

# Unraveling The Musical Tapestry Of Tazul Tajuddin's *Opera Puteri Saadong* Through Freytag's Pyramid

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**Abstract:** *In the heart of Kanazawa, Japan, on May 3, 2016, the Kanazawa Opera House was the stage for an operatic spectacle that transcended cultural boundaries and took the audience on a profound emotional odyssey. Tazul Tajuddin's "Opera Puteri Saadong" skillfully weaved together Malaysian and Western influences, creating a musical narrative that resonated with both heartache and desire. This article delves into the performance of the "Opera Puteri Saadong", focusing specifically on its musical elements within the perspective of Freytag's five-act structure. Through an exploration of the opera's music, including its emotional depth, character development, dramatic tension, cultural influences, and vocal performance, this analysis seeks to uncover how the music enhances the storytelling and conveys the central themes of the narrative in each act. Outlining a moment of tragedy for the main character, Freytag's pyramid was determined as the analytical approach to analyse the opera performance due to its emphasis on tragic narrative, which is applicable to the dramatic arc of the legendary story of Puteri Saadong. By examining a range of musical techniques and dramatic effects demonstrated throughout the opera, this paper also intends to provide insight into the significance of incorporating materials of Malaysian folk music and contemporary Western art music in bringing the tale of Puteri Saadong to life on the operatic stage. From the tender intimacy of a love scene to the epic grandeur of a battle sequence, this intercultural music enhances the overall impact of the opera, conveying its central themes of love, betrayal, resilience, and transformation with depth and resonance, engaging the audience with its unique blend of Malaysian and Western cultural impact.*

**Keywords:** Opera, Music Analysis, New Music, Malaysian Music, Dramatic Effects

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## 1. Introduction

*Opera Puteri Saadong* is a captivating opera that delves into themes of love, betrayal, resilience, and transformation. Set in a small state ruled by a royal family, the story revolves around Puteri Saadong, a young woman destined to marry her beloved cousin, Raja Abdullah (Tajuddin, 2018). However, her fate takes a tumultuous turn when she attracts the attention of King Narai, a powerful ruler from a neighbouring country who seeks her hand in marriage. Refusing the foreign king's proposal leads to dire consequences, as King Narai vows to destroy Puteri Saadong's happiness and her kingdom. Through its compelling narrative, vibrant characters, and rich musical score, the opera offers a poignant exploration of love, loyalty, and the human spirit. The opera unfolds through a series of dramatic events, including battles, sacrifices, and, ultimately, Puteri Saadong's transformation into the Goddess of the Mountain. With its twists and turns, this narrative structure provides a rich backdrop for the opera's

musical elements, intriguing the audience and allowing the music to enhance each scene's emotional depth and dramatic tension. As its sweeping melodies and emotional depth sweep audiences away, they are reminded of the enduring power of contemporary art music or modern compositional methods to transcend language and culture, touching hearts and minds in profound and unforgettable ways.

Tazul Tajuddin is a well-known Malaysian contemporary composer for his radical cross-cultural creative process. Composed within the realm of contemporary art music, *Opera Puteri Saadong* provides the audiences with plenty of atonality combined with traditional elements, something that is not found in the popular aesthetic of the standard repertoire (Muhriz, 2015). The opera incorporates elements of traditional Malay or Southeast Asian music, reflecting the cultural and regional influences of its setting. This could include the use of indigenous instruments, such as the gamelan and the mak yong troupe, as well as traditional melodic scales and rhythmic patterns. Tajuddin's brilliance shone through the orchestral preparations that combined the characteristics of traditional Malaysian instruments with the grandeur of a Western orchestra. The gamelan's sensitive tones danced along sweeping strings and commanding brass, creating a musical panorama as diverse and complicated as the characters themselves. By incorporating these musical elements, Tajuddin can evoke a sense of authenticity and cultural richness, immersing the audience in the world of the opera and enhancing its dramatic impact.

