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**Bali Fusion Pop Music**

I Wayan Sudirana

Graduate Studies Program

Institut Seni Indonesia Denpasar

E-mail: [wayansudirana@isi-dps.co.id](mailto:wayansudirana@isi-dps.co.id)

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**ABSTRACT**

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**Purpose:** In this era of globalization, intercultural interaction between musicians from all over the world is inevitable. This worldwide interaction ultimately enriches contemporary music. **Methods:** As Blaukopf says, "acculturation doesn't necessarily mean the loss of cultural identity; there is also acculturation which leads to enrichment in music, independent of its economical significance. **Results and discussion:** The emergence of fusion pop music groups is a response of the development of human's culture. The commercialized forms of their musics are the effect of the rapid development of tourism industry in Bali. Their innovations and creative ideas are depending on their consumers' needs. **Implication:** The positive outcome of these creative ideas is that composers are looking for new styles and ways of playing, composing, and exploring that do not intersect with traditional ones.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In the past ten years, an interesting phenomenon has appeared in the Balinese music scene. Musicians have become interested in combining instruments as well as borrowing musical elements from outside of Bali. They have been immersed in the idea of "being modern." For these musicians, it is believed that being able to make use of foreign musical instruments and techniques in their music as a symbol of modernity can help to elevate their social status. Although few people were aware of its existence earlier, this new (popular) music has gained popularity by being introduced to larger

audiences.

The paper is divided into three parts. First, I briefly discuss the historical background of the emergence of fusion pop music in Bali as a result of globalization, along with issues related to classifying its style. In the second part, I explore two Balinese musical groups that have devoted themselves to the works that combine foreign musical instruments and elements with local ones. I ask how these musicians adopt foreign musical instruments and materials into their music. Finally, in the third part, I explore the significance and impact of fusion pop music in Bali on Balinese culture in general by discussing comments and reactions to this new musical genre and the effects it has had on the continuation of traditional genres. The comparison of between the concept of Balinese fusion pop music and the Javanese *campursari* is outlined as a final discussion in each section.

## METHODS

The act of borrowing other musical elements becomes common among composers. There are many musical works that occur with methods combining two or more musical styles. Even though the act of borrowing from other genres and styles always occurs, Sean Roger Friar (2017) says that there are two differences that occur when viewed from the results of the merging of musical genres that have been carried out. The first is superficial, and the second is a deeper level (Friar, 2017: 2).

Superficial is simply a classification or criterion resulting from the methods used by composers when borrowing from popular genres in their music. For example, much of pop music has references to Classical music, such as The Toys' 1965 hit "A Lover's Concerto," whose melody was taken from J.S. Bach; or chaconne structure from Pachelbel Canon on Coolio's song "I'll C U When U Get There." Likewise traditional songs such as the Ginada form of "Ede Ngaden Awak Bisa" which is used in Bona Alit's works, the children song "Juru Pencar" by Balawan Etnik Fusion, and another children song "Meong-meong" by Gus Teja World Music. In all these cases, the basic characteristics of the genres chosen by these composers were not altered at all in the new genres they composed. Core elements such as form, harmonic language, and cultural function of the original genre are all left intact. This is what is meant by "superficial."

A deeper level category often involves cross-fertilization between genres at a

deeper level, and according to Friar (2017), it is more accurately called hybridization. This is analogous to mixing at the “musical DNA” level rather than at the surface level. The most important thing is the reference to other genres, indeed it must really be understood as another genre, because it has its own expressive value. In hybrid music, the appearance of other genres in the music is not an important aesthetic goal. In fact, not only is it not important, but it is not certain that the superficial features of other genres present in hybrid music can be recognized, or that the listener is still at the stage of recognizing the properties of these musical features. The result is music that incorporates deep elements, at the level of the musical DNA, from more than one genre in a way that is not superficial, creating a listening experience in which the listener cannot easily categorize what he or she hears as in one genre over another. According to Frair, this way of merging genres is essential, and indeed it is more accurately described as hybridization in music.

