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ISMN 979-0-9016525-7-6

# Sälapa'

septet opus 102 for playing, reciting, gesturing, singing, dancing and ambulating performers

ROBERT CASTEELS

#### **Programme notes**

Sälapa' is the title of a cycle of Pala' wan love poems I composed for a septet of playing, reciting, gesturing, singing, dancing and ambulating performers. Palawan is an island province of the Philippines situated between the Philippines and East Malaysia. The oral tradition of Pala'wan poetry is rich and highly charged with subtle metaphors. Sälapa' means the betel box in Pala' wan language. The betel box is a metaphor for the body of the beloved woman. The finely chiseled box contains the areca nut which a man hopes to offer to the lady of his choice. To give a betel box signifies to offer one's body. I selected stanzas from different Pala'wan poems to constitute a cycle in which the male figure is de-multiplied into six different persons. My wish is not to "neo-colonially" steal from an oral tradition nor to attempt to re-create the Pala'wan contest in love eloquence. Pala'wan poetry comprises songs of seduction in which the woman is invited to an impossible and forbidden adulterous carnal love. The woman curtly rejects this invitation. So doing, the poetry reminds the listeners of the powerful social and moral interdict. This Tristan duality resonates in my European heart. As an artist ecologically engaged, I strive towards a zero-carbon-emission performance by calling only for instruments made out of wood and bamboo, as I did in a previous composition titled Spirit of Wood opus 45 in 2003. Sounds from bamboo and banana leaves appeared prominently in my opus 60 Taman Suara in 2007. I adopted a different approach than in my Bird songs opus 66 of 2009 by incorporating in Sälapa' aviary onomatopoeia that are truly used by English speaking ornithologists. I used two Pala'wan scales in accordance with the function of each scale: the anhemitonic kulilal scale for the poem and the hemitonic läpläp bägit Pala' wan aviary scale for the melodies. The action of walking forcibly on the same spot whilst swinging the arms refers to the theatrical tradition I saw in the municipality of Luisiana in the province of Laguna. Furthermore this peripatetic nature of the human soul corresponds to my European sense of being a Wanderer. The first performance of Sälapa' concluded the final outdoor concert of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Asia Composers League International Festival and Conference in 2015 in the Philippines. The theme of this Festival was: "Likha - Likas, Reconfiguring Music, Nature and Myth".

#### Duration 6'30"

#### Performers

Performer 1 is a woman wearing a long dress. Performers 2 to 7 should be men. Women who would be performing parts 2 to 7 should adopt a low pitch voice and tone down the feminine aspect of their clothing.

#### Instruments

Performer 1:

- Zither or lute;

Performer 2:

- staff: idiophone consisting of a long wooden hand-held stick with which performer 2 pounds the floor (the performer shall find suitable alternatives in case the stage is not made of resonant wood)
- xylophone: a number of wooden bars graduated in length to sound to a non-well-tempered series of pitches (avoid using the European xylophone);

Performer 3:

- idiophone consisting of banana leaves with stalks and blades
- grain-filled or seed-filled hand drum that is held horizontally



goblet drum: single-headed drum (akin to the Pala'wan *dabakan*) played with two sticks made of rattan;

Performer 4:

- idiophone consisting of bamboo with leaves with abutting stem
- wood blocks: a pair of non-well-tempered blocks of hard wood with a slotted resonant cavity (if nonwell-tempered wood blocks are not available, choose two well-tempered pitches that are tuned an augmented fourth apart)
- a pair of wooden sticks;

Performer 5:

- bamboo jew's-harp (like the Pala'wan *äruding*) struck with a finger (avoid strucking with a string and avoid using the metal jew's-harp)
- claves: a pair of short and thick pieces of hard wood
- a pair of wooden sticks;

Performer 6:

- suling: a non-well-tempered bamboo ring flute with 6 holes (akin to the Pala'wan bäbäräk)
- whip: idiophone consisting of two wooden boards joined by a hinge at one end
- coconut shell idiophone consisting of one high-pitched coconut shell and one low-pitched coconut shell, both filled with dried beans and mounted on a wooden handle (avoid using plastic bottles)
- a pair of wooden sticks;

Performer 7:

- log drum: large and hollow wooden idiophone with two slits.

#### Stage plan

Performer 1 sits centre stage on a high stool or on an elevated platform. It is important from the audience's point of view that her face is positioned higher than the face of performers 2 to 7.

Performers 2 to 7 are welcome to position themselves according to any stage plan as long nobody is positioned directly behind or directly in front of performer 1.

Performers 2 to 7 should have enough room to perform the ambulation.

Even if performers do not perform from memory, there should be no music stands and no conductor.

#### Notation

A quarter note rest means a rest of the necessary length, not a specific rest of one quarter note in solfege notation.

Vertical ascending and descending arrows indicate a moment of synchronicity.

### Performance notes

Performers may prefer to rehearse and perform using copies of the full score rather than individual parts.

The poetry must be performed in Pala' wan language. The spelling in this score is a phonological transcription. The [ä] sound is pronounced like {man} in English. The literal translation and commentary are only added to help and enhance the performer's comprehension of the poetry.



