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Recontextualizing *gendang lima sendalanan* through big band arrangement for cultural tourism

Pulumun Peterus Ginting^{*)1}, Frinawaty Lestarina Barus¹, Yakobus Ndona¹, Lamhot Basani Sihombing¹, Lanang Riyadi¹, Elisa Br Ginting²

¹ Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

² STP Santo Bonaventura KAM, Medan, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines a practice-based approach to recontextualizing Karo *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire into a big band format for cultural tourism applications. The study addresses the challenge of presenting repertoire associated with ritual contexts in contemporary performance settings while retaining identifiable musical characteristics. A qualitative, practice-based design was employed through four stages: pre-application, application, post-application, and reporting. “*Simelungun Rayat*,” “*Odak-Odak*,” and “*Patam-Patam*” were purposively selected based on contrasting musical characteristics and adaptation potential. Data were generated through interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, participatory observation, and iterative composition development. The adaptation retained selected melodic contours, rhythmic motifs, and structural characteristics while mapping them onto big band instrumentation. The arrangements were reviewed by academic and performance practitioners and refined through rehearsal. Thirty Music Education students participated as performers and received training before a performance on November 10, 2023. The study produced three big band scores, performance documentation, and copyright documentation. The findings demonstrate the feasibility of producing contemporary arrangements in which selected musical characteristics remain identifiable. Because the performance was conducted in an academic rather than tourism setting, the study does not establish tourist reception or tourism impact. The contribution is positioned as a practice-based adaptation framework and prototype for further evaluation in tourism settings.



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Corresponding Author:

Pulumun Peterus Ginting,
 pulumunpbs@unimed.ac.id

Introduction

Cultural heritage is nowadays being seen as a means of protecting cultural identity and dynamic practice that evolves as communities come into contact with new social, educational, technological, and tourist environments. Music plays a special role in this process since musical traditions are kept alive through performance, transmission, participation, and adaptation rather than by preserving them as fixed cultural items (Livingston, 1999). Ethnomusicological research therefore focuses on sustainability, resilience, and the ability of music cultures to adapt to change while maintaining meaningful continuity (Li & Ismail, 2025; Zhang, 2026). Titon (2009) maintains that musical sustainability should be understood ecologically, about diversity, interconnectedness, limits, and stewardship, rather than simply viewing musical heritage as a

commodity for tourism. (Schippers & Grant, 2016) define music sustainability in terms of several interrelated domains and stress the need to allow music cultures to sustain and revitalize themselves in their own way.

This applies especially to traditional music performed outside its normal settings. If music connected with ritual or ceremonial situations is included in tourism and modern performance contexts, alterations might include changes in length, instruments used, musical structure, presentation, and how it addresses the audience. Such changes should not be taken automatically to mean that the music is being preserved or that cultural loss is taking place (Sularso et al., 2023). Studies of music revival and revitalization indicate that transformation, renewal, and innovation can become part of the ongoing life of musical traditions (Sihombing et al., 2025). Musical revitalization as a process which involves cultural actors, historical sources, collective participation and evolving relationships between tradition and contemporary practice (Chan, 2018; Kärjä, 2019; Piccone, 2024). Musical traditions are dynamic and that transmission and performance always take place in changing cultural environments (Handayani et al., 2026; Smarandhana et al., 2026).

Caution is needed when considering the connection between musical adaptation and tourism. While tourism can provide opportunities for cultural visibility, cultural transmission, and economic support, it may also lead to selective portrayals of heritage to meet outside expectations (Manlee & Kasemsarn, 2025; Sumanapala & Wolf, 2026). Titon (2009) warns against approaches to heritage preservation that make it depend on tourism commerce and the idea of staged authenticity. Studies on the commodification of music show that adapting ethnic music for tourists involves more than just making the music more accessible (Aryandari, 2025; Soewarlan, 2019); it is part of the relationships involving culture, economy, identity, place, and political interests (Su, 2011). Authenticity should not be seen as a fixed attribute of cultural performances, since different parties (including government actors, tourists, and cultural communities) may define and negotiate authenticity in different ways (Azizi, 2024; Soewarlan, 2019). When adapting traditional music today, it is necessary to consider not only audience accessibility but also which musical features are kept, which are changed, and how the resulting performance should be understood in relation to the source tradition.