The vocal performances in *Opera Puteri Saadong* have been nothing short of high quality. As the story unfolded, the vocal ensemble, which featured a blend of Malaysian and Japanese performers, showcased the operatic prowess required to convey the intricacies of the plot. The set design and lighting played a crucial role in shaping the opera's visual aesthetic. Each scene was meticulously crafted, from the opulent royal palaces to the desolation of the conflict-torn landscapes and the mystical realms. The visual transitions mirrored the emotional arcs of the characters, enhancing the opera's overall impact. The opera celebrates Malaysia's rich history, inviting us to explore timeless themes through the magic of new music and an intercultural perspective. In this captivating opera, the meticulous orchestration, vocal performances, and choreography converge to deliver a profound emotional experience. Employing Freytag's five-part dramatic structure as an analytical framework, this study delves into this musical canvas, where every note carries the weight of destiny. The synthesis of these elements in Acts 1 through 5 lays the foundation for the concluding acts, promising a riveting exploration of Puteri Saadong's mythical transformation.

## 2. Freytag's Five-Part Pyramidal Structure

Freytag's pyramid is a well-established pyramidal structure used as an influential model for creating a narrative and understanding the dramatic movement of the characters. Focusing on tragedy over other dramatic forms, Gustav Freytag, who developed this narrative framework in the nineteenth century, emphasises the concept that every drama possesses five key stages or acts—introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and catastrophe—which represent the connection of events in a narrative. An element of cause and effect between each component and the characters' course of action determines the development of the plot, conflict, and occurrences depicted in each act (Freytag, 1900). Like Aristotle's notion of praxis, Freytag argues that a character's emotions, thoughts, and motivations are crucial elements in serious drama (Freytag, 1900; Tomaszewski, 2011). The intrinsic value lies not in the emotions or actions themselves but rather in how a character's emotions drive their determination to take action. This study uses this analytical framework to provide a comprehensive understanding of

the dramatic structure of *Opera Puteri Saadong*, enhancing the audience's appreciation of the opera's narrative and musical elements.

Due to the universality of its structural design, it is functional and beneficial for understanding the creation of a narrative or drama. There is a study on the use of Freytag's pyramid as the analytical system to discover the narrative structure and dramatic elements in *Film Negara Malaysia's* first animated cartoon, *Hikayat Sang Kancil*. Through the process, the authors encountered a disadvantage because Freytag's model does not emphasise the time length, a crucial component for the construction of animation (Harun et al., 2013). This led to the premise of introducing time-related variables as part of the analytical approach to help overcome the limitation. Prompted by that method, this paper thus includes the timing or duration aspect in the analysis since the main substances of the *Opera Puteri Saadong* are in both temporal forms: music and narrative. Although the animated cartoon is not tragedy-based, it is interesting to note how the sequence of events contained within its story is similar and could be aligned to the underscored pattern of Freytag's dramatic structure, specifically its resemblance to the symmetrical pyramid of dramatic action, driven by the cause and effect relationship between the five key scenes.

A character's motivation can originate internally or be generated by external influences (Freytag, 1900; Tomaszewski, 2011). Through the states and peculiarities of the action, the lower level of organisation in Freytag's pyramid in a structural balance of the dualist forces of "play" and "counterplay" serves as a unifying relation of cause and effect to produce the whole structure of a drama or narrative. A serious drama will invariably feature a protagonist engaged in some struggle or conflict due to the consequences of their earlier decisions or actions, inevitably leading to a tragic end for the protagonist. The tragic tale of *Puteri Saadong* seems to conform to Freytag's five-part design in terms of its emphasis on tragedy. In this regard, this pyramidal structure is applicable in comprehending the story's dramatic structure due to its central idea of having a moment of catastrophe rather than a denouement for the protagonist at the end. Each character carries their own motivations, conflicts, and complexities to the narrative, adding depth and richness to the opera's exploration of love, power, and the human spirit.

### 3. Music Composition as a Form of Storytelling

Beyond literary composition and oral tradition, this framework finds utility in other art forms as well when devising and organising dramatic elements related to storytelling. For instance, Greg Simon suggests a method of composing music that models musical form after two narrative designs, one of which is Freytag's pyramid. Drawing inspiration from the premise that music can be interpreted as a sort of storytelling, He proposes applying Freytag's pyramid as a framework to develop musical structure by conceptualising the dramatic events or action sequences in a story as five-part rondos (Simon, 2019). To instil the composition with more intentional musical structures, unity, and expression, it is necessary to situate the musical choices made and their consequences within a broader context. This entails generating answers to the questions that these choices may engender melodically, rhythmically, harmonically, or texturally in correspondence with the story's events.

