruna Goak*, arranged in a jazz music format (Firdaus et al., 2019). In the context of performing arts, transformation is a natural and even inevitable process, as it is common for one form of art to draw from another as its source (Damono, 2012). Thus, the concept of transformation becomes essential in sustaining artistic traditions, as tradition does not imply

something static or dead, but rather a continuous process of change, reflecting the inherently creative nature of human beings (Damono, 2012). Therefore, the concept of transformation is crucial as an innovative approach in the composition of *Bala Tektek*.

## 2.2 Musical Aspects

A musical composition is supported by two main aspects: musical and extra-musical. The musical aspect refers to the elements that form the structure and expression within a composition, creating emotional and aesthetic impressions. The extra-musical aspect includes elements outside of music, such as social norms and guiding values (Kariasa & Diana Putra, 2021). The musical elements consist of melody, rhythm, harmony, tempo, and dynamics (Arsana, 2012), all of which are discussed in this article. Melody is defined as a sequence of tones or sounds perceived based on pitch variation (Soeharto, 1992), while Dieter Mack refers to melody through the concept of pitch (Mack, 1996). Melody is not limited to vocal music but also applies to instruments, and vocal aesthetics can vary across eras and even from one composer to another (Mack, 1996: 16). Melodic elements are not strictly connected to formal phrases or diatonic/chromatic intervals but are greatly influenced by the stylistic tendencies of the time and the composer's ideology. Rhythm is the repetition of note durations within a musical phrase. Rhythm can include metric, rhythmical, rhapsodic, syncopated, resultant, and polyphonic forms (Hayes R in Arsana, 2012: 159). Harmony refers to the congruence among musical elements—between instruments and the song, instruments and performers, the song and the performer, the character of the piece and the performance context, the form of presentation and its setting, and more (Arsana, 2012: 163). Tempo determines the speed of a musical composition and influences its character. 'Dynamics' refers to the intensity of sound in a composition (Soeharto, 1992: 30). Dynamic expression can be achieved by contrasting different sections or musical elements, making the composition more vivid, fresh, and engaging (Arsana, 2012: 164). Effective handling of musical aspects results in a unique and compelling composition.

## 2.3 Meaning

Meaning refers to the concept or message contained within a symbol, word, sentence, or text that can be understood by the reader or listener based on its contextual use. Meaning is generally categorised into two types: literal or explicit meaning and intentional or implicit meaning (Nurgiyantoro, 2010: 33). According to Sudoyo (2007), meaning in an artwork is the result of an interaction between the creator, the work, and the audience, all of which are inseparable from a specific cultural context. Meaning serves as a fundamental element in art, functioning as a medium to express ideas, emotions, and social realities. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) emphasised that aesthetic experience is a unique way through which humans perceive the world, and thus, the meaning of an artwork is accessed through direct experience. Meaning in art is dynamic and not always fixed; it depends on the audience's interpretation and the surrounding context. The presence of meaning within a work of art adds depth and conveys the artist's message to their audience.

## 3.0 Methodology

The creation process of *Bala Tektek* follows the *Panca Sthiti Ngawi Sani* method of artistic creation, which consists of five distinct stages that integrate practical working patterns with theoretical approaches (Dibia, 2021: 33). These stages include the *ngawirasa*, or inspiration phase, where the initial creative impulse emerges; the *ngawacak*, or exploration phase, involving research, observation, and data collection; the *ngerencana* or conception phase, which focuses on developing a detailed artistic and technical plan; the *ngawangun* or execution phase, in which the composition is realised and refined; and the *ngebah* or production phase, which culminates in the presentation of the completed work to an audience.



Fig. 2: The players are in rehearsal process of *Bala Tektek* performance  
(Source: Astini, 2023)

The inspiration stage (*ngawirasa*) is the stage in which the creator begins to experience inspiration and develops a desire to create (Dibia, 2021:34). In this context, it takes the form of a strong motivation to compose the *Bala Tektek* musical composition by transforming the ritual phenomenon of Ngerebeg Mekotek into a musical work. The next stage is exploration (*ngawacak*), during which the creator explores and refines the ideas and concepts of the work (Dibia, 2021:40). This stage involves reviewing relevant literature, observing everyday activities as creative material, and collecting audiovisual data related to the Ngerebeg Mekotek ritual. This is followed by the

conception phase (*ngrencana*), in which the creator begins to formulate plans concerning various artistic and technical aspects (Dibia, 2021:41). These activities include designing the overall form, determining aesthetic concepts, and planning the working patterns and modes of presentation for the *Bala Tektek* composition. The subsequent stage is execution (*ngawangun*), which involves realizing and materializing the planned artistic work (Dibia, 2021:43). This stage includes implementing the designed concepts, developing the structural sections of the composition, making additions and reductions to the work, and finalizing the overall form of the *Bala Tektek* musical composition. The final stage is production (*ngebah*), which marks the conclusion of the creative process by presenting the *Bala Tektek* musical composition before an audience (Dibia, 2021:46).