The situation concerns the musical tradition of the Karo people in North Sumatra, specifically the *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* group, which is linked to significant cultural and ceremonial activities within Karo society. Existing research has described the ensemble's cultural, ritual, and musical features, including its connection to ceremonial settings and its unique melodic and rhythmic characteristics (Ginting et al., 2026; Perangin-Angin & Wimbrayardi, 2022; Tobing, 2020). Yet the literature reviewed in this study pays little attention to how certain pieces from the *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire can be recontextualized into a modern ensemble setup while retaining their identifiable musical traits. This poses a more particular research problem than merely asserting that traditional music should be modernized for tourism purposes. The main issue is how a repertoire connected to a specific cultural and performance context can be reorganized into a contemporary ensemble without the transformation amounting to either simple preservation or uncontrolled modernization.

A possible approach is to use a big band setup as a medium for contemporary performances. The reason a big band was chosen in this study is not that it is inherently better than other types of musical adaptation, and the study does not compare big band music with chamber ensembles, fusion groups, or other modern formats. Instead, the big band format was selected as an arrangement framework based on practice because its sectional structure offers a variety of instrumental resources that can be used to redistribute melodic, rhythmic, and accompaniment functions. The big band tradition also includes well-developed practices in arranging, sectional interaction, call-and-response, harmonic organization, and ensemble performance, all of which can provide a structured setting for reworking existing musical material. Big band practices have likewise been applied to local musical materials, indicating the format's potential as a venue for musical experimentation rather than proving it the best strategy for adaptation (Azmi, 2026; Dirgualam et al., 2021; Nugraha et al., 2025). As a result, the current study treats the big band as a selected adaptation medium, not as an intervention empirically proven superior.

The study examines the gap between documentation of Karo traditional music and practice-oriented research on its current recontextualization. Rather than assessing the impact of tourism, tourist satisfaction, or audience preferences, it examines how certain pieces of music can be rearranged into a big band format and determines which musical features remain identifiable in the process. Here, musical continuity means preserving the selected melodic contours, characteristic rhythmic motifs, modal characteristics where they apply, and the original music's structure. It does not mean that the rearranged versions reproduce the full

cultural, ritual, social, or performative context of the original tradition. This point matters because adapting musical material alone does not guarantee cultural authenticity or tourism effectiveness.

This study examines a practice-oriented method for recontextualizing three chosen *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* pieces—'Simelungun Rayat', 'Odak-Odak' and 'Patam-Patam'—into a big band style, while retaining certain musical features of the original collection. The study uses a qualitative, practice-based approach that includes selecting the repertoire, conducting musical analysis and adaptation, having experts and practitioners review it, developing iterative arrangements, and rehearsing and performing. The arrangements produced are regarded as musical prototypes, and their suitability as contemporary performances can be assessed before considering their possible use in cultural tourism situations. The study therefore does not attempt to determine the impact on tourism; instead, it offers a documented example of musical recontextualization which can form the basis for further research involving real tourists, audience reception, cultural learning and tourism contexts.

The study's importance lies in linking practice-based music creation to current discussions of musical sustainability, cultural adaptation, and heritage tourism. Rather than asserting that traditional Karo music should be altered into a modern commercial style, the study documents and analyses how certain musical features can be negotiated when an ensemble adapts the music. In this way, it addresses music cultures as dynamic systems in which continuity and change go hand in hand (Schipper & Grant, 2016; Tison, 2009). The study acknowledges that the cultural and tourism consequences of such adaptation cannot be determined simply by new arrangements. Further empirical research is needed to investigate community viewpoints, authenticity, audience reception, cultural ownership, and the commodification of tourism. The present study therefore treats big band arrangements as a practice-based prototype and a methodological starting point for examining the current pathways through which traditional music might enter new performance situations.

Method

This study employed a qualitative, practice-based design to examine the recontextualization of selected Karo *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire into a big band format. The study was conducted in 2023 and involved musical analysis, arrangement development, expert/practitioner review, rehearsal, and performance. The research followed four iterative stages: pre-application, application, post-application, and reporting (Goldkuhl & Sjöström, 2018). The pre-application stage involved repertoire selection, review of musical documentation, preparation of instruments and resources, and discussions with relevant academics and music practitioners. The application stage involved musical analysis and arrangement using Sibelius software, while the post-application stage comprised qualitative review, revision, rehearsal, and performer training. The final stage involved documentation and reporting. Although *Taman Budaya Sumatera Utara* (TBSU) was the intended cultural-performance context, the final performance was conducted at the *Pendopo* of the Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan, because of logistical constraints in transporting big band equipment.