The definition of hybridization of music at a deeper level and essential is supported by Homi Bhaba's statement that basically hybridity is "a process of creating a clear cultural identity. Hybridity leads to a change in identity which leads to subjective changes" (Bhaba in Friar, 2007: 124-126). Bhaba's intention here is a process of merging at a deeper level, namely in the processing of musical elements to give rise to new forms and characteristics that are subjective, and these new characteristics come from the two (or more) genres that are combined.

Composers who move at this deeper level argue that mixing musical genres does not require identification of the materials used in the final output. In fact, most quotations from works in this realm imply that the composer did not want this, and it would be inappropriate if the materials used were easily identifiable. The actual process that must be carried out is to study, understand, and properly digest the genres that will be used. In the digesting process, what happens is the process of “destroying” the surface characteristics that can be recognized openly. Another thing that can be done is to use genres/styles that will be used as a starting point, not as objects whose integrity must be maintained. They (these genres) are a means of process of going to an end, not the final product. This is a critical distinction to make, as distinguishing music in this way from music that relies on references to other genres becomes clear.

It may seem counterintuitive that music that refers to other obvious genres may

actually be involved with those genres only superficially, while music in which those genres whose components are not even visible, may actually be involved with those genres in depth. But just as some animals have evolved to imitate other animals they are not actually related to, so music can have the layers of a given genre without actually functioning like that genre in a substantive way. On the other hand, some musical genres that appear very different at first glance actually share a deep resemblance across important musical parameters.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Historical Background

The idea of combining foreign musical instruments with gamelan has existed in Java since 1970s. It is called *campursari*, a genre that originally combined *kroncong*<sup>1</sup> and Javanese gamelan. It was only in the late 1980s that *campursari* music began to grow and nowadays it has continued to make developments, both in term of its quality, musical format, function, and the frequency of its performances (Supangah 2003: 3). The basic form of *campursari* is a combination of the instruments of the *kroncong* ensemble, combined with gamelan and foreign musical instruments such as the saxophone, trumpet, drum set, bongos, maracas, tabla, and keyboard. In such combinations, however, the western instruments are dominated by the traditional Javanese instruments according to local customs such as *langgam Jawa*<sup>2</sup> and *gending*<sup>3</sup>. This phenomenon was eventually overtaken by the popularity of other musical genres, such as *dangdut*<sup>4</sup>, *kroncong*, and *karawitan*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kroncong* is the name of a ukulele-type instrument and an Indonesian musical style that typically makes use of the *kroncong* (the name comes from the sound *chrong-chrong-chrong* said to be made by this instrument.) The band or ensemble (called a *keronchong orchestra*) consist of a flute, a violin, a melodic guitar, a cello played in pizzicato style, a string bass also playing pizzicato, and a female or male singer.

<sup>2</sup> *Langgam Jawa* is a regional form of Indonesian *kroncong* music most often associated with the city of Surakarta (Solo). As is the case with traditional *kroncong* music, *langgam Jawa* utilizes a variety of non-native instruments, such as the flute, guitar, ukulele, cello and violin. However, these instruments are performed using a seven-tone Javanese gamelan scale known as *pelog*. The cello typically plays the role of a gamelan *ciblon* drum, with the performer slowly plucking or slapping the strings in a percussive fashion.

<sup>3</sup> *Gending* is a class of structures used in Javanese gamelan music. *Gending* can also be used to refer to gamelan compositions in general.

<sup>4</sup> *Dangdut* is a genre of Indonesian popular music that is partly derived from Malay, Arabic, and Hindustani music. It developed in the 1970s among working-class Muslim youth, but beginning in the late 1990s reached a broader following in low class Indonesians, Malaysia, and the southern Philippines.

<sup>5</sup> *Karawitan* is a general term for music and singing associated with the gamelan of Java.

However, the popularity of *campursari* was in fact only centered in Java due to the music's prevalence within the Javanese cultural sphere, especially central Java, Yogyakarta and East Java. It was also popular in the regions with large Javanese populations, such as parts of greater Jakarta (the capital city of Indonesia) and Lampung (in the Southern part of Sumatra). As Supangah states, *campursari* is a reflection of the life of the middle and lower classes of Javanese society, "who have a wide and complex range of viewpoints, lifestyles, level of education and characteristics, as is reflected in the breadth, openness and complexity of *campursari* music (2003: 15)."

