



## **VARIOUS TYPES OF INSTRUMENTS IN THE INVENTORY OF IBAN CULTURAL MUSIC**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to examine the inventory of the cultural and musical heritage of the Iban people in Sarawak and emphasized the types of instruments played. The study synthesized that the Iban traditional music is percussion-oriented, consisting of various types of percussion ensembles such as gongs, drums, stringed instruments as well as wind instruments. There are 18 instruments discovered through field work, structured interviews, survey, questionnaires consisting of free-response questions, observation with check-list and document analysis. Findings show that these cultural musical instruments are three gongs (engkerumung, bebendai and setawak), five drums (gendang, ketebung, rebana, tar and tengkuang), seven stringed instruments (balulin, belikan, engkeratung, engkerebab, serunai, ruding and sape) and three wind instruments (engkerurai, enserunai and ensuling). Most sadly it has been discovered that today, unfortunately very few younger people know how to play belikan, engkeratung, engkerebab, serunai, ruding and engkerurai and the art of playing these instrument is rapidly dying out. Significantly, the Ibans should cultivate the skills and inclinations of playing these stringed and wind instruments otherwise this traditional and cultural musical art will be swallowed by the era modernization in the music industry.

**Keywords:** Bards, Gongs, Instrumental, Percussion, Ensemble, Distinctive, Improvise, Predominant

### **Introduction**

Iban traditional music can be divided into two major categories – vocal and instrumental music (Vinson and Sutlive, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. Vocal music may be accompanied by the rhythmic striking of sticks, as used by the Iban bards in their performance of chants (Vinson and Sutlive, 2001)<sup>1</sup> or unaccompanied in the performance of Iban women in their songs like dirges and *pantun*. Musical competitions are staged in longhouses which combine vocal and instrumental music. The Iban frequently stage formal contests in the performance of *pantun* (songs), in which skilled



women compete in their abilities to create and perform elaborate and intricate verses of *pantun*. The competition involves the skills of each team or individual contestant to improvise lyrics in response to challenges issued by the other contestants. Each contestant takes a turn, and must demonstrate the ability to compose verse with rhythm with the pattern of the melody.

Typically, Iban instrumental music is characterized by a predominant use of percussion instruments, notably drums and brass gongs (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>. Drums are carved from hardwoods over the mouths of which are stretched animal skins, but today the mouths of drums are stretched pieces of durable fabrics. Iban purchased gongs from the Malays and Chinese traders and these gongs comprised part of the family's heirlooms. As far as the Iban community is concerned, drumming is regarded as a divine gift. There are several distinctive meters or rhythms, some of which are maintained simultaneously by two or three drummers in ensemble. Gongs vary in size, from the large gongs to the much smaller gongs. The large gongs are called *tawak* and the smaller ones are called *engkerumung* that are arranged on a sounding board. These are the percussion instruments of the Ibans in Sarawak.

The Ibans play the following traditional and cultural musical instruments (altogether at least nineteen instruments) such as *balulin* (a viol played with a bow), *bebendai* (a large gong), *belikan* (three-stringed guitar), *dumbak* (a drum with the skin stretched tight from both ends), *engkeratung* (a harp with four or more strings), *engkerebab* (a two-stringed viol), *engkerumung* (a set of eight small brass gongs), *engekerurai* (a wind instrument or a mouth organ) *ensuling* (a flute or pipe), *gendang* (a drum with the skin stretched tight from both ends), *ketebung* (drums with the skin stretched tight from both ends), *rebab* (a two-stringed fiddle), *rebana* (a dance drum or a tambourine-line musical instrument), *ruding* (a Jew's harp made of brass), *sape'* (a 3-stringed instrument), *serunai* (a type of one-stringed instrument), *setawak* (a large gong made of brass), *tar* (a castanet) and *tengkuang* (a Maloh drum cut from a single log with a length-wise slit and no cover).

## Objectives

The main objectives of the paper are:

- To discuss the traditional musical heritage of the Iban people in Sarawak
- To identify the various types of instruments in the inventory of Iban cultural music
- To analyse the significant rhythm in the Iban traditional music relating to their religious rituals

## The Ibans: Largest Indigenous Ethnic Group In Sarawak

The Ibans are an ethnic branch of the Dayak peoples of Borneo (Vinson and Joanne Sutlive, 2001)<sup>1</sup> living in Sarawak, East Malaysia. There are eight groups of this indigenous peoples namely the Ibans of Saribas, Skrang, Lemanak, Balau, Undup, Sebuyau, Remun and Dau. These



identities are related to their settlements (Mckeown, 1983)<sup>3</sup> who identified themselves by the streams or other significant geographic feature near their residence (Sather, 1994)<sup>4</sup>. Rivers formed a major focus of Iban social identities and riverine societies which are defined by watershed boundaries that divide one river system from another. That is why, the Iban people normally identify with the river on which they live, and those who live along the same river system, distinguished from other Ibans by minor differences of dialect and adat (Sather, 1994)<sup>4</sup>, describing themselves for example as kami Saribas or kami Skrang or kami Sebuyau (*we of the Saribas river, we of the Skrang river or we of the Sebuyau river*).

During the colonial period they were formerly known by the British as *Sea Dayaks* because they were frequently seen patrolling the sea to help the Malays fight against the pirates. Being a very strong and successful warring tribe, the Ibans were very feared tribe and renowned for practising headhunting their enemies and making tribal or territorial expansion in Borneo (Sandin, 1978)<sup>5</sup>. Headhunting among the Ibans is believed to have started when the lands occupied by the Ibans are intruded by other tribes from Kalimantan (King, 1975)<sup>6</sup>, and also due to the arrival of western civilization which occupied their lands belonging to them. Therefore, confrontation was the only way of survival even if it resulted to death. Today, the days of headhunting and piracy are long gone and the Ibans live peacefully with the other ethnic tribes and other races such as the Malays, Chinese, Orang Ulu, Bidayuh and the like in the Land of the Hornbills (Numpang, 1989)<sup>7</sup> enjoying modern era of globalization and technology but they were originally farmers, hunters, and gatherers before the arrival of the Western expeditions and White Rajahs to Sarawak.