Ambulation refers to the action of walking forcibly on the same spot whilst swinging the arms, as in the theatrical tradition of the municipality of Luisiana in the province of Laguna. The ambulation continues until the next performer has arrived on stage. The ambulation involving more than one performer should start and stop at the same time, unless otherwise indicated in the score.

At the end of the piece all performers exit in the same manner, that is: slow, lifting the upper leg until it forms a right angle with the knee, extending the foot and slowly touching the floor, never turning one's back to performer 1.

Independent tempi refer to other ratios than binary ratios between two or more rates of speed. In other words, avoid for example playing one part at crotchet = 60 whilst another part is played at crotchet = 120.

Rehearsal letter	
А	If the floor of the stage is not resonant, performer 2 uses an alternative way.
В	Performer 2 changes the pitch pattern and dynamic together with the text.
С	Performer 2 plays in between the text. Performer 3 changes the manipulation of the banana leaves together with the text. The delicate noise produced by the manipulation of the banana may need to be delicately amplified in order to be heard by the audience (even though this would contradict achieving a zero-carbon-emission performance).
D	Performer 4 changes the manipulation of the bamboo together with the text. The delicate noise produced by the manipulation of the bamboo may need to be delicately amplified in order to be heard by the audience.
F	Performer 3 and 7 listen and wait for the suling. The suling waits for the voice of performer 7. The note values of the stemless pitches in the part of performer 6 suggest the rhythmic duration and are not be read like solfeggio notation. Take note of the stepwise increase and decrease in dynamics.
G	A cloud of sticks means that performer 5, 6 and 7 lift percussion sticks high in the air and knock against each other.
Н	The notational representation in the score does not represent the sonic reality since different tempi are superimposed. This section should not last longer than approximately one minute and sound like a hectic and intense soundscape. Performer 1 paces her text within this one minute.
I	Performers 2 to 6 freely adjust the text to the pitches whilst performer 1 dances in response to their love exhortations. The note values of the stemless pitches in the parts of performers 2 to 6 suggest the rhythmic duration and are not be read like solfeggio notation.
K	The note values of the stemless pitches in the part of performer 1 suggest the rhythmic duration and are not be read like solfeggio notation. The chironomy of performers 4, 5 and 6 refers to a non synchronized dance focused on hands. Each represents an individual approach to the beloved woman with stylized circular motions of fingers, hands and wrists as indicated in the score. Performer 7 waits until performer 1 and 3 have completed their first slow soft phrase before starting the 2nd stanza "kas kä mägsambatan".
L	All performers play in the same fast tempo. However, the notational representation in the score does not represent the sonic reality because players start playing their canonic phrase as soon as practically possible.



## **Commentary and literary sources**

All verses are Pala'wan poetry, more specifically from the Kulilal Ät Taw Ät Suluk, Kulilal Si Karät, Kulilal Ni Dangkuk, Kulilal Ni Masäk and Kulilal Ni Jose.

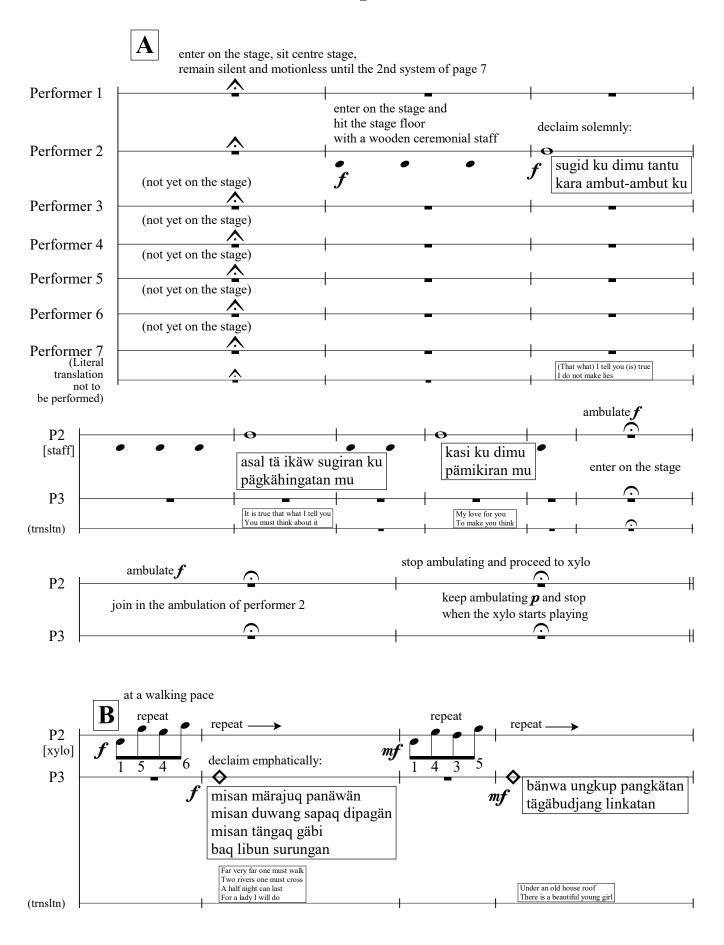
The grey salangane is a swiflet, a bird with a very fine fuselage that can fly quickly. The
salangane is a metaphor for the beloved lady.
A perfect and fine line of eyebrows is considered beautiful. Similarly for legs when they
are as smooth as wax.
The areca nut is the seed of the areca plant. In this context the areca symbolizes the
growing love between a man and a woman. This love will lead to the engagement
with exchange of gifts between the families.
The scented flower of sandalwood symbolizes the nascent love between a man and a
woman.
The betel box is a metaphor for the body of the beloved woman. To give a betel box
signifies to offer one's body.
Offerings and smoking together are part of the social rites of marriage.
For the Pala'wan people, the liver (not the heart) is the centre of emotions.
The hazel-grouse refers to a tall and slim female figure, which in turn suggests the
inaccessibility of woman.
The ginowo is a non-tapering tree whose bole can reach 80 metres. Its slender foliage
forms a high and inaccessible cupola.
In Pala'wan love poetry, the zither is played by women.
Red colour symbolizes lie, vulgarity and anger.
The lute player discreetly points his instrument towards the lady he secretly loves
without looking at her.
An open roof indicates the non-existence of a house, that is: the fact of not being able
to live together with the beloved woman.
The sail is a metaphor for men who come and go. So does love.

