

Echoing Karinding Tones: The Global Journey of the Sundanese Traditional Musical Instrument

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Abstract

This study investigates the revival of karinding, a traditional Sundanese instrument, and its impact both globally and locally. Originally tied to Sundanese environmental and philosophical teachings, karinding has adapted to modern times. We explore how modern elements have spurred their revival and global recognition. This study investigates the resurgence of karinding, particularly among Indonesian millennials and its growing global popularity. Using qualitative methods, we analyze how Sundanese bands, like "Karinding Attack," use innovative adaptations and multimedia strategies to modernize and promote this ancient instrument. In addition, we study international exposure and global reception. This study shows that karinding, by combining tradition and modernity, has revived its importance as a cultural resurgence symbol and an artistic innovation hub. The blending of traditional components with modern genres and technology has sparked a dynamic cultural movement, highlighting the global appeal and rekindling recognition of Sundanese musical artistry.

Keywords: *Karinding resurgence, Youth generation engagement, Cultural revitalization, Cultural music innovation, Global cultural exchange.*

INTRODUCTION

Music fundamentally serves as an art form, in which sound operates as a conduit to foster communication with its audience. A series of sounds can be classified as music when they integrate a multitude of elements, including melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre (or sound color), tempo, and dynamics, thereby creating a harmonious entity (Hansen et al., 2019; Kirchberger and Russo, 2015; Shin et al., 2021). On the other hand, traditional music is a vibrant component of culture, deeply rooted in specific regions and transmitted across generations, encapsulating the unique characteristics and peculiarities that distinguish it

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(Elizabeth Elmi, 2018; López-Angarita et al., 2022; Zhao, 2021). This type of music not only embodies the rhythms and melodies of a region but also encapsulates its historical narratives and cultural nuances, representing a rich tapestry of heritage that resonates over time (Kim, 2023).

Indonesia is home to approximately 1,340 distinct ethnic groups, each harboring a rich repository of traditional music forms (Kim, 2023). Within this vibrant tapestry of musical diversity, Karinding, predominantly associated with Sundanese ethnic groups, occupies a special place. This age-old musical instrument embodies centuries of cultural heritage and has been meticulously transmitted across generations, retaining its significance (Agatha et al., 2022; Alamsyah and Suherman, 2022). The Karinding or Sundanese jew's harp is a part of the "idiophone" family, a group of instruments defined by their ability to produce sound primarily through the vibration of the instrument itself, without the need for strings or membranes. Instruments belonging to this family are scattered across various regions of Indonesia and have even found an international presence in countries such as China and the Netherlands, albeit with different nomenclatures and structures (Agatha et al., 2022). Similar instruments can be identified in the Indonesian archipelago, such as the *genggong* in Bali, *rinding* in Yogyakarta, *gurinding* in Kalimantan, *sagasaga* in Sumatra, *slober* in Lombok, and *pikons* in Papua. Although they differ in their construction and local names, these instruments have a shared characteristic in that they produce similar sounds. The divergence lies in the techniques employed to play them, with methods ranging from plucking and striking to pulling, each creating a distinctive sonic texture. For instance, it distinguishes itself through its unique playing technique, which often involves a combination of striking and plucking, creating a melody that resonates with the rich cultural narratives of Sundanese people (Araniri, 2014; Haryanti, 2014; Kimung, 2021; Romadhon, 2018).

Kimung, a Sundanese scholar and artist, and his collective network have driven the global revival of karinding, a traditional Sundanese and Indonesian musical instrument. They used YouTube and social media to introduce karinding to a global audience, organized festivals and concerts, and collaborated with international musicians to incorporate karinding into modern music. Kimung also created training programs to support Karinding enthusiasts (Daryana, 2017; Kimung, 2021). Kimung and the karinding community have created merchandise to promote the instrument, such as apparel and pictures. This has grown the global fan base and has served as a promotional tool. Kimung also participated in international music events, such as the *Europalia Arts Festival 2017* and "*Karinding Attack*" Europe Tour 2017, to Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands in 2017. Kimung displays the karinding's rustic charm with modern touches. He is working to create a record label to promote karinding music, making it a distinguished genre of worldwide interest. He has also contributed scholarly work on karinding at a global conference, such as in Porto University, Portugal. (Kimung, 2021).

