

## **The Learning Stages of Ngroncong/Undul Usuk: Achieving the Original Solo Keroncong Singing Style**

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Published online: 31 December 2022

Cite this article (APA): Sukmayadi, Y., Supiarza, H. & Andini, M. (2022). The learning stages of ngroncong/undul usuk: Achieving the original solo keroncong singing style. *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 11(1), 84-108. <https://doi.org/10.37134/mjm.vol11.1.6.2022>

### **Abstract**

The hegemony of advanced keroncong figures in keroncong singing has made the Solo keroncong singing style more recognised by the wider community with its lilting characteristics. However, for the Surakarta people (Solo), there is something more essential than that, namely *ngroncong*, also known as *undul usuk*. This term is often given to keroncong singers as an assessment of the quality of their singing. Hence, this research aims at identifying and describing undul usuk and its achievement process by employing descriptive qualitative methods. Observation, interviews, and documentation studies were used to collect the data, while the triangulation technique was used to test the data's validity. The findings show that the undul usuk concept is a sub-concept of the ngroncong basic concept. There are various hierarchical stages in the achievement of Solo keroncong singing, which consist of the beginner stage, the average stage, the skilled stage, the specialist stage, and singing ngroncong as the highest achievement or expert stage. To achieve this, some rules and tips need to be followed, which requires effort and time. Singers are required to be effortless in aligning skills, thoughts, and feelings. This study manifests a society that preserves the essence of keroncong singing through development and preservation dualism. The novelty of this research is on how it can be used as a reference for the performer and connoisseurs of keroncong music.

*Keywords:* singing achievement, solo-style keroncong, undul usuk

### **Introduction**

In terminology, music in every culture is described as a social identity that must be preserved. Every ethnic group in this world has a diverse terminology in musical culture, and the meaning of music in a culture is seen as a social symbol for sustainable meaning creation (Widdess, 2012). This research seeks to examine one of

the many musical terms in Indonesia by focusing on the achievement of singing the Solo-style keroncong, which is known as *ngroncong* (*undul usuk*). Ngroncong (*undul usuk*) has multiple interpretations and is used as a simple diction to express the pinnacle of keroncong aesthetics, especially the Solo-style. In another word, it is a concept with a role in the highest phase, since there are hierarchical building blocks, elements, or layers. The formation of a ngroncong music aesthetic is supported by individual and collective ngroncong achievement (Andini et al., 2021). Ngroncong/*undul usuk* is a personal and interpersonal musical quality that contributes to the development of ngroncong musicality (Prabowo, 2018). Its quality is related to the techniques, characteristics, and musical abilities possessed. Meanwhile, the experience is related to how much and how long a person has been involved in the keroncong mentoring and training processes, and other related experiences. Moreover, the experience gained has an impact on the musical intuition that each individual has. It is related to other musical terms in individual ngroncong achievements, such as *nyendaren* in flute playing, *ngglali* in violin playing, *mbanyumili* in guitar playing, *sintiran* and *gojek* in *cak* and *cuk* playing, and *undul usuk* in singing (Andini et al., 2021; Prabowo, 2018).

The term *undul usuk* (or also *usuk*) is used as a term for singing that achieves the aesthetics of keroncong/*ngroncong* (Andini et al., 2021). Furthermore, *ngroncong* is collectively formed as a whole unit. There are internal and external factors in its achievements that serve as building and supporting factors. Internal factors are related to intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills. Meanwhile, external factors are related to the quality of the songs, audio-visual, and socio-cultural environment. Ngroncong is not only formed by one or two people as individual achievements, but by all players and singers who are involved in an ensemble (Andini et al., 2021). This was also stated by Prabowo (2018, p. 8) that “Every keroncong artist has ensemble awareness, in which the harmonisation of keroncong music is formed on the basis of interpersonal relations.” Therefore, the competence possessed by keroncong artists is not to show personal virtuosity. Judith Becker (Fikri, 2017, p. 259) states that keroncong is directly related to the Javanese gamelan tradition. In Central Java, keroncong is “gamelanized,” both in terms of connotations and associations in terms of music and meaning, which makes keroncong appreciated. The accompaniment tools, in addition to playing “*um-ching*” as the simplest arrangement of keroncong, also use melodic figurations and patterns like some gamelan instruments (Supiarza, 2019).

The development of keroncong music in Indonesia is inseparable from the role of Surakarta City (Solo), which seriously maintains its cultural heritage up to this day. The cultural heritage in Solo is divided into two types, namely tangible and intangible. Keroncong is an intangible inheritance (Nugraha et al., 2016). Solo has hegemonized keroncong music in Indonesia, which is indicated by the emergence of various standards legitimised by previous keroncong figures and maestros (Christy et al., 2019; Supiarza & Sarbeni, 2021). For example, the standard covers the four formats of the keroncong music repertoire, as well as the rules for the style of playing and singing the Solo Keroncong. The keroncong singing styles are divided into two singing styles, namely the Tugu style and the Solo-style (Andini et al., 2021; Soladi, 2019). The Solo singing style is a keroncong singing style, which is generally

performed at a moderate or slow tempo, giving the impression of a lilting performance (Widyanta, 2017). These two styles are the most dominant singing styles in keroncong singing. The dominance of the Solo singing style occurs due to the holding of festivals and keroncong singing competitions where the judges refer to the Soloan Surakarta singing style. In addition, many keroncong singers from Surakarta dominate the recording industry of keroncong music (Mulyadi & Indira, 2019; Puguh, 2018; Supiarza & Sarbeni, 2021). Meanwhile, the Tugu singing style is explained in the results of research by Prof. Victor Ganap (Keroncong Tugu, 2017), Pinta Resti Ayu Ayunda (Singing style in Tugu kerontjong music “Saartje Michiels style analysis”).

At every festival or competition of singing keroncong, the Solo keroncong style is often used as a reference in the judges' evaluations, in which the rules and regulations are considered the standard for judging (Supiarza & Sarbeni, 2021). Up to now, there is still a stigma about the difficulty of singing keroncong in society, which reduces interest in learning to sing keroncong. Technically, the stigma is related to several rules mastered by someone who wants to sing keroncong music, these technical rules include; breathing techniques, dexterity that must be flexible, peculiarities of ornamentation, and intervals (long range of notes). To stay dynamic, it takes a little liberation without losing the essence (Supiarza & Sarbeni, 2021).

The innovation and creativity of the Solo keroncong musicians is one of the factors supporting the rapid development of Solo keroncong music. This evidence can be found in the Solo history of keroncong music (Christy et al., 2019). Many innovations and the new terms that emerged as a result of their inventive and creative ideas are evidenced by the existence of the term *ngroncong*. The term is frequently used by Solo keroncong artists and people, particularly when practising or performing keroncong music. Prabowo (2018) explains that *ngroncong* is a musicality that indicates the distinctive nature of keroncong music. This will be achieved when it is in accordance with the aesthetics and culture of keroncong music. During a performance, when a singer has reached *ngroncong*, he can fully convey musical messages. In addition, for the accompaniment (music player) and audience, they can feel the atmosphere of *ngalaras* — a feeling of being *sumeleh/semoleh* (feeling calm, surrendering to God), said Yanti Sapto (personal communication, 18 July 2019).