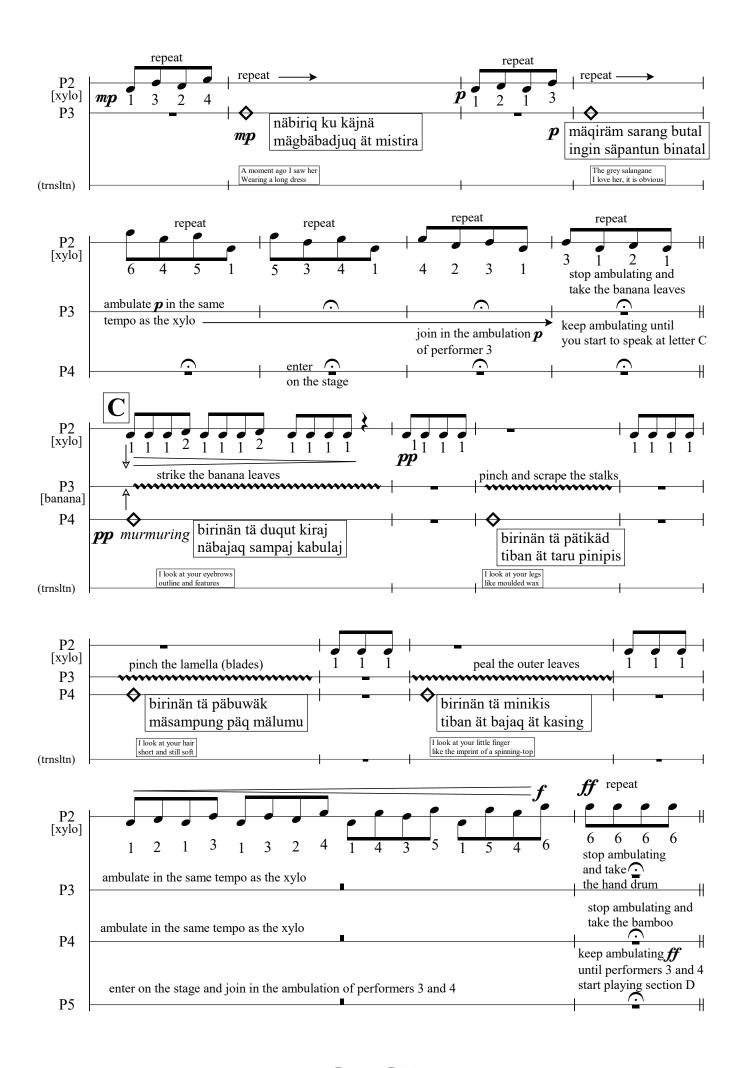
# Acknowledgments

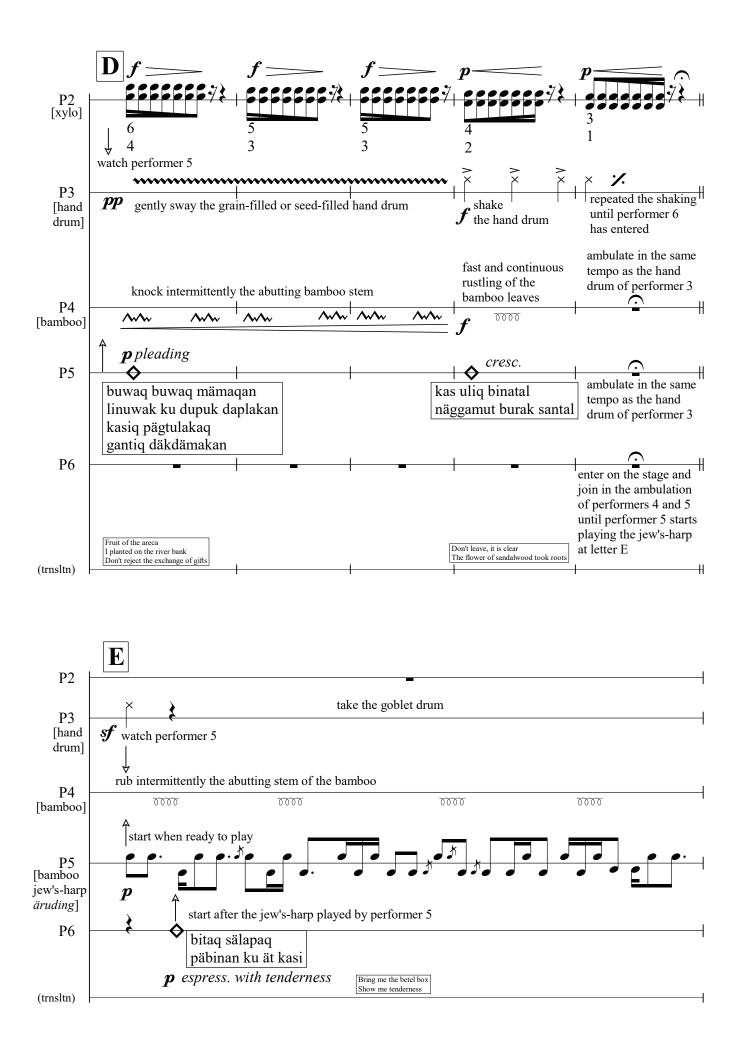
I am gratefully indebted to the research and writings of José Maceda and Nicole Revel as well