Three compositions—*Simelungun Rayat*, *Odak-Odak*, and *Patam-Patam*—were selected as practice-based cases rather than as a statistically representative sample of the *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire. Selection criteria included availability of source documentation, identifiable melodic and rhythmic characteristics, variation among the selected pieces, sufficient musical material for sectional arrangement, and technical feasibility within the available big band instrumentation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participatory observation, and document analysis. Sources included traditional music experts, music academics and composers, big band practitioners, music observers, and 30 students from the Music Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Medan who served as the performance cohort. The students were selected based on musical ability and suitability for the required instrumental parts. Training was conducted weekly from July 2023 until the final performance on November 2023. Musical continuity was analyzed through four dimensions: melodic, rhythmic, structural, and modal/pitch characteristics. Melodic continuity concerned identifiable contours, phrases, and motifs; rhythmic continuity concerned characteristic rhythmic patterns and motifs; structural continuity concerned formal and sectional relationships; and modal/pitch continuity concerned identifiable pitch or modal characteristics where applicable. These criteria were used to examine musical continuity and were not treated as measures of complete cultural authenticity. The transformation involved instrumental redistribution, melodic and rhythmic adaptation, and ensemble integration using saxophones, trumpets, trombones, piano, bass, and drums. Sibelius was used for score preparation, orchestration, playback, and iterative revision before live rehearsal.

The resulting arrangements were qualitatively reviewed by academics and performance practitioners according to three criteria: continuity of selected musical characteristics, technical feasibility, and aesthetic coherence (Moura et al., 2024). Feedback was documented and incorporated through iterative revision and rehearsal. When recommendations differed, the research team compared them with the predefined criteria and discussed alternative revisions with the relevant practitioners. Because the study used qualitative formative review rather than a standardized psychometric instrument, no statistical inter-rater reliability coefficient was calculated (Amirzadeh et al., 2024; Biddix & Bourke, 2025; Mancar & Gulleroglu, 2022). Reliability was addressed through multiple sources of evidence, repeated review and revision, comparison of source materials with the arrangements, and rehearsal-based assessment. The final performance demonstrated the practical realization of the arrangements but was not designed to measure tourist reception, audience preference, economic impact, or tourism development.

Results and Discussions

The practice-based recontextualization produced three complete big band arrangements of selected *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire: “*Simelungun Rayat*,” “*Odak-Odak*,” and “*Patam-Patam*.” The results are presented in four areas: (1) identification of source musical characteristics, (2) development of the big band arrangements, (3) iterative review and rehearsal-based refinement, and (4) implementation through ensemble performance. The results are reported in relation to the predefined criteria of melodic, rhythmic, structural, and modal/pitch continuity rather than the broader concept of preserving complete cultural authenticity.

Source-Repertoire Characteristics and Arrangement Outcomes

The three selected compositions provided different musical materials for the adaptation process. “*Simelungun Rayat*” provided a relatively energetic rhythmic profile, “*Odak-Odak*” provided more lyrical material, and “*Patam-Patam*” provided material associated with a more festive performance character. These differences influenced the orchestration and ensemble treatment used in the resulting arrangements.

Table 1. Source musical characteristics and corresponding arrangement treatment

Composition	Identified source characteristics	Arrangement treatment
“ <i>Simelungun Rayat</i> ”	Energetic rhythmic profile and identifiable melodic material	The principal melodic material was assigned primarily to the saxophone section, with trumpet accents and rhythm-section support
“ <i>Odak-Odak</i> ”	More lyrical melodic character and contrasting rhythmic treatment	Piano and saxophones were given prominent melodic roles, while brushes were used in the drum part to support a softer ensemble texture
“ <i>Patam-Patam</i> ”	Festive character and identifiable recurring musical material	Full ensemble passages, dynamic contrasts, and call-and-response between wind sections were used to develop the arrangement