In addition to being known as a way of playing keroncong music, the term *ngroncong* is often used to describe keroncong singers as an appraisal of the quality of the Solo-style keroncong singing. There are several figures who explain the stages of achievement for singing *ngroncong/undul usuk*. However, an in-depth study of how to indicate a singer has reached the stage of being capable of singing *ngroncong* and how the process must be followed has not been found. Therefore, this research examines singing *ngroncong* (*undul usuk*) as an achievement in Solo-style keroncong singing by identifying and describing the process of achieving it, especially in carrying out the original keroncong repertoire.

The formation of a Solo-style singing character or style, is related to the creative culture of the people of Solo coupled with Soekarno's political tendencies, who established Lokananta as the first recording company in Indonesia, so that a mixture of *karawitan* (classical gamelan music and performance practise in Javanese music) and keroncong music can be published throughout Indonesia through RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia/Radio of Republic Indonesia) (Puguh, 2018; Supiarza,

2019). Javanese (Solo) karawitan art first lived in the midst of the Solo people, while keroncong music entered Solo around the 1920s (Suadi, 2017). This becomes the reason that Solo has its own characteristics and dominance when compared to keroncong from other regions in Indonesia.

This study documents an important example of a community that preserves the essence of singing keroncong in the dualistic process of development and preservation. In particular, this research aims at examining the rules and highest achievements in singing Solo-style keroncong and the social and cultural contexts of Solo people. Thus, the implications of this research are on (a) how it can become a new discourse for the repertoire of keroncong music as hybrid music in Indonesia and (b) knowledge for keroncong singers regarding the highest achievement in singing Solo-style keroncong.

### **How to Achieve Singing**

Theoretically, the achievement of every singer is to make their presence in every performance able to attract the attention of the audience (Ning, 2017). To achieve this, every singer must go through a long process, including developing technical skills and emotional maturity. In an investigation of a singer's problem, the singing achievement processes, such as emotion, memory, and knowledge, can be influenced by the singer's consciousness (Lv, 2018). The basis of a person's talent in singing or not can be determined from the tone accuracy, which is related to repetitive practice, the exercise performed, age-specific adjustments, and training in playing music, including instrumental training that is independently correlated with singing accuracy (Pfordresher & Demorest, 2021).

The research conducted by Meloni (2021) entitled *Foreign Sindhen in practice: New teaching strategies and the impact of practice-led research on Javanese female singing* adopted a truly participatory ethnographic approach. Since the researcher is a Javanese Sindhen or a female singer who sings in gamelan ensembles and performs arts accompanied by gamelan with certain repertoires and qualities, she positioned herself in this research as a Sindhen, not as a doctor. The research results succeeded in naturally revealing the formulation of the research problem by proving that there is an internal relationship between the achievement of singing ngroncong/undul usuk in keroncong music and the achievement of singing in Sindhen as a gamelan tradition in Javanese culture (Meloni, 2021, p. 28). The most typical acculturation of keroncong music with Javanese gamelan music is in Solo, especially the adaptation of the keroncong instrument with musical instruments in gamelan (Soladi, Mintargo, & Kiswanto, 2020). The internalisation of gamelan in keroncong music then created a new genre of keroncong music, namely Langgam Jawa (Rachman & Utomo, 2019; Ratnasari, 2015; Skelchy, 2015). It is natural for an outside type of music that develops in a new area to influence and imitate each other, with the potential to create an eclectic type of music (Nuccio et al., 2018). The cultural internalization of Javanese music singing into keroncong music (Javanese style) is explained and proven in the Javanese poetry (*Macapat*) (Skelchy, 2015). Based on several of the aforementioned explanations in the research, the finding in Meloni's research is in line with this research. This is supported by an explanation of the

requirements of a Sindhen, such as the ability to sing and elaborate melodic patterns (cengkok), as well as specific ways of behaving to realise the ideals of hyper-feminine Javanese (related to some norms about language, costumes, and manners, such as the way they sit on the stage and interact with musicians and audience) (Meloni, 2021).

In Javanese karawitan works, ornamentation is widely used in ngroncong singing performance. Regarding the achievement, it was actually adopted from a term often used by Javanese karawitan artists. Ngroncong is a musical sub-concept. The habit of creating diction as an expression in Javanese karawitan was also carried over when keroncong entered Solo. Diction that later became a musical sub-concept term in karawitan includes; *nggalali*, *nyendaren*, *samenspelen*, *luk*, *gojek*, and *mbesut*. While the musical symptoms are technical in nature, they are; *mbanyumili*, *sintiran*, *isen-isen* (Andini et al., 2021; Prabowo, 2019).

The research on ngroncong has been conducted by Prabowo (2019) entitled *Personal quality in achieving the aesthetic of “ngroncong”*. This research examined the relationship between the term ngroncong and the aesthetics of keroncong music in general. This research found several important aspects in achieving personal quality so that a person can reach the ngroncong stage, namely knowledge accumulation, song interpretation, competence, and personal disposition. His research also reveals the realisation of total cooperation in the Keroncong music ensemble and how the feeling is manifested into a single entity through the artists' interpersonal relationships. To achieve a sense of ngroncong, every individual is required to have (a) accumulated knowledge; (b) competence; and (c) song interpretation (Prabowo, 2018). In fact, in other types of music, these conditions must be met to achieve the aesthetic quality of musical presentation in the form of an ensemble. As explained by Solis, in her book entitled *Performing ethnomusicology: Teaching and representation in world music ensembles*, she completely describes the requirements of artists in a musical ensemble. In general, the research on ngroncong conducted by (Prabowo, 2019) is quite interesting, especially with the existence of locals and his findings. However, the research specifically did not find the essence of ngroncong itself as a peculiarity of keroncong music in the context of ensembles. Hence, this present study seeks to provide a more in-depth study in the context of ngroncong as the main feature in keroncong music by exploring the term from the perspective of the singing style.

## Methodology

This research employs a descriptive analysis method with a qualitative approach. In this research, the researchers described the phenomena that occurred in the field as a whole and naturally as they are. The research consisted of three stages, namely the early stage, the implementation stage, and the final stage. The three stages of this research were adopted from the qualitative research paradigm as the process of collecting all research data, and the research stages are needed in qualitative research as a way to obtain research data comprehensively (Creswell, 2014; Sukmayadi et al., 2022). In the early stages, the activities consisted of planning, preparation, review, and initial study. Meanwhile, in the implementation stage, the activities consisted of

data collection, data analysis, and understanding. Lastly, in the final stage, the activities were evaluation and preparation process.

### **Early Stage**

The researchers prepared a research plan, research guidelines, and everything else needed, reviewed the research site for adaptation, recorded important phenomena, and conducted initial studies by looking for various relevant and credible references. This research was conducted specifically in Solo involving singers, musicians, and keroncong figures both as connoisseurs and activists. Several keroncong singers participated in this research, for example, Mini Satria, Yanti Sapto, Kus Landung, Waldjinah, and Subardjo HS. In addition, the figures and keroncong artists who also participated in this research were Wartono, Ary Mulyono, Sapto Haryono, Danis Sugiyanto, Imoeng Cr., Erie Setiawan, Sapto Ksvara Kusbini, and Soladi.

