



Improvisation Scat Singing in *Mbiring Manggis* Song: An Interpretive Approach to Karo Traditional Music

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the relationship between scat singing vocal improvisation techniques and the development of vocal interpretation in a traditional Batak Karo song entitled *Mbiring manggis*. The scat singing technique, which comes from the jazz vocal tradition, is rarely used in the context of folk songs. Therefore, its application in the song *Mbiring manggis* offers a new approach in enriching the traditional vocal arrangement style. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and musical exploration conducted in the process of rehearsal and song recording. The results showed that the application of scat singing can improve the singer's musical expression through rhythmic flexibility, improvisational syllable selection, and strengthening the meaning of emotions in the lyrics. The vocal interpretations not only retain the original characteristics of Karo songs, but also create new musical colors that can reach modern audiences. This research recommends further exploration of the collaboration of jazz vocal techniques and traditional music as a strategy for preservation and innovation.

Keywords: Scat singing, Vocal interpretation, Improvisation, Karo folk song *Mbiring manggis*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis keterkaitan antara teknik improvisasi vokal scat singing dengan perkembangan interpretasi vokal dalam lagu tradisional Batak Karo berjudul *Mbiring Manggis*. Teknik scat singing yang berasal dari tradisi vokal jazz ini jarang digunakan dalam konteks lagu daerah. Oleh karena itu, penerapannya dalam lagu *Mbiring Manggis* menawarkan pendekatan baru dalam memperkaya gaya aransemen vokal tradisional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dokumentasi, dan eksplorasi musikal yang dilakukan dalam proses gladi resik dan rekaman lagu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan scat singing dapat meningkatkan ekspresi musikal penyanyi melalui fleksibilitas ritme, pemilihan suku kata yang improvisasional, dan penguatan makna emosi dalam lirik. Interpretasi vokal tersebut tidak hanya mempertahankan ciri asli lagu Karo, tetapi juga menciptakan warna musikal baru yang dapat menjangkau khalayak modern. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan eksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang kolaborasi teknik vokal jazz dan musik tradisional sebagai strategi pelestarian dan inovasi.

Kata kunci: : Scat singing, Interpretasi vokal, Improvisasi, Lagu daerah Karo *Mbiring manggis*



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1. Introduction

Vocal music serves not only as a medium of entertainment, but also as a means of artistic expression and cultural communication. In vocal practice, interpretation is an important element that allows singers to convey the emotional meaning and context of song lyrics in a personal and communicative way. According to Taryadi & Latif (2022), interpretation is the process of diving into and reviving a composer's musical ideas based on the singer's understanding and aesthetic sensitivity.

One interpretive approach that has developed in the modern vocal tradition is improvisation, particularly the

scat singing technique in jazz music. Scat singing is a vocal technique that utilizes nonsensical syllables such as "do-bap-ba-doo" sung rhythmically and melodically to create improvisational vocal phrases. In Indonesia, the study of scat singing is still relatively limited, but it has started to get attention in the context of vocal education. Setiarani and Midde's research (2022), for example, formulated the stages of learning scat singing for beginner jazz vocalists in the vocal academic environment of Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Yogyakarta.

On the other hand, traditional Indonesian music, such as Batak Karo folk songs, has a unique and distinctive musical richness. *Mbiring manggis*, composed by Tumtam Tarigan in the early 1980s, is an example of a popular Karo folk song characterized by an upbeat melody, fast tempo and romantic message. The song has been re-performed in various arrangements, including by Lyodra Ginting in a national festival with the addition of modern rap and pop elements. This shows that traditional Karo songs have the flexibility to be adapted in a more contemporary musical format (Girsang, 2023).

However, combining jazz vocal improvisation techniques such as scat singing with traditional folk songs is still rare, both in practice and in academic studies. Generally, re-presentations of folk songs only include changes to harmony or rhythm without exploration of improvisational vocal techniques. This is where the important gap of study lies - namely how jazz vocal improvisation can be applied contextually and creatively in traditional Karo songs without losing local characteristics.

Hartayu's (2017) research on Ella Fitzgerald's scat singing in the song "Flying Home" shows that scat singing can be a means of strengthening vocal character in musical performances. In the local context, Damarisa Br Tarigan (2021) has explored the application of the Karo rengget technique in the modern song "Speechless" which is packaged in an ethnic fusion combo format, and produces a new vocal color without removing its ethnic elements. This shows that traditional vocal techniques such as rengget and modern improvisational techniques such as scat singing can be combined to create innovative and contextualized vocal aesthetics.