The diverse spectrum of traditional musical instruments across the Indonesian archipelago mirrors the rich and varied cultural tapestry woven over the centuries. Despite their regional adaptations and varied terminologies, these instruments echo a common sonic signature, harmonizing them in a symphonic blend of heritage and tradition (Fatmawati, 2021). This study explores karinding, a Sundanese instrument with unique sounds and cultural significance. We aimed to uncover its modalities, place it among other traditional instruments, and trace its evolution from a local icon to a global performer. Our goal was to build a narrative that portrays the history, cultural importance, and global journey of karinding. This inquiry seeks to answer the following question: How has karinding maintained its cultural values and history while going global? What stories and values are in their tones and melodies and how have they changed over time?

METHOD

Our study focused on the karinding, an indigenous musical instrument, and explored its cultural, historical, and international significance through qualitative research. As part of our study on the resurgence and global emergence of the traditional Sundanese instrument karinding, we conducted interviews with artists and active karinding communities, observed performances and educational events, and collected historical documents and multimedia samples. In addition to a literature review, we used a primary data repository to make our research more robust. In this study, we delve into the transcending ability of karinding, a traditional Indonesian instrument, beyond geographical and cultural boundaries through collaborations and international recognition. Our goal is to showcase the global influence, history, and potential of karinding. Initially, we focused on preserving the unique nature of karinding by exploring its historical and philosophical origins. (Hutton, 2019; López-Angarita et al., 2022; Wheeler, 2010).

As we shift our focus from a local to a global perspective, our research reflects karinding's journey towards the international stage. The second pillar—Global Resonance and Integration—examines an instrument's evolving role and impact on contemporary musical landscapes. This includes a comprehensive analysis of cross-cultural collaboration and its incorporation into modern musical genre. (Hughes and Keith, 2015; Lee and Wong, 2017; Ting et al., 2023). We examined the representation of karinding across different media, promotional tactics, and the role of international festivals and collaborations in building a global audience. This analysis highlights the distinct features of karinding and the universal elements shared with other musical cultures. We also examine the prospects pillar, which foresees educational initiatives and global outreach for karinding. This segment seeks to create a path for karinding to resonate globally by combining tradition and modernity in harmony (Daryana, 2017; Matheson, 2008; Robertson et al., 2018; Ting, 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Karinding in a Glimpse of History

The precise origins of karinding music remain shrouded in the mists of time, with speculative estimates suggesting its genesis within tribes inhabiting Asia and Papua 10,000–5,000 years ago (Kimung, 2021). These estimations, however, find a tangible anchor in historical narratives, as reflected in the 7th-century romantic tale detailed in the poem "Karinding di Citamiang (Karinding in Citamiang)." In this poem, a pivotal moment illustrates Sekarwati crafting a primitive Karinding instrument to signal her presence to her lover Kalamanda. This poetic imagery not only marks the instrument's role as a symbolic medium fostering connection but also traces its historical lineage to ancient times. Further substantiating this timeline, a documentary by Kuyasunda chronicles the craft of the Karinding creation, pinpointing its emergence to a period spanning 300–500 years. This era also aligns with the insights shared by Asep Nata, highlighting the probable inception of the term 'Karinding' around 300 years ago, a theory documented by Erlin Haryanti in her 2014 publication (Haryanti, 2014).

In the Bandung Regency, a significant scholarly effort has been undertaken to categorize various forms of artistic expression, spearheaded by Tumenggung Wiranatakoesoemah in collaboration with the Jaap Kunst on a Sundanese music assemble performance in 1921 during the Java-Instituut (Institute of Java) Congress. The key to this classification was the identification of karinding music, a non-orchestral genre that is inextricably woven into the Sundanese cultural fabric (Java-Instituut, 1921; Kunst, 1949). Karinding in traditional societal practices has a considerable historical significance. Evidence from regions such as Cikalong Kulon, Cianjur Regency, and West Java shows that the instrument played an essential role in community events around 1908, accompanied by

activities such as cockfighting and buffalo herding, embodying a rich cultural resonance (Haryanti, 2014: 21). Notably, from 1940 to 1960, it served as a vital element in ceremonies such as weddings and circumcisions, symbolizing a celebration of community and heritage. Furthermore, contemporary analyses, particularly a study by Kimung (2021), elucidate that karinding encapsulates the symbiotic relationship between Sundanese society and its natural habitat, characterized by forests, water, and mountains, acting as a cultural echo of environmental symbiosis.