### **Implementation Stage**

Data collection in this research was carried out using observation, interviews, and documentation studies while the triangulation technique was used to test the validity of the data. During the observation process, the researchers carried out complete participatory observation, in which the researchers were fully involved in what the data sources were doing in a more natural atmosphere. Furthermore, informal interviews were also carried out using questions that depended on the spontaneity of the questioner and used the research objectives as interview guidelines. In this research, the documentation study consists of sound recording documents, discographies of legitimised keroncong singers, especially Mini Satria's discography in *Bintang Radio 1982* and Ismanto's discography from *Album Emas Keroncong Ismanto*, scores of keroncong songs, both sheet music, the original and the transcript of *Kr. Senandung Bidari* song, photos and videos of supporting documentation, keroncong music books, theses, dissertations, journals, and other written works about keroncong music.

The criteria used to select the singers came from references given by the Surakarta keroncong community. They state that Mini Satria is considered to have achieved the quality of singing ngroncong. This data is based on the results of interviews with informants, namely Danis, Yanti Sapto, Sapto Haryono, Kus Landung, and Soladi (personal communication, July-August 2019). The researchers also adopted triangulation for data collection techniques and data collection sources.

### **Analysis Procedure**

The researchers carried out data analysis procedures by making transcripts of data from observations, interviews, and documentation studies, then sorting and selecting the main and important data, making categorizations to get a clearer description of ngroncong as an achievement in singing the Solo-style keroncong. Afterwards, the data were presented in the form of descriptive text in a narrative and systematic way so that it was clearer and easier to understand. Furthermore, the researchers made conclusions from the research results, referring to the research questions for

verification. A conclusion was credible if it was supported by valid and consistent evidence, as well as with considerations from various related parties.

### **Final Stage of Research**

The evaluation and preparation activities were still related to the implementation stage. The evaluation process was carried out to find out the advantages and disadvantages of the research results, if there was still data requiring supporting data or if there were other shortcomings, it could therefore be completed in tandem with the preparation process.

### **Result**

Following the completion of the research on undul usuk as an achievement of singing the Solo-style keroncong, the following research findings were obtained:

#### **Process of Achieving Singing Ngroncong**

Based on the findings of observations and interviews related to the history of keroncong music in Solo, it was discovered that the fluctuating existence of keroncong music in Solo had an impact on the development of the Solo-style; keroncong in terms of playing musical instruments and singing in its own unique way. When the existence of keroncong music was receding, the emergence of Mus Mulyadi and Rama Aiphama had a significant influence on the development of Solo-style keroncong singing.

These two singers made a very important contribution to the image of keroncong music in the industry. Mus Mulyadi was a popular singer in the keroncong music genre around the 1970-1990s. He is often nicknamed "The King of Keroncong" because of his vocal ability in processing and improvising songs, which has a distinctive twist as a representation of the Soloan style. At the beginning of his career, Mus Mulyadi changed the original keroncong song entitled *Dewi Murni* into a pop keroncong style, so that it was more easily accepted by the market (Mulyadi & Indira, 2019). Meanwhile, Rama Aiphama can be said to be a singer who tries to present fresh air for the development of keroncong music by collaborating the reggae style with keroncong music, as well as creating an eccentric performance style (Arbie & Bandung, 2022).

With their characteristics, the existence of keroncong music rose again, to the extent that the Solo-style began to develop. Mus Mulyadi with his cengkok keroncong singing pattern became a novelty in the development of Solo-style keroncong singing. Many in the Solo Keroncong community, on the other hand, rejected Mus Mulyadi's style as unorthodox and far from the standard of singing Ngroncong.

The research participants stated that the term ngroncong was formed from the culture of the Solo keroncong community and had existed for a long time. Ngroncong was often expressed by previous people as an image to give a certain musical identity outside of the existing musical terms, because these terms were still considered less representative. This statement is in line with Prabowo (2018) who

states that ngroncongi is a musicality indicating the distinctive nature of keroncong music. Ngroncongi will be achieved if it is in accordance with the aesthetics and culture of keroncong music.

The keroncong performance can be classified based on its purpose, namely the conservative aspect and the entertainment aspect. The conservative aspect is when the rules in singing keroncong music must comply with the five levels of the concept of solo keroncong singing, namely; ngroncongi/expert, specialist, skilled, average, and beginner stages, while the entertainment aspect is just enough to reach four aspects, namely; specialist, skilled, average, and beginner. Both have different targets, and a balance is needed for both the preservation and development of keroncong music. In this case, the keroncong singers need to be aware and able to position themselves based on that goal. In the conservative aspect, there are things that need to be considered as agreed in special provisions, prioritising the preservation of keroncong music without losing its essence. Meanwhile, in the entertainment aspect, it prioritises aspects based on market interests.

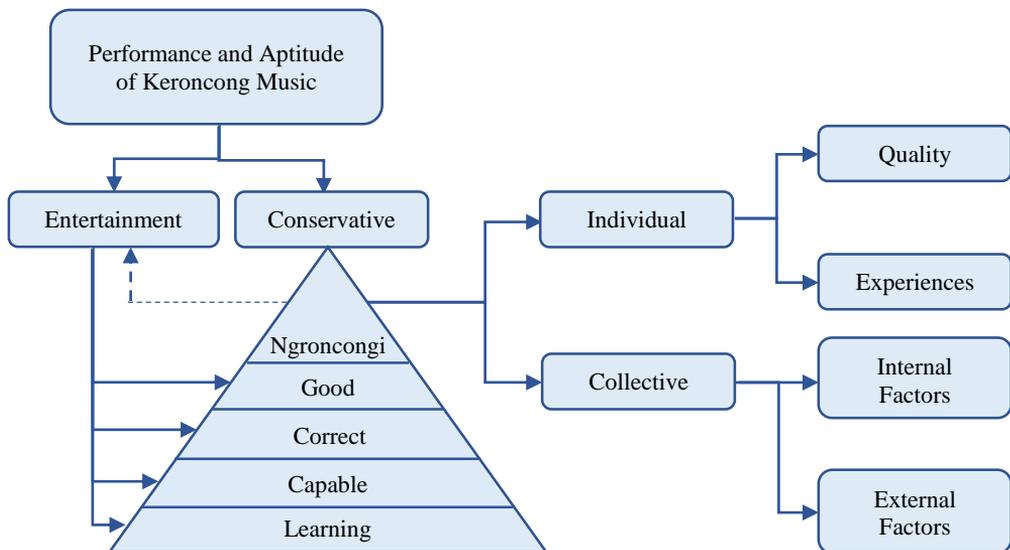


Figure 1. Ngroncongi Concept Chart (January 2021)

Ngroncongi has a conservative aspect, but it can also have an entertainment aspect when it is presented to certain audiences who can enjoy and feel entertained by the ngroncongi music presentation. This can be seen in Figure 1 chart, where it is impossible to create Solo-style Keroncong music by combining just one or two elements. Although the keroncong music is all about singing and music playing, this study discusses specifically on the singing style.