Furthermore, contextualisation has become an important method in enhancing the interconnectedness between musical ideas and their corresponding narratives. Inspired by the tales of legendary Malaysian princesses, Tazul Tajuddin continued utilising various sonic elements derived from Malaysian folk music and contemporary Western art music for the

construction of contemporary musical language in his recent operative work, *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* (Tajuddin, 2021). This intercultural compositional approach allows the composer to integrate cultural and historical backgrounds associated with the stories more freely into the musical expression and to explore new sounds and techniques suitable for evoking a more abstract level of musical symbolism through the new composition for opera. Tajuddin's treatment of the opera aims for mediation between Eastern and Western musical elements and illustrates various principles of embracing and organising those elements into unified phrases and gestures. Examples include quoting Malay folk melodies in a fragmented and repetitive manner and using diatonic and pentatonic collections drawn from traditional Southeast Asian music in complex and independent canonic or contrapuntal measures. Rather than depending on traditional harmony and cadences, which imply that discords must be resolved, Tajuddin created highly personal idioms that relied on tonal ambiguity and folk inspirations to highlight novelty and sophistication as the composition's key features.

#### 4. Method

This study used a combination of analytical methods, including narrative analysis, musical analysis, and video observation of a musical performance (in the form of a YouTube video). It considers the Freytag pyramid as the primary facet of this analytical system because of its close relationship with the central idea, musical form and dramatic elements rooted in Tajuddin's *Opera Puteri Saadong*. Interpretative analysis was used for both the music and narrative analysis, which involved observing, scrutinising and interpreting the musical performance of the *Opera Puteri Saadong* to understand its meanings, themes and symbolic significance in each opera scene, navigated by the basic structure of Freytag's dramatic model. It is of the utmost importance that the musical setting corresponds symbolically to the dramatic moments and dynamic switch in moods evoked by the selected narrative. To this end, the analysis was arranged chronologically according to the five parts of the dramatic action, focusing on the respective musical events that occurred within each act. By examining the performance of the five-act *Opera Puteri Saadong* through the lens of this dramatic structural framework, it is possible to divide it into five chief sections based on their cause-and-effect relationship within the plot or dramatic occurrences—that go from the introduction into the rising action, to the middle point known as the climax, to the falling action, and finally, the catastrophe. Consequently, this analysis seeks to uncover how the music of the opera serves as a powerful vehicle for conveying the emotional depth and complexity of the characters' journeys, as well as how specific musical motifs and themes are used to represent key characters, emotions, and plot developments.

#### 5. Results

##### **Analysis of the *Opera Puteri Saadong* Using Freytag's Five-Part Design**

Music is instrumental in building dramatic tension throughout the opera, heightening the emotional impact of key moments and driving the narrative forward. It is a vital storytelling tool, enriching the narrative with layers of emotion, atmosphere, and meaning. The music intensifies the suspense and anticipation through dynamic shifts in tempo and dynamics and greater freedom in rhythmic and pitch organisation between voices and instruments, leading to pivotal scenes such as battles, betrayals, and reconciliations. By manipulating these musical elements, Tajuddin can effectively engage the audience's emotions and keep them invested in the unfolding drama. Through evocative melodies and harmonies associated with contemporary orchestration techniques, the new musical language utilised in *Opera Puteri Saadong* elicits a range of moods, from joy and love to sadness and despair, permitting the

audience to empathise with the characters and their struggles. For instance, Puteri Saadong's theme begins as a simple, innocent melody but gradually evolves into a more complex and assertive motif as she confronts the challenges and obstacles in her path. Likewise, King Narai's theme becomes increasingly menacing and foreboding as his obsession with Puteri Saadong consumes him, leading to the opera's climactic confrontation. In addition, specific compositional techniques were employed to evoke the setting and time of Puteri Saadong, transporting the audience to the world of the opera in a highly static mood of folk nature. For example, the Western and Malay traditional materials were woven into the score's fabric, providing a sense of continuity and connection to the opera's cultural heritage.

