

# Why Heavy Metal?: A Sound of Guitar Study in Dangdut

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**Abstract:** Rock-dangdut was first known and stretched by dangdut singer and guitar player named Rhoma Irama. He was carrying the dangdut idea and the nuances of electric guitar distortion in the 1970's and succeeded in changing dangdut from Malay dangdut to dangdut rock, also initiated by the arrival of bands and rock music in the "Orde Baru" era. He was motivated and sparked the idea of Dangdut Rock through his guitar concept and the distortion he used, namely Heavy Metal. This also made the dangdut rock identity which is judged by heavy metal guitar sound. This study will help us explore and examine the quality of dangdut guitar sound, which is up until now still has the same color and cannot be replaced with other sounds (guitar). The aesthetics of heavy metal sound colors that have been attached through decades from its appearance in the 1970's until now 2019, still provide a big mystery, and the sound provides a basic perspective of society in assessing dangdut rock music. This study uses literature references, newspaper sources, audio sources, videos and interviews that are mixed into descriptive explanations. It used descriptive qualitative method, with a musicology approach, music history, and cultural studies. The writer hoped that this research can provide an overview of the quality of guitar sound on dangdut music, and provide an exposure to the intentions of the heavy metal sound were used.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Music shows cannot be separated from various aspects related to how the presentation is designed. Present shows include elements such as kinetic, visual, theater and sound / music. The elements are presented based on the need for the purpose of the work presented. The formation of meanings will appear to be an artificial representation. Dangdut itself in the world of entertainment in Indonesia, has various kinds of artificial elements such as performance costumes, dance moves in its presentation, dramaturgy and the meaning of sounds and themes. The sound of the guitar itself is recognized as a strong representation, as a means by which people identify themselves and show this identity to others (Bennett & Dawe, 2001: 15). One of the representations is produced by guitar sound. Sound low, high or middle, can give a philosophical meaning in it, for example high notes as representations Emotion, feeling, god or something noble, and low is a representation of human, suffering, life, and the tangible. The topic built on the elements of the show is the guitar sound used in dangdut music. The sound of the guitar from the

1970s to 2019 is still the same and has not changed. Why is that?

Is that how hard Rhoma Irama's guitar sound is? Phenomenon found in the general public and music players especially electric guitars regarding the dangdut guitar sound and its play. The intonation dangdut guitar game is easy to write and follow again, but there is something missing, namely the taste of the game. The melody of the dangdut guitar is rarely found in fingerstyle or progression of fast melodies, but only responds to the guitar and flute or guitar and singer. Another difficulty comes from the difficulty of finding a decent guitar sound for dangdut. The sound of the guitar is often only found in quality similar to the idol (Rhoma Irama). There are also those who think that the sound is similar but still cannot be like the game Rhoma Irama. In fact, it was also found in the community of Forsa (Fans of Rhoma Irama and Sonata) that members in Forsa itself had many guitar players or dangdut music. The players who were members of Forsa claimed that they were intentionally and even drifting away with the procedure of carrying out the music Rhoma Irama, to the way the sound was produced. Weird enough? Is the guitar sound inherited culturally? Or did Rhoma Irama succeed in producing sound reproduction through the masses?

This problem was raised because of the assumption of dangdut guitar sound which is still a mystery among academics, players, and guitar activists. The guitar playing, taste and sound always refers to the wealth of Rhoma Irama's guitar playing. Why should so? The sound of the guitar used by Rhoma Irama according to the Forza community includes the distortion effect of Heavy Metal and Booster. The distortion effect itself is an "amplifier that was initially developed to take a weak signal and make it change without changing its character of the signal changes" (Ross, 1998: 39). Those two effects are often used by Bang Haji Rhoma. The problem is the sound guitar character that was delivered by Rhoma Irama until now has remained the same and has not changed. How could Rhoma not keep up with music technology? surely he knew and could have bought a more modern distortion effect. Then why is that? Did he keep the guitar sound as a character and the dangdut rock music identity that he stretched out?

The description is the basis of researchers in finding answers to issues that exist in phenomena in society, especially in Indonesia. To what extent can the mystery of the dangdut guitar sound be described in the music rules? what is the meaning of sound in the bandage to the culture in the community? And whether the frequency calculation is related to the selection of the sound?

### 1.1. Dangdut

Dangdut music is indeed known by its drumming game. Dangdut music itself is a name taken from the drumming game. Sounds like 'dang' and 'dut' originating from the drum are referred to as the names of one of the music in Indonesia (Lohanda, 1983: 139-140). The word dangdut has several assumptions in society and scientists, some say that dangdut (known in 1972, formerly known as the *Orkes Melayu*) as a sound representation (*onomatopoeia*) and some argue that the word is an insulting expression of the upper class towards the low class (Frederick, 1982: 105).

Dangdut music before the arrival of popular American music, still has the perception of cheap music. The music was very clear when dangdut was faced with fierce competition against rock music (in the 1970s). The competition was enlivened by debate, arguments, sarcastic, to arrive at a show, throwing stones and endangering dangdut players at that time (Najwa Interview with Rhoma in Mata Najwa's show on one of the private TV in Indonesia). Dangdut music can finally be released and reconciled with the public with the coming of the concept of the band Soneta with Rhoma Irama singing dangdut with the feel of rock music (Frederick, 1997: 263). Rhoma

Irama was not only resent as an amicator of the situation, but also brought a great revolution to dangdut music which was only underestimated at the time.

Until now dangdut is growing and expanding. The emergence of many dangdut singers such as Ayu Tingting, Gothic Sazkia, Cut Meimei, Siti Badriah, Via Vallen, Cita Citata, Danang, and others, gave space to the hearts of the people. Dangdut music with various versions appeared and was present in the Indonesian music industry, such as Ayu tingting with a dangdut style based on Kpop, Siti badriah with 'Centil' style, to Via Vallen which appeared with the style of dangdut music mixed with Reggae, Rap and Javanese (Permana, 2019 : 201).

The development of technology also accompanies dangdut music with the presence of dangdut disco in the 90s (Sitorus, 1994). The appearance of the disco-style dangdut was initiated by a karaoke club in Indonesia, and again the singers who sang the dangdut disco were dismissed as beginning to eliminate the original *cengkok* dangdut in Malay style (allowing dangdut disco singers to no longer be traditional dangdut singers) (Muttaqin, 2006). This situation continues until now. Dangdut music develops into dangdut pop that is in the style of American Pop balads, and Pop dangdut which is oriented towards crookedness (such as those present in the dangdut singers talent show on TV). Dangdut music is no longer said to be low class music, but all classes. Dangdut music with a variety of luxurious and elegant performance shows creates a dangdut image that used to be cheap to level up.

Based on several assumptions about the development of dangdut music from the Orkes Melayu to dangdut that came into contact with technology. Some of them are dangdut developing in line with technological progress; dangdut music develops according to the needs of the music industry in Indonesia; and dangdut music as a form of resistance.

## 2 METHODS

This study uses literature, audio, video, and interview sources. source of books on sound and dangdut, as well as various research results from experts in dangdut and sound topics. The source will be described in the form of a description. This research approach uses a musicalology, a history of development and cultural studies. This multi-approach is also used for approaches in cultural studies, including in the field of performing arts, so qualitative research is an interdisciplinary field, across disciplines, and sometimes even against

discipline (compare with Denzim & Lincoln, 1994; and Salim, 2001 : 9). These three approaches are used to get the desired results. The approach of musicology uses music theories such as the science of harmony, composition, sound balance, and is balanced by the historical approach to the development of dangdut music, as well as the approach to cultural studies to get results regarding the structure created by dangdut into society. Interpreting and understanding the new text requires background knowledge about the text that preceded it (Kristeva in Culler, 1981: 154). The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. The method was chosen based on the data source and the results to be achieved, namely in the form of explanation and description of the guitar sound in dangdut music and the meaning that the sound has.

In the study of culture, the form of culture is divided into two components including material culture and non-material culture (Sulasman & Gumilar, 2013: 47). Material culture is a visible form of culture, or the result of human creation that is tangible. Whereas nonmaterial is a form of culture that is invisible, can be in the form of a human mind. Appropriate approaches to research cultural artifacts can use critical theory, culture, and technology. These three views are used to see the extent to which music technology is developing and how the socio-cultural context is in the midst of that era. In the search for meaning about behavior, it is understood to be three things, including (1) the meaning of a sign, code or certain nonverbal text; (2) how to obtain this meaning; (3) why does he obtain that meaning (Danesi, 2010: 65)

### 3 A SOUND OF GUITAR STUDY IN DANGDUT

Guitar sound is basically built from the quality of the material. Guitar raw materials starting from the wood used will affect the sound results. In addition, those related to the results of the vote include pick-up, string thickness, and how to play. The guitar used by Rhoma Irama is a Steinberger type of guitar that has a humbucker pick-up, without headstock, and has a thick sound. A guitar with a humbucker character must have a thicker sound than a single coil guitar (like the Fender Stratocaster). This guitar with a humbucker character is often used by guitarists from metal, rock, underground, hard core, emo, and modern rock bands. The guitar player usually has a high level of skill in each game. Then maybe the Rhoma Irama also has the same high skills as progressive music.

Some things that distinguish single coil and humbucker. Guitars such as the Fender Stratocaster usually have basic characters such as open sound, tight bass sound with a bright treble, scale neck length: 25.5 inch, neck and body on the screw (imperfect unity will produce less resonance) and sustain. In contrast to guitars such as Gibson, Les Paul, Flying V, SG, and Steinberger, coil characters are bigger and bigger than Stratocaster fenders, the advantages of this type of guitar are that it has smooth sound, the balance frequency, short scale neck: 24.75 inch, construction of neck united with body, and very sustain (Sardo, 2011)

In the community both in the dangdut, Forsa, and general communities, there are often more dangdut guitar players who use guitars with humbucker characters, or double coil that has a thicker sound level. It becomes a big question when guitars with certain characters that develop in America and the genres of music they carry, are different from what happened in Indonesia, especially dangdut music. Instead, dangdut uses a guitar with a rock band image for each game. The guitar has a principle of good, clear sound, comfortable to hear, as Devine (2013: 166) says that loud and clear sounds are difficult for certain producers and audiences. Here are the guitars that have been used by Rhoma Irama.

The guitars that have been used by Rhoma Irama include:

- 1973 Fender Telecaster Deluxe
- Fender Stratocaster Vintage natural finish
- Rickenbacker
- White Fender Stratocaster
- Fender Stratocaster Anniversary '79
- Red Fender Stratocaster
- Steinberger GP-2S
- Steinberger GM-2T Trans Tram
- Steinberger GM-2T Trans Trem (white pickguard)
- Custom Hand Made ala Steinberger
- SR Guitar
- Steinberger Spirit GU Deluxe
- Steinberger GM-2S



Figure 1. Steinberger GM-2S type guitar

From the historical terms the dangdut was used in 1972 which was circulated on radio at that time, and the ability of the mass media to actualize the word was termed as the development of new forms of the Malay Orchestra (before the 1970s). In the era of bands such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Gianstep, to Godbless, Malay music almost lost its existence. Until Rhoma and his band Soneta came up with a distorted electric guitar concept and a form of music made in the style of rock music (Luaylik & Khusyairi, 2012: 35), they were finally able to lift the existence of dangdut music. The sound of the ‘gahar’ guitar brought by Rhoma was a form of resistance to rock music that developed at that time.

The development of a sound system amplifier so far is still often found Marshall JCM900 amps. Amps are often used in various music events in Indonesia. Unlike the construction of dangdut music, more often using the type of solid state amps, such as Jazz chorus. Chorus jazz amps are used by Rhoma in each stage. These amps are combined with the effects of heavy metal guitars, and Steinberger guitars used by Rhoma. The result resembles a Ritchie blackmore guitar sound model.

*“My principle is that music has to be able to shape the people. If we want them red, they’ll turn red. If we want them white, they’ll turn white. In order to do that, we need harmony between the lyrics, the feeling, and the performance so that our aims/goals will reach them. When they go home after one of our shows, they’ll think back to what we said. We need music that can entertain in order to motivate people and educate people. Drunks will stop drinking. Rude people will become pleasant. Non-believers will become believers. All form music”.* (pers.comm., 14 July 2005; Weintraub, 2010:88)

People who listen to dangdut are often known as small people; commoners; lower class; marginal people; fringe people; and the class goes down (Weintraub, 2010: 82). Therefore dangdut music is often also referred to as music from the people, for the people and the people themselves. This statement is a general description of dangdut construction. Dangdut is considered as the power of representation from the community. What was felt by the people, they wanted and dreamed of being present in the music and lyrics of dangdut. Lyrics that have the theme of romance, social criticism, gender, rich and poor, difficult economy, become representative of the sense of belonging to the community (Luaylik & Khusyairi, 2012: 28). The representation of taste is manifested by the composition of music and the sound it forms. Therefore guitar sound has its own color, which is different from other musical genres that must have meaning related to the social conditions of the community.

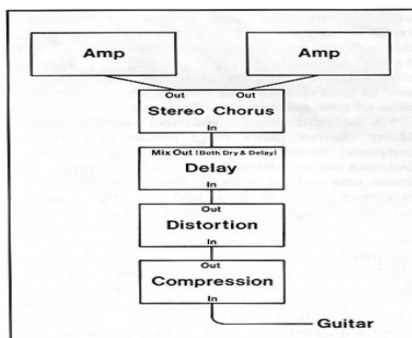


Figure 2. Setting the guitar (adapted from Ross, 1998: 58)

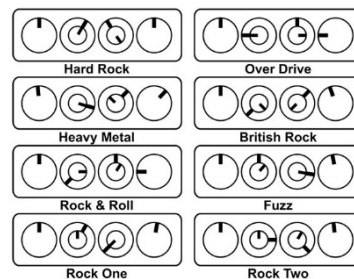




Figure 3. Setting effects and Roland jazz Chorus guitar amps that are often used by Rhoma. (google image source)

When looking at the picture above (figure 3) it can be seen from the Heavy Metal effect set consisting of four potentiometers, including the leftmost volume, the middle left Low frequency, the middle right High frequency, and the far right Distortion. