

Menir Moéda and His Style of Jenaka Sunda

Indra Ridwan
{indra827@gmail.com}

Institut Seni dan Budaya Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract. *Jenaka sunda* is a type of Sundanese music, and its emergence was pioneered by a Sundanese musician, Menir Moéda, around the end of the 1930s. Menir Moéda created *jenaka sunda* by remodeling, transforming, and rearranging old Sundanese traditional music into new forms or even creating new songs and musical forms that fit the needs of radio programs and listeners. The popularity of Menir Moéda and the development of *jenaka sunda* are closely related to the music programs broadcast on the radio, including the Dutch government radio station (NIROM), the Indonesian government radio station (RRI), and the local private radio station in West Java, namely VORL. Menir Moéda has inspired many Sundanese musicians who act as preservers and successors of *jenaka sunda*.

Keywords: *Jenaka sunda*; Menir Moéda; pioneer; new musical form; radio

1 Introduction

In the realm of Sundanese music, the name Menir Moéda¹ is synonymous with *jenaka sunda*. Menir Moéda is regarded as the trailblazer in developing *jenaka sunda* music. Menir Moéda and his *jenaka sunda* gained popularity as *jenaka sunda* programs were increasingly broadcasted through radio stations such as NIROM² (*Netherlandsch Indische Radio Omroep Maatschappi*), VORL³ (*Vereeniging Oosterse Radio Luisterars*), and RRI⁴ (*Radio Republik Indonesia*). Menir Moéda's pioneering work earned him recognition and served as a source of inspiration for the practitioners of *jenaka sunda*, who later followed in his footsteps. This paper provides a concise account of Menir Moéda's process of conceiving and advancing *jenaka sunda*. The data utilized in this study is derived from various sources, including radio magazines such as *Soéara NIROM* and *Berita VORL*, which featured radio programs from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. *Pedoman Radio*, a radio program magazine by RRI, was published from 1948 to 1961. Furthermore, vinyl

¹ Menir Moéda was used as a stage name; his real name was Saim bin Suad (b. 1906), better known as Holil. For citations, words, and sentences garnered from pre-1972 printed sources, the author maintains the old spelling, for example, /u/ was written /oé/, and /j/ was written /dj/.

² NIROM was the radio network established by the government of the Netherlands in 1934 in Batavia (later renamed Jakarta).

³ VORL was a private or listener-supported Bandung station established in 1935.

⁴ RRI is the Indonesian national radio station network, founded on 11 September 1945. In Bandung, it is known as RRI Bandung.

records containing *jenaka sunda* recordings released by the recording companies, including Odeon, Canary, His Master's Voice, Irama, and PT Dimita, were distributed from the end of the 1930s to the 1950s.

Jenaka sunda is a type of Sundanese music that emphasizes the singing style of Menir Moéda. The repertoire of songs is diverse, ranging from traditional Sundanese songs adapted into a new format or form to new songs typical of *jenaka sunda*. The songs are accompanied by Sundanese zither called *kacapi*, played by the singer himself. In addition to playing the *kacapi* and singing the song, interactive dialog and witty musical responses are essential to *jenaka sunda* performances. Therefore, *jenaka sunda* performances always involve more than one performer, each having a different role.

2 Menir Moéda and the Jenaka Sunda Program on Radio

According to the author's research, the term *jenaka sunda* was initially introduced during a music program aired by radio NIROM on July 8, 1940. The presentation showcased *Djenaka Soénda*, starring Menir Moéda and his *kacapi* instrument. The *Djenaka Soénda* program was aired twice on that date, from 5.05 pm to 6.15 pm and then from 6.45 pm to 7.30 pm. The NIROM stations in Jogja, Surabaya, Solo, and Semarang relayed that program. Shortly after that, VORL adopted and utilized the program name *Djenaka Soénda*. Afterward, the *Djenaka Soénda* program gained significant popularity within the community, particularly in the West Java region. Individuals are fond of this genre of music due to the novel ideas and musical alterations introduced by its practitioners. The performance format showcased lively and innovative Sundanese tunes and dynamic presentation styles. Upon further investigation, it becomes evident that the unique style executed by Menir Moéda was derived and modified from the *bobodoran soénda* performance, in which Menir Moéda and various other performers, such as Ose Hidayat, Baim, Odik, Euneng (Mang Onjon), Amud (Ogin) [1], Éon, Épén Soétardi, Nji Moérsih, Iboék, and Partasoéwanda, played.

Bobodoran Soénda was a radio program packaged in the form of humorous programs. This program was also known as *Bebodoran* and *Leloétjon Soénda*. In an article entitled "Djenaka Soéda," R.A. Darja explains that the humorous aspect of the *Bobodoran Soénda* program is more accentuated compared to the *Djenaka Soénda* program [2]. However, based on the audio recordings in the author's possession, the witty dialog elements in the songs "Bobodoran Tjolénat" (Odeon, A 278 393a) and "Bobodoran Boéngboélang Adan" (Odeon, A 278 393b), performed by Menir and Menir Moéda (Holil), do not show the prominence of the humorous aspect as Darja stated. Therefore, the author assumes that Darja's assertions may be factual if we compare the form of performance of *Bobodoran Soénda* and *Djenaka Soénda* by attending their live performances or listening to the live radio broadcasts of *Lagoé Soénda: Bobodoran Menir*, broadcast by VORL and NIROM, rather than based on recordings contained on vinyl records. Specifically, the duration of the recorded music on the vinyl is minimal. The duration of live performances of *jenaka sunda* broadcast on radio stations averages between fifteen and thirty minutes per show. However, some programs were allocated two hours of non-stop *Bobodoran/Leloétjon Soénda* performance time.

The *jenaka sunda* style, created by Menir Moéda, is well renowned. The producer of the music program dedicated a substantial amount of time to Menir Moéda's broadcast, as stated in *Soéara NIROM* magazine. According to the section titled "Jang Penting Minggoé Ini" ("Important Information This Week"), the statement is as follows:

"Menir Moéda, seorang jang ta' asing lagi dengan bobodoran dan leloétjonnya, akan berhadapan dengan microfoon kita, menjad-jikan beberapa lagoé djenaka. Agar memoéaskan, Menir Moéda kita beri kesempatan bermain doéa djam lamanja di depan microfoon kita [3]." "Menir Moéda, known as *bobodoran* and *leloétjon* performances, will be singing some humorous songs in front of our microphone. To satisfy our listeners, we will allow Menir Moéda to play two hours in front of our microphone."

The purpose of increasing Menir Moéda's broadcast time allocation was to satisfy the listeners of the *Djenaka Soénda* program. As a matter of fact, a large audience always attends live performances featuring Menir Moéda. Like the audience of a *wayang golék*⁵ performance, people flock to the location where Menir Moéda performs to enjoy his performances [4].

3 Menir Moéda and His Jenaka Sunda Style

Menir Moéda is recognized as a trailblazer in developing *jenaka sunda*. Menir Moéda distinctively performs this genre of music, playing the *kacapi* instrument while accompanying himself. In his article titled "Jenaka Sunda," Sayudi asserts that the innovative approach introduced by Menir Moéda effectively highlighted the distinctive traits of the Sundanese community, renowned for their jovial nature [4]. Furthermore, the selection of songs performed and how they were sung exhibited a humorous and clever quality. Similarly, the *kacapi* playing was agile and captivating.

During the mid-1930s, Menir embarked on a solo career as a practitioner of *bobodoran*, after that showcasing his skills in *jenaka sunda*. Menir consistently delved into the vocal elements and performance techniques of the Sundanese *kacapi*. Menir devised strategies to produce high-pitched, piercing voices that surpassed those of the average male singer. He could even sing intricate, twisting notes with unique vocal embellishments. Furthermore, she successfully merged falsetto techniques with her natural voice, incorporating the production of both original and falsetto voices as a fundamental aspect of her vocal style [5]. Menir possesses a method for generating nasal sounds, which is also one of her distinctive vocal attributes. Menir Moéda's vocal technique, known as "musical humor," involves singing to elicit laughter from the audience. In singing songs, Menir is more concerned with the fall of the notes of the vocal melody. Although

⁵ *Wayang golek* (the Sundanese three-dimensional rod-puppet theater) is a type of West Javanese art that is very popular in the wider community.

Menir sometimes sings *cianjuran*⁶ songs that mix *sorog*⁷ and *saléndro*⁸ scales [6], the way and style of singing these *cianjuran* songs are considered folk songs that he composed himself.

Menir chose the Sundanese zither as his principal musical instrument. The technique used to play the *kacapi* and the patterns and variations of the music are similar to the general technique of playing the Sundanese *kacapi*. Those techniques include plucked (*dipetik*), touched (*ditoél*), flicked (*disintreuk*), and “dijengkalan” (the method of measuring the length of objects using hand-span measurements). In contrast to other *kacapi* performers, Menir Moéda demonstrates a dynamic manner when playing his zither, especially during live performances. Menir demonstrates impressive skill as he skillfully plucks the wire of the *kacapi*, showcasing various techniques [4]. In addition, Menir's performance involves a distinctive style of playing the zither, sometimes resembling a tiger's claw. This technique is commonly called "The Tiger's Claw" [7]. Menir occasionally positioned the zither on his shoulders or transported it on his back while performing on the instrument. The acrobatic element is a prominent feature of Menir Moéda's performances. Menir's unique singing technique and mastery of the zither garnered significant popularity within the community.