as to Romy De weerdt for the original photography of an antique betel box on the cover of the score.

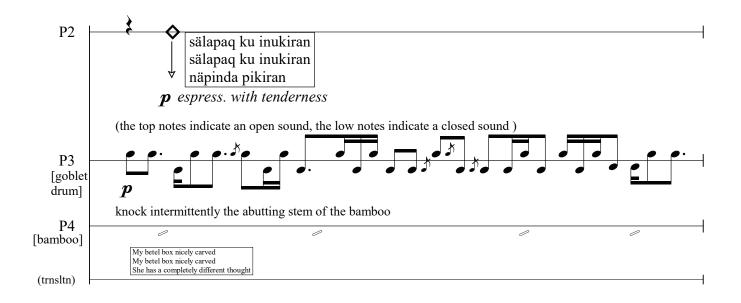


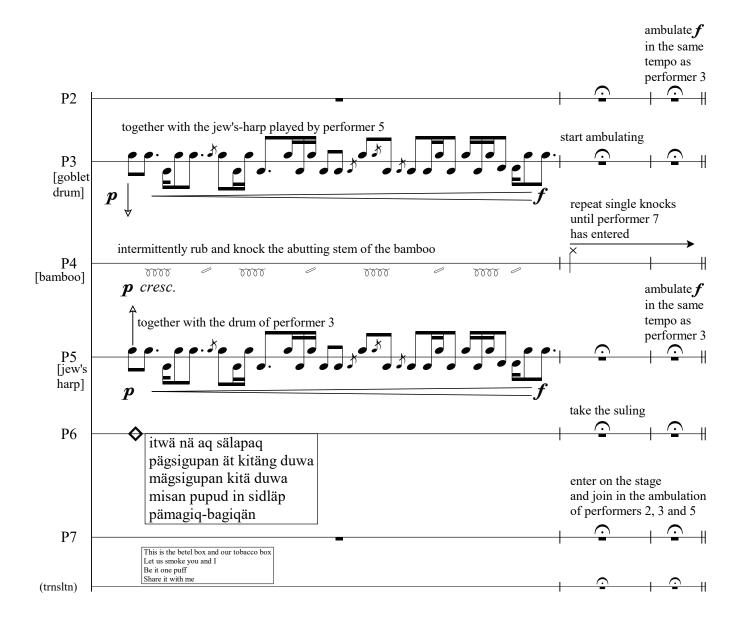
# Sälapa'