Uniquely, they live in longhouses called *rumah panjai* in the middle-level hills (Vinson, 1978)<sup>8</sup> and on delta plains until today. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Iban settlements are well established and most of the Iban longhouses nowadays are equipped with modern facilities such as electricity and water supply and other facilities such as tar-sealed roads, telephone lines and the internet. The younger Ibans are mostly making a living in urban areas but they frequent visit their hometowns especially during the holidays or festive seasons. Although the Ibans today are becoming increasingly urbanised, surprisingly they are still retaining most of their traditional heritage and culture (Vinson, 1989)<sup>8</sup> in their respective villages. The dynamic relations between the Ibans and the other racial societies have produced profound changes in the Iban society and culture.

### **Traditional Musical Heritage of the Ibans**

Iban traditional music is percussion-oriented. The Ibans have a musical heritage consisting of various types of percussion ensembles composed of several hanging or held, knobbed gongs which act as drones of the melodic instrument (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>. Here, the typical Iban percussion ensemble include a set of *engkerumungs* (*small gongs arranged together side by side and played like a xylophone*), a *tawak* (*the so-called 'bass, a large gong'*), a *bendai* (a gong less the size of *tawak* which acts as a snare gong) and also a set of *ketebung* or sometimes called



*bedup* (a single sided drum percussion). This traditional music is called *tabuh*, that is, a set of the four musical instruments namely *engkerumung*, *tawak*, *bebendai* and *ketebung*, each of which is respectively played by one person in synchronisation.

The *tabuh* and *gendang* significantly accompanied the unique Iban traditional dance, the *ngajat*. There are various kinds of *tabuh* depending on the purpose and types of *ngajat* dance. In other words, they can be played in some distinctive types corresponding to the purpose and type of each ceremony with the most popular ones are called *gendang rayah* and *gendang pampat*, two kinds of musical or percussion ensemble played to welcome the gods or supernatural spirits from the unseen worlds as part of their invocations. The performers will dance with hand-held weapons and each *ngajat* is accompanied by the *tabuh*.

For example, an Iban warrior performs the *ajat bebunoh* (warrior dance) with the music of a *gendang panjai* orchestra and he dances as if he is fighting against an enemy. While he performs the warrior dance, he occasionally shouts and raises his shield with one arm and swings his *ilang* (warrior sword) with his other arm as if he moves towards the enemy. While he moves forward, he has to be careful with the steps of his feet in order to guard them from being cut by his foe. It is noted that the tempo of his action is very fast, with his knife and shield gleaming up and down as he dances in the *ruai* (longhouse gallery).

If one is observant enough, when the dancers take the floor to dance, the musicians begin beating two *gendang* drums, a *bendai* gong, a set of seven or eight small gongs (*engkerumung*) and a large *tawak* gong. The music for the performance of *ajat bebunoh* (warrior dance) is always quicker in tempo than the music for any other normal dances. However, the longhouse folks from time immemorial, have been very skilled in playing all kinds of *gendang* music. Also, when the percussion ensemble called *gendang rayah* is played, it is considered a solemn performance only for religious festivals with the same percussion ensemble for *gendang rayah* to make the music.

Yet, there is something unique about the music played using the *ketebung* drums. There can be several drummers, even up to eleven of them. These long drums are cylindrical, made from strong wood, such as *tapang* or *mengeris*, and one of its ends is covered with the skins of monkeys or mouse deer or the skin of a monitor lizard. The major types of *ketebung* drum music are known as *Gendang Bebandong*, *Gendang Lanjan*, *Gendang Enjun Batang*, *Gendang Tama Pechal*, *Gendang Pampat*, *Gendang Tama Lubang*, *Gendang Tinggang Batang* and *Singkam Nggam*. Each of these types of *ketebung* drum music are played by drummers on the open air verandas during the celebration of the *Gawai Burung* festival. For example, the *Singkam Nggam* music is accompanied by the quick beating of *beliong* adzes. After each of these types of *ketebung* drum music has been played, then the drummers beat another music called *sambi sanjan*, which is followed by still another called *tempap tambak pechal*. To end this orchestral performance, the ritual music of *gendang bebandung* is beaten.



When a festival called *Gawai Manang* or *bebangun* is held for a layman to be consecrated as a *manang* (shaman), several music must be beaten on the *ketebung* drums at the open veranda (*tanju*) of the longhouse of the initiator or sponsor such as *Gendang Dudok*, *Gendang Rueh*, *Gendang Kelakendai*, *Gendang Tari*, *Gendang Naik*, *Gendang Po Umboi*, *Gendang Sembayan*, *Gendang Layar*, *Gendang Bebandung* and *Gendang Nyereman*. But *Gendang Bebanuong* must also be beaten when a *manang* dies and is beaten again when his coffin is lowered from the open air verandah (*tanju*) to the ground below, on its way to the cemetery for burial. Nevertheless, there are other or ordinary types of music beaten by drummers for pleasure, not for ritual purposes, such as *Gendang Dumbang*, *Gendang Ngang*, *Gendang Ringka*, *Gendang Enjun Batang*, *Kechendai Inggap Diatap* and *Gendang Kanto*.

*Tabuh* is described as the Iban's brass band orchestra with four musicians playing music, that is, one playing the *bebendai* (small gong) which is beaten first of all to determine the rhythm of the *tabuh* music, then responded to by the *gendang drum*, after that followed by the *tawak* (big gong) and finalized by the *engkerumung* (small gongs) set. We hear only two rhythms of *tabuh* music for *ngajat* dance – either fast or slow rhythm, for any four types of *ngajat* dance, namely *Ayun Lundai* (slow swing), *Ai Anyut* (flowing water), *Sinu Ngenang* (sad remembrance) and *Tanjak Ai* (against the water flow).