Similarly, the music provides a cohesive framework for the narrative, tying together disparate plot elements and character arcs into a unified whole that resembles a pyramid-like diagram. By establishing recurring motifs and themes in nontraditional ways, the music reinforces key moments and themes throughout the opera, enhancing the overall unity and impact of the storytelling. Puteri Saadong's theme is characterised by a tender melody accompanied by gentle instrumentation, symbolising her innocence and purity. Conversely, King Narai's theme is marked by ominous chords, militaristic rhythms, and aggressive orchestration, reflecting his power-hungry nature and the threat he poses to Puteri Saadong and her kingdom. These musical motifs recur throughout the opera, underscoring the characters' motivations and the unfolding drama. Whether evoking the opulence of a royal court, the tranquillity of a pastoral landscape, or the chaos of a battlefield, the music enhances the sense of place and time, drawing the audience deeper into the story. In moments of resolution and catharsis, the music undergoes a dramatic transformation, reflecting the characters' emotional release and the resolution of their conflicts. Majestic fanfare, triumphant melodies, and soaring vocal lines accompany scenes of victory and redemption, signalling the characters' triumph over adversity and their journey towards reconciliation and closure. Through these musical techniques, the composer can provide a sense of catharsis for both the characters and the audience, bringing the opera to a satisfying and emotionally resonant conclusion. Figure 1 shows Freytag's pyramid diagram for the *Opera Puteri Saadong*, organised chronologically according to each act or scene's theme and central idea. Subsequently, Table 1 portrays a brief analysis of the opera within the framework of Freytag's pyramid.

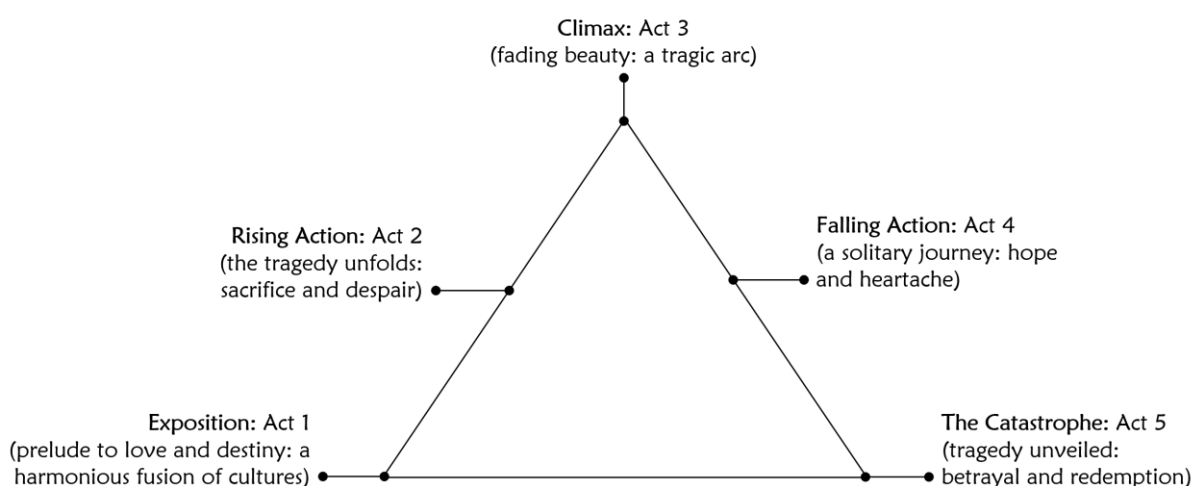


Figure 1: Freytag's Pyramid for "Opera Puteri Saadong"