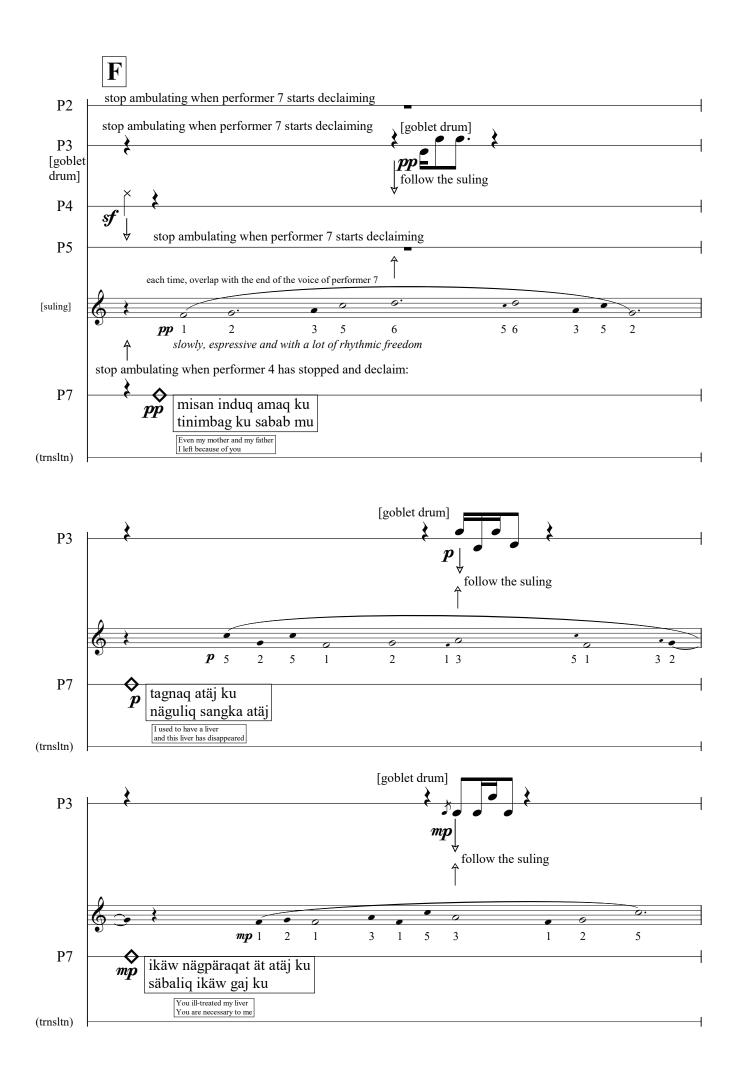


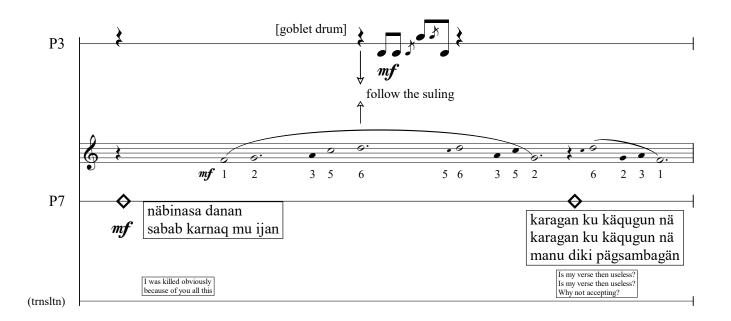


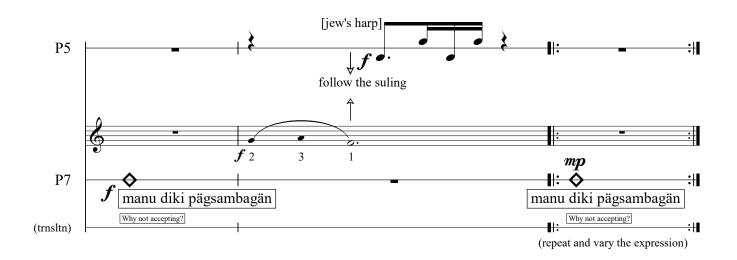


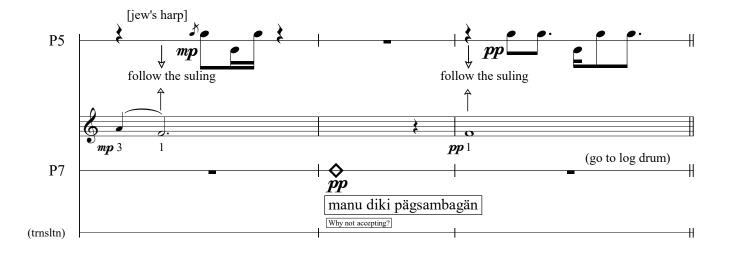


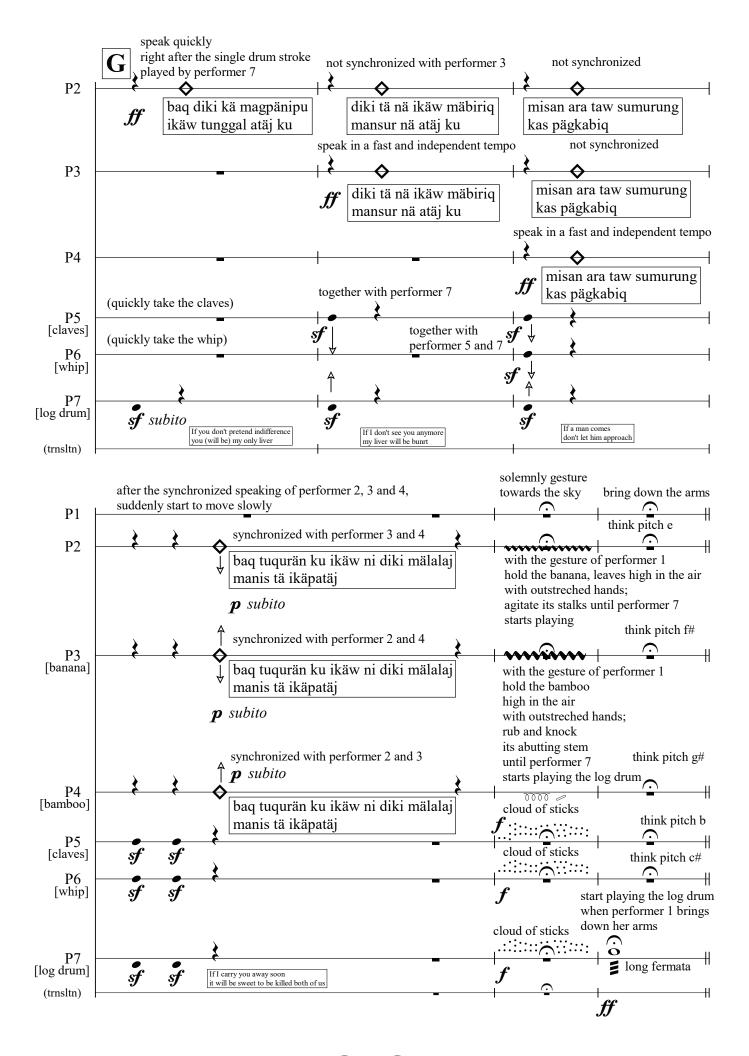