Despite its rooted history, the advent of modern arts in the 1970s led to the waning prominence of karinding, marginalizing it to the periphery of cultural events. This shifted in 2003 with the intervention of Abah Olot, who embarked on a journey to rejuvenate the dwindling legacy of this traditional instrument (Ferrari, 2020: 20). By amplifying his efforts in 2004, Olot evolved into an artisan of both Karinding and Celempungan instruments, fostering symphonic revival. With remarkable development, the establishment of the “Giri Kerenceng” music group marked a new era in the instrument's existence. Olot supported the fusion of karinding with modern musical elements, culminating in the formation of the “Karinding Attack,” a testament to the harmonious blend of tradition and contemporary innovation (Ferrari, 2020: 20). This endeavor signifies a critical juncture in Karinding's journey, encapsulating its evolving role in the global cultural panorama and heralding a promising future, wherein the instrument reverberates with both historical depth and modern relevance.

Kimung's creative adaptation sparked the revival of karinding in modern music. By combining karinding's traditional sounds with metal music, Kimung has attracted a younger audience and collaborated with renowned local bands to broaden the instrument's reach. (Kimung, 2021). The 'Karinding Attack' initiative popularized karinding on a global scale, revolutionizing its traditional boundaries. This movement extended to tourism, education, and the creative economy, reviving the arts, advancing music, promoting karinding, art literacy, and inspiring innovation. This karinding renaissance not only safeguards cultural heritage, but also propels it as a modern art form that contributes to global cultural discourse. (Kimung, 2021).

Karinding: An Exploration of the Philosophy and Cultural Virtue

Karinding, a musical instrument with deep roots in Sundanese culture, derives its name from Kakarindingan, a term originally used to denote a common insect found in rice fields in bygone times. Karinding originated as a kalangenan instrument, characterized by its free form and an intricate relationship with the environment in which it was crafted. This intrinsic connection has bestowed upon it a rich diversity of forms, playing techniques, materials, functionalities, philosophies, and locals that are intrinsically linked to the folklore and historical narratives of the regions in which it flourished (Kimung, 2021).

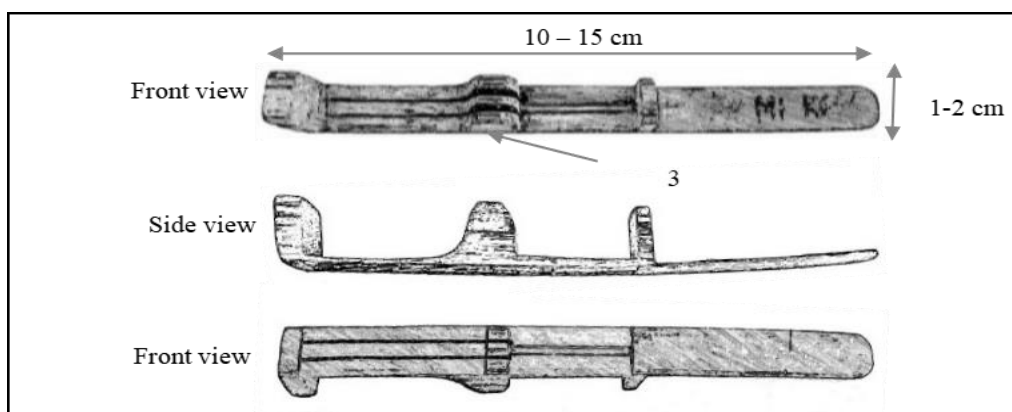


Figure 1: Karinding Instrumen

At its core, both the traditional and contemporary versions of karinding are segmented into three crucial components (Figure 1): the panyepengan, or holding part; the cecepu ucing, a section equipped with a "needle" that produces vibrations when struck; and the panabeuh, the part of the instrument that the player strikes. These components embody a profound philosophy, accentuating the portrayal of good knowledge and moral behavior towards others while safeguarding one's faith diligently. The intricate design of karinding serves as a symbolic guide that leads individuals to illuminate the world through virtuous conduct and wisdom (Kimung, 2021).