The arrangements therefore did not attempt to reproduce the original instrumentation instrument-for-instrument. Instead, the source musical functions were redistributed within the big band configuration. The melodic role associated with the *sarune*, for example, was reinterpreted through saxophone and trumpet writing, while rhythmic functions associated with the traditional drum ensemble were redistributed across the drum set, bass, and other rhythm-section instruments. The resulting arrangements retained selected source-repertoire characteristics while introducing the harmonic, textural, and orchestral resources of the big band. This process is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Redistribution of selected musical functions in the big band arrangements

Source musical function	Big band realization	Transformation
Principal melodic material	Saxophones and/or trumpets	Melodic contours retained while instrumental timbre and voicing were changed
Rhythmic foundation	Drum set and bass	Characteristic rhythmic material redistributed within the rhythm section
Recurrent rhythmic motifs	Rhythm section and wind-section accents	Motifs retained and integrated with big band rhythmic patterns
Structural/sectional material	Full ensemble and sectional writing	Source sections reorganized through big band orchestration
Pitch/modal material where applicable	Wind-section voicing and harmonic accompaniment	Source pitch characteristics retained where identifiable while additional harmonic material was introduced

The table should be understood as a description of the observed arrangement outcomes, rather than evidence that individual big band instruments are direct equivalents of traditional Karo instruments. The transformation involved functional redistribution rather than literal instrumental substitution.

Iterative Arrangement and Validation

The preliminary scores underwent iterative review by academic and big band practitioners. The review was organized around three predefined criteria: (1) continuity of selected musical characteristics, (2) technical feasibility, and (3) ensemble/aesthetic coherence. These criteria were applied during score review and subsequently revisited during rehearsal. Reviewers examined whether selected melodic contours, characteristic rhythmic motifs, structural relationships, and relevant modal/pitch characteristics remained identifiable after arrangement. Technical feasibility concerned the playability and distribution of instrumental parts. Ensemble coherence concerned whether the resulting arrangement functioned effectively as a coordinated big band performance.

The review process resulted in several types of refinement. Melodic material was redistributed when the initial instrumental assignment did not provide sufficient clarity. Some rhythmic passages were simplified or re-voiced when they created technical difficulties during rehearsal. Sectional balances were also adjusted when the brass, woodwind, or rhythm sections obscured important melodic material. These changes demonstrate that the adaptation was iterative rather than a single-stage conversion of the traditional repertoire. Because the validation process was qualitative and formative, the study did not generate numerical ratings or calculate inter-rater reliability coefficients. Consequently, the results should not be interpreted as demonstrating statistical agreement among validators. Instead, the evidence of refinement consists of the documented relationship between the predefined criteria, expert/practitioner feedback, arrangement revisions, and subsequent rehearsal observations. This distinction is important. The study demonstrates a documented review-and-revision process, but it does not claim psychometric validation of the arrangements.

Rehearsal and Performance Implementation

Following the arrangement and review process, the three compositions were implemented by a cohort of 30 Music Education students at Universitas Negeri Medan. The students were trained beginning in July 2023 through weekly rehearsal sessions. Training involved sectional practice, full ensemble rehearsal, score reading, rhythmic coordination, instrumental balance, and interpretation of the prepared arrangements. The rehearsal process provided an additional practical test of the arrangements. Difficult passages identified during ensemble practice were returned to the arrangement process for modification. This resulted in changes to selected voicings, instrumental distributions, and technically demanding passages. The rehearsal process therefore functioned as a practical feedback mechanism connecting the written scores with their live realization.

The final performance was held on November 10, 2023, at the Pendopo of the Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan. Although TBSU had initially been considered as the performance location, the performance was relocated because of logistical constraints associated with transporting the big band instrumentation. The final performance consequently represents an implementation of the arrangements in an academic performance environment rather than a performance experiment conducted in a tourism setting. The three arrangements were performed in sequence. “*Simelungun Rayat*” emphasized energetic ensemble writing and sectional rhythmic accents. “*Odak-Odak*” used a comparatively lighter texture, with piano, saxophones, and brushes providing prominent roles. “*Patam-Patam*” employed fuller ensemble writing, dynamic contrasts, and sectional call-and-response to emphasize its festive musical character. The performance was documented through video recording and resulted in three completed big band scores. These materials constitute the principal practice-based outputs of the study.