The slow rhythm accompanies the *ajat semain* (group happy dance), *ajat iring* (accompanying dance) and *ajat kelulu* (comedial dance), because these dances are rather slow although graceful. The other rhythm of *tabuh* is fast which is suitable for the *ajat bebunoh* (killing dance). However, the slow rhythm of *tabuh* music may be played for *tinggang punggung* dance, a special dance for purpose of *ngambi indu*, (inviting or taking the bride) for wedding. The rhythm for *tabuh rayah* (*rayah* music) is also slow for *ngerandang* and *ngelalau jalai* (a dance for clearing pathway for the bride to walk in a bridal procession) – sometimes this dance is called fencing dance.

Such percussion ensemble like *tabuh* music can often be performed at many types of social events, including agriculture rituals, weddings, victory celebrations, curing rites, rituals for the dead, entertainment for visitors, and other community rituals, just like the *agung* orchestra among the main lowland Philippine groups such as the Tagalog, Visayan, Kapampangan, Ilocano. This instrumental ensemble is still played until today among the Iban community in Sarawak. Similarly, the Kadazan-Dusun, located on the western coast of Sabah, refer to their percussion ensemble as a *tawag* or *bandil*, which consists of six to seven large gongs in shoreline groups and 7–8 large gongs for those in interior valleys. In south-western Sarawak, the Bidayuh's percussion ensemble consist of nine large gongs divided into four groups (*taway*, *puum*, *bandil*, and *sanang*), however among the Ibans in Sarawak, Brunei and Kalimantan, these percussion ensembles are smaller in comparison.



## Inventory of Iban Cultural Musical Instruments

The Iban music is predominated by the percussion instruments. In the context of Iban society, although string and wind instruments are common, it is gongs and drums that are more important (Vinson and Sutlive, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. The intervals in the eight-piece gong set known as *engkerumung* is particularly interesting, though not unique to Ibans. These eight small gongs are arranged on a sounding board and struck with a piece of wood. The first, third and fifth gongs are in intervals of thirds, but the seventh gong is an interval of only two notes. This produces a minor and an unforgettable melody as the gongs are struck sequentially by players. *Tabuh* or *betabuh* is a predicate for ‘drumming’. Drums and the skills to play them, are regarded as gifts from the gods, a belief shared with people in other parts of the world, such as the Mattaponi, Chickahominy and the Virginia Indians.

Described below is the inventory of musical instruments belonging to the Ibans in Sarawak. This inventory includes the various types of gongs, drums, stringed instruments and wind instruments:

### Gongs

Gongs made up most of the percussion ensemble of the Iban music. There are the *engkerumung* (*kerumung*, *mumung*) or the smaller gongs, the *bebendai* (the intermediate-sized gongs), and the *Setawak* (*tawak*, a larger gongs). They are played together in synchronisation with drums.

#### *Engkerumung* (*kerumung*, *mumung*)

A set of eight small brass gongs that are arranged on rattan strips tied to a sounding platform. It is arranged according to its sound scale. Each gong is struck with a wooden stick or mallet in a prescribed order, with the accompaniment of two larger gongs (the larger one tuned to ‘G’, the smaller one to ‘A’) that produce a discordant background against which the dominant tune pattern is played (Vinson and Sutlive, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. In other words, they are laid on bark strips in a frame and played with two sticks. In a concert, the *engkerumung* are played with *tawak*, *bebendai* or *chanang* and *gendang* for dancing. *Engkerumung* is also played for dancing at ritual and the rhythm is *gendang rayah*.

#### *Bebendai*

*Bebendai* is an intermediate-sized gong that is struck, having a boss like the larger *tawak* (a gong larger than *bebendai*) but the boss is shallower than that of the *tawak*. When played, it is hung with a strand of *tekalung* (a kind slender rope) so that its sound is clear and loud. However, the Ibans called this traditional musical instrument a nipple gong because it has a central raised boss or nipple, often made of a different metals than other gongs with varying degrees of quality and resonance. It has a tone with less shimmer than other gongs, and two distinct sounds depending on whether they are struck on the boss or next to it.



Nipple gongs range in size from 6" to 20" or larger. Sets of smaller, tuned nipple gongs can be used to play a tune, like the nipple gongs used in Chinese temples for worship. This instrument come in various sizes (its size ranges in up to 1 meter in diameter) with different pitch (either deepest pitch, slightly higher pitch, higher pitch or just a note beat). The Chinese called this instrument *chanang* but the Ibans called it *bebendai* but it is just a type of gong with a flat surface and shallow boss which produce a loud sound. Whatever its name, *bebendai* is good for use when struck together with a larger gong (*tawak* or *setawak*) to provide the rhythm and beat for the Iban martial arts of *pencha* or *kuntau* (Janang et.al, 2016)<sup>9</sup>.

*Setawak* (*tawak*, a larger gong)

This cultural instrument is a deep gong of brass or bronze, with a high edge, and boss in the centre of the face (Janang et.al, 2016)<sup>9</sup>. A gong described as one span or width is a gong whose face measures a span from the edge of the boss to the edge of the face. The depth of the gong is about half, and open back about two-thirds of the face diameter. It is believed that gongs are made in Java and Brunei, and gongs are measured in *jengkal* (spans) on face but for trade, they are valued for kilograms nowadays. Its face is dished in the centre round boss.

When in use, like *bebendai* when struck, it is also hung by bark strap from beam or if in procession, from shoulder or on pole between two men. Gong is sounded by striking with short heavy rubber headed stick and the sound stopped (made staccato) by holding sides of the boss with other hand. *Tawak* beaten rapidly and alone is an alarm or gathering call for the traditional Ibans. For rites and dances, *tawak* provide complex rhythm (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup> accompanied by shallow gong (commonly called nipple gong, *bebendai* or *chanang*), a set of 8 small gongs (*engkerumung*) and drum (*gendang*).