Menir performed songs that in the Sundanese music are called staple songs that already have rules (*patokan*)⁹, such as "Panglima," "Banjaran," and "Sinyur." However, he changed the technique of playing the zither when accompanying those songs. For example, stopping the zither in the middle of playing and using the free meter technique (free tempo/a tempo) to show his vocal twists. This is one of the reasons why Sundanese music practitioners, especially those who adhere to conventional Sundanese music playing, negatively evaluate Menir's *kacapi* technique and playing style because they are different from the standard. But for Menir, the melodies of his songs are not confined by a static tempo; the tempo and rhythm are not based on a particular beat, so his playing does not reflect the use of tempo rules as in traditional Sundanese music.

The lyrics of Menir Moéda's *jenaka sunda* songs are not only in Sundanese but are sometimes interspersed with lyrics in Malay and Javanese languages [9]. This is the case with Menir Moéda's song "Kopi Soésoé," which was recorded on a vinyl record released by the Canary company (HS 46 A6329). The mixed-language lyrical model was followed by other Sundanese musicians, such as "Keliling Dunia I" by Didi Suara (PT Dimita MP-52 10 L 103) and "Bobodoran Kadjawan" by Épén Soétardi (Odéon A 278261b Jab 2270). It is, therefore, not surprising that *jenaka sunda* is not only popular among the Sundanese people but is also known and loved by people from other ethnic groups in Indonesia.

⁶ *Tembang sunda cianjuran*, also commonly called *cianjuran* may briefly be described as sung poetry.

⁷ *Sorog* is a specific Sundanese tuning system or scale.

⁸ *Saléndro* is a specific Sundanese tuning system or scale.

⁹ *Patokan* refers to “the underlying structure of tones (*patok* = stake, pillar) that establishes the basic tonal framework of many *lagu* (Sundanese songs) in the gamelan *saléndro* repertoire” [8].

The following are some audio recordings featuring Menir Moéda, released by some major record companies, such as Odeon, Canary Record, Irama Record, and His Master's Voice (H.M.V.):

Table 1. List of audio recordings of Menir Moéda

Player	Title of Song	Record Company
Menir and Holil	“Bobodoran Tjolénat”	Odeon A278393a
Menir and Holil	“Bobodoran Boéngboélang Adan”	Odeon A278393b
Menir Moéda	“Pratagan”	Canary Record HS 29
Menir Moéda	“Ys Krim”	Canary Record HS 29
Menir Moéda	“Rénggong Gantjang”	Canary Record HS 38
Menir Moéda	“Ros Boéngboélang”	Canary Record HS 38
Menir Moéda	“Kopi Soésoé”	Canary Record HS 46
Menir Moéda	“Satria”	Canary Record HS 46
Menir Moéda	“Salah Sangka”	Canary Record HS 86
Menir Moéda	“Polos Gado-Gado”	Canary Record HS 86
Menir Moéda	“Dasar Milik Noé Pahatoé”	Canary Record HS 94
Menir Moéda	“Ojong-Ojong Bangkong”	Canary Record HS 94
Menir Moéda	“Bala Wiri”	Canary Record HS 102
Menir Moéda	“Pantoénan Padjadjaran”	Canary Record HS 102
Menir Moéda	“Tablo”	Canary Record HS 119
Menir Moéda	“Titiran Djaman Modern”	Canary Record HS 119
Menir Moéda	“Pagi Soré”	Canary Record HS 238
Menir Moéda	“Patoéraj Tjinta”	Canary Record HS 238
Menir Moéda	“Sénggot Arileu”	Canary Record HS 320
Menir Moéda	“Manggoét-Manggoét”	Canary Record HS 320
Menir Moéda	“Malih Warna”	Canary Record HS 343
Menir Moéda	“Kring Tjirebon”	Canary Record HS 343
Menir Moéda	“Tmb [tembang] Hegar Manah”	His Master’s Voice NS 331
Menir Moéda	“Tmb [tembang] Panjanongan-Gado2 Soékamandi”	His Master’s Voice NS 331
Menir Moéda	“Bodoran Bangket”	His Master’s Voice NS 437
Menir Moéda	“Extra Waled”	His Master’s Voice NS 437
Menir Muda	“Kadjawen Kulu2”	Irama D.208-16
Menir Muda	“Gado2 Suasana”	Irama D.208-16
Menir Muda	“Kota Baru”	Irama D.249-22
Menir Muda	“Ajam Padjar”	Irama D.249-22
Menir Muda	“Kidung”	Irama IRD.204-163
Menir Muda	“Kembang Priangan”	Irama IRD.204-163

The list of songs played by Menir Moéda is very diverse, as shown in table 1 above. Not only songs recomposed from other genres of Sundanese music, including *kliningan*,¹⁰ and *tembang sunda cianjuran*; more than that, Menir created a variety of new songs, which, of course, were intended to fulfill his desire to express his musical ideas, as well as to fulfill the desires of his listeners and fans.