During this time, however, the popularity of *campursari* did not reach Balinese shores. This situation occurred because, on one hand, the Balinese people were not familiar with the nuances and characteristics of fusion music. On the other hand, on Bali, different spheres of musical culture had been cultivated within the framework of a Balinese tradition. However, the idea of combining foreign and local musical elements is a generic concept caused by globalization. Since Balinese musicians have long had contact with Westerners, including artists such as Walter Spies, Colin McPhee, and Antonio Blanco, the inclination towards adopting new materials was introduced to them, direct or indirectly, during collaborations with foreign artists.

Today, such collaborations are common, and perhaps are considered prestigious to the Balinese as many artists seek the opportunity to collaborate with foreign artists. Globalization has become the main reason for local artists to look for new identities in order to compete in the global market as relationships and interactions produced by the encounter between the global and the local continue to lead to homogenization among local traditions (Lomax 1968). Hence, Balinese artists have started to construct or reconstruct traditional arts forms as modern genres. "A proud cliché of Balinese culture is the simultaneous openness to new ideas and the steadfast preservation of tradition" (Sandino 2008: 26). They have adopted ideas based on their experiences working with foreign artists. In particular, Balinese musicians have started to follow their Javanese fellow musicians' path in combining foreign musical instruments and elements with their own. However, what are Balinese musicians really doing? Is it the same as the concept of Javanese *campursari*? Or does it have an indigenous conceptualization that differs from the basic concept of *campursari*?

Bearing these questions in mind, we have to think logically that most Balinese

artists have a strong traditional foundation, and this foundation will always be carried over to whatever innovation they create. David Harnish outlines how existing and emerging forms of Balinese music are essentially based on older traditional genres: new genres of music built upon existing forms, and once they have become established they become old as new musical forms emerge (Harnish in McIntosh, 2010: 4). Moreover, Harnish states that such a process demonstrates the “uncanny ability [of the Balinese] to assimilate national, external, or global ideas and objects and localize them, infusing them with new and relevant local meanings” (2005, 119). Hence, Balinese musicians create new forms of music that fuse local (traditional) and the global (modern) musical aspects.

Although conservative musicians agree with this ideal, such creations do not always follow this pattern. Younger innovative musicians, and the more idealistic ones, often state that they are going against tradition.<sup>6</sup> They avoid the use of traditional musical elements in their works. They are completely free in finding their identity in this era of globalization. For instance, they build their own instruments, creating new musical styles that they claim to be their own original invention. However, they have to realize that the basic musical foundation that resides in their blood, traditional Balinese music, would logically influence each of their creations or inventions. Instead of moving away from existing cultural models, Balinese musicians attempt to connect local traditional musical aesthetics with national and global ones (Heimarck 2003: 9).

### **New Sounds and The Fusion of Musical Traditions**

Bruno Nettl explained that the production of music in non-western society is distinguished by three motivating factors: (1) the desire to totally preserve traditional culture, (2) a complete westernization, that is, simple incorporation of a society into the western cultural system, and (3) modernization, which combines aspects from the first two categories (2005: 347). The first factor is becoming part of the “unwritten rules” within arts institutions as a standard guideline for students in creating music.<sup>7</sup> The second and the third factors are usually becoming the concept of modern art (music) groups in their musical productions.

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<sup>6</sup> See Harnish 2005, Heimarck 2002, Vicker 1996, Baulch (2002, 2003, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See McGraw 2005, Sudirana 2011

As Westernization and modernization are two different juxtaposing concepts—Westernization is a total adaptation of particular kind of Western music, and modernization is a desire to create a new, adapted, modernized version of the original—the one that typically adopted in the creation of new music by the contemporary Balinese composers is the concept of modernization. As Nettl defines modernization as “the adoption and adaptation of Western technology and other products of Western culture, as needed, simultaneously with an insistence that the core of cultural values will not change greatly and does not match those of the West” (ibid: 348). This is because “modernization does not entail a total repudiation of the past traditions but rather an alteration of them to adapt them to modern needs” (Heimark 2003: 8).

