

# ADAPTING RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT IN DONDANG SAYANG: MELODY AND MOVEMENT MATCHING ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the adaptation of rhythmic movement in dondang sayang by examining its melodic and rhythmic structures. While previous research has extensively explored the lyrical content and melodic compositions of dondang sayang, there has been limited focus on the theoretical relationship between its melody and rhythmic elements. To address this gap, this study reviews existing literature and connects the elements of rhythmic movement with the musical framework of dondang sayang. Despite dondang sayang's deep roots in Malay culture, its rhythmic movements can effectively manifest the musical structure and convey the song's message. This research demonstrates how rhythmic movement is intricately blended into dondang sayang, resonating with the aesthetic principles of Malay music culture. By providing a detailed analysis of the interplay between melody and rhythm, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how traditional music interacts with rhythmic movement, accommodating and molding each other to create a new form of aesthetic expression. It has the potential to enhance both the performance and the audience's experience, indirectly enriching and strengthening dondang sayang as a Malay cultural heritage for future generations.

## Keywords

dondang sayang; rhythmic movement; melodic structure; traditional Malay music; cultural heritage

## INTRODUCTION

The performance art of dondang sayang is a cherished traditional cultural expression that holds significant value as a heritage art form. Originating from Melaka, dondang sayang has been an integral part of Malay cultural events for centuries (Amend, 1998). Traditionally, dondang sayang is performed in a relaxed and sometimes humorous manner during pantun (poetry) exchanges. These performances are accompanied by a variety of musical instruments, including the violin, rebana, accordion, and tetawak, creating a rich auditory experience that complements the poetic dialogue. According to Ahmad (1984), this art form has existed since the reign of the Melaka Sultanate in 1511. The unique charm of dondang sayang lies in its pantun-based performance, where the singer's ability to skillfully exchange pantuns is crucial. The delivery style is casual, often infused with love poems, which adds an emotional and expressive dimension to the performance. The art of pantun exchange requires not only linguistic agility but also a deep understanding of cultural aesthetics, making each performance a display of both artistic and intellectual ability. This intricate interplay of lyrics and music has made dondang sayang a significant

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cultural treasure, representing the artistic legacy of the Malay people. A sample of pantun lyric in *dondang sayang* stated by Yusop (2016) is below:

Bunga gaharu di tepi padang,  
Gugur ditimpa si pohon nangka,  
Kalau tak tahu *dondang sayang*,  
Jangan mengaku orang Melaka.

*Dondang sayang*'s instruments provide the rhythmic foundation and melodic accompaniment that enhance poetic recitations (Chopyak, 1986). The combination of vocal and instrumental elements in *dondang sayang* creates a unique aesthetic experience that is both auditory and performative. Despite its long-standing tradition, the origins of *dondang sayang*'s creator remain unknown, adding a layer of mystery to its history and perpetuating its allure as a cultural enigma. Over time, *dondang sayang* has undergone significant changes. Azharul (2024) stated that the traditional rhythm of *dondang sayang* has transitioned from its original gentle sway to incorporate modern beats such as *joget*, *mambo*, and *zapin*. This evolution reflects a broader trend of cultural adaptation and modernization, demonstrating how traditional art forms can transform while retaining their core identity. The shift from a purely traditional rhythm to a blend of old and new styles signifies the dynamic nature of *dondang sayang*, making it relevant to contemporary audiences while preserving its historical roots.

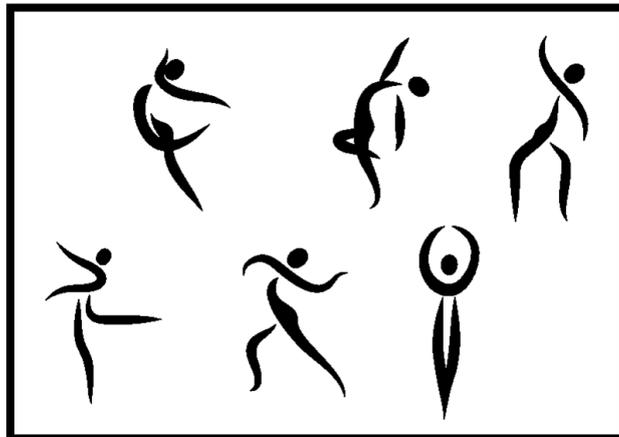
This study aims to analyze the adaptation of rhythmic movement in *dondang sayang* by examining its melodic and rhythmic structures. While previous studies have explored its lyrical content and melodic compositions, there has been limited research on the theoretical relationship between its melody and rhythmic elements. This research seeks to bridge this gap by providing a detailed analysis of how melodic structures influence rhythmic movements. By focusing on the theoretical aspects of melody and rhythm adaptation, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of *dondang sayang* and its cultural significance.