The song *Mbiring manggis* also has the potential to be explored vocally due to its flexible melodic nature and has musical gaps that can be filled with improvisation. The combination of scat singing and this song can enrich vocal interpretation, especially in expressing playfulness, spontaneity and emotion in song lyrics. Scat singing allows singers to create a variety of personalized and expressive vocal phrases, in accordance with a more creative contemporary musical approach. In the world of vocal academics, such exploration is important as a form of preserving traditional music with an adaptive approach to the times. According to Suryati (2020), innovation in the presentation of traditional music is needed so that cultural heritage is not merely preserved statically, but is revived through contextualized creative practices.

Based on this background, this research was conducted with two main objectives. First, to describe the process of applying scat singing improvisation in *Mbiring manggis* song. Second, to analyze the relationship between scat singing techniques and the development of vocal interpretation in the song. The research used a qualitative method with a case study approach to the singer's practice in processing the song.

2. Method

This research is a qualitative research with an intrinsic case study approach. Qualitative research was chosen because it is oriented towards understanding meaning, processes, and subjective experiences that cannot be measured quantitatively (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). In this context, the main focus Rather than measuring the results of the application of vocal techniques, the research explores the creative process, musical experience, and the influence of scat singing techniques on interpretive quality in the traditional song *Mbiring manggis*.

Intrinsic case studies are used because the object under study is unique and specific, namely the vocal exploration process carried out by the researcher himself as the main actor. This approach follows Yin's (2018) view that case studies allow a thorough observation of a phenomenon in its actual context, taking into account the complexity and socio-cultural dimensions that accompany it. In this case, the song *Mbiring mangosteen* is not only understood as musical material, but as a representation of Karo culture that is full of meaning, and therefore, the application of scat singing techniques in the song requires a deep contextual understanding.

The researcher is not only an observer or analyst, but also an active participant who experiences, lives and reflects directly on the vocal process as a whole. Therefore, the approach used is reflective practice led research, as described by Candy (2006), where creative practice is used as a source of knowledge, and the direct experience of the performer becomes the main data of the research. This approach is relevant to the field of performing arts, especially vocals, as it allows empirical exploration of musical experiences that cannot be fully explained through nonpractical methods.

In this context, the practice of exploring scat singing techniques is positioned as a transformative process that not only adds improvisational elements to songs, but also reshapes the way researchers understand vocal interpretation. This process includes directed vocal exercises, improvisational phrase experiments, self-reflection through daily vocal journals, and analysis of rehearsal and performance recordings. Thus, this research not only generates theoretical understanding, but also opens the possibility to formulate new pedagogical approaches in the development of local culture-based vocal techniques and modern improvisation.

Furthermore, this approach also allows for holistic analysis: how vocal improvisation relates to the musical values of the Karo tradition, how the singer's vocal body responds when applying the scat technique, and how this technique can be used as a strategy to strengthen emotional expressiveness in traditional songs. None of this can be achieved through a quantitative approach that is detached from the experience of the performer.

With this reflective case study approach, the research becomes more than just data collection, it becomes a space for the creation, contemplation and recording of artistic knowledge born from real vocal experiences. In this way, this research is expected to contribute to the development of vocal interpretation methods in art education institutions, as well as an effort to improve the quality of vocal interpretation. innovative in preserving and enriching Indonesia's traditional vocal heritage through the bridge of contemporary vocal techniques.

3. Result and Discussion

The process of applying scat singing in the song *Mbiring manggis* begins with knowing and understanding the song *Mbiring manggis*. Then, interpreting it to facilitate analysis in determining the parts of the song to be emphasized. The final step is practicing scat singing so that it can be applied to the determined parts. The result of applying scat singing in the song *Mbiring manggis* is supporting a deep interpretation so that the message of the song about happiness and joy is conveyed well. In addition, it reinforces and clarifies the dynamics to enliven the emotion of the song, so that it can provide a deep appreciation for the singer and also the listeners.

The result of this research is that the application of scat singing supports a deep interpretation so that the message of the song about happiness and joy is conveyed well. Scat singing is applied with adjustments, so it does not damage the main characteristics of the song *Mbiring manggis*.