In the production of new innovative musical style by modern Balinese composers, there are two contrasting musical creativities. One is the adaptation of the characteristic of pop music, combined with the local ones. It is an innovative creativity that is usually understood to be commercially recorded music. This is often oriented towards a tourism market that has familiar musical structure—it consists of relatively short, simple songs utilizing technological innovations to produce new variations on existing themes. The second one is purely idealistic musical creativity—the experimental types of music that focuses more on finding new identity and self-satisfaction. Unlike the first one, the music has unfamiliar structure, integrating foreign musical elements, and inventing new radical musical developments that to some extend, moving away from tradition.<sup>8</sup>

In this section, I explore Balinese contemporary composers, the ones that follow the first category mentioned above, in creating their musical works. To illustrate this, I explore two groups who have devoted themselves in this path. The first is Sanggar Bona Alit (SBA) with the composer I Gusti Ngurah Adiputra (Agung Alit), and the second one is Gus Teja World Music (GTWM) with the composer Agus Teja Sentosa.

### **Sanggar Bona Alit**

Sanggar Bona Alit is one of Bali's famous traditional music and art collectives led by Agung Alit. Alit comes from a Balinese royal family that has preserved ancient

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<sup>8</sup> See McGraw 2005, Sudirana 2011

traditions through a variety of art forms. The group performs Balinese music in a unique contemporary “world music” fashion, a style that incorporates a diverse range of Balinese, Indonesian, and an ever-growing range of world musical instruments (including unique ones that Alit actually builds himself). Based on strongly traditional Balinese and/or Indonesian elements, Alit’s musical expressions have taken Bali into another artistic dimension through his musical work and associated art forms.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to this, Alit was earlier intensively trained as a traditional gamelan player. He started to play gamelan at the age of ten, and was selected as a drummer for the traditional theater group, Arja, which he has traveled and performed extensively with across Bali. According to Alit, by the age of 18, he began to feel overcome by a sense of boredom, which in his opinion, every artist is subject to feel. He was tired of being tied to the Arja performances because it was the same routine every night and there was no creativity involved. This situation inspired a turn-around in seeking musical innovations. He started improvising, integrating drums with guitar and bamboo flute, piano with gongs and bamboo gamelan, and began creating his own instruments. This was the beginning of Alit’s journey in contemporary fusion pop music style.<sup>10</sup>

Together with his group, Bona Alit, Alit launched the album series entitled “Kishi-kishi” (whisper) in early 2001. This album was a result of Alit’s innovative exploration in finding his musical identity. The pieces in this album exhibit a wide variety of instrumentation and combine at least three different musical styles; Balinese, Sundanese *degung*, and Kroncong style. For example, in the piece entitled “Melasti (ritual procession),” the basic form of *gilak*, the Balinese eight-beat gong structure that is often used in the *baleganjur* processional music, is adopted as a basic structure of the piece. The bass guitar plays a basic melodic part substituting the function of the *calung* instrument of the Balinese gamelan. The main melody is played by Alit’s homemade *erhu* (Chinese two-string instrument), which is considered to be the featured instrument in Alit’s music. In the middle of the piece, Sundanese *degung* is inserted. Sundanese drum is used all the way from the beginning to the end of the piece, which strengthens the combination of the musical styles.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Agung Alit, August 6, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Agung Alit, August 6, 2011.



The Kroncong and Sundanese *degung* style are clearly exhibited in the rest of the pieces in the album. For example the piece entitled “ngempu” (babysitting) employs the basic structure of Sundanese *degung*. Sundanese solo drumming played in its particular Sundanese solo drumming style, gives a sense of authenticity. The ukulele is plucked according to the distinct Kroncong style. The melody is played on Alit’s homemade *erhu*, and the rest of the instruments enrich the piece; Alit’s homemade *genggong* plays interlocking figurations, a guitar emphasizes the melody with its chords, and basic skeleton of the melody is played on organ using sampled gamelan sounds.