Figure 1 shows that there are five levels where ngroncongi is at its peak. The five levels listed above represent the study’s findings based on the results of all interviews conducted. Currently, a National-level singing competition, known as the National Student Art Week (PEKSIMINAS, Pekan Seni Mahasiswa Nasional), which

is held every two years, continues to use these levels for keroncong vocal competitions. In our observations, we have not seen developments in the format of the jury's assessment for the keroncong music competition if the competition is a competition entitled Keroncong music singing competition, said Henrikus Mulyadi (Imoeng), one of the judges for the national keroncong competition (personal communication, 28 August 2019).

Thus, ngroncong is seen as the highest achievement. Therefore, to achieve this, it takes various efforts that require consistency and hierarchical stages. This concept is also formed from the results of interviews that discussed factors, elements, or layers under the ngroncong with each layer having its own benchmark. This can refer to various theories of the highest achievement, such as the concept of *makrifat* as the highest spiritual achievement of humans. Based on this concept, the following describes the stages and benchmarks in singing the Solo-style keroncong.

### **Stage of Learning to Sing (Beginner Stage)**

The stage of learning to sing is the most fundamental stage in achieving Solo-style keroncong singing. This stage indicates that this stage is intended for people who already have an interest, desire, and intention to learn to sing keroncong and then realise it in the learning process. In this stage, there are no special demands to achieve a certain singing quality because the urgency is to attract interest so that people enjoy learning to sing keroncong. The learning process must continue to be carried out as the foundation of every step towards higher stages.

### **Stage of Being Capable to Sing (Average Stage)**

After going through the stages of learning to sing, the next stage is being capable of singing keroncong. Regardless of his/her shortcomings, a person can be classified in this stage if he is capable of singing to the accompaniment of keroncong music and various keroncong songs. At this stage, they should have understood the form and structure of the keroncong song that he was singing.

### **Stage of Singing Correctly (Skilled Stage)**

In this stage, the singer can be considered to have stepped onto the stage of true singing, if he can sing the keroncong song correctly and in accordance with the provisions, especially in the original keroncong repertoire. Singing correctly means that the person can sing the melody of the song according to the notation, use the correct singing technique, use the style of personality and ornamentation, and self-evaluate and realise when he finds mistakes in singing keroncong.

### **Stage of Good Singing (Specialist Stage)**

This stage is indicated by a person who can sing correctly, beautifully, and alive but still does not have the characteristics of singing ngroncong. At this stage, they have begun to pay attention to the aesthetic elements of the song rendition and are capable of interpreting the song content, but it cannot be fully enjoyed by the audience.

Singers already have good musical skills and can use their analytical skills for the aesthetic benefit of a song. However, sometimes there are singers who carry characters from other music genres, for example, pop, jazz, karawitan, etc., hence, the character of the keroncong is dismissed. This stage is the highest in the entertainment field, and many keroncong singers stop at this stage.

### **Stage of Singing Ngroncong (Expert Stage)**

As previously mentioned, singing ngroncong is the highest achievement of the Solo-style of keroncong singing. In this stage, there are various rules, supporting factors, and tips that must be followed to achieve the singing quality that fulfils the sense of keroncong. This stage has reached the highest aesthetic, which the audience can enjoy.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, the formation of the ngroncong quality is supported by its individual and collective achievements. This is in line with Prabowo (2018) who explains that musical quality, both personally and interpersonally, is a supporting element in building a chronological musicality. The achievement of individual ngroncong is shown by the ngroncong quality of each musician and singer. It is formed from the quality and experience of each musician and singer individually. The quality in question is related to the technique, characteristics, and musical abilities possessed. While experience relates to the extent to which a person is involved in the field of keroncong music, the process of mentoring and training, and other experiences.

Based on the interview results, ngroncong is seen as the aesthetics peak of keroncong music that needs to be achieved through certain stages and built by certain elements of ngroncong quality. This term has been used for a long time, but it is not certain when and who first originated it. This is a cultural practise of the Javanese people to give special terms or identities to things. The use of ngroncong term is more often found in the process of rehearsing and percussion to measure the success of the quality of achievement of a player and singer. People who have the right to say they have reached the ngroncong level are people who are considered teachers in a keroncong community. For the keroncong community outside Solo, especially in the areas of West Java, East Java, Jakarta and even elsewhere in Indonesia, they do not really put much importance on this. Especially, for today's young generation, ngroncong is not a reference in singing keroncong. The younger generation's desire to learn keroncong does not imply a refusal, but rather that they are unaware of it.

Furthermore, ngroncong are formed collectively as a unity. In collective ngroncong achievements, there are internal and external factors that are building and supporting factors for ngroncong achievements. Internal factors are related to intrapersonal skills (positioning and controlling themselves) and interpersonal skills (the ability to interact and respect both in musical and affective). Meanwhile, external factors are related to the quality of the song (the musical elements that make up the song or the composition of the song), audio-visual quality (audio: the influence of organology, room acoustics, sound system settings; visual: appearance, dress, stage style), and the socio-cultural environment (habits carried out for the formation of chemistry, according to the culture of the noble Solo community).

### Singing Ngroncongi (Undul usuk)

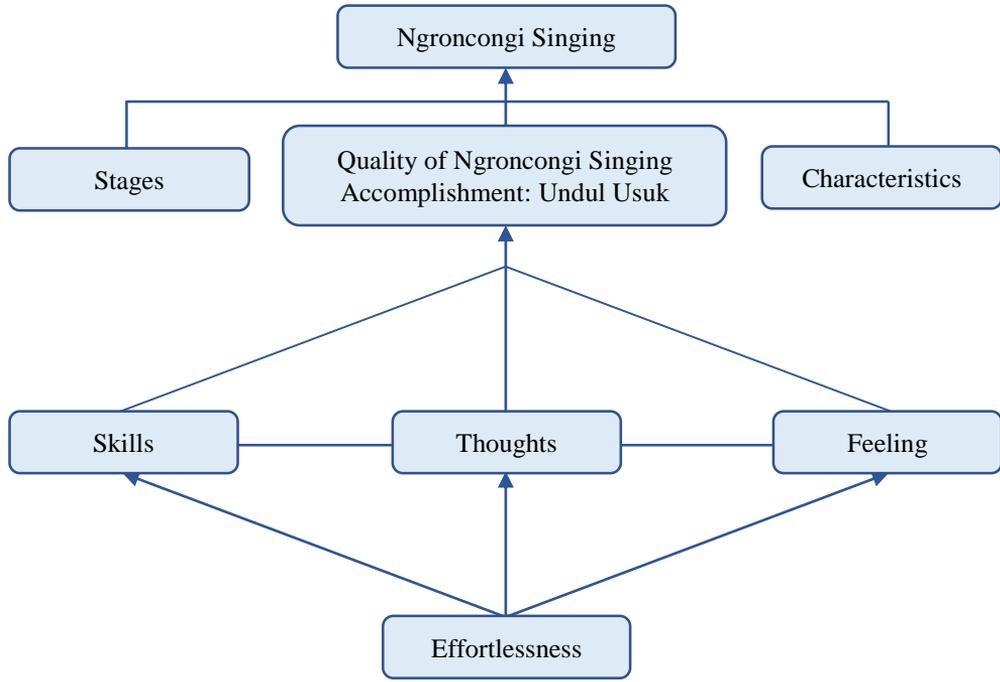


Figure 2. Ngroncongi Singing Concept Chart (January 2021)