## 4.0 Findings

In this study, the authors explain three key elements in the creation of an artwork: transformation, musical aspects that form the composition, and meaning. The concept of transformation is used to determine the source material, the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual. Two notable features were identified, including the "tek tek tek" sound produced by the clashing of wooden sticks—used as props during the *Mekotek* ritual, and the presence of *Balaganjur* music as ritual accompaniment. The concept of transformation is closely linked to the treatment of musical elements. The melodic, rhythmic, tempo, harmonic, and dynamic aspects of the *Bala Tektek* composition are adapted in accordance with the idioms and media being transformed. This, in turn, relates to the final issue: musical meaning, which is intertwined with the message conveyed through the composition.

## 5.0 Discussion

*Bala Tektek* musical composition was presented at *The 3rd International Dance Conference and Festival (IDCF) 2023* on Friday, October 20, 2023, at the Media Rekam Building Plaza, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta. The composition can be viewed via the following YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G4d5zx7uwk>. As previously mentioned, *Bala Tektek* is inspired by the ritual tradition of *Ngerebeg Mekotek*. Therefore, this section will discuss the transformation process involved, the elements that underwent transformation, how the transformation concept is manifested through the musical components of the composition, and the meanings embedded in the work. These three aspects will be elaborated as follows. This work is expected to serve as a model for teaching music composition to students in the Ethnomusicology and Karawitan study programs.

### 5.1 Transformation of *Ngerebeg Mekotek* into *Bala Tektek* Composition

Not all elements of the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual tradition were transformed in the *Bala Tektek* composition. Two elements, however, underwent a process of transformation: the idiom and the musical medium. The sonic idiom that was transformed is the distinctive "tek tek tek" sound produced by the clashing of wooden sticks used as ritual props. This sound was transformed into an interlocking rhythmic pattern using *kentongan* (slit drums) as the medium. The original musical medium, the *Balaganjur* gamelan ensemble that typically accompanies the procession, was transformed into the *Semarandana* gamelan ensemble for *Bala Tektek*. Instruments used in this composition include *jublag*, *pemade*, *suling*, *kendang*, *kentongan*, *gong*, *kempur*, and *kempli*. In addition, the *gending gilak* form from *Balaganjur*, which features the two-note melodic instrument *ponggang* (producing *ndung* and *ndang*), was reinterpreted in the *Semarandana* gamelan ensemble using a four-note melodic system: *ndong*, *ndeng*, *ndung*, and *ndang*.

### 5.2 Musical Aspects of *Bala Tektek* Composition

*Bala Tektek*'s musical composition consists of three sections: the beginning, middle, and end. The medium used to perform this piece is the *Semarandana* gamelan ensemble. As previously described, this composition is structured based on a transformation concept derived from the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual tradition. Several ritual phenomena that were transformed—as outlined in the preceding subsection—served as sources for the creative process in developing the musical elements that shape the composition.

The melodic aspect in *Bala Tektek* is structured based on the antecedent-consequent concept (known in *karawitan* as *padang-ulihan*), as well as pitch direction and motion. The melody is derived from several sources: the Japanese song "The Song of Teru" (the soundtrack of the animated film *Tales from Earthsea*), melodic patterns from the *selonding* ensemble, and developments of *ponggang* drumming patterns in *Balaganjur* gamelan. "The Song of Teru" serves as the melodic source for the opening section of the composition. The melody, originally based on a diatonic scale, is adapted and transformed into a pentatonic scale in *laras pelog*. The melodic line is refined through the *suling* (bamboo flute) performance using the *ngunjai angkihan* technique, producing a smooth, uninterrupted flow. The *suling* melody is performed in call-and-response style with melodies played by the *pemade* and *jublag* instruments. In the middle section, the melody is constructed by adapting *selonding* drumming patterns, combined with vocals in the style of *kidung*. In the final section, the melody draws from the *ponggang* drumming patterns of *Balaganjur*, which typically use two tones (*ndang* and *ndung*), and is transformed into the *Semarandana* gamelan to produce a four-tone scale consisting of *ndong* (2), *ndeng* (3), *ndung* (5), and *ndang* (6).