The Sundanese variant of this instrument is often crafted with bamboo (Bambusoideae) or sugar palm tree wood (*Arenga pinnata*), forming a "fork-like" structure that encloses a vibrating tongue, which sometimes extends into multiple protuberances. A distinctive feature of this variant is the inclusion of a bamboo tube that is open at both ends. This tube, when brought to the player's mouth, amplifies the relatively soft sounds produced by karinding, creating a resonance that connects with the ground and enhances the auditory experience (Kunst 1949). In certain regions, such as Tasikmalaya district in West Java, the name of the instrument may vary depending on the material used. When it is made from sugar palm tree wood (*Arenga pinnata*), it is referred to as a karinding, but when made of bamboo (Bambusoideae), it is called a kareng. This distinction highlights the complex bond between the material makeup of the instrument and its local cultural significance, underscoring the rich diversity and heritage of the region (Kunst, 1949).

In the rich tapestry of Sundanese culture, karinding is a testament to the harmonious blend of tradition and innovation. Traditionally, the crafting of the kawung variant of karinding involved the use of a large curved knife, a technique that has since evolved to incorporate modern tools, such as saws, machetes, and fine sandpaper, with the addition of wedges and varnish for bamboo karinding (Araniri, 2014). These contemporary methods have not completely overhauled the ancestral stages of creation; rather, they have streamlined meticulous processes, such as drying, measuring, peeling, and carving intricate parts, such as the vibrating head and body of the instrument (Romadhon, 2018). Meanwhile, the creation of bamboo karinding necessitates its own unique set of stages, including the shaping of the ceuceut careuh (noisy chatter) and tongue, highlighting nuanced craftsmanship grounded in the cultural heritage of the region (Araniri, 2014).

Karinding, when brought to life through performance, transforms into a captivating, auditory landscape. The musician's mouth functions as a resonator, permitting the modulation of pitch and establishing a profound organic bond between the artist and instrument. The melody is elicited by a vibrating tongue that is expertly struck by the fingers, evoking the rich cultural heritage of Sundanese traditions (Araniri, 2014; Romadhon, 2018). This tradition has also witnessed innovations, notably in figures such as Abah Olot (karinding artist) and Asep Nata (ethnomusicologists who invented karinding toel or karinding through touch). They introduced a new rendition, expanding the instrument's repertoire and allowing for a richer and more dynamic musical expression, thereby merging ancestral rhythms with contemporary harmonies in a beautiful symbiosis (Ferrari, 2020).

Karinding is a Sundanese cultural symbol. It was initially used to teach environmentalism and now serves as a medium to connect humans and nature, foster social interactions, and entertain farmers. In the rural locales of Sundanese village, where karinding has been present, it has played various roles as a pest repellent and a central element in mupuhun (harvest parties), kalangenan (games), and melet (a method to woo women), among other functions. It also holds a sacred place in tree-planting ceremonies and rituals to establish prohibition forests, ngahudangkeun rasa (meditation practices), and sasadu papalaku ka alam (ceremonies to seek nature's forgiveness), thereby weaving itself into the fabric of community life and entertainment.

Reflecting the teachings encapsulated in patanjala philosophy, karinding serves as a living allegory of the harmonious interplay between the universe, nature, and the surrounding environment, symbolizing the undying bond between water bodies and forests that grace the native lands (Kimung, 2021). This instrument, like the river and forest to indigenous people, has a three-tiered structure that reflects Sundanese's holistic approach to conservation. The upper tiered section represents the untamed upper reaches of the river, regarded as a sacred and prohibited forest; the middle portion denotes a tutupan (cover) forest symbolizing a reservoir of knowledge, whereas the lower reaches embody a baladahan (production) forest, which is a source of nourishment and sustenance. This trifurcated representation entrenched in karinding not only symbolizes Sundanese people's categorization of forest areas but also underscores their intrinsic passion and commitment towards safeguarding their environment, thus uniting culture, music, and nature in a symbiotic relationship.

