

News
LIFE

Workers use tools of their trade to make music

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YOGYAKARTA (JP): As we rhythmically tap our fingers on a table when listening to music, do we ever consider the beat to be basic music?

There are abundant examples in our daily life: the sound the carpenter makes when hammering a nail into wood; the sculptor chipping away at stone; or a smith pounding molten steel with a hammer.

Listen carefully, and it is all musical.

Contemporary musician Haryo Yose Suyoto, an alumnus of the Indonesian Arts Institute in Yogyakarta, showed his talent in exploiting basic musical sounds in a concert in Yogyakarta last month.

Suyoto called his show at Cemeti House of Arts the Komunitas Bunyi (Noise Community).

The Jakarta-based composer showcased 44 artisans from various backgrounds. Every one of them was armed with the tools they use in their daily work.

The collaboration produced a colorful harmony. An artisan chiseling leather on a wooden slab, a bakso (meatball) seller chopping meat, a gravestone artist engraving, a carpenter sawing wood -- all made musical sounds with the noises produced by others making household tools from wood and zinc.

The unique concert, which did not use any conventional musical instruments during the 30 minutes, reminded the audience that even laymen who know little of formal "music" can be musical in their daily routines.

The show began with the dimming of the studio lights, which created tranquility and greater sensitivity of audience members for the sounds around them.

Suddenly a spotlight gleamed amid the darkness in a corner, illuminating a group of seven sculptors. They immediately worked with the tools in their hands on making wooden sculptures.

The sounds of wooden hammers pounding iron chisels filled the air. Soon a spotlight flashed in another corner, where seven carpenters started working. They hammered nails, sawed wood or chopped a plank of wood.

The chorus of noises produced by the carpenters and sculptors blended with the sounds made by people crafting household tools from zinc.

The clamorous noise suddenly stopped and was replaced by the sound of an iron hammer pounding on hard rock from Mount Merapi. Soon this sound created by gravestone makers dominated the music. Sometimes it was fast or irregular and then slow to produce sounds like a clock ticking.

Nine shoemakers took their turn. They began with a slow rhythm and increased the pace. Following them was the music of six high-spirited bakso sellers chopping meat. The sounds that two groups produced reminded us of the Balinese music that accompanies the Kecak dance.

The sounds of meatball making stopped and the spotlight moved to a gravestone maker. The muscular man sat idle, enjoying a cigarette. He needed a while to grab his hammer and go back to work. The spontaneity appeared extremely natural.

The concert provoked different responses from the observers, which is what the organizers expected.

Suyoto said makers of musical instruments were inspired by noises found in their daily life.

"Perhaps, the creators of gamelan were inspired by the sounds produced by smiths," he said.

Suyoto did not attempt to create a particular melody but let the music of noise take its own course.

"I have to reduce my role as a musician. That's why I don't call this a 'musical concert' but 'noise community'."

But the show was expected to shatter the long-held perception that an art show must involve experts.

"I act only as a facilitator. It is the workers who work out the music with their work tools. What I do is set up the lighting system and tell them when to start playing," said the 47-year-old composer.

The concert also provided insight into the daily routine of the workers. They retained their freedom on stage, with the bakso sellers pulling each others' leg while chopping the meat.

And the audience was transported to the slopes of Mt. Merapi when they watched the gravestone maker lazily puff away on his cigarette when his turn to perform had come.

Yogyakarta contemporary musician Sapto Rahardjo described the show as a "new experience" in musical concerts.

The experimental concert provided total freedom of expression in music. Conventional theories in music did not apply but it inspired many of the audience members to look deeper into the origins of folk music.

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