Scat singing analysis

Scat singing analysis involves understanding and researching the techniques and strategies used by scat singers in vocal improvisation. Here are some aspects that can be analyzed in scat singing :

- a. Melody and scale selection: Scat singers use musical scales to create improvisational melodies.
- b. Rhythm patterns: Scat singing often involves the use of complex and diverse rhythm patterns.
- c. Interaction with other musicians: Scat improvisation often occurs in the context of collaboration with other instrumentalists.

Through scat singing analysis, the author gains insight into the techniques, creativity, and strategies used by scat singers in creating expressive and unique vocal improvisations. This can help in understanding and developing vocal improvisation skills in the context of jazz music and other musical forms involving vocal improvisation.

Vocal interpretation analysis

Analysis of vocal interpretation involves evaluating and understanding how a singer understands and expresses the emotions, messages, or meanings of song lyrics through the use of vocal techniques and artistic interpretation. A singer can use various vocal techniques such as intonation, vibrato, dynamics, phrasing, and other vocal techniques to express specific emotions or messages contained in the lyrics. Here are some aspects that can be analyzed in vocal interpretation :

- a. Use of vocal techniques: The vocal techniques used in this study are the Karo rengget technique, breathing techniques, intonation, articulation, resonance, and delivery.
- b. Use of dynamics: crescendo
- c. Use of phrasing: Vocal interpretation also involves the use of appropriate phrasing to express the nuances and meanings of the lyrics.
- d. Use of intonation and vibrato: Intonation and vibrato can be used to add certain colors or nuances to the vocal interpretation.
- e. Tempo and rhythm selection: Choosing the right tempo and rhythm can help in expressing the emotions or message of the lyrics.

Through vocal interpretation analysis, the author gains a deeper understanding of the techniques and strategies used by singers to express the emotions or message of the lyrics. This can help in developing vocal interpretation skills and enriching the listener's experience in enjoying vocal music.

Analysis of the Karo folk song *Mbiring manggis*

"Lagu *Mbiring manggis* " is a folk song from Indonesia, specifically from the Karo region. Analysis of this song involves understanding various aspects such as lyrics, melody, rhythm, instruments, cultural context, as well as the values and messages contained in the song. Here are some aspects that can be analyzed in the song "*Mbiring manggis* ":

Lyrics : Analysis can be done on the lyrics of the song, both in terms of meaning and language use. The lyrics of "*Mbiring manggis* " describe the atmosphere of joy in a Karo traditional celebration or performance.

Melody : Melody analysis involves understanding the melody patterns and pitch changes in the song. The melody of "*Mbiring manggis* " can be analyzed in terms of its uniqueness,

- a. the melody contour used, and how the melody reflects the emotions or atmosphere in the song.
- b. Instruments : Analysis can also be done on the use of instruments in the song. "*Mbiring manggis* " usually uses traditional Karo instruments such as kulcapi, keteng-keteng, sarune, gong. Understanding the role and characteristics of these instruments in the song can provide insight into the musical nuances of the song.
- c. Rhythm and Musical Patterns : Rhythm analysis involves understanding the rhythmic patterns and beats in the song. The rhythm of "*Mbiring manggis* " often depicts a lively and energetic rhythm, reflecting the spirit and joy of celebration.
- d. Cultural Context : "*Mbiring manggis* " is a traditional Karo song related to the culture and traditions of the Karo people.

Through the analysis of the song "*Mbiring manggis* ," we can gain a deeper understanding of the musical aspects, lyrics, cultural context, and messages contained in this song. This analysis can provide insight into the richness and uniqueness of Karo traditional music, as well as enrich the listener's experience in appreciating and understanding this song more deeply.

In this study, the *scat singing* techniques and development used in the Batak Karo folk song *Mbiring manggis* are the Karo rengget technique, and in the development of rhythm and melody, the author follows the original form of the song. However, in the vocal style, the author creates scat patterns with sounds like "tarara", "hoo", "dada", "nana". The following is an example of a Karo rengget pattern in the form of scat with variations of notes mi, fa, la, si, do (3, 4, 6, 7,1).

10 scat
ha a

20 pa ra pa pa na te ra te pa ra ha

28 hm m m m da

♩=100

Notation 4.1 Karo rengget pattern uses notes 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 1.
Source: Personal documentation

Notation 4.8 is a form of Karo rengget using the Karo scale which is composed of notes mi, fa, la, si, do (3, 4, 6, 7,1). These notes are arranged into a pattern that resembles scat, but this is a pattern from Karo rengget. This improvisation section is located at the beginning of the song, namely part A of the *Mbiring manggis* song arrangement. Furthermore, in the middle of the song there is a *scat singing* arrangement with note patterns that are not based on a scale. The intention is that the improvisation in this section only focuses on notes that contain the rhythm and melody of the *Mbiring manggis* song.