Karinding Enters the Global Scene

In the last few decades, karinding has seen a resurgence in Indonesia, particularly among millennials. This is because of its harmonious blend of tradition and modernity, which appeals to young people. Local bands such as “Barak Karinding”, “Balaruna”, “Kareri”, “Giri Kenceng”, “Karinding Attack”, “Karinding Keos”, and “Karinding” Kasemaran have been instrumental in this revival. Karinding, a traditional West Java sound, has been blended with modern music, sparking revival in Indonesia since the 2010s. Social media have amplified the reach and influence of karinding by engaging millennials. Events and festivals showcasing karinding's versatility have turned it into a cultural movement, reflecting millennials' desires for authenticity and artistic innovation. Karinding is experiencing a revival, resonating with modern Indonesian youth and signifying its cultural importance. (Daryana, 2017; Kimung, 2021; Spiller, 2015).

According to Kimung (2021), the resurgence of karinding on a global stage can be attributed to several key elements that have been intertwined to foster its popularity. First, innovation sits at the core of this revival, with karinding experiencing a metamorphosis that blends its traditional roots with contemporary or even metallic music genres. This rejuvenation is further fueled by technological advancements, such as sound amplification, digital mixing, effects and modulation, and the utilization of streaming platforms, which have facilitated remote collaborations and erasing geographical boundaries.

The second pivotal element in the resurgence of karinding is its substantial presence in mass media, encompassing both print and electronic platforms, as well as the vast expanse of the Internet and social media channels. This media presence includes notable publications such as *Global*, a Copenhagen-based creative space, which highlighted the distinctive sound of karinding, giving it a platform on the international stage. Interpersonal communication has also played a significant role in creating a ripple effect of awareness and appreciation for the instrument. The third component of the renaissance of karinding is the considerable time span over which it has spread, extending from its birthplace in Bandung, West Java, to various international destinations. The 2017 *Europalia Festival* tour was a major milestone in the global spread of karinding (Kimung, 2021). The *Karinding Attack* ensemble made a remarkable journey, performing at renowned European venues during the “*Europalia Festival*”. Their electrifying shows at *WORM* in Rotterdam, *Vooruit* in Ghent, *Les Ateliers Claus* in Brussels, *Berghain* in Berlin, and *Global* in Copenhagen showcase the fusion of traditional Sundanese music with modern elements, captivating European audiences. This tour was a crucial milestone in the international spread of karinding and highlighted its versatility and appeal worldwide. Each performance reinforced the revival of this musical art form, demonstrating its deep connection with modern audiences worldwide (Kimung, 2021).

Lastly, the underlying force propelling the karinding movement comprises groups and social systems united by shared passion and a convergent thought process. These artists and innovators embarked on a collaborative journey to amplify the reach of karinding, undertaking various initiatives and movements with a unified objective: to elevate karinding to new heights, showcasing its rich heritage, and potential to resonate globally. Together, these elements have crafted a promising trajectory for karinding, weaving a rich tapestry of innovation, communication, historical progress, and communal efforts that signify the burgeoning global footprint of traditional Sundanese musical instruments (Kimung, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the ancient Sundanese instrument, karinding, has seen a dynamic resurgence that extends beyond its native West Java to captivate audiences globally with its innovative blend of tradition and modernity. This instrument, once deeply rooted in Sundanese philosophy and environmental harmony, has been transformed into a vibrant emblem of musical innovation and cultural revival. Contemporary Sundanese bands, particularly the Karinding Attack, have been at the forefront of this renaissance, merging the traditional sounds of karinding with modern genres, thereby unveiling its boundless potential and profoundly resonating with millennials' quest for authenticity and heritage connection. Leveraging modern technology and communication platforms, these bands have facilitated a broader appreciation of karinding's distinct sound, which now graces international stages, including the prominent Eurotopia Festival. The global appeal of this instrument has fostered a newfound appreciation for Sundanese musical craftsmanship, establishing the karinding phenomenon as a beacon for innovation, collaboration, and cultural preservation. This study portrays karinding as not only a symbol of Sundanese cultural resurgence but also as a pioneering force in the contemporary artistic revolution, seamlessly connecting the past with the present and intertwining the local with the global.

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