**Table 1: The Five-Act “Opera Puteri Saadong” Through Freytag’s Pyramid of Dramatic Action**

No.	Dramatic Action	Opera Act / Duration Length	Description
1	Introduction	Act 1 (0:25 - 25:45)	It unfolds against the backdrop of a small state ruled by a royal family, in which Puteri Saadong's destiny is etched into the intertwining threads of affection and emotional turmoil. The music during this act features bright and uplifting melodies to reflect the initial happiness and peace in Puteri Saadong's life, along with gentle, static and tender orchestrations incorporating elements of Western and Malay traditional music to underscore the love between them.
2	Rise	Act 2 (26:00 - 48:00)	As the story progresses, Puteri Saadong and her husband, Raja Abdullah, fight to preserve their realm from King Narai's attack. Powerful and stirring orchestrations during moments of battle and conflict heighten the sense of urgency and peril, while poignant and emotive melodies capture the characters' anguish and despair as they confront the harsh realities of war.
3	Climax	Act 3 (48:45 - 1:03:30)	In Act 3, the composition mirrors the poignant narrative of Puteri Saadong's tragic life inside the confines of King Narai's palace. The haunting melodies throughout this section are significantly evocative, capturing the essence of Puteri Saadong's melancholy and fading beauty. By establishing the foundation for the tragedy, this scene serves as a musical battleground from which it emanates in subsequent acts.
4	Return	Act 4 (1:03:30 - 1:12:15)	As Puteri Saadong sets out on her journey home, leaving King Narai's palace, the music depicts her resilience and determination to restore her life and reconcile with her husband. The soaring melodies and emotive phraseology highlight her inner turmoil as she confronts the prospect of rejection upon her return. The juxtaposition of traditional Malay motifs with Western orchestration creates a wealthy tapestry of sound and improves the opera's cultural context.
5	Catastrophe	Act 5 (1:12:23 - 1:28:40)	In Act 5, the opera plunges into a tempest of emotion—a crescendo of affection, betrayal, and irreversible choices. The last scenes, depicting Puteri Saadong's determination to reclaim her identity and the tragic culmination of her reunion with Raja Abdullah, have been handled with poignant musical finesse. Dissonant chords and irregular rhythmic patterns underscore the chaotic nature of the scene, capturing the intensity of the characters' clashing feelings and movements. Here, the stage turns into a battlefield of hearts, and the audience witnesses the unravelling of destiny. The finale consolidates the recurring ideas and motifs explored throughout the performance, providing a conclusive and emotionally purging experience for both the characters and the audience.

### **Exposition – Act 1 (0:25 Until 25:45)**

In Exposition or Act 1, the music sets the stage for the story's introduction, setting and the establishment of key characters, motifs and themes that will recur throughout the performance. It effectively captures the essence of the narrative and establishes the emotional landscape of the opera. The overture served as a sonic portal, transporting listeners to the small state ruled by a royal family, where Puteri Saadong, a young woman of noble birth, finds herself at the centre of a tumultuous tale of love, betrayal, and redemption. The overture beckons the audience into the mythical realm of Puteri Saadong, marked by a delicate melodic dance that ensues among conventional Malaysian and Western elements, symbolising the profound cultural intricacies inherent in the tale. Furthermore, the orchestration, characterised by its evocativeness, mirrors the innocence and purity of Puteri Saadong's early years. It paints a canvas of cultural richness, reflecting the land she calls home.

In this prelude, the music becomes a bridge—a passage connecting two worlds, two hearts. We are drawn into the depths of human emotion, keen to witness how love and destiny will

intertwine within the tale of Puteri Saadong. The anticipation builds because the love story between Puteri Saadong and Raja Abdullah is delicately foreshadowed, creating a musical panorama that resonates with each Malaysian and Western impact. Traditional Malaysian instruments, like the mak yong and gamelan, seamlessly intertwine with Western strings, developing a harmonious fusion that mirrors the multifaceted cultural tapestry of the narrative. The melodic interaction reflects the innocence in their unfulfilled love, creating a resonant prelude to the unfolding epic, while the orchestral crescendos foreshadow love's promise and the load it contains. We feel the fragility of happiness, the anxiety between desire and responsibility.

However, their happiness is threatened by the unwelcome advances of King Narai, a powerful ruler from a neighbouring kingdom. When Puteri Saadong's family rejects King Narai's proposal, it sets off a chain of events that culminates in a devastating conflict between the two nations. As the overture unfolds, Tazul Tajuddin masterfully introduces the important leitmotifs, setting the tone and the stage for the unfolding narrative. Key leitmotifs emerge like threads weaving through time. They hint at the problematic tapestry of Puteri Saadong's life. Additionally, majestic and regal motifs represent the royal setting and the characters' noble lineage. Foreshadowing elements in the music hint at the impending conflict with King Narai and the challenges that lie ahead. King Narai's unyielding longing remains, casting a shadow over their happiness. Act 1 inspires the approaching tragedy and triumph, leaving the audience immersed in the evocative folk melodies that echo the guarantees and uncertainties of the legendary realm of Puteri Saadong. In this introduction act, the level is set with a melodic fusion of Malaysian and Western motifs for a tale that transcends borders—a tale of affection, power, and the sensitive stability between obligation and choice.