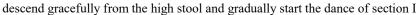


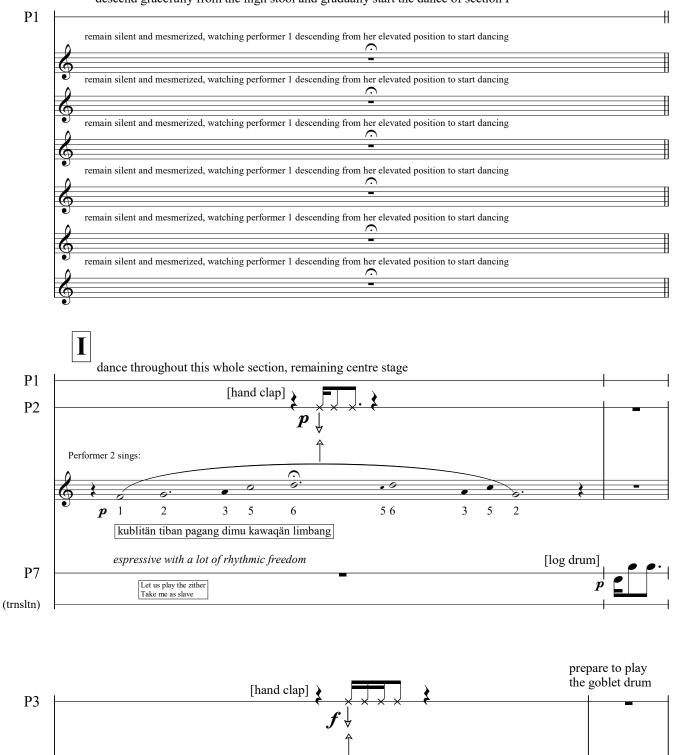


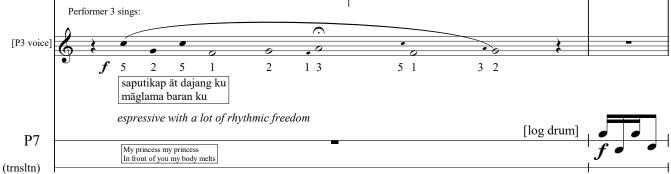


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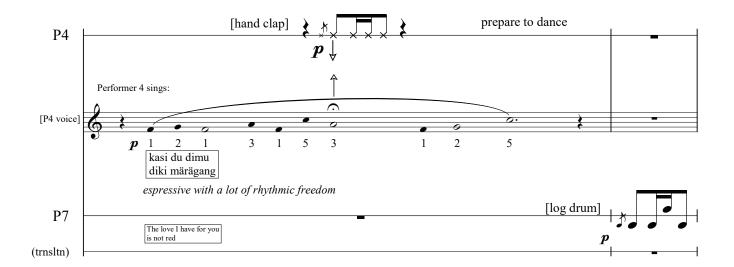