Singing ngroncongi is a sub-concept of ngroncongi. Singing ngroncongi can be defined as a musical identity in the highest achievement of the conceptual Solo-style keroncong singing. There are several interrelated perspectives to discuss the concept of ngroncongi singing, namely singing ngroncongi as the highest stage; singing ngroncongi as a quality of achievement; and ngroncongi as a characteristic of the Solo-style keroncong singing. The quality of achievement in singing ngroncongi is related to the rules and tips for achieving the Solo-style keroncong singing. This quality can also be referred to as *undul usuk/turut usuk*, which is used to express the quality of singing keroncong at its highest achievement. From this explanation, it can be concluded that *undul usuk* and singing ngroncongi have similar meanings.

*Undul usuk* is a term that has multiple interpretations. *Undul* can be interpreted as heading, bouncing, or towering up high. *Usuk* is a long piece of wood or bamboo that is installed as the rib roof of the house. Thus, *undul usuk* can be interpreted as an expression of the high quality of singing keroncong. *Undul usuk* is related to aesthetics and is built from the values of a singer's musicality.

*Ngroncongi/undul usuk* is a term of Javanese origins. *Keroncong* becomes the root word, then at the beginning of the word it gets the prefix "ng-" and at the end it gets the affix "i-" so that initially *keroncong* is a noun and turns into an adjective. In essence, *ngroncongi* is a musicality that has characteristic of *keroncong* music. *Ngroncongi* will be achieved if it is in accordance with the aesthetics of *keroncong*

music. Meanwhile, the term *undul usuk* was briefly mentioned by Soladi (2019, p. 33) with the term “tuk usuk”, which is used as a term for singing that achieves the aesthetics of *keroncong/ngroncongi*.

This is in accordance with interviews and the exposure result of Soladi (2019) who expresses that the aesthetic peak of singing *keroncong* is called *turut usuk*. This concept is usually multi-interpreted, and can be understood from any point of view related to musical values in singing *keroncong* songs. Furthermore, *turut usuk* is a term in *keroncong* music in which singing achieves the aesthetic of *keroncong/ngroncongi* (Soladi, 2019, p. 72).

The quality of the *undul usuk* achievement requires the singer’s flexibility in harmonising three elements, namely skills, thoughts, and feelings. The skills are related to musical skills, intrapersonal skills, and interpersonal skills. Then, the thought is related to cognitive abilities in a singer’s musical knowledge and insight, thinking and analytical abilities, and memory. In this case, the singer’s feeling is required to harmonize, ensoul, love the song being sung, and feel the strains of the accompanying *keroncong* music, so that the character can be enjoyed by oneself and reaches the audience. The concept of achieving *undul usuk* is based on the results of observations and interviews, and refers to the discussion (Prabowo, 2019), in which the elements that develop personal qualities are knowledge accumulation; competence; interpretation of the *keroncong* song; and personal demeanor.

Based on the observations and interview results, the singing technique used to achieve *undul usuk* emphasises body posture, breathing techniques, phrasing, intonation, articulation, and voice registers. This is in line with Nafisi (2014), who states that various singing techniques include body posture, breathing techniques, voice positioning techniques, pronunciation techniques, and expressions.

In breathing techniques, the “*keroncong* breath,” or “longer and stronger breaths,” is required. This is related to phrasing, which is the correct technique for decapitating sentences when taking a breath. Then, intonation and voice registers need to be considered when finding extreme pitch jumps to get the tone right and produce smooth characteristics. Singers must be able to connect the process of switching voice registers, so it does not create an uneven or streaky timbre, and is not too loud/rough. In other words, the resulting timbre does not change. Meanwhile, the body posture is closely related to the history of its development, namely the rules for singers’ microphones not to be held during competitions. It is considered an assessment material for posture when singing. Even with a limited range of motion, singing quietly in place by only giving gestures and body movements is considered an advantage for some singers to focus more and prioritise the quality of their singing. Then, this rule is also related to the technical ability to use a microphone. Singers must understand the distance between the mouth and the microphone along with the strength of their voice when singing.

Singing the Solo-style *keroncong* has distinct performance characteristics, which are denoted by the terms *cengkok*, *gregel*, portamento and *gandul* (Soladi et al., 2020). Singing the Solo-style *keroncong* has special characteristics in its performance, as known by the terms *cengkok*, *gregel*, portamento, and *gandul*. After reviewing various literature, observations, and conducting interviews, various confusions were found in these terms. Various terms adapted from these musical

terms often lead to misperceptions. Therefore, most of the keroncong practitioners in Solo often mention the tone ornamentation or improvisation named *cengkok keroncong* accompanied by *nggandul*.

To achieve *undul usuk*, there are various provisions in interpreting the song. The use of ornamentation and the nature of *nggandul* must be in accordance with the portion. *Nggandul* is a term in keroncong music and other music used to refer to an inaccurate pitch twist when the beat falls. Apart from *gandul/nggandul*, there are other terms, namely; *cengkok*, *gregel*, *luk* and *mbesut*. These terms only exist in Solo-style keroncong. *Cengkok* (twist) is an arrangement of additional notes to beautify the song (Soladi, 2019), all forms of tonal arrangements (ornament), or in short, the size of the melody that beautifies and enlivens the song (Fikri, 2017). Specifically, the notes ornament on the main tone that moves up then moves down and returns to the main tone. How to sing *cengkok keroncong* is different from the typical techniques of other keroncong styles, in general, *cengkok* is sung quickly but still effortlessly. In original keroncong songs, not all phrases have *cengkok*, usually in one song, there are only one or two *cengkok* touches on different phrases. *Gregel cengkok* is an ornamental *cengkok* that is sung by slightly lowering the tone by one or half of the intervals, and usually the *gregel* is performed after the *luk*. *Gregel* often occurs at the end of a phrase but can also be found in the middle of a phrase. *Luk* is an ornamental tune in singing, sung occasionally before *gregel*. *Mbesut* is a way to beautify song sentences when singing keroncong by inserting vocal melody ornaments using the *glissando* technique. In principle, the way to sing *mbesut* is to propagate from one note to another, either towards a higher note or a lower tone. A singer, when he does *mbesut*, consciously understands how to cut syllables in a song sentence, which is used as a long note to be filled with the composition.