## CONNECTING RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT IN DONDANG SAYANG

Dalcroze (1917) identified two fundamental elements to illustrate the connection between sound and movement: tone and movement. He emphasized movement as the primary element because it is inherently present within the human body, whereas tone is a secondary element that can be learned. Dalcroze's findings suggest that the concept of rhythm is naturally ingrained in individuals and can be manifested through music. The integration of rhythmic movement optimizes the interaction between brain functions and the body. Dalcroze believed that the brain is the key medium for receiving and analyzing stimuli, which then directs the body to perform corresponding actions. Rhythm, according to Dalcroze, consists of two core elements: time and energy. Experiencing rhythm (*conscience du rythme*) involves an individual's ability to perceive the timing between movements, thereby controlling time, space, and energy in their actions (Juntunen, 2016).

In rhythmic movement activities, the body's movements incorporate elements of time and energy within spatial dimensions. Using movement to illustrate music can significantly enhance aural skills and listening capabilities (Ismail et al., 2023). These movements are

performed as responses to the music, beginning with simple actions like walking to adjust to changes in tempo, dynamics, and phrasing of the song as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Rhythmic movement as shown in the author's previous work (Ismail et al., 2023).**

The primary goal of these activities is to deepen musical knowledge, improve movement learning, enhance focus, listening skills, musical expression, and enrich the overall musical experience (Juntunen, 2004). Activities such as moving, listening, singing, improvising, thinking, and visualizing music in movement are integrated. This approach leverages the body as an instrument, blending music and physical movement seamlessly (Ismail et al., 2021).

The principles of rhythmic movement are deeply rooted in the distinction between locomotor and non-locomotor movements, both of which are essential components of dance, music (eurhythmics), and physical education. Locomotor movements, which involve a change of position, such as walking, galloping, or jumping, are fundamental for developing spatial awareness, coordination, and dynamic balance (Syahputra et al., 2021). These movements are essential not only for physical development but also for the mental and emotional engagement of individuals, as they often serve as responses to rhythmic stimuli and purposeful goals. The integration of locomotor movements into rhythmic activities highlights their role in planned behavior, driven by the anticipation of future achievements or the necessity to respond to immediate challenges.

Non-locomotor movements, in contrast, emphasize the importance of stability, control, and precision. These movements, such as twisting or stretching, are crucial for enhancing body awareness and the ability to execute complex movements without altering one's location (Kurniawan & Hanief, 2022). In rhythmic movement activities like dance and gymnastics, non-locomotor movements allow individuals to express rhythmic patterns while maintaining a grounded presence. The careful balance between locomotor and non-locomotor movements is what creates the fluidity and grace seen in artistic performances like dance, where rhythm is expressed through both dynamic and static forms of movement.

In the context of *dondang sayang*, these principles of rhythmic movement can be observed in the dance patterns that accompany the music. The fluid and graceful movements, guided by the rhythmic structure of the music, create a cohesive performance that is both visually and aurally engaging. In *dondang sayang*, movements can be identified through various dance patterns that enhance the overall performance. The arrangement of floor

patterns adds a layer of visual interest, making the dance sequences more engaging. The art of *dondang sayang* is characterized by the gentle movements of the dance, the melodious voice and rhythm, and the deep emotional resonance expressed through the song lyrics (Azharul, 2024). These movements are intricately aligned with the beat of the music, the dynamics of the song, and the melodic flow. Each motion not only complements the musical elements but also serves to communicate the underlying themes of *dondang sayang*. The performances often convey messages of love, advice, and warmth, all presented in a spontaneous, cheerful, and occasionally humorous manner.

The fluidity and grace of the dance movements, combined with the harmonious blend of voice and rhythm, create a powerful and immersive experience for the audience. The movements as shown in Figure 2 follow the beat, respond to the song's dynamics, and mirror the melodic progression, ensuring a cohesive and unified performance. Through this synergy, *dondang sayang* becomes a medium for storytelling, where each gesture and step contributes to the narrative of love, wisdom, and camaraderie.