In later development of his music, Alit started to use the full set of gamelan *semar pegulingan*, combined with all of those instruments mentioned above, to create pop music under the umbrella of fusion pop music. As Gerhard Steingress states, “with regard to popular music, it is evident that musical evolution itself is a process of continuous blending of different styles, techniques of composition, arrangement and instrumentation” (2002: 307). In this fusion pop music style, the elements of traditional art forms continue to be explored and re-arranged with the fundamental characteristic of pop music style. Based on these explorations, Bona Alit’s fusion pop music style has similarities to the Javanese *campursari* music. The basic form of *campursari* is a combination of a wide range of instrumentation and musical elements, including traditional song styles, which create a new pop music style based on the arrangement of the composers, and Alit, in creating his music, also applies this notion. The only different is that Alit creates new musical instruments that represent his own identity. Consequently, this identity and the reinterpretation of traditional elements combined with foreign ones, represents an evolution from traditional to popular.

### **Gus Teja World Music**

Gus Teja World Music (GTWM) was founded by Agus Teja Sentosa in 2009. This group focuses on creating new forms of music that, according to Agus, “represents the future of Balinese world music.”<sup>11</sup> Unlike Agung Alit, Agus composes his musical creations on his special homemade instruments combined with only two Western instruments, guitar and bass guitar. He built a new version of Balinese *tingklik*

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Agus Teja Sentosa, August 8, 2011.

(traditional Balinese bamboo xylophone) which applies the standard Western tuning, naming it *tingklik baro*. He also does the same thing to the Balinese *slonding* (ancient iron xylophone) which he names *slokro* (an abbreviation of *selonding* and 'chromatic'). Agus also built many different styles of flute such as the Native American Flute, Shakuhachi, Pan Flute, Bansuri, and, of course, Balinese flutes.

In 2010, GTWM released the first album entitled "Rhythm of Paradise." In this album, Agus explores possibilities in utilizing the instruments mentioned above, using his musical knowledge and intuition to create innovative pop musical styles. As Gerhard Steingress states, "innovation is the positive trait most often associated with fusion" (2002:126). Agus's music in this album is indeed fusion music—the type of innovative music which breaks free of traditionalism as its principal defining characteristic. It adopts the characteristics of modern pop music styles (familiar structure, simple and relatively short songs). The metamorphosis of the instrumentation and musical elements has also been adapted thoroughly and hides its traditional characteristics.

Considering the notion mentioned above, Agus's fusion pop music exhibits a distinctive musical scope compared to that of the Javanese *campursari*. Agus intelligently converts the playing technique and physical appearance of traditional instruments—the *tingklik baro* and *slokro* are built to be entirely freed from their normative roles—in accordance with his compositional needs. As mentioned previously, Agus also creates duplicates of flutes from around the world to fit his ability to play and manipulate the instruments. In addition, he arranges the Balinese *kendang angklung* in a wooden frame so it can be played similarly to the Cuban *conga*. From these innovations emerge a concept for the work that in turn motivates an already familiar or new compositional method and particular set of tools from which Agus's music is built. These compositional tools have included, for example, a diversity of timbres, adjustable playing techniques, a wider range of octaves (three octaves), and original formulas for integrating intuitive materials.<sup>12</sup> They convey an original musical identity for Agus's pop fusion music. Another differentiation between Agus's music and *campursari* is situated in the use of Western musical instruments. While in *campursari*

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<sup>12</sup> This is basis of all of Agus's musical composition, where he uses his intuition in composing materials and integrates them with no musical notations.

music, the playing techniques of Western instruments, such as keyboard, guitar, cello, etc. are manipulated to substitute the function traditional instruments in the Javanese gamelan, the conventional playing techniques of Western guitar and bass in Agus's fusion music are maintained.

### The Significant and Impact

The ability to make use of western musical instrument elevates the composers' social status as a musician in the society since there is a notion that being able to do so is considered "modern." The term modern signifies the act of adopting modern life and cosmopolitan culture, which is synonymous with Western Culture. In fact, whenever Agus or Alit, with their group, are in public, people greet them politely and use *bahasa bali halus*, high level of Balinese language. People also give them high respect—the same one that is given to the head of the village or the important person. Their musicianship status is, in this regard, higher than the common musicians because they are sufficiently knowledgeable in employing foreign musical instruments that support their compositional requirements.