Synthesis of the Results

Taken together, the results indicate that the selected *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire could be recontextualized into a big band configuration while retaining selected identifiable musical characteristics. The process did not preserve the original repertoire in its complete cultural or ritual context; rather, it retained selected musical materials while changing instrumentation, orchestration, harmonic treatment, ensemble texture, and performance context. The results also show that the transformation required continuous negotiation between source musical characteristics and the technical requirements of the target ensemble. The three arrangements therefore represent practice-based musical prototypes, rather than evidence that big band is inherently superior to other contemporary adaptation formats.

Because the performance took place at the Faculty of Language and Arts rather than in a tourism environment, the results do not establish tourist reception, audience preference among visitors, increased

accessibility to tourists, or tourism-development impact. Such outcomes require subsequent evaluation involving actual tourism audiences and settings. The present results are consequently limited to demonstrating the feasibility of producing and performing the selected arrangements and documenting the musical decisions involved in their recontextualization.

The results show that when certain parts of the *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire are adapted into a big band style, this should be seen as an instance of musical continuity and recontextualisation rather than as a way of preserving the cultural authenticity of the repertoire in its complete form (Nelson et al., 2025). In the three arrangements, certain melodic, rhythmic, structural and, where appropriate, modal or pitch features have been kept while the instrumentation, orchestration, harmonic treatment, ensemble texture and performance situation have been greatly revised. The arrangements thus constitute new ways of performing which still maintain a connection with the original repertoire through clear musical features. This view is in agreement with those perspectives which regard traditional music as a dynamic cultural practice rather than as a fixed musical object (Born, 2011, 2015; Long, 2013).

Regarding musical sustainability, the results show one-way certain traditional musical elements can be passed on in a modern musical group. Yet adaptation must not be seen as equivalent to sustainability. Musical sustainability includes interconnectedness, stewardship, participation, and the continued existence of music cultures (Anggadwita & Irjayanti, 2026; Aryandari, 2025; Grant et al., 2022). The current study offers an example of practice-based adaptation. Cultural practitioners, community involvement, institutional support, and the interests of the relevant cultural community determine whether such adaptation contributes to Karo music's long-term sustainability (Ginting et al., 2026).

It also calls into question the idea of a simple choice between preservation and modernisation. The various musical functions were assigned to saxophones, trumpets, trombones, piano, bass, drums, and other instruments typical of big bands, thus creating new harmonic, timbral, rhythmic, and orchestral relationships. The musical features which were kept in the arrangements must therefore not be seen as representing an objectively defined 'cultural essence'. Rather, they were the result of analytical and artistic decisions taken within a specific institutional setting which involved researchers, arrangers, reviewers, and performers. As a result, the concept of musical continuity in this study refers only to the identifiable musical features and should not be taken to mean complete cultural continuity or equivalence.

This point is especially significant when considering authenticity. The study cannot claim that the adapted repertoire remains culturally authentic, since authenticity entails more than preserving melody, rhythm, or structure; it also depends on performance context, ritual function, social relationships, cultural authority, embodied practices, and practitioners' views. Similarly, tourism research shows that heritage is actively chosen, interpreted, and presented rather than passed on unchanged (Aryandari, 2025; Erwen et al., 2025; Soewarlan, 2019; Zikri et al., 2025). Because the current study did not systematically involve Karo cultural practitioners in assessing the cultural legitimacy of the adaptation or its appropriateness in a given context, its findings relate only to musical continuity and arrangement, not to assertions of cultural authenticity.

The same caution should be applied when considering the implications for cultural tourism. Even though the adaptation had some basis in the possibility of giving a modern cultural presentation, the actual performance took place at the Faculty of Language and Arts and not in a tourism context. As a result, the study did not include any measurement of tourist reception, visitor satisfaction, cultural learning, willingness to return, or economic effects. The arrangements that have been made should therefore be seen as a practice-based prototype suitable for possible use in cultural tourism rather than as proof of the effectiveness of tourism. This view is in line with critical tourism research which indicates that the spread of ethnic music within tourism can involve both opportunities for cultural representation and the risk of commodification (Titon, 2009; Su, 2011). The cultural consequences of the adaptation thus depend on how, by whom, and for whom the music is later presented.