Therefore, *setawak* or simply commonly known as *tawak*, is a larger gong that is played for dancing and for ceremonial occasions. The Ibans collected and kept sets of brass gongs as part of their collectibles and family heirlooms. Gongs are highly prized as indicators of wealth. That is why they are regarded as part of heirlooms of families. In fact, the Ibans regarded them as almost equal to jars as objects of acquisition by Iban travellers. These gongs are used for the dances performed at community gatherings. There are several sizes of gongs with differing tones (Cadar and Robert, 1996)<sup>10</sup>; Otto, 1996)<sup>11</sup> that are combined in the percussion groups. Central to such musical groups are sets of tuned gongs (*engkerumung*), pitched to the notes G, G#, B, C, D, E, F# and E. These pitches are taken from one collection (Scholz, 1996)<sup>12</sup>. Pitches are relative and vary from set to set. These gongs are struck in a sequence that produces a plaintive tune in a minor key (Vinson and Sutlive, 2001)<sup>1</sup>, against which are played the intermediate-sized gongs (*bebendai* or *chanang*) and the larger gongs (*tawak* or *setawak*). Metre is kept on drums, which are struck in a regularly variable time.

It is noted that a gong is comprised of two parts – *bunchul* or *geligir*, that is, the central boss of the face of a gong, and *sambang*, that is, the face or flat surface around the central boss of a gong. Anthony Richards refers to *tawak* as deep bronze gong with hemispherical boss



(*bunchul, geligir*) on face (*papan, sambang*). Generally, a larger gong is a musical percussion instrument that takes the form of a flat, circular metal disc which is hit with a mallet. Historically, it originated in China and later spread to Southeast Asia (Kalanduyan, 1996)<sup>13</sup>, and it can also be used in the percussion section of Western symphony orchestra (Terada, 1996)<sup>14</sup>. In the Iban society, gongs are broadly of three types – the suspended gongs, bossed (nipped) gongs which are intermediate-sized and the bowl gongs or *engkerumung*. Suspended or larger gongs are flat, circular discs of metal suspended vertically by means of a cord passed through holes near to the top rim (Cadar, 1996)<sup>15</sup>. Bossed or nipple gongs have a raised centre boss and are often suspended when played horizontally, and bowl gongs are bowl-shaped, and rest on cushions and belong more to bells than gongs. The Iban gongs are made mainly from bronze or brass but there are many other alloys in use. Generally, gongs produce two distinct types of sound, that is, a gong with a substantially flat surface vibrates in multiple modes, giving a "crash" rather than a tuned note (Matusky, 1985)<sup>16</sup>. This category of gong is sometimes called a *tam-tam* to distinguish it from the bossed gongs that give a tuned note.

## Drums

There are several types of drums such as *gendang, ketebung* (sometimes called *ketabuh*), *rebana, tar* and *tengkuang*. These musical instruments are all parts of the Iban ensemble percussion. It takes a player to learn some technical skill to play each type of the drums. The beating of the drum of course requires an exact sense of timing to strike it on a precise beat. When the Ibans are free in the evenings, they would gather in the longhouse gallery (*ruai*) to learn how to strike the various types of *gendang* or drums.

## Gendang

*Gendang* is a musical instrument called drum, with the skin stretched tight from both ends (like *dumbak* in Malay culture). It is broad and shallow with heavy wooden shell. This is a percussion instrument, that is, a typical drum about 2' x 1' and cylindrical with skin at each end (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>. It is played together with a band of gongs (small, intermediate-sized and the larger ones). When it is stricken (played with the hands), it is rested on the floor and it produced a percussive beat. Techniques of drumming, though seemingly easy, in fact require an exact sense of timing and a demanding ability to strike the instrument on a precise beat.

According to an Iban myth (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup> immediately after his departure from the visible world, the hero named Keling, taught the ancestors of the Ibans to play the percussional *gendang raya* music on gongs and drums so that, even after their separation, humankind might continue to summon the mythical heroes in "the raised world" to this world down here, in order to celebrate the great *Gawai* festivals (Sather 1994)<sup>4</sup>. Drumming also is critical in the initiation of the Iban *manang*. It is the pulsating beat of the drum that the *manang* follows, added by his familiar spirit (*yang*), to return from his soul. At the beginning of a major *gawai*, many drums





are played together in a contest of rhythm and skill. The reason for this was a signal to the *Panggau* people (“people of the raised world” in the heavens) to come as guests.

### *Ketebung (ketabuh)*

This drum is about 3’ – 4’ long with 8” skin at one end only. The dried skin of deer, goats or a monitor lizard, is fitted at the end of a wooden cylinder, from wood of *merebau* tree. The cylinder is constricted at the middle or towards the open end not covered with skins. The skin is secured with a strip of pliable rattan (Janang et.al, 2016)<sup>9</sup> called *tali rembuyan*, and made tight using a treenail or peg. The drum is struck to make its sound. This drum is sometimes called *ketabuh*. It is between three and four feet in length, and has one end covered with animal skin, secured with cane and strings.

Drums are both musical and ritual instruments. The technique of drumming was first taught by the mythological figure named Keling. Drums are also played in the ritual performances of the Iban shaman. During initiation and healing rites, a drum is beaten to recall back the soul of the shaman, lest it be lost. Types of drums include *betal*, *dadup* and *dumbak* (a small drum), *gendang and gung* (a broad bronze drum), *ketebung* and *rebana* (a dance drum) and *sebang* (a large drum). A strict prohibition exists on drumheads made either with the skin of a long-tailed monkey or macaque for which reason only *manang* (shaman) knows why. Such drums (six or seven drums) are used to invite the spirits of the *dead festivals* in their honour (for example *Gawai Antu* in the Kuching-Sri Aman Divisions, and *Gawai Ngelumbung* in the Kapit Division). Therefore, such drums can never be used to invite the gods to a major ritual like *Gawai Amat* (Masing, 1981)<sup>17</sup>

### *Rebana*

*Rebana* is a Malay term for a dance drum or in some parts, a tambourine-line musical instrument. For the Ibans in Sarawak, it is a musical instrument in the percussion family consisting of a frame, often of wood or plastic, with pairs of small metal jingles, called "zils". Classically the term *rebana* denotes an instrument with a drumhead, though some variants may not have a head at all. The *rebana* is often used with regular percussion sets. They can be mounted, for example on a stand as part of a drum kit (and played with drum sticks), or they can be held in the hands and played by tapping or hitting the instrument (Schleisinger, 1911)<sup>18</sup>. This musical instrument come in many shapes with the most common being circular. It is found in many forms of music like folk music, classical music, gospel music, rock music and pop music. The Ibans believed that rebana originated in Egypt, where they were known as *kof* to the Hebrews, in which the instrument was mainly used in religious contexts.