Moreover, if it is too much or excessive, it will eliminate the characteristics of the *ngroncong* singing. For example, a *nggandul* pattern that is too excessive to match the tempo of the accompaniments, usually known as *nglewer* or *kenggandulen*. This is in line with Pambajeng et al., (2019) statement that in large orchestras, the *Gandul* technique tends not to be used often because it will lose the sense and meaning of the song, and the singing tempo will lag behind the tempo of the accompaniment (*kenggandulen*). Likewise, excessive use of ornamentation will give the impression of “does not sound like keroncong” or even lead to other musical genres. Sometimes, this leads the singer to stray away from the original notation. Singers must interpret without changing the main melody that has been created.

The *nggadul* implementation should be the result of ornamentation use and the singer’s flexibility in bringing the keroncong song. In addition, there is a rule that at the beginning of the song entry (the introduction part), the notes and beats must be correct, and it is not allowed to use ornamentation. This is a challenge for singers, because some keroncong songs start with a high note and cannot be glided, or using *glissando* or *legato* techniques. Regarding the technique used in *ngroncong* singing ornamentation, Prabowo (2018) introduced it to the term *mbesut* for the use of the *glissando* and *luk* technique for the *legato* technique.

*Undul usuk* can not only be achieved with skill. In a keroncong music presentation, a singer does not only sing, but is included in the ensembleship and must have a burgeoning position by having a bargaining value on music. All of this must

be based on musical knowledge, insight, and analytical thinking skills in keroncong music. Singers can provide input and determine what kind of keroncong music game should be presented. For example, in determining the accompaniment pattern used, setting the tempo, and so on, it takes unity between the singer and the accompanist to create a quality ngroncong.

Furthermore, the most essential aspect for achieving the quality of undul usuk is feeling. In other words, singing is not just a physical technique but has entered the realm of human psychology. Singers must be able to ensoul the meaning of the song they are singing. The singer's flexibility will form the achievement of feeling, where flexibility is formed as an accumulation of experience and process. The characteristics of ngroncong singing are lilting, smooth, aesthetic, and essential.

As the visual of every keroncong music performance, the singer's appearance is important to consider. In the past, keroncong singers were synonymous with wearing kebaya for women and suits for men. Kebaya, which is also the identity of Javanese women, adds to the essence and aesthetics of keroncong music as a hyper-feminist embodiment (Meloni, 2021). The rules in this way of dressing are in line with those put forward (Mulyadi & Indira, 2019) in which for singers and keroncong musicians, female singers usually wear a kebaya with their hair tied in a bun, and male singers usually wear batik or a suit. Nowadays, it is rare to find keroncong singers with such appearances, but being polite and neat is still prioritised. As the quality of undul usuk has been achieved, if you look inappropriately, it will certainly reduce the essence and aesthetics of the ngroncong.

Several sources found that the quality of singing ngroncong (undul usuk) can only be achieved in the original keroncong repertoire. Therefore, the researchers are still limited to the realm of the original keroncong repertoire. Based on the observations, the song *Kr. Senandung Bidari* created by Sapari/WS. Nardi, sung by Mini Satria in *Album Bintang-Bintang Radio 1982*, was chosen as an example of the achievement of singing ngroncong (undul usuk). As previously explained, song quality is one of the external factors that form the quality of ngroncong. As previously explained, the song quality is one of the external factors that form the ngroncong quality. Prabowo (2018) explains that the composition of the song that forms the feeling of ngroncong is formed by its song, main melody, and tone interval. The song *Kr. Senandung Bidari* can be proven as a song that forms the characteristics of ngroncong.

## Discussion

### Keroncong Song Entitled *Senandung Bidari*

The song *Kr. Senandung Bidari* consists of 28 bars (excluding the intro and coda), 4/4 rhythm with an andante tempo or medium slow. This song certainly has a sentence form consisting of three parts, namely, part A ("*Angkatan*" or the introduction) on bars 1-6, part B ("*Ole-ole*" or middle) on bars 11-20, part C ("*Senggaan*" or end) on bars 21-28, with two sequences. On bars 9-10, there is a middle section called the middle spell (interlude). This is in accordance with the original keroncong repertoire format proposed by Widjajadi (2007). The following is a transcript of the original

notation *Kr. Senandung Bidari* with an A major tonality in accordance with Mini Satria's character. The description of the original score and the researchers' transcription score are presented in Figure 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Original Notation *Kr. Senandung Bidari*

Figure 4. Notation Transcript of *Kr. Senandung Bidari* (January, 2021)

The tonal area of the song *Kr. Senandung Bidari* is quite wide, with a range of almost 2 octaves, from e (lowest note) to c#2 (highest note) in A major tonality. In this song, there are also pitch intervals, extreme pitch jumps, and extreme pitch jumps. For more details, the following is a piece of phrases in the first 4 bars of the song *Kr. Senandung Bidari* in the forms of a table and graph. This phrase is considered sufficient to represent the whole song. In the vertical column, it describes the beats from bar 1 to bar 4 at every half beat. While the horizontal line describes the notes starting from a small octave to octave 2 (from bottom to top).

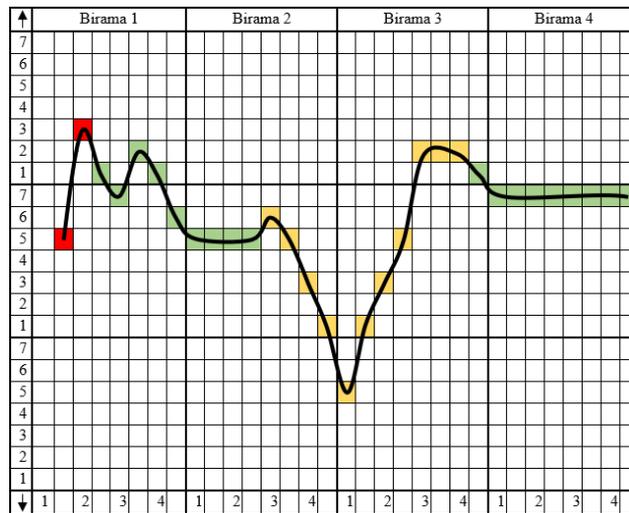


Figure 5. Tone Region Graphics *Kr. Senandung Bidari* (January, 2021)

The red colour in Figure 5 shows extreme pitch jumps, namely from 5 (sol) in octave 1 to 3 (mi) in octave 2. The leap notes in red appear several times in this song, and indicate major sector intervals that are  $4\frac{1}{2}$  notes. Furthermore, the yellow colour in the chart still represents the extreme pitch jump, but the extreme tone is passed gradually past the other helpful notes. The jump in the extreme yellow tone is 6 (la) in octave 1 by going through tones 5 (sol), 3 (mi), 1 (do) to 5 (sol) in small octaves. Then, it is continued from 5 (sol) in a small octave by going through the notes of 1 (do), 3 (mi), 5 (sol) in octave 1 to 2 (re) in octave 2. Furthermore, the green colour in Figure 5 indicates the playing of tonal intervals. In the form of the song, the wide range of notes, the playing of note intervals, and the extreme pitch jumps are found in this song. Therefore, it proves that *Kr. Senandung Bidari* has the characteristics of a ngroncong song.