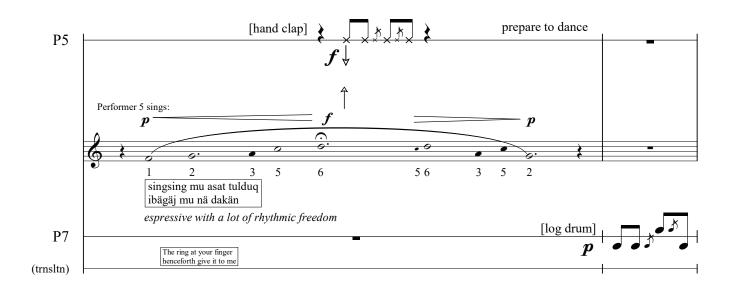


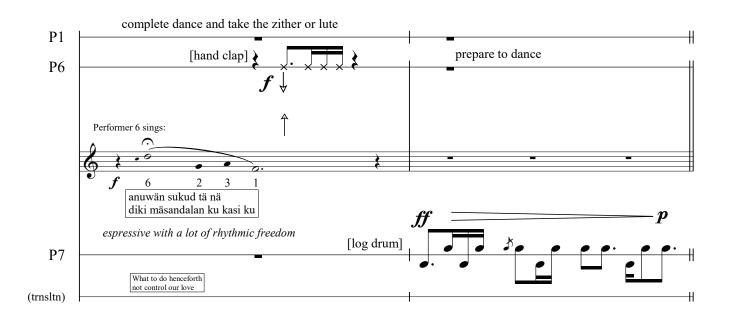




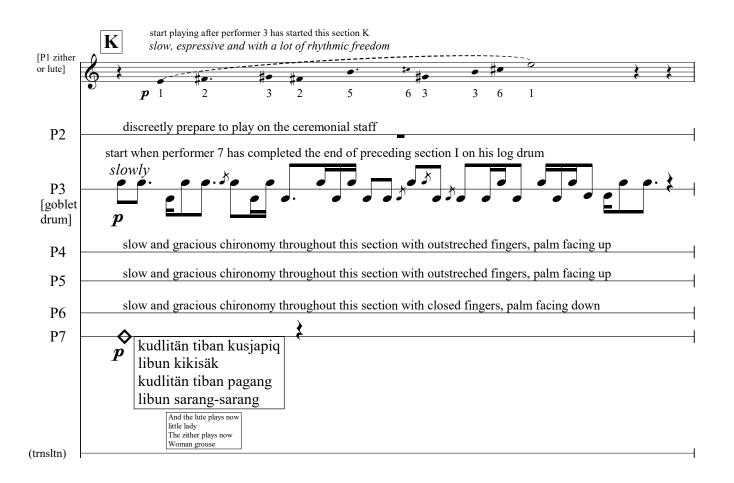
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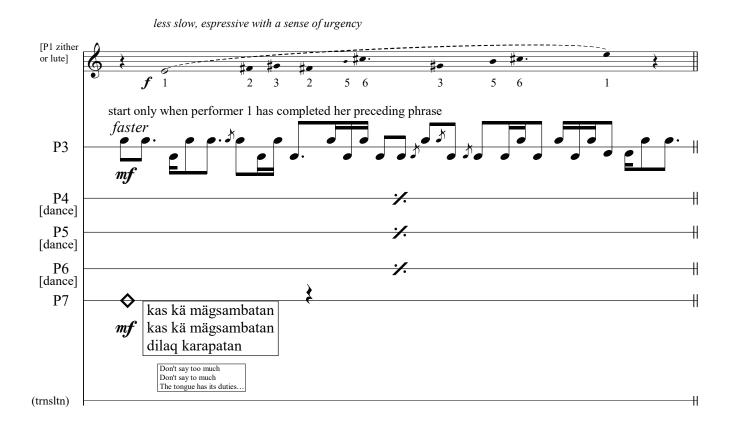