The decision to use a big band should also be seen as choosing a particular form of musical adaptation rather than as indicating a generally superior format. The big band's structure offers practical opportunities to divide melodic, rhythmic, and accompaniment roles, and the current arrangements show that the chosen repertoire fits this setup. Nevertheless, the study does not prove that the big band is more effective than other kinds of contemporary ensemble arrangements. To reach such a conclusion, comparative research involving chamber ensembles, fusion groups, traditional-modern ensembles, or other types would be necessary. Formative validation by academics and performance practitioners should be seen as a way to identify musical and technical difficulties and improve the arrangements, not as a final statement of cultural approval.

Judgments of this kind may be affected by professional experience, one's position within an institution, generational differences, and familiarity with Western ensemble traditions.

The study also has important consequences for music education; thirty Music Education students took part in an applied setting in which they encountered traditional repertoire, contemporary arranging, and ensemble performance. However, it did not formally assess any changes in the students' musical knowledge, cultural understanding, arranging ability, or attitudes. Therefore, the educational value of the activity is only a contextual implication, not a proven educational effect. Future research might examine this aspect using pre- and post-intervention measures, reflective journals, interviews, or mixed-method approaches.

Several limitations determine the extent to which the interpretation can be carried out. Because only three compositions were deliberately chosen, the repertoire cannot reflect the full *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* tradition. Moreover, all performers came from one Music Education program, so the findings cannot easily be applied to professional or other educational contexts. Although the qualitative validation did not produce statistical inter-rater reliability figures, reliability was established through multiple sources, repeated examination, comparisons between the source materials and the arrangements, and improvements made during rehearsals. The final performance also did not include a systematically sampled tourist audience. Sibelius was responsible for notation, playback, and orchestration, but written notation cannot fully capture embodied technique, timbral nuances, interaction, improvisation, or the specific meanings associated with the context. The arrangements must therefore be seen as partial representations of the original musical materials and not as complete transfers of the tradition.

The limitations set out the boundary conditions for the practice-based approach in question. It is best suited to examining current arrangements of certain musical materials, not to reproducing an entire ritual system or asserting cultural equivalence. When the music involves sacred restrictions, when the community controls performance rights, or when meanings cannot be properly expressed in ordinary musical notation, adaptation should be handled with greater care. Future research should therefore engage Karo cultural practitioners and community stakeholders more directly, assess the adapted repertoire in real tourism situations, compare different ensemble configurations, and examine longer-term effects on transmission, participation, ownership, attribution, cultural rights, production costs, and the distribution of benefits. This study contributes by documenting a feasible procedure involving selection, recontextualization, validation, revision, and performance—rather than showing that traditional Karo music can be made "modern" or "tourist-friendly."

Conclusions

The study shows that it is practical to adapt certain pieces from the Karo *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire into a big band setup without losing recognizable musical features. By adapting "Simelungan Rayat", "Odak-Odak", and "Patam-Patam", it shows that it is possible to retain key melodic, rhythmic, structural, and modal or pitch characteristics while significantly reorganizing the instrumentation, orchestration, harmonic treatment, and ensemble texture for a modern performance setting. The arrangements and recordings form a practice-based musical prototype that shows one-way traditional repertoire can be recontextualized in a contemporary way. The study's contribution is therefore not to show the effects of preserving cultural authenticity completely, but to illustrate how specific musical characteristics can be identified, adapted, examined, revised, and put into practice in a new ensemble format. The study also sets clear limits on how its findings can be interpreted. Because the validation phase was qualitative and the final performance took place in an academic rather than a tourism environment, the results do not allow conclusions to be drawn regarding tourist reception or tourism effectiveness, or the wider cultural legitimacy of the transformed *Gendang Lima Sendalanan* repertoire. It is also not valid to say that retaining certain musical features amounts to preserving the full ritual, social, or cultural context of *Gendang Lima Sendalanan*. For this reason, further research should involve Karo cultural practitioners and other relevant community members more directly and examine the reception, cultural implications, and sustainability of such adaptations in real tourism and community settings. Within these limits, the study offers a documented starting point for future work on musical recontextualization, cultural sustainability, and the contemporary presentation of traditional Indonesian music.

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