Figure 6. Mini Satria Sings in My Motherland Golden Earth Concert (2019)

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and analysis of the study documentation, the researchers used an audio recording of Mini Satria in this research as an example of a singer who was considered to have achieved ngroncong/undul usuk. The song *Kr. Senandung Bidari* sung by Mini Satria was used as a text analysis to reveal the principles of building undul usuk achievements. In the audio recording that the researchers used as material for analysis, she has achieved the vocal quality of ngroncong in singing *Kr. Senandung Bidari*. His performance is very flexible and in harmony with the principles of developing the ngroncong vocal quality. The interpretation can be seen in the following comparison. Her interpretative notation is not exactly what it is, but it is close to that. This is because of his flexibility in performing songs coupled with his distinctive character.

### Interpretation of Senandung Bidari Song



Figure 7. Notation Transcript of Bar 11-12 *Kr. Senandung Bidari* (January 2021)



Figure 8. Notation Interpretation of Bar 11-12 (January 2021)

From this notation, the interpretation of Mini Satria is in accordance with the principles of ngroncong vocal, meaning that ornamentation should not be given at

the beginning of the first beat, and that it is appropriate for stressed beats. At the beginning of the song, she sang right on the 2nd beat of thesis and right on the note of e1 without being glided or given any other ornamentation. For *mungkret*, her beats used triplets. Almost the whole song, triplets are used. In *nggandul*, it can be seen clearly from her beats that don't bring out the same as the beats in the original notation. Several times, at the beginning of a sentence other than at the beginning of the song, she starts with *nggandul*, which is entered on the 2/4 beat. For example, on bar 3 beat 3, she clears 1/4 beats before entering the song. Then, there are many uses of ornamentation symbolised by mordent, one of which is in the syllable "du." According to Kusbini's theory, this ornamentation is called *gregel*, when it is sung as follows:

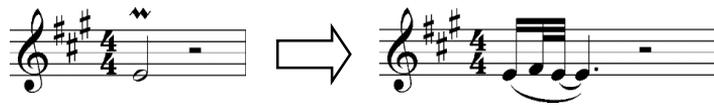


Figure 9. Notation Interpretation of Bar 17 Kr. *Senandung Bidari* (January 2021)

Furthermore, on bar 2, beat 4, Mini Satria provides ornamentation by gliding the tone towards the target tone with the portamento technique or commonly known as *luk*, and some call it *embat naik*. *Luk* is a characteristic of a *keroncong* singer. The implementation of singing with *luk* in the context of *ngroncong* is different from *luk* in Javanese *karawitan*. *Luk* in the context of *ngroncong* is flexible. *Embat naik* is the term for adding the nearest note above the main note. In writing, *appoggiatura* is used on one note below the intended tone. In the whole song, it was found that there were many tones, which were given *luk* ornamentation by her and transcribed with various kinds of writing. As is the case in verse 1, bar 3, beat 4 on the *wang* syllable, there is a g#1 note marked with a *slur* leading to the a1 note. The way to sing it is still the same with the ornamentation, but the pronunciation is different.



Figure 10. Notation Transcript of Bar 11-12 Kr. *Senandung Bidari* (January 2021)



Figure 11. Notation Interpretation of Bar 11-12 "Senandung Bidari" (January 2021)

The notation above is a transcript of the notation on bar 11 and bar 12. After being analysed, as before, Mini Satria started on the 2nd beat of the thesis again and then used triplets. Then, it was found that there was acciaccatura on bar 11 beat 3, which was sung with the glissando technique to the main note. On bar 12, there was a cengkok keroncong ornamentation, which has also been written in the original notation. She then interpreted it with a difference in beats. For the main melodic notation, there was no difference. If it is not stated in the original notation, cengkok can be written using the grouppetto symbol. Regarding the character of the voice and the style of the stage, Mini Satria is known as a beautiful woman who is cheerful and coquettish. Her vocal performance is more improvisational, she disagrees with how to sing according to the notation. She is more concerned with interpretation by using *luk* to sound sweeter and more effortless.

Someone can definitely guess that it is Mini Satria's voice when hearing it. In this song, she inserted her trademark, which was so obvious, namely on the 17th bar. With *nggandul* and ornamentation that is very flexible and has character, it can emphasize the coquettish impression that is the unique characteristics of Mini Satria, even though it only listened to audio without seeing its visual appearance. The following is a transcript of the notation:

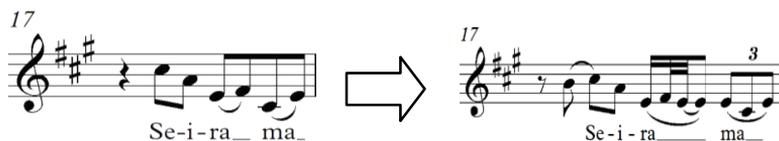


Figure 12. Notation Interpretation of Bar 17 *Kr. Senandung Bidari* (January 2021)

This 17th bar can also prove Mini Satria's high musical thinking and analysis skills. From the interval playing and the sound length of the "ra" and "ma" syllables, she used it to provide ornamentation that gave the impression of being coquettish following the lyrics of the song "seirama lenggang," which could support the atmosphere. Mini Satria always placed ornamentation in the right parts and not excessively so that it had a high aesthetic value.

The specialty of Mini Satria is also found in its intonation technique. She also always sings with feelings. She always said that when singing, the song must be loved. Thus, she can enjoy the song, and it also makes the feeling reach the audience and listeners and be memorable and equally delicious. Mini Satria's appreciation for the song is undeniable, even she can convey the contents of the song with her style and character.

There are two sequences of the transcript of Mini Satria's carrying notation, each with 28 bars. Mini Satria can do a second sequence by using ornamentation in the same place, and it was almost the same as the first sequence. There is only a slight development of ornamentation in the second sequence of the *ole-ole* section, as shown in the transcript of the notation in bars 11-14:

First Sequence

Second Sequence

Figure 14. Comparison of Sequences 1 and 2 “Kr. Keroncong Bidari” (January 2021)

There is an ornamentation development carried out by Mini Satria by adding luk ornaments to bar 12 beat 3, bar 13 beat 1½, and bar 14 beat 3½. The rest of the song’s ornamentation was exactly what was performed in the first sequence. Mini Satria proved the use of memory in performing two sequences of songs with the same ornamentation and type placement. This is related to the concept previously explained that memory is one of the factors that form the quality of ngroncong vocals.

In addition, this proves and strengthens Sapto’s statement (personal communication, July 22, 2019) that ancient people could repeat the cengkok that had been sung. ‘Madam, cengkok like earlier’ ‘Sing ngendi toh? Sing iki?’ Yes. Because they have sense/feeling. The important aspect is sense/feeling first. Therefore, it becomes skill, brain, and heart. The transcript of the entire notation of *Kr. Senandung Bidari* by Mini Satria can be found in the appendix.