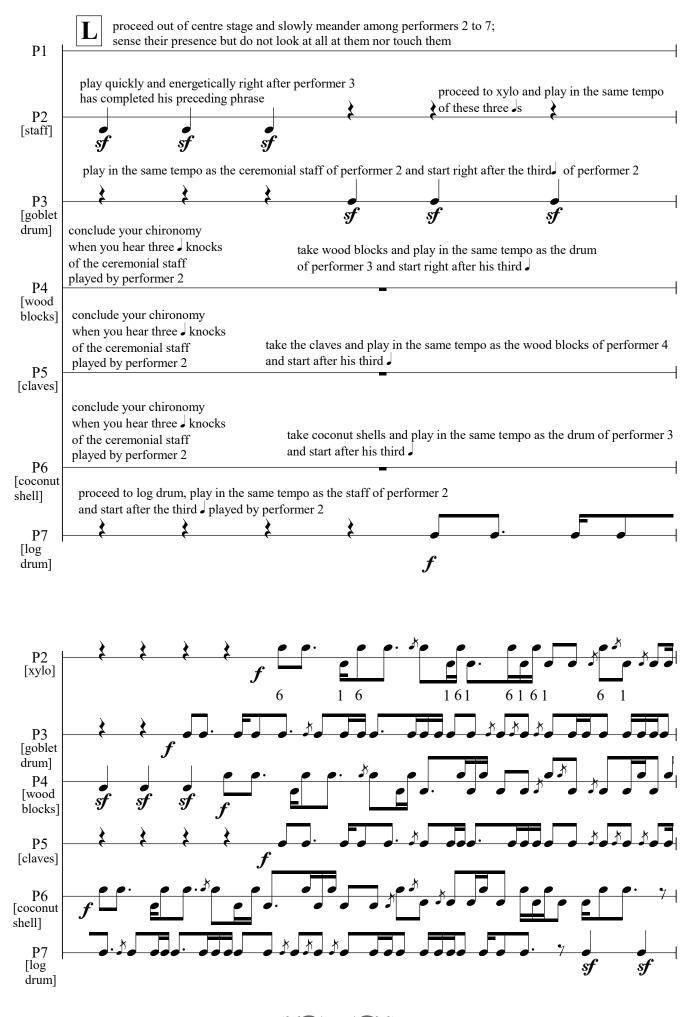


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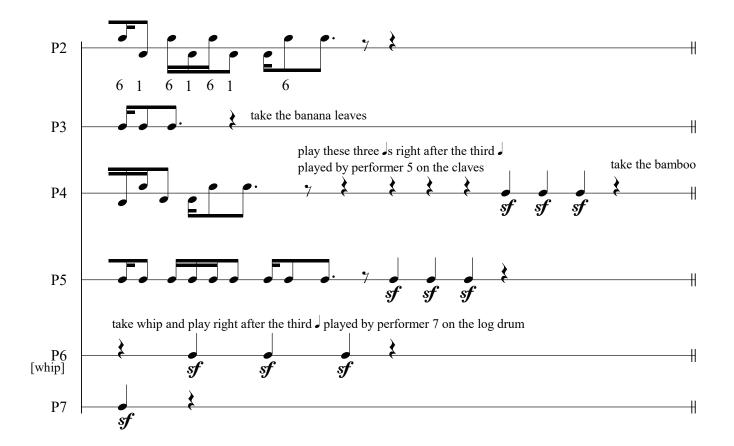


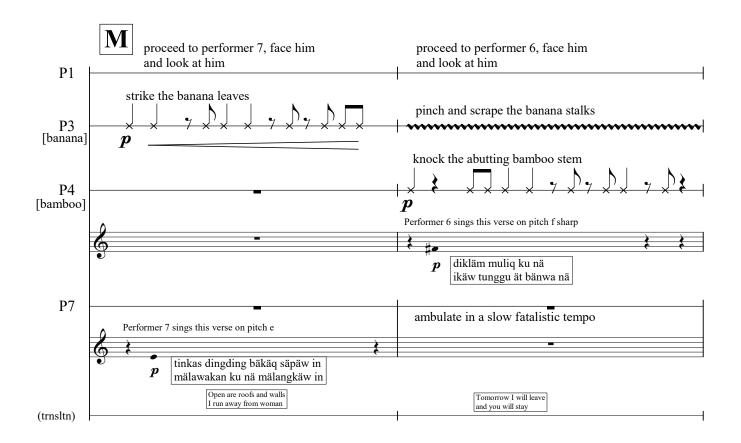


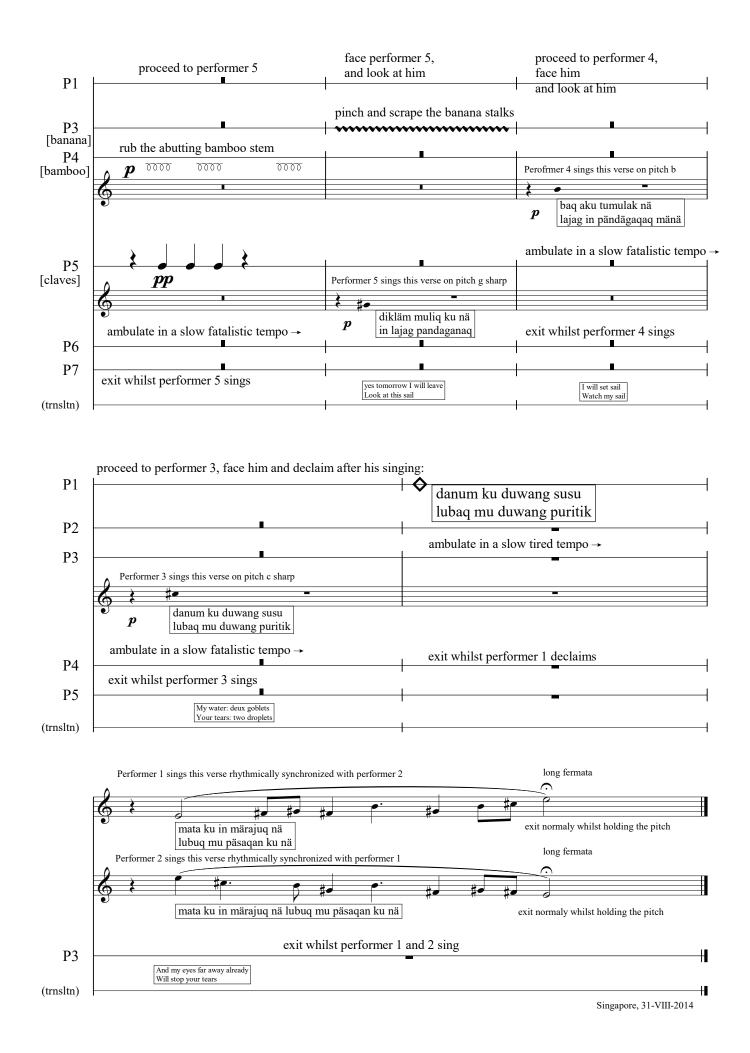
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Publisher Robert Casteels www.robertcasteels.com

> *Cover* Romy De weerdt

*Graphic Designer* Neol Leung Yick Chuen

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