81 **D**
ku da da da hm m da da da da na na na nda da

84 da da da da hm na na na ra mpa pa pa ram da da da

89 na ha a a a a ta ra ra ra na na da di da

93 da da da da di da ta ra ra na na ta na na na na ram ta rap ta ra ra

97 ta ta na na na ta na ta di da da o o o o di da

Notation 4.2 Scat pattern in the song *Mbiring manggis*
Source: Personal documentation

In this section, the arrangement form of the *Mbiring manggis* song is a *scat singing* pattern that uses the syllables “tarara”, ”dadada”, “nanana”. The improvisation is patterned without being based on a structured scale. However, the improvisation was created by following the rhythm and melody of the *Mbiring manggis* song.

In the arrangement form of the *Mbiring manggis* song, the author combines the song Sik-Sik Sibatumanikkam in the middle of the song after scat singing. In this section, the song Sik-Sik Sibatumanikkam changes the tempo of the song which was originally 100 bpm in the *Mbiring manggis* song to 120 bpm in the Sik-sik Sibatumanikkam song. Apart from the tempo, this section also changes the basic tone of the song which in the *Mbiring manggis* song is in the key of D, but in the Sik-Sik Sibatumanikkam song it changes to the key of E. The following is the song Sik-Sik Sibatumanikkam which is included in the arrangement of the *Mbiring manggis* song.

118
Voice ni si bam bang kar ju la ju la si bam bang kar ju la ju la

120
Voice sik sik si ba tu ma ni kam di par jo ged sor ma di got tam di na ma ngi na

123 **F**
Voice ha bang bi rik bi rik ha bang bi rik bi rik sat ta bi di lo lo a non di pa

Notation 4.3 Part of the song when the key and tempo change
Source: Personal documentation

After *scat singing* and the song *Sik-Sik Sibatumanikkam* in the beginning and middle of the song, the author recreated improvisation with free note patterns with a different basic tone from the *Mbiring manggis* song which is in the beginning of the song. This improvisation triggers the end of the *Mbiring manggis* song. The following is part of the improvisation.

145 **G**
Voice pa ri ra ta ra ta ra ta na ta ta la la la la

149
Voice tu tu ta ta ta ya pa pa tu tu ta ta ya ta ta ra ta

Notation 4.4 *Scat singing* improvisation towards the end of the song in the key of E
Source: Personal documentation

The right emphasis and dynamics in the song *Mbiring manggis* . Singers can consider placing emphasis on words or phrases that are important in the lyrics, and using vocal dynamics to create variations in expression and intensity that match the meaning of the song.

In the song *Mbiring manggis* , the use of dynamics plays an important role in conveying the content and meaning of the song well. One of the dynamics used in the song *Mbiring manggis* is crescendo dynamics. The following is the use of crescendo dynamics in the song *Mbiring manggis* in this research.

ta ra ra ra ra na na da di da

Notation 4.12 Use of crescendo dynamics
Source: Personal document

The appropriate emotional expression of a singer. "Lagu *Mbiring manggis* " can have various meanings and emotional nuances, depending on the context and individual interpretation. The singer can strive to communicate the emotions in the song lyrics through the use of vocal nuances, such as the use of vibrato or changes in vocal character. Body expression can also influence a singer to perform their best. For example, upright posture, hand gestures, facial expressions, body movements, eye contact. Here is an example of a singer's body posture using body expression.



Figure 4.4 Body Expression
Source: Personal documentation

In this explanation, vocal interpretation is a personal process that depends on the singer's individual style and interpretation. Each singer can have their own unique approach to performing a song. However, in this study, the interpretation of performing the song *Mbiring manggis* is by using appropriate dynamics, appropriate body expression, and appreciation in Karo culture by using the uniqueness of Karo musical instruments.

The Effect of *Scat singing* on Vocal Interpretation

The application of the *scat singing* technique in the song *Mbiring mangosteen* has a significant impact on the development of the singer's vocal interpretation, both technically, expressively and musically. Vocal interpretation, in this context, is no longer understood simply as conveying the meaning of lyrics, but as a creative process of singers in forming a complete and communicative musical experience. Through *scat* improvisation, singers get the space to express emotional responses to lyrics and song melodies personally, spontaneously, and contextually.