### **Rising Action – Act 2 (26:00 Until 48:00)**

The ominous undertones are the bold way the opera's antagonist, King Narai, enters the narrative in the first scene of the rising action. He is a powerful ruler driven by ambition and desire—his relentless pursuit of Puteri Saadong and his thirst for revenge lead to devastating consequences for both kingdoms. The song takes a darker turn, symbolising the growing hazard that lurks within the neighbouring nation. The orchestral tension intensifies, mirroring King Narai's unrequited dreams. Tajuddin's composition undergoes a darkish metamorphosis, embodying the advent of King Narai with a sense of drawing close to doom. Tajuddin skillfully employs the juxtaposition of traditional Malaysian and Western elements inside the composition, creating a sonic panorama that highlights the stark differences and irreconcilable aims. It turns into a prelude to the tragedy that lies beforehand, with every word foreshadowing the approaching typhoon to shatter the concord hooked up in the sooner acts.

As the story progresses, themes of loyalty, sacrifice, and resilience emerge as Puteri Saadong and her husband, Raja Abdullah, strive to defend their kingdom against King Narai's relentless attacks. Despite their efforts, tragedy strikes, leading to Puteri Saadong's selfless surrender to the foreign oppressor in a bid to end the bloodshed. However, her sacrifice only deepens the rift between the warring factions, leading to further turmoil and heartache. As tension rises and conflict ensues, the music in Act 2 intensifies to reflect the escalating drama and turmoil the characters face. Key musical characteristics may include dramatic shifts in dynamics and tempo associated with more chromaticism and irregular rhythmic patterns to convey the chaos and devastation wrought by King Narai's attack, along with dark and foreboding motifs to underscore the threat posed by King Narai and the impending danger faced by Puteri Saadong and her kingdom.

In this pivotal act, Tajuddin's mastery becomes obvious as he orchestrates not only the clash of characters but also the clash of cultures, ideologies, and goals. The music swells, echoing the cries of a kingdom torn aside. Through the rising action, the audience witnesses the inexorable march closer to tragedy. It becomes a mirror reflecting the human condition—our capacity for sacrifice, our longing for love, and the fragility of peace.

### **Climax – Act 3 (48:45 Until 1:03:30)**

In Act 3, the music reflects the passage of time and the emotional toll of Puteri Saadong's captivity in King Narai's palace. Musical elements in this act include haunting and melancholic melodies to convey Puteri Saadong's despair and longing for her home and loved ones, along with subtle shifts in instrumentation and texture to reflect the gradual decay of Puteri Saadong's beauty and the fading hope of her eventual rescue. The song's slow development with its harmonic stasis mirrors the passage of time, with sombre strings and haunting woodwinds weaving a melancholic tapestry. The recurring motifs mirror the monotony of Puteri Saadong's imprisonment, emphasising the relentless passage of hours, days, and years.

The orchestral palette shifts, reflecting the slow loss of her radiant beauty and King Narai's disappointment. One of the key elements in this segment is the use of leitmotifs related to Puteri Saadong's enchanted hair decoration. As the protective appeal weakens, the composition builds anxiety, in which the tune subtly shifts to introduce more dissonance and instability. The decaying beauty of Puteri Saadong is mirrored in the gradual degradation of these motifs, symbolising the inevitable decline of her once radiant attraction. Puteri Saadong's aria all through this phase is a spotlight, with the soprano navigating a delicate balance between vulnerability and resilience. Tension-filled motifs underscore the power struggle between Puteri Saadong and King Narai as he attempts to break her spirit, and she defiantly resists his advances. King Narai's frustration is palpable through the baritone's powerful delivery, adding a layer of anxiety to the unfolding narrative. Moments of introspection and reflection are conveyed through delicate solo passages and introspective harmonies as Puteri Saadong grapples with her identity and purpose in captivity. To enhance the emotional impact, the pacing of Act 3 is properly crafted, with the music—the orchestral climaxes and poignant vocal moments—seamlessly aligning with the dramatic arc.