But the word *rebana* finds its origins in French as *tambourine*, which referred to a long narrow drum. When the Ibans played the *rebana*, it can be held in the hand or mounted on a stand, and can be played in numerous ways, from stroking or shaking the jingles to striking it sharply with the hand or a stick or using the tambourine, strike the leg or hip. In the context of



the Iban community, *rebana* is indeed just a small frame drum (one whose shell is too narrow to resonate the sound) having one or two skins nailed or glued to a shallow circular or polygonal frame. The *rebana* is normally played with the bare hands and often has attached to it jingles, pellet bells, or snares. The Iban *rebana* typically have one skin and jingling disks set into the sides of the frame. However, for this ethnic group of people, the term *rebana* is often extended to include all related frame drums, such as those of the Arabic countries (Brinkworth, 2012)<sup>19</sup>.

### *Tar*

*Tar* is a rhythm instrument that consists of two small flat round parts fastened to the thumb and clicked by the fingers. In other words, it is a percussion instrument consisting of a hollow shell or cylinder with a drumhead stretched over one or both ends that is beaten with the hands or with some implement (as a stick or wire brush). It is an instrument like the castanet, a percussion instrument (idiophone), used in a set of music. The instrument consists of a pair of concave shells joined on one edge by a string. They are held in the hand and used to produce clicks for rhythmic accents or a ripping or rattling sound consisting of a rapid series of clicks (Clacforsyth, 1919)<sup>20</sup>.

*Tar* is traditionally made of hardwood because in the olden days, fibreglasses are not available yet then Clacforsyth (1919)<sup>20</sup>. In practice, a player usually uses two pairs of *tar*. One pair is held in each hand, with the string hooked over the thumb and the *tar* resting on the palm with the fingers bent over to support the other side. Each pair will make a sound of a slightly different pitch. The origins of the instrument are not known. The practice of clicking hand-held sticks together to accompany dancing is ancient, and was practiced by the older folks in times past (Karl and Fritz, 1976)<sup>21</sup>. Sometimes, the young people join in the music by using the bones, spoons and jug band to add to the music of merry making (traditionally, these also can also be considered as forms of *tar* or the castanets). Long time ago, during the *gawai* festival, *tar* was featured prominently in dances or ballet more or less.

### *Tengkuang*

This instrument is called Maloh drum, that is, a drum of the Maloh tribe of Kalimantan who live in Sarawak long ago. It is cut from a single log with a length-wise slit and no cover. *Tengkuang* is a percussion instrument consisting of a hollow shell or cylinder with a drumhead stretched over one or both ends that is beaten with the hands or with some implement (as a stick or wire brush).

Its shape is something resembling any of the cylindrical blocks that form the shaft of a column. It has a unique drumming or croaking noise. But normally, this musical instrument just a hollowed log with a lengthwise slit and no skin to cover its hollow. When played, it is only beaten with two sticks (Janang et.al, 2016)<sup>9</sup>



## Stringed-Instrument

The Ibans have several musical stringed-instruments such as *Balulin* or *belula*, *belikan*, *engkeratung*, *engkerebab* (*rebab*), *serunai*, *rusing* (*Jew's harp*) and *sape*. Out of the eighteen cultural musical instruments discovered, the Ibans have more stringed-guitar instruments than any other like drums, gongs and the wind instruments.

### *Balulin* or *belula*

*Balulin* or *belula* is actually what is commonly known as a viola (Schoenbaum, 2012)<sup>22</sup> played with a *penyayat* (bow). It is a wooden string instrument in the violin family, the smallest and highest-pitched instrument in the family of Iban music. This typical viol has four strings (Templeton, 2001)<sup>23</sup> commonly played by drawing a *penyayat* (bow) across its strings. *Balulin* can also be played by plucking the strings with the fingers (*pizzicato*) but not many of them have the musical inclinations and skills to play it likewise.

Today, *balulin* is not so prominent in the Iban society although at times it is sometimes used in many varieties of folk music because there are not many Ibans who can play it well in the country music, bluegrass music or jazz music. Yet, it was once upon a time informally called a *fiddle* (Young, 2007)<sup>24</sup>. Unfortunately and most discouragingly today, a *luthier* (*balulin* maker or repairer) can never be found among the modern Iban generations in Sarawak.

### *Belikan*

In the Iban community, *belikan* is a three-stringed musical instrument or guitar, which is made of wood. It is made from *koompassia* wood (a kind of bee tree in the forest), made hollowed from the face and closed by thin wood with a small hole in it. Normally, the sound of a *belikan* is clear and loud when played for dancing in the longhouse. However, today *belikan* is one of the more obscure instruments of the ancient Iban musical instrument (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>.

This instrument resembles medieval viol called the guitar fiddle. The body of a *belikan* may be just a figure eight shaped with point waist, bouts roughly equal, and a soft blend into the neck with sloped shoulders. There are three strings leading to three pegs in a spade peg box, pegs inserted from underneath. Tailpiece is present, and looks to be looped around an end knob. No indication of bridge, fingerboard or nut. There are four D shaped sound holes, situated at the upper portion of each of the bouts, with the lower sound holes larger than the upper sound holes. The bow is a little longer than the instrument, and is held in the underhand position.