Figure 2: The *dondang sayang* dance from a video (still) made by the author.

*Dondang sayang* music typically features a slow tempo, utilizing the traditional *Asli* rhythm as partly seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Stylized *Asli* rhythm as provided by courtesy of Arshad, 2015.

The *dondang sayang* song begins with an introduction (informal conversation by singers, softly accompanied by violin), followed by the *rebana*, then the *tetawak*, and finally the vocals starting at the introduction (singers' informal conversation). The musical style is informal, with the violin leading the melody and closely following the singer. The singer, in turn, must be alert to the violin sound to begin each line of the song. The *dondang sayang*'s melody played by violin was transcribed into notation, articulated in Figure 4.

**Dondang Sayang**

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a violin piece titled "Dondang Sayang". The score is written on ten staves in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings like *pp*, *f*, and *mf*. Below the notes, there are extensive handwritten fingerings (numbers 0-4) and some performance instructions. The piece begins with a 3-measure introduction. The notation is dense and detailed, capturing the intricate melodic lines of the violin.



Figure 4. Original *dondang sayang* Music Score for Violin (Reproduced personally from the author's collection).

For amateur singers, *dondang sayang* music can be quite challenging. The complexity arises because there are no clear cues in the musical accompaniment to guide the singer in starting their verses. The lead violinist plays a crucial role in guiding the flow of the song, requiring the singer to pay close attention to the musical tones. This intricate interaction between the singer and the violinist adds to the depth and richness of the *dondang sayang* performance, demanding a high level of musical sensitivity and coordination.

## RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT AND ITS INTEGRATION IN *DONDANG SAYANG* PERFORMANCES

Every individual inherently possesses a sense of rhythm, which is evident in nature and manifests most clearly through dance. Dance, as the art of movement, embodies rhythmic activities that are physical expressions of mental and emotional responses to rhythm (Goodridge, 1999). These activities engage individuals physically, socially, and mentally with regular patterns of sound. In the context of *dondang sayang*, dance refers to movements set to music, emerging as a composition with organization, structure, and pattern. Mastery of dance requires fundamental knowledge and rhythmic skills to achieve proficiency and efficiency in bodily movements.

The elements of rhythm crucial to understanding *dondang sayang* include:

Beat: The underlying pulse of a rhythm.

Tempo: The rate of speed of a movement.

Intensity: Variation of stress in movement.

Pitch: The lowness or highness of a tone.

Accent: Emphasis on certain beats.

Meter: The regular recurrence of beats that divides a musical design into measures.

Phrase: Measures grouped together.

Bar: A vertical line in music dividing it into equal measures of time.

Count: A pulse beat, marking time.

Note: A printed symbol of a musical tone.

Measure: A group of pulse beats.

Tone Pattern: A set of tones with or without rest used for specific dance steps.

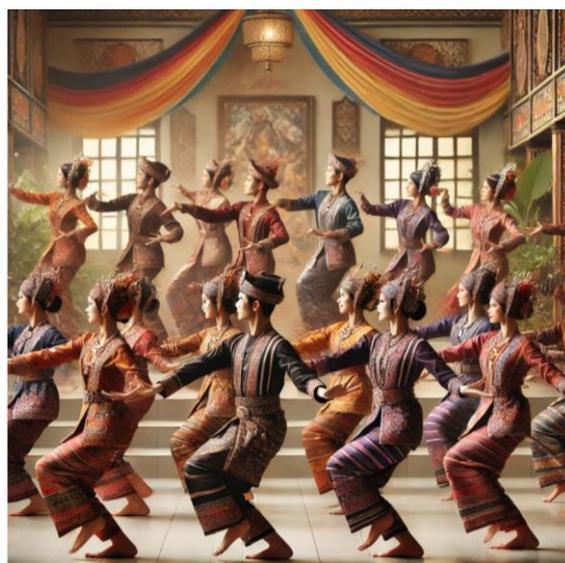
**Step Pattern:** The movements corresponding to each dance step.

In dance, movement elements such as direction, level, range, and floor pattern define how space is utilized. Direction refers to the line of movement, which may be forward, backward, sideward, diagonal, upward, or a combination. Level denotes movement through space at high, low, or medium levels. Range describes the area covered by the body, either small or large. Floor pattern outlines the path created during movement, which can form shapes like circles, squares, straight lines, or zigzags.