The rhythmic aspect of the *Bala Tektek* composition results from the transformation of the sound produced by the clashing of wooden sticks used as props during the ritual procession, which is reinterpreted through the *kentongan* (slit drum or *kulkul*) using interlocking patterns that combine multiple motifs played simultaneously. This produces a resultant rhythm formed by the interaction of two or more rhythmic lines, including the combination of *reyong* patterns: *polos* (e.g., //1.61 6.16 1.61 .61. 616. 161. 16.1 6.16//) and *sangsih* (e.g., //23. 32.3 .23. 23.2 3.23 2.32 .32. 32.3//), which, when played together, create a tightly rhythmic sound. In addition to the resultant rhythm, the composition also incorporates metric rhythm, where beats fall consistently and are closely tied to the melodic structure,

giving an impression of strength, clarity, and stability—such as the rhythm played by the *jublag*. The harmonic aspect is developed through the layering of pitches from instruments such as the *jublag*, *pemade*, and *suling*, as well as through the interplay between melodic and rhythmic instruments and the cohesive integration of different compositional sections.

The following aspects are tempo and dynamics. Three types of tempo are used in the *Bala Tektek* composition: slow (*adeng*), moderate (*sedeng*), and fast (*becat*). The opening and middle sections of the composition use a slow tempo, the transition between the two sections uses a moderate tempo, and the final section employs a fast tempo. The final musical aspect is dynamics, which refers to the degree of loudness or softness in the presentation of sound within a composition. This aspect is expressed through the use of contrasting elements in the music, such as loud–soft, fast–slow, gentle–bold, high–low, long–short, flowing–abrupt, and other similar contrasts. In the performance of the *Bala Tektek*, as shown in Figure 3, the musical elements serve as a medium to convey messages or meanings to the audience.



Fig. 3. The players are performing Bala Tektek composition  
(Source: Deddy Setyawan, 2023)

### 5.3 Bala Tektek Composition Meaning

Two meanings are conveyed through *Bala Tektek*'s musical composition: religious meaning and social meaning. The spiritual sense is expressed through creative melodic arrangements derived from the sounds and atmosphere of the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual procession. These sonic elements and the ritual mood are transformed in the composition into several forms. First, the melody is developed and adapted from the Japanese song "The Song of Teru". Second, a melody is constructed by adapting *selonding* drumming patterns combined with vocal lines in the style of *kidung* in the opening and middle sections of the composition, creating a majestic and sacred atmosphere. These elements convey a religious message as a symbol of protection and spiritual strength against misfortune.

The social meaning conveyed through this composition is expressed through the treatment of rhythmic elements, the blending of musical components, and the interconnection between the sections of the composition. The combination of rhythms that produces interlocking figuration, wrapped in the *gending gilak* form derived from *Balaganjur*, which is characterised by intensity, energy, and aggression, delivers a strong social message aimed at evoking a spirit of struggle, unity, and solidarity.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The *Bala Tektek* musical composition is a work resulting from the transformation of the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual phenomenon. As a sample for the creative study, the authors transformed some idioms and media. In this study, the authors transformed the "tek tek tek" sound produced by striking wooden poles in the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual into the sound of the *kentongan*; the use of the *Balaganjur* ensemble into the *Semarandana gamelan* medium; and the *Balaganjur* *gilak* *gending* into a *gilak* *gending* presented using the *Semarandana gamelan*. Musical elements from *Balaganjur* are restructured through melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, temporal, and dynamic manipulations to evoke a sacred or mystical atmosphere. Furthermore, the adaptation of the melody from the Japanese song *The Song of Teru*, featured in the animated film *Tales from Earthsea*, into *Balinese gamelan* instrumentation introduces a glocal dimension, blending global references with local expression.

The *Bala Tektek* composition embodies both religious and social meanings. Its spiritual dimension is conveyed through the use of *selonding*-inspired drum patterns, vocals with *kidung*-like qualities, and the *gending gilak* form, all of which are deeply rooted in the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* tradition. Within this context, *Bala Tektek* functions as a symbol of protection and spiritual strength. Simultaneously, the transformation of the rituals "tek tek tek" sound into *kentongan* patterns, interwoven with other musical elements, conveys social meanings, particularly the awakening of a collective spirit of struggle, unity, and solidarity. These religious and social values, symbolic protection, inner strength, perseverance, and communal togetherness, are central to *Bala Tektek* and warrant preservation and transmission to future generations.

However, this study is subject to several limitations. The data analyzed represent only selected samples of the *Ngerebeg Mekotek* ritual tradition and therefore cannot be considered representative of the tradition in its entirety. The process of musical transformation is also bounded by structural constraints, as not all ritual functions, symbolic meanings, and performative practices are transferred into the

compositional framework. Certain aspects of ritual context, embodied action, and communal participation remain inherent to the original ceremonial practice and are not fully transformed into musical form. Future studies may further examine and validate these findings through reception studies and performance-based research, including analyses of audience interpretation and performer experience, in order to deepen understanding of how transformed ritual elements are perceived and negotiated in contemporary musical contexts.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to ethnomusicology and contemporary composition by transforming a Balinese ritual into a musical work that reflects spiritual and social values, using the Panca Sthiti Ngawi Sani method.

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