At first, the music of SBA and GTWM are strange due to its nontraditional sound.<sup>13</sup> However, it easily becomes popular because it has similar characteristic as the modern pop music—the motives of the melodic lines are simple and easy to follow, it usually uses a regular 4/4 meter, and has a single melodic theme throughout the piece. It is enlightened and is becoming the favorite music of most people who have heard it. Most of them have said that the music makes them happy and calm.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it has relevance for today's busy environment where people often get stressed easily. By hearing the music, they are able to release their stresses from work.<sup>15</sup>

Today, GTWM and SBA's musics are commercialized. It is popular not only in Balinese society, but also in the global tourism market. Based on the local market business' statistic, according to Alit and Agus, both albums (Agus's "Rhythm of Paradise" and Alit's "Kishi-kishi") are the best selling albums in Bali today.<sup>16</sup> Their

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with some of the patrons, August 19, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with some of the patrons, August 19, 2011

<sup>15</sup> From Facebook page of GTWM and SBA.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Agus Teja and Gung Alit, August 2011.

musics are always heard at shopping malls, hotels, restaurants, and spas in Kuta, Sanur, and Ubud—all the tourist destination areas of Bali. They often perform at the traditional and modern wedding receptions, communal village celebrations (the anniversary of the village and private ceremonies), yearly Arts and Music festival all around Bali (Ubud Festival, Kuta Carnival, Sanur Village Festival, and Bali Art Festival), international convention center (in Bali and Jakarta) and all other tourism related events. In this case, obviously, their associated context is not religious, but entertainment-based. The local demand and the global market are significant for the increasing popularity of fusion music in Bali.

In result, traditional gamelan groups started to have no place in the eyes of the commercial event organizers (CEO). Today, there are fewer gigs for them to perform at the hotels and/or other commercial events. Instead, GTWM and SBA are becoming the first choice of the commercial musical entertainments. This is because their musics are easy to be understood by tourists since some of its elements are already familiar for western audiences. Also, the combination with traditional instruments and musical elements enriches the selling points of it.

There are also practical reasons for this change of interest of the CEO to hire fusion pop music rather than traditional gamelan groups, (1) traditional gamelan group takes up a large space, (2) gamelan instruments are heavy and impractical to carry and set up, (3) traditional gamelan requires a large number of musicians, and (4) because of these first three reasons, the cost of hiring traditional gamelan is high because it covers a large number of musicians' fee, transportation (for the instruments and musicians), and food. All of These limitations provided a useful opportunity for GTWM and SBA to replace the gamelan ensemble for various celebrations within the Balinese community and commercial performances for the tourism industry.

## CONCLUSION

In this era of globalization, intercultural interaction between musicians from all over the world is inevitable. This worldwide interaction ultimately enriches contemporary music. As Blaukopf says, "acculturation doesn't necessarily mean the loss of cultural identity; there is also acculturation which leads to enrichment in music, independent of its economical significance (in Steingress 2002: 317)." The emergence of fusion pop music groups, like SBA and GTWM, is a response of the development

of human's culture. The commercialized forms of their musics are the effect of the rapid development of tourism industry in Bali. Their innovations and creative ideas are depending on their consumers' needs. The positive outcome of these creative ideas is that composers are looking for new styles and ways of playing, composing, and exploring that do not intersect with traditional ones.

Fusion pop music is moving in parallel with traditional music, rather than conceiving of musical revolutions, or breaks from tradition. In other words, a creative approach to composing fusion pop music does not obscure, let alone destroy, Balinese classical music (Sudirana, 2011: 18). The Balinese classical genre has already crystallized and will remain unchanged. The only changing element is tradition—it creates spaces of social and cultural relations for fusion pop music that is challenged by worldwide globalization. Therefore, as part of the tradition, fusion pop music will continue to develop, along with its stakeholders, to enrich the variety of Balinese musical styles.

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