From a technical perspective, improvisational *scat singing* improved the researcher's ability to manage vocal phrases more freely and responsively to harmony. Continuous *scat* practice strengthens mastery of breath control, articulation, and vocal dynamics. This is in line with Sutopo's (2020) opinion that the mastery of vocal techniques such as *mixed voice*, *falsestto*, and the use of rhythmic articulation is the foundation in creating characterful vocal interpretations. The researcher experienced an increase in the ability to vary the intensity of the voice, enrich vocal colors through timbre play, and create phrase stresses that match the emotion of the lyrics.

Expressively, *scat singing* allows singers to explore the emotional side of *Mbiring mangosteen* more deeply. This song, which was originally only understood as a song with nuances of love and praise, in improvisational practice becomes a medium to convey feelings of joy, admiration, and even surprise—all of which are realized in the choice of vocal phrases without lyrics. *Scat* is not only present as a filler of musical empty space, but becomes an alternative form of language that conveys meaning beyond the text. This supports Yudiaryani's (2013) statement that performance art does not only re-present the structure of the work, but also involves the re-conveyance of meaning through gesture, sound and improvisation.

This finding was strengthened by an interview with a vocal lecturer at ISI Yogyakarta, who stated that the researcher's performance of *Mbiring mangosteen* with *scat* improvisation showed that improvement in the aspects of expression, mastery of dynamics, and continuity of vocal phrases. The lecturer considered that the use of *scat singing* actually clarified the feeling in the song, because it was able to strengthen the atmosphere of "spontaneous joy" which was the main character of the song.

Meanwhile, the Karo musicians interviewed considered that although the *scat* technique is foreign to the Karo tradition, its application in this context was done with respect for the original song structure. The researcher kept the main melody of the song and only inserted improvisation in the interlude or closing part of

the song, without changing the structure or meaning of the lyrics. In the musician's view, *scat singing* in this song does not eliminate Karo identity, but rather provides a new aesthetic space that may be more easily accepted by the younger generation of Karo who are familiar with popular music formats.

Furthermore, this improvisational experience formed a new musical awareness for the researcher about the importance of the balance between vocal freedom and responsibility to the character of the song. Vocal improvisation is not just "playing with sound", but must be able to dialogue with the structure of the song and the cultural values it contains. In the researcher's vocal practice, *scat* improvisation not only strengthens interpretation, but also enriches the previously static form of traditional music presentation to become more open, flexible and communicative.

Thus, the *scat singing* technique proves to have an important role in the development of vocal interpretation in the traditional song *Mbiring manggis*. The application of this technique opens up space for the creation of new phrases, more diverse emotional nuances, and a deeper understanding of musical meaning. This experience shows that improvisation is not a threat to the purity of tradition, but can instead be a creative bridge between cultural heritage and modern expressions that are relevant to today's audiences.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the process of applying *scat singing* techniques and its influence on the development of vocal interpretation in the traditional Batak Karo song *Mbiring manggis* (Girsang, 2023). Through a case study-based qualitative approach, with direct practice by the researcher as a vocal performer, findings were obtained that showed the relationship between improvisational techniques and vocal expression in the context of local culture (Creswell, 2016; Candy, 2006).

First, the process of applying *scat singing* is carried out through the stages of exploring the melodic structure of the song, developing improvised phrases, and evaluating based on reflection on practice and interviewing interviewees (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). Improvisation is selectively inserted in the interlude and coda sections, so as not to overdo it. Undermines the main song form, in line with the principles of contextual vocal interpretation (Sitinjak, 2021; Tarigan, 2021).

Second, *scat singing* techniques have been shown to contribute to the richness of expression and flexibility of vocal interpretation, especially in bringing to life the musical dynamics and emotions in songs (Sutopo, 2020; Setiarani & Midde, 2022). Improvisation allows singers to develop original phrases that are responsive to the atmosphere of the song, without losing the basic meaning of the lyrics (Yudiaryani, 2013). The application of this technique is carried out while maintaining the local characteristics of the song *Mbiring manggis*, according to the principle of cultural preservation innovation (Suryati, 2020). This technique has successfully revitalized the presentation of traditional songs with a contemporary interpretive approach that does not eliminate cultural values (Yudiaryani, 2013; Girsang, 2023).

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