Movement qualities are expressed through the elements of time, energy, and space (Daly, 2022). Time qualities differentiate between fast movements, like a galloping horse or jet plane, and slow movements, like a turtle or growing flower. Creative rhythms, also known as fundamental rhythms or natural dances, result from exploration and improvisation, allowing individuals, especially children, to express themselves through movement.

Folk or ethnic dance is a cultural art form passed down through generations, reflecting the customs, beliefs, rituals, and occupations of a people. In *dondang sayang*, rhythmic activities serve not only as physical manifestations of emotional responses but also as sources of enjoyment across all ages. These activities help individuals acquire and develop a sense of rhythm, express feelings, and experience the principles of time, space, and energy.

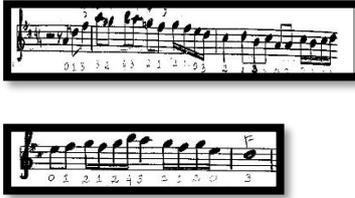
The Asli dance movements in *dondang sayang* trace back to early Malay kingdoms of the 14th century, embodying traditional rhythms and steps. By meticulously mapping these movements to the music in the selected videos, the study aimed to demonstrate the suitability of rhythmic movement blends in traditional dance to portray musical notes effectively. This detailed analysis provides insights into the cultural significance and intricate connection between dance and music in *dondang sayang*, enriching the field of music and dance research. Figure 5 shows a prototype of rhythmic movement that integrated the *dondang sayang*'s dance steps (*ragam*). The dancers, in colourful traditional attire, are moving to the rhythm of the music, showcasing various rhythmic movements. It indicates how the dance steps align with the musical elements, highlighting the integration of rhythm and melody of *dondang sayang* performances.



**Figure 5. Prototype of Rhythmic Movement in *dondang sayang*. (Photograph by courtesy of the Music School of UiTM).**

# ANALYSIS OF THE INTEGRATION BETWEEN RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT AND DONDANG SAYANG MELODIC STRUCTURES

The data collection process for the study involved a meticulous examination of rhythmic movements observed in *dondang sayang* performances. The primary sources of data were two YouTube videos, which provided personal definition representations of *dondang sayang* performances relevant to the study's focus. The process began with the careful selection of these videos, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the dance sequences and musical performances. Each video was reviewed multiple times to accurately note specific dance steps, gestures, and movements synchronized with the music. The rhythmic movements were then meticulously mapped to the corresponding segments of the *dondang sayang* music. This involved breaking down the music into its melodic and rhythmic components and identifying how the dance movements aligned with these elements. Detailed annotations were made for each segment, including the timing of movements, the type of steps, and any notable gestures. Further, the melodic and rhythmic patterns of the *dondang sayang* music were analyzed to understand their structure and how they influence the dance movements as shown in Table 1. This analysis included identifying recurring themes, variations in tempo, and unique musical elements emphasized during the performances. A comparative analysis of the two videos was also conducted to identify similarities and differences in the adaptation of rhythmic movements. Factors such as the style of the dancers, the interpretation of the music, and the overall presentation were considered in this comparison.

Music Score Excerpt	Video 1 Tarian <i>dondang sayang</i> Melaka	Video 2 JUARA Pertandingan Tarian <i>dondang sayang</i> 2022
		
		
		



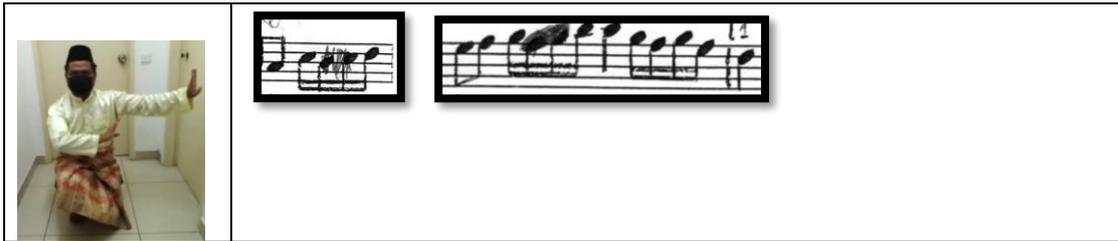
**Figure 6: Analysis of the *dondang sayang* melody and dance steps**

All observations and analyses were documented in a structured format, including written notes, annotated video segments, and graphical representations of the rhythmic and melodic patterns. The documentation also reflected on the cultural significance of the movements and their relationship to the *dondang sayang* music. This thorough and systematic data collection process ensured that the rhythmic movements observed in the two YouTube videos were accurately mapped to the *dondang sayang* music, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis of melody and movement adaptation in *dondang sayang* performances. The detailed observations and annotations enabled a comprehensive understanding of how rhythmic movements are intricately connected to the musical elements of *dondang sayang*, contributing valuable insights to the field of music and dance research.