Regarded as the middle point that firmly unites the rising and the falling actions, the narrative in the climax of this opera takes a sombre turn, plunging us into the depths of melancholy and unrequited longing. Here, the passage of time becomes both a curse and a silent witness to tragedy. The integration of musical elements in the absence of functional tonality expresses the nuances of the characters' struggles, making this phase stand out inside the opera's narrative. This scene serves as a musical battleground, laying the basis for the tragedy so it can spread in subsequent acts. In the end, the opera confronts us with the fragility of beauty, the cost of sacrifice, and the inexorable march of time. As Puteri Saadong steps into the unknown, we feel pain for her fading grace and the echoes of lost dreams.

### **Falling Action – Act 4 (1:03:30 Until 1:12:15)**

As Puteri Saadong embarks on her journey home, the music in the falling action reflects her resilience and determination to reclaim her life and reunite with her husband. Upbeat and triumphant melodies convey Puteri Saadong's newfound strength and resolve as she sets out on her journey, while energetic and lively orchestrations capture the excitement and anticipation of her return to her homeland. Moments of solidarity are expressed through joyful ensemble passages and spirited choral refrains as Puteri Saadong receives aid and support from the kind local people she encounters along the way. Stirring and emotive motifs during her arrival at the



palace gates build anticipation for the climactic reunion with her husband and the resolution of their story.

The orchestral arrangement in this phase evokes a feeling of longing and perseverance, reflecting Puteri Saadong's resilience as she travels back to her native land. The use of sweeping strings and plaintive woodwinds captures the vastness of the panorama and the emotional weight of her adventure. As Puteri Saadong faces various demanding situations along the way, the tune shifts in depth, conveying the highs and lows of her quest. Vocal performances continue to play a crucial role in articulating the emotional depth of the characters. The soaring melodies and emotive phraseology spotlight the person's inner turmoil as she grapples with the possibility of rejection upon her return.

The orchestration throughout this section subtly underscores the anxiety and uncertainty of Puteri Saadong's situation, with dissonant harmonies and asymmetrical rhythms reflecting her precarious function. As she waits in the darkness outside the palace gates, the music becomes increasingly suspenseful, heightening the anticipation of her eventual reunion with her husband. The falling action of the opera is a compelling exploration of resilience and perseverance, underscored by evocative songs and powerful vocal performances. The composer's adept use of contemporary orchestration and incorporation of traditional elements add intensity and authenticity to the narrative, even as the emotive singing of the singers brings the characters' internal struggles to life.

#### **Catastrophe – Act 5 (1:12:23 Until 1:28:40)**

In the catastrophe, the music reaches its emotional climax as Puteri Saadong confronts her husband and their tragic fate is revealed. Tense and suspenseful motifs underscore the confrontation between Puteri Saadong and Raja Abdullah, as the truth of her identity is revealed and their love is put to the ultimate test. Anguished and impassioned melodies convey the depth of their love and the heart-wrenching nature of their parting, while poignant and introspective harmonies accompany Puteri Saadong's grappling with the consequences of her actions and the reality of her loss. The tune throughout the final catastrophe vitally heightens the dramatic tension and turmoil between the lead characters, Puteri Saadong and her husband, as their confrontation comes to a head. The soprano's portrayal of Puteri Saadong's emotional turmoil modified into heartbreak, her voice echoing the character's depression and the unforgiving nature of the future. Apart from creating tonal instability and dissonant harmonies resulting from chromaticism, the organisation of rhythms and metrical framework in nontraditional ways—including irregular rhythmic phrases and patterns—reflect the escalating warfare and underscore the chaotic nature of the scene, contributing a sense of unease and betrayal that enhances the emotional impact of the tale.

Similar to the other acts, the instrumentation in this scene demonstrates the blend of traditional Malay instruments, such as the gamelan, mak yong and rebana, with a present-day orchestral ensemble. This fusion creates an authentic yet dramatically pressing atmosphere, befitting the cultural richness of the story. Moreover, recurring melodic themes for Puteri Saadong and Raja Abdullah improve their diverging emotional arcs. Puteri Saadong's melodies are poignant and melancholic, conveying her inner heartbreak, even as Raja Abdullah's motifs turn harsh and competitive, reflecting his betrayal and hostility in her direction. The contrasting music deepens the characterisations and conflicts at the heart of the drama. Puteri Saadong is overcome with sadness and regret after the end of the violence when she holds her mortally wounded husband in her arms. Haunting and ethereal orchestrations during the opera's closing

moments capture the bittersweet essence of Puteri Saadong's departure into the unknown, leaving behind a legacy of love, sacrifice, and redemption.