In performing the song *Kr. Senandung Bidari*, Mini Satria mostly used glissando and legato techniques with microtonic tones to add to the impression of flexibility in her performance. The character of her voice is very inherent, and she has achieved the quality of ngroncong vocals with his very flexible demeanor. She can balance the elements of skill, thought, and feeling. Its aesthetic quality has reached its peak, or is called undul usuk. All of that is formed from her long experience in the world of singing, especially keroncong. Mini Satria deserves to be legitimized as a singer who has achieved ngroncong vocal quality. At the end of this research, the researchers concluded that there are six absolute requirements for a keroncong singer to achieve the ngroncong/undul usuk level as follows:

### Original Notation

Learning and understanding the original notation is the most important tip because of its urgency, which is often overlooked. Technological advances in music notation software make it possible to clearly see the relationship between written and sound notation (del Mar Galera et al., 2013). The original notation became the initial benchmark in studying keroncong songs. It was known that in singing keroncong, it

was necessary to harmonise the main melody with the original notation, although the performance and other ornamentations were adjusted based on the singer's interpretation. Most importantly, there is no original notes that should be changed. However, the majority of singers who study keroncong use the listening method more than understanding the notation first.

### **Listening to Song**

In the surrounding environment, there are many audio recordings of keroncong songs sung by various keroncong singers. However, sometimes there are singers who change the original notation. Listening to keroncong songs must be from the right source. Understanding the notation can help ensure that the audio samples are chosen correctly. In addition, if you want to have ngroncong vocal characteristics, it is important to listen to singers who have achieved ngroncong vocal quality. The impact of learning a song from the wrong source is to be carried away in the habit of listening and singing as an example.

### **Practice**

Regular practise is also one of the efforts to develop and improve the vocal quality of ngroncong. In the training process, it is necessary to have a target so that it continues to increase until it reaches the desired quality. The practises can be done individually or with a keroncong music group.

### **Experience**

As previously mentioned, experience is one of the factors that form the quality of ngroncong individually. By increasing the experience of singing, it will certainly affect the quality of achievement, especially ngroncong vocals. Therefore, singers are expected to increase their experiences by following various jam session, singing at weddings, and so on but it is still in the context of singing keroncong. In addition, unique incidents in singing can also be used as learning and affect the quality of someone's singing.

### **Senior Support**

The entire learning process cannot be separated from the guidance of senior keroncong figures, both figures who are fluent in keroncong and senior keroncong singers who are considered to have ngroncong vocal qualities. Singers should be able to learn a lot by discussing and asking for input for improvement if there are still shortcomings. The seniors will also always guide with sincerity, and will feel happy because there are those who want to learn and preserve keroncong music.

### **Concept Understanding**

As a keroncong singer, it is necessary to understand the concept of ngroncong and the concept of its vocal. By comprehending this, singers can evaluate themselves, and it will be easier to achieve their achievements quality because they will

understand what aspects have not been achieved and what factors are needed. In addition, the singers can also position themselves, as stated in the concept. For example, the burgeoning position that a singer must have to achieve ngroncong vocal quality.

### **Conclusion**

The history and development of keroncong music in Solo have had an influence on the fluctuating quantity and quality in the realm of solo-style keroncong vocals. Mus Mulyadi, as a reformer, greatly influenced the existence and musicality of keroncong at that time. Every player or singer must have an awareness of the purpose of each keroncong music presentation, which is aimed at the realm of entertainment or conservatives. In the conservative aspect of playing and performing Solo-style keroncong, there is the term ngroncong as a concept of the highest achievement in keroncong music. The concept is built from various sub-concepts within it.

Ngroncong vocals can be defined as a musical identity in the highest achievement of conceptual Solo-style keroncong vocals. There are several interrelated perspectives to discuss the concept of its vocals, namely ngroncong vocals as stages; ngroncong vocals as a quality of achievement; ngroncong vocals as a characteristic. The concept of ngroncong vocals as stages explains that there are hierarchical stages of solo-style keroncong vocals. The most basic stage starts from the stage of learning to sing, the stage of being capable of singing, the stage of singing correctly, the stage of good singing, and finally the singing ngroncong stage.

The quality of ngroncong is formed individually and collectively. Individual ngroncong is formed from quality and experience. Meanwhile, collective ngroncong is formed from internal factors, including intrapersonal and interpersonal skills; as well as external factors, including song quality, audio-visual quality, and socio-cultural environment. The concept of the quality of ngroncong vocal performance is related to the principles and tips for achieving solo-style keroncong vocals. The quality of ngroncong vocal performance requires the flexibility of the singer to harmonise three elements; skills, thoughts, and feelings. The skills referred to in the concept of the quality of vocal ngroncong achievement are musical skills, intrapersonal skills, and interpersonal skills.

In addition, the cognitive abilities in the musical knowledge and insight of a vocalist, thinking and analysis abilities, and memory also have an important role. Vocalist' feelings are required to make them able to relate, animate, and love the song being sung, as well as feel the accompaniment of the keroncong music, so that the performance can be enjoyed by not only by themselves and but also by the audience. A flexible nature in singing can create ngroncong's vocal characteristics known as lilting, smooth, tender, aesthetic, and essential. Furthermore, the singer's attractive appearance as the visual element in a Keroncong music performance supports ngroncong's vocal characteristics. It cannot be denied that the vocal achievements of ngroncong cannot be separated from the voice gift from God Almighty. However, there are several tips to achieve ngroncong vocals, including; (a) understanding the notation and listening to the song from the correct source, then interpreting the song

while still paying attention to the original notation, (b) doing regular exercise, (c) getting more experiences, (d) learning a lot, discussing and asking for improvement input from seniors, and (e) understanding of concepts.

The existence of ngroncong and ngroncong concept and vocal is actually to provide a musical identity and as a form of originality of keroncong music. The community believes that the ngroncong vocals can be used as a benchmark for singing Solo-style keroncong. The most important benefit is achieving peace and equanimity, which is called *sumeleh* or *semeleh*. They revealed that the ngroncong quality of keroncong relieves fatigue and burden after a tiring day's work. It can have implications for the development and preservation of keroncong music and can be done by enriching the repertoire of Solo-style keroncong music, especially in the vocal domain, with various musical concepts and identities. However, providing a solution to the problem of certain standard claims makes keroncong very stiff. The results of this research provide flexibility for practitioners to adjust the playing and performance of keroncong music based on entertainment and conservative goals in various situations and conditions. Thus, it eases the keroncong singers' ability to self-evaluate their quality and achievements in singing keroncong, especially in performing the original keroncong repertoire.

Singing ngroncong is the highest achievement in the Solo-style keroncong singing in its conservative aspect, some figures called it *undul usuk*. This achievement applies especially to the original keroncong repertoire. In addition, further research is needed in other keroncong music repertoires. It takes a process and time to achieve *undul usuk* with various rules and tips that must be implemented. In the process of achieving it, there are various stages of achievement in the Solo-style keroncong singing that can be used as a reference for singers to measure their abilities. It is important for singers to be able to position themselves to harmonise the preservation and development of keroncong, especially in the realm of singing.

This research recommends that the next researchers to do further research on keroncong music, especially in the vocal domain, both in the method used and the material to be studied. From the results of this research, there are several things that can be studied in-depth. This research can be used as a reference and source of information about keroncong vocals, particularly the solo style, by future researchers.

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