Action	Melody Excerpt
	<p>Intro</p>







**Figure 7: Analysis of rhythmic movement and *dondang sayang* melody.**

The analysis of rhythmic movements in *dondang sayang* reveals the involvement of both locomotor and non-locomotor movements. These movements are intricately combined with the aesthetic elements of *Silat*, seamlessly integrated into the dance in its original form. Locomotor movements include stepping forward, stepping backward, cross-stepping, swaying steps, and brisk walking. These movements are essential as they involve the body's ability to travel through space, demonstrating dynamic motion and directional change. Non-locomotor movements consist of hand crossing, side tapping, arm swinging, extending arms, stretching out hands, bending hands, interlocking palms, and blocking. These movements highlight the body's capacity to move in place, emphasizing control, balance, and expressive gestures.

Locomotor movements, such as stepping forward and backward, contribute to the dancer's spatial awareness and coordination. They are crucial for transitioning between different formations and maintaining the flow of the dance. Cross-stepping enhances agility and balance, allowing dancers to perform intricate footwork that adds complexity and visual interest to the performance. Swaying steps incorporate rhythm and fluidity, facilitating graceful transitions and embodying the dance's aesthetic appeal. Brisk walking demonstrates speed and control, contributing to the dynamic nature of the dance.

Non-locomotor movements, such as hand crossing and side tapping, emphasize rhythm and synchronization, enabling dancers to highlight specific beats and accents in the music. Arm swinging and extending arms enhance the visual impact of the dance, creating expansive movements that convey emotion and artistic expression. Stretching and bending hands require flexibility and precision, contributing to the overall aesthetic and technical quality of the dance. Interlocking palms and blocking add a sense of drama and narrative to the performance, often symbolizing traditional combat techniques and cultural motifs.

## CONCLUSION

The gentle and graceful melodies inherent in *dondang sayang* play a crucial role in elevating the Malay community's cultural stature through its rich traditional music. Mastery of *dondang sayang* requires proficiency in several performance skills, including the use of figurative language, expressions of love and wisdom, and subtle satire. These elements are critical in maintaining the artistic integrity and traditional essence of the performance. However, the current generation struggles to master and practice these skills, posing a challenge to the continuity of this unique cultural art form. Abas Katan, in his observations, highlighted the declining involvement of younger generations in *dondang sayang*, noting that its preservation is largely upheld by veteran performers. The core strength of *dondang sayang* lies in the singer's prowess and the power of the poetic verses, making it a challenging art form for contemporary enthusiasts, particularly the youth.

This study is vital in the context of *dondang sayang*'s performance art. Abas Katan's remarks underscore the urgency of ongoing efforts to prevent this cultural heritage from becoming obsolete. Continuous initiatives are needed to safeguard this tradition and to enhance the quality of *dondang sayang* performances in Malaysia. As a significant aspect of Melaka's artistic and cultural heritage, *dondang sayang* has been cherished and passed down through generations. Its popularity within the Melaka community attests to its cultural significance. Highlighting its unique features and importance to the younger generation is essential for its preservation.

The connection between rhythmic movements and the significance of this study is evident in how these movements encapsulate the essence of *dondang sayang*. The dance integrates locomotor movements, such as stepping forward, stepping backward, and cross-stepping, which align with the music's rhythmic and melodic components. Non-locomotor movements, such as hand crossing and arm swinging, emphasize control and expressive gestures, enhancing the visual and emotional impact of the performance. Understanding and analyzing these movements within the context of *dondang sayang* not only showcases the dancers' technical skills but also enriches the cultural and artistic expressions inherent in the dance. This study provided a comprehensive analysis that underscores the importance of rhythmic movements in preserving and promoting the traditional art form of *dondang sayang*.

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## REMARK

All depictions are produced by the author and/or used in his works repeatedly.

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