### *Engkeratung*

*Engkeratung* (harp) is a stringed musical instrument which has four strings or more, running at an angle to its soundboard, which are plucked with the fingers. *Engkeratungs* have been known since antiquity (perhaps in the 1950s) in Sarawak but I have never seen any Iban musician



playing it yet. This instrument is believed to have had great popularity in Europe (Dave & Gerou, 1998)<sup>25</sup> during the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Ehsan, 2003)<sup>26</sup>, and was disseminated to European colonies which ruled the South East Asian people, particularly our country in the 1950s.

*Engkeratungs* vary in many ways in terms of size. Older folks mentioned that many smaller *engkeratungs* can be played on the lap, while the larger *engkeratungs* are quite heavy to carry. Different *engkeratungs* may use strings of catgut, nylon, metal, or some combinations. While all *engkeratungs* have a neck, resonator, and strings, it has a pillar at its long end to support the strings. The Iban do not have the modern *engkeratungs*, therefore the Ibans are uncertain about the techniques used to extend the range and chromaticity of the strings; neither can they adjusting a string's note mid-performance with levers or pedals (Ruth and Lou, 1985)<sup>27</sup> which modify the pitch of the *engkeratungs*.

#### *Engkerebap or Rebab*

This two-stringed viol has a soft figure eight shape with a very broad waist, and only soft curves there. Lower bout is definitely larger than the upper bout, and the body has a gradual curve into the neck with sloping shoulders like a viol. There are two strings (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>, complete with two pegs on a disc peg box, the pegs being inserted from behind. The tailpiece is fairly long, and though it might be difficult to make out from this particular sized image, it is forked at the end, possibly indicating either a tail gut or a hook joint.

There are two sound holes, simple D shaped, set in the waist of the instrument. The bridge, however, is set in the middle of the lower bout, not between the sound holes as might be expected. The bow is about as long as the instrument, and uses an underhand grip. The scale of the instrument is a bit larger than usual, being about from the knee to almost the top of the head, making it closer to about 35-40 inches long.

#### *Serunai*

*Serunai* is a one-stringed viol, that is, a bowed stringed instrument (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>, fairly large, somewhere around 30-35 inches in length. It is exclusively played gamba style (on the leg, like a cello). The instrument is most likely carved from a single block of wood, as most traditional Iban instruments were, with an attached soundboard. The shape of the body was roughly figure eight shaped, with various waist bumps or points. From the sculptural evidence, it seems as though the instrument had both a flat soundboard (very typical of Iban traditional musical instruments) and a flat back (also consistent with a block carved instrument).

As a bowed instrument, it is tended to be called some variant of fiddle (viol, viola, vielle, fiedel, etc.) indiscriminately. As such we don't really have any confirmable textual evidence for the instrument. This also includes tuning, which we'd have to make some sort of guess on based



on the physical form of the instrument and the scant information we have on tuning of fiddles in general. There are no physically surviving examples.

### *Ruding* (Jew's harp)

A *ruding*, often made of brass, but best of *aping* palm, used by young people for singing to each other. It has a few names (*ruding kacai*, *ruding kacu* and *ruding inang*) but they refer to the same thing. *Ruding* are narrow and straight and are held by the cords across between open lips. There are a number of parts, for examples *papan*, *pala*, *genaling*, *sembulang* and *punggang*. *Papan* is the flat body of *ruding* in which the tongue (*dilah*) is cut. *Pala* is the end at the base of the tongue with its short projection (*genaling*) to which a cord and a toggle (*sembulang*) are tied for tugging to sound the *ruding*. The other end has also a *genaling* with a groove (*punggang*) for cord to be looped on a finger of the other hand to hold it steady. Today very few younger people know how to play this instrument and the art is rapidly dying out.

The *ruding* is also known as Jew's harp (Fox, 1984<sup>28</sup>; Gallman, 1977)<sup>29</sup>, just a lamellophone instrument, which is in the category of plucked idiophones: it consists of a flexible metal or bamboo tongue or reed attached to a frame. The tongue or reed is placed in the performer's mouth and plucked with the finger to produce a note. When played, the frame is held firmly against the performer's parted teeth or lips (depending on the type), using the jaw and mouth as a resonator (Kolitveit, 2006)<sup>30</sup> greatly increasing the volume of the instrument. The teeth must be parted sufficiently for the reed to vibrate freely, and the fleshy parts of the mouth should not come into contact with the reed to prevent damping of the vibrations and possible pain. The note or tone thus produced is constant in pitch (Wright, 2008)<sup>31</sup>, though by changing the shape of his or her mouth, and the amount of air contained in it (and in some traditions closing the glottis), the performer can cause different overtones to sound and thus create melodies. The volume of the note (tone) can be varied by breathing in and out. The Ibans considered this musical instrument to be one of the oldest musical instruments in the world. The instrument is known in many different cultures by many different names. The common English name "Jew's harp" is sometimes considered controversial or potentially misleading, and so the Ibans called it *ruding*.

### *Sape'*

The *sape'* is a three-stringed instrument, made of a single piece of *pelai'* wood about 3 feet long ((Richards,1981)<sup>2</sup>. Its stalk and face of belly are straight but the belly is made hollowed from the back and left open. It is tuned with keys at its head and played by plucking. Its melody is played on the higher tuned string and the other strings provide a rhythmic ground (Janang et.al, 2016)<sup>9</sup>. The Ibans (as well as the Kayan of Orang Ulu) have been playing this musical instrument for a long time. Today, the *sape'* is the official instrument for the Malaysian state of Sarawak. It is played similarly to the way rock guitarists play guitar solos, albeit a little slower, but not as slow as blues. *Sape'* is originally a traditional music by Orang Ulu (Kayan, Kenyah and Kelabit), but nowadays both the Ibans as well as the Orang Ulu play this instrument which resembles the



guitar. Normally, when sape' is played, the common traditional dances (*datun jalut* and *nganjak lansam*) are performed in accordance with a sape' tune.