R.H. Ading Affandi (better known as RAF), a prominent Sundanese writer, composer, and cultural expert, asserted that Menir Moéda skillfully revolutionized the traditional Sundanese zither playing and singing technique. The style became a unique identity, known to the people as *gaya memeniran* [imitating Menir's style] or *njanjian Menir Moédaan* [singing style of Menir Moéda] [2], which was typical of Menir's way of singing. The *memeniran* style gained immense popularity among the community due to Menir Moéda's continuous performances at many events, including community-organized gatherings and radio programs. Menir's creative activity has resulted in the establishment of various significant point, specifically (1) the formation of Sundanese comedy groups that incorporate Menir's name as the group's title, such as Menir Moéda Poétrá, Menir Tua, Menir Baroé, and Ogél Menir. (2) The recognition of the relationship between Menir Moéda and Sundanese humor, one of which was written in a radio magazine column, "Menir Moéda, known as *bobodoran* and *leloétjon* performances." (3) Four major record companies, namely Odeon, HMV (His Master's Voice), Canary Record, and Irama Record, produced and distributed LPs containing recordings of Menir Moéda's music. (4) The emergence of the names of other Sundanese music groups that carried the music format "a la Menir Muda" [10], both in the way they plucked their Sundanese zither and the vocal ornamentation (*sénggol*) of their singing, even to the production and color of their sound as much as possible imitating Menir Moéda [4], for example the *jenaka sunda* group namely Kantja Priangan, led by Dasé, and Pusaka Siliwangi, led by Sumadinata. (5) The *jenaka sunda* program of Menir Moéda was broadcast or relayed by several radio stations, namely NIROM branches in Jogja, Surabaya, Solo, and Semarang, as well as RRI outside the West Java region, namely RRI Palembang station, RRI Madiun station, and RRI Jakarta station.

The following are some *jenaka sunda* performers (Menir Moéda and his successors) and the names of their groups, as follows:

Table 2. List of the names of *jenaka sunda* performers and their groups

Name of Group	Performer
<i>Djenaka Soénda</i>	Menir Moéda [Holil]
<i>Djenaka Soénda Pangloéjoé</i>	Épén Soétardi
<i>Ogél Menir dan Koéja</i>	Menir Moeda
<i>Mang Oesén</i>	Menir Baru alias Mang Oesén
<i>Kantja Indihiang</i>	Mang Koko alias Koko Koswara

¹⁰ *Kliningan* is an instrumental gamelan performance or *gamelan* as accompaniment for a solo female vocalist.

<i>Srimawar</i>	Nata Warna
<i>Wargi Pangluju</i>	Épén Saputra
<i>Djakad-Pusat</i>	n.a.
<i>Pangledjar</i>	Iin Sutardi
<i>Sritunggal</i>	Suhara
<i>Kantja Priangan</i>	Dasé
<i>Menir Tua</i>	n.a.
<i>Pusaka Siliwangi</i>	Sumadinata dari DPBAD Terr. III
<i>Pusaka</i>	Atjih Djukasih
<i>Budi Daja</i>	A. Adiwinata
<i>Tresna Tunggal</i>	E. Sopandi Spk.
<i>Menir Moéda Poétra</i>	Osé Hidayat alias Mang Onyon
<i>Ciung Muda</i>	Osé Hidayat alias Mang Onyon
<i>Sabri Muda</i>	Sabri
<i>Jenaka Sunda</i>	Uam
<i>Jenaka Sunda</i>	Adang Akil
<i>Haleuang Rasa</i>	Uju alias Mang Utun

4 Conclusion

Menir Moéda is an example of a creative artist breaking with old traditions and reimagining the meaning and value of Sundanese music. The radio program managers accommodated Menir Moéda's musical compositions through new music programs aired by their radio stations. Through radio programs, Menir Moéda develops ideas into a new style of Sundanese music, creates innovative genres, tones, and instrumentation, and, in turn, shapes new tastes in modern Sundanese music. The success of Menir Moéda has inspired other musicians to imitate and develop *jenaka sunda*. In short, Menir Moéda presented a new (modern) type of Sundanese music. Menir Moéda is a trendsetter and pioneer who made history through his creations and innovations in creating one of the Sundanese art genres, *jenaka sunda*.

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