The climactic duet between Puteri Saadong and Raja Abdullah brings together the themes and motifs developed throughout the performance, offering a sense of closure and catharsis for both the characters and the audience. In brief, the opera confronts us with the fragility of consideration, the agony of mistaken identity, and the irrevocable effects of love's collision with fate. Puteri Saadong's adventure—from desire to despair—leaves us haunted, thinking about the limits of forgiveness. Act 5 serves as a poignant transition, a vital juncture preparing the audience for the climactic finale. Tajuddin's composition now not only captures the desolation of Puteri Saadong's plight but also becomes a testimony to the human potential for resilience and the transformative strength of desire. The operatic journey, through the evocative melodies of Act 5, propels the narrative towards its ultimate decision, leaving the audience emotionally engaged and eagerly watching for the effective conclusion to the epic tale of Puteri Saadong.

## 6. Conclusion

Several key findings emerge through a comprehensive analysis of the musical performance of the *Opera Puteri Saadong* associated with Freytag's dramatic structure. The new musical language serves as a vehicle for conveying the emotional depth and complexity of the characters' journeys, with specific musical motifs and themes used to represent their inner struggles and motivations. The orchestration and vocal performances contribute to building dramatic tension and resolution while also evoking the cultural and regional influences of the opera's setting. The orchestral arrangement that combines tonal and non-tonal techniques plays a vital role in shaping the opera's narrative and enhancing its dramatic impact. From sweeping string sections to thunderous percussion, the orchestra provides a rich and dynamic backdrop for the vocal performances, adding depth, texture, and colour to the music. The prominent use of tonal ambiguity and contemporary orchestration techniques can evoke a wide range of emotions and moods, from the tender intimacy of a love scene to the epic grandeur of a battle sequence. Apart from widening the emotional range of the music, the utilisation of extended techniques assigned to certain instruments establishes symbolic connections with specific characters, scenes, and moods within the narrative.

Many of the techniques employed in this work lean towards the stylistic traits of twentieth-century music, where impressionism and symbolism emerged as the primary highlights through the compositions of that period. Melodic and harmonic constructions, in particular, represent the layering of traditional and atonal materials, resulting in a more ambiguous and complex sonority throughout the piece. The substitution of conventional tonal and harmonic functions by the new musical language, as well as the harmonic stasis and irresolute tonality of impressionism, seems to be linked to the emotional state of the characters in the opera. Through subtle shifts in melody, harmony, and orchestration, the music can convey the nuances of each character's emotional journey, from moments of doubt and vulnerability to instances of strength and resolve. For example, Puteri Saadong's musical themes evolve throughout the opera, mirroring her transformation from a naive young woman to a resilient leader. Similarly, Raja Abdullah's musical motifs reflect his unwavering loyalty and sense of duty, even in the face of adversity. As the characters undergo personal growth and development, their musical themes may undergo corresponding changes. During moments of joy and love, the music features bright melodies, static harmonies, and soaring vocal lines, evoking feelings of happiness and contentment. Conversely, during scenes of conflict and despair, the music adopts darker tones,

more dissonant and chromatic harmonies, and asymmetrical and turbulent rhythms, reflecting the characters' internal struggles and challenges.

*Opera Puteri Saadong* is a masterful exploration of musical storytelling, resembling the dramatic arc of Freytag's five-part design. The composer's meticulous attention to detail in orchestrating the emotional landscape through modern compositional methods, coupled with stellar vocal performances, results in a fascinating experience. It holds the audience captive, a testament to the composer's capability to bring the intricacies of human drama through the medium of music. The *Opera Puteri Saadong* stands as a sworn explanation of the control of new music to provide the complexity of human feelings. Through Tajuddin's craftsmanship, the opera brought to life a story that, while being rooted in Malaysian and Western cultures, resonated universally. The echoes of tragedy and transcendence lingered in the audience's minds, a sworn statement of the long-lasting impact of this operatic gem.

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