Originally, *sape'* is a traditional lute of many of the Orang Ulu or "upriver people", who live in the longhouses that line the rivers of Central Borneo. Sapes are carved (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup> from a single bole of wood (with many modern instruments) reaching over a metre in length. Initially the sape was a fairly limited instrument with two or three strings and only three frets. Its use was restricted to a form of ritualistic music to induce trance. But gradually, in the 21st century, the sape' gradually became a social instrument to accompany dances or as a form of entertainment. Today, three, four or five-string instruments are used, with a range of more than three octaves. One or two strings are carrying the melody and the accompanying strings as rhythmic drones. In practice, the music is quite complex, with many ornamentations and thematic variations. There are two common modes, one for the men's longhouse dance and the other for the woman's longhouse dance.

Sape music is usually inspired by dreams and there are many traditional pieces with many variations. It is interesting to note that the sape is a member of the plucked cordophone family. Although the sape is a boat-shaped lute that has a short neck, it can produced many variations of melodies in the core repertoire. When playing the sape the player sits down in which the sape is supported by the player's legs the sape is held close to the chest. The player mainly plucks the the lowest tuned or the bottom string and the rest of the strings are plucked as drones.

#### Wind Instrument

The Ibans do not have many wind instruments. There are however only three commonly known among the Iban community in Sarawak. These three instruments are *engkerurai* (*engkeruri*), *enserunai* and *kesuling* (*suling*). It is interesting to learn that all the three musical instruments are mouth-organ and the Ibans are at least creative enough to introduce these three instruments in their culture and deserves to be complimented for the musical inclinations in this aspect of musical genres.

#### *Engkerurai* (engekuri)

This is a kind of the Iban wind instrument, that is, a mouth organ made of gourd into which are inserted small lengths of bamboo (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>. This wind instrument contains some type of resonator (usually a tube), in which a column of air is set into vibration by the player blowing into (or over) a mouthpiece set at or near the end of the resonator. The pitch of the vibration is determined by the length of the tube and by manual modifications of the effective length of the vibrating column of air. In the case of some wind instruments, sound is produced by blowing through a reed; others require buzzing into a metal mouthpiece.



Sometimes the Ibans simply called this musical instrument as *kerurai* because it is a mouth-organ made from a small dried gourd into which are inserted six lengths of dried bamboo (*engkalat*), each about the size of a thumb and of varying lengths. Each piece of bamboo is carved with a 'tongue' with small holes that are opened or closed with the fingers of the player. The pieces are tied together with a thin cane, and fixed in place in the gourd with beeswax. The organ is played when the performer blows into or sucks air from the gourd, while changing the fingering on the bamboo pieces. Some tunes are *Kenjan-kenjan Kara Rugan* and *Minta Telu Indai Latit*.

A pipe is sounded by exhaling or inhaling, but only when the hole is stopped. The pipes are arranged (clockwise) 1 4 2 6 3 5, where 1 (the lowest note) is farthest and 6 nearest the mouthpiece (4 and 2 being to the right). Pitch varies (Janang et.al, 2016: 371), *kerurai* being a solo instrument; but approximate intervals, with the names of the pipes and their fingering are: G *Indu* (left forefinger tip), 2 B flat *Nyingit* (right thumb), 3 C *Ranggung* (right middle finger), D *Ranggung dua* (left fourth finger), 5 F *Ranggung atas* (butt of left forefinger) and 6 G Octave Anak (left thumb). *Nyingit* (2) is between B and B flat. *Indu* (1) is used partly as drone and partly to mark rhythm. It seems that its style is similar to that of Scottish pipes. Nevertheless, the simplest *engkerurai* in the Iban community is the *keluri*. *Keluri* is a set of bamboo reed pipes, crafted from pieces of bamboo of different lengths and fastened with beeswax in the hollow of the gourd in which they are set.

### *Enserunai*

*Enserunai* is a wind musical instrument, that is, a bell-mouth clarinet or just a harmonica or other similar instruments. For the traditional Iban community in Sarawak, it is a one-string violin played with a rattan-string bow (Janang et.al, 2016)<sup>9</sup>, wetted with saliva, is played on a sound box of gourd with a flat thin face. The sound is provided by moistening the bow with saliva, and drawing it over the string that is taut over the sound box. The sound box is made from a gourd, one third of which is cut away and a thin flat piece of wood secured in the gourd. In East Malaysia however, among the Malays, *serunai* are harmonicas or mouth-organs. The Iban people in Sarawak sometimes called it *enserunai* or 'clarinet' or a bell-mouth clarinet because it is a mouth-organ.

### *Ensuling* (kesuling)

This musical instrument is a flute sometimes called *suling* (Richards, 1981)<sup>2</sup>. It is made from a small piece of bamboo which produces the sound of music when blown. A minor ethnic group of Murut in Sarawak called it *selingut*, and to them it is a nose flute (a flute carved from a piece of bamboo that is played by exhaling and inhaling through the nostrils). So, the *kesuling* or *ensuling* is a family of musical instruments in the woodwind group (Carroll, 1999)<sup>32</sup>. Unlike woodwind instruments with reeds, an *ensuling* is an aerophone or reedless wind instrument that produces its sound from the flow of air across an opening. This instrument may be categorized as



edge-blown aerophones. A musician who plays the *ensuling* can be referred to as a flute player, flutist or, less commonly, a fluter.

In the Iban community, *ensuling* may be one of the earliest extant musical instruments. A number of *kesuling* are kept in Sarawak Meseum, demonstrating that a developed musical tradition existed from the earliest period of modern human presence in Sarawak, which had become an integral part of the Ibanic culture. *Ensuling* produce sound by directing a focused stream of air below the edge of a hole in a cylindrical tube. To produce a sound with an opened *ensuling*, the player is required to blow a stream of air across a sharp edge that then splits the airstream (Boehm, 1964)<sup>33</sup>. This split airstream then acts upon the air column contained within the flute's hollow causing it to vibrate and produce sound. To produce a sound with a closed *ensuling*, the player is required to blow air into a duct. This duct acts as a channel bringing the air to a sharp edge (Galway, 1982<sup>34</sup>; Putnik, 1970<sup>35</sup>; Wye, 1988<sup>36</sup>). As with the open *ensuling*, the air is then split; this causes the column of air within the closed *ensuling* to vibrate and produce sound.

### **The Significant Rhythms In The Various Iban Traditional Music Relating To Their Religious Rituals**

As far as the Iban community is concerned, drumming is regarded as a divine gift. There are several distinctive metres or rhythms, some of which are maintained simultaneously by two or three drummers in ensemble. Gongs vary in size, from the large gongs to the much smaller gongs. The large gongs are called tawak and the smaller ones are called *engkerumung* that are arranged on a sounding board. These are the percussion instruments of the Ibans but the rhythms are inspirations and there are certain ones that can only be used to invoke the spirits. There are distinctive and replicable rhythms in the chants of bards (*lemambang*) and shamans (*manang*). Bards, for example, establish a rhythm that is easily followed by a chorus. The bard's stick (*tungkat lemambang*) constructed of hardwood or medium-sized bamboo, is fitted with a hardwood tapper that moves freely as the stick is raised and then lowered to come into contact with the floor.

The Iban traditional music is the *tabuh* but it is played at any religious ritual with a solemn rhythm (not too fast and not too slow). With this rhythmic music, they perform a unique dance called the *ngajat* to the gods and unseen supernatural spirits. The word *ngajat* originates from the word "engkajat" which means "jumping on the spot" with the rhythm by the music of gongs and drums. As far as the dancing performance is concerned, the *ajat* dance is attributed to a spiritual being, Batu Lichin, Bujang Indang Lengain, who brought it to the Iban many generations ago. While returning home after a *ngayau* (headhunting) expedition against the enemies who had attacked his longhouse, Batu Lichin being an Iban warrior, happily dance at the head of their war-boats after successfully obtaining trophy heads during headhunting raids. In the interior parts of Sarawak, the practice of warrior dance is still continued until today. Performing this dance means respecting and invoking the spirit of Batu Lichin. Therefore,





playing the rhythm of musical instruments serves many purposes depending on the occasion, not only to entertain the people who in the olden days, but to serve as a respect to the Iban god of war, "Sengalang Burong".

*Gendang raya*, a rapidly beaten rhythm to catch the attention of the gods and spirits, is said to be more important in inviting gods and ancestors to festivals (*gawai*). On the other hand, *sanjak* is a distinctive drum beat that is used to invite *Lang Sengalang Burong* to war festivals in the *Gawai Burong* (bird's festivals). When talking about *sepepat* (fireflies being considered as spirits), Erik Jensen (1974)<sup>37</sup> says that "a special rhythm is beaten which is thought to be particularly effective in summoning the spirits". According to him, "this rhythm is never used unless spirit presence is deliberately sought and the appropriate sacrificial offerings are in readiness".

Drum rhythms or beats are quite distinctive, and with the general technique of drumming, regarded as a divine gift to Iban musicians. As scholars (Gass, 1999)<sup>38</sup> learn more about the significance of pulsating rhythms, their capacities to excite or to calm, the purpose and the potential of Iban beats becomes clearer. In invocatory chants, internal rhythm is achieved by using words with two syllables (Masing 1997)<sup>17</sup>. In examples that Masing provides, disyllabic words account for about three-quarters of the total words used. In other cases internal rhythm is maintained by the grouping of words having the same meaning.

It is somewhat surprising that there is little information about the names of rhythms, nor is there any basic description of rhythms that provide structure to various Iban chants, drum-beats and songs. A distinctive drum rhythm or *gendang sanjak lanjan*, the rhythm is performed at festivals related to warfare (*Gawai Burong*) to which *Lang Sengalang Burong* and his retinue are invited. However, it should be noted that not all rhythms have the same purpose of invoking important beings to attend the festivals.

## Conclusion

There are two major categories of Iban traditional and cultural music, that is, the vocal and instrumental music. But the vocal part of it is not discussed here in this article. Normally, vocal music is accompanied by the stringed and wind instruments or by the rhythmic striking of sticks (as used by the Iban bards in their performance of chants) or unaccompanied by any kind of musical instruments (as in the performance of Iban women in their songs like dirges and *pantun*). However, the Iban instrumental music is characterized by a predominant use of percussion instruments, notably drums and brass gongs. The drums are carved from hardwoods over the mouths of which are stretched animal skins. Today, the mouths of drums are stretched pieces of durable fabrics. In the olden days, the Ibans purchased the gongs from the Malays and Chinese traders and these gongs comprised part of the family's heirlooms.



Drumming is regarded as a divine gift. As far as drumming is concerned, in the context of Iban society, there are several distinctive metres or rhythms with regards to the beating of drums, some of which are maintained simultaneously by two or three drummers in ensemble. However, the percussion instruments of the Ibans also includes gongs which vary in size, from the large gongs to the much smaller gongs. The large gongs are called *tawak* and the smaller ones are called *engkerumung* that are arranged on a sounding board. Traditionally, the Ibans played the following musical instruments (altogether at least eighteen instruments) such as *balulin* (a viol played with a bow), *bebendai* (a large gong), *belikan* (three-stringed guitar), *gendang* (a drum with the skin stretched tight from both ends), *engkeratung* (a harp with four or more strings), *engkerebab* (a two-stringed viol), *engkerumung* (a set of eight small brass gongs), *engekerurai* (a wind instrument or a mouth organ) *ensuling* (a flute or pipe), *gendang* (a drum with the skin stretched tight from both ends), *ketebung* (drums with the skin stretched tight from both ends), *rebab* (a two-stringed fiddle), *rebana* (a dance drum or a tambourine-line musical instrument), *ruding* (a Jew's harp made of brass), *sape'* (a 3-stringed instrument), *serunai* (a type of one-stringed instrument), *setawak* (a large gong made of brass), *tar* (a castanet) and *tengkuang* (a Maloh drum cut from a single log with a length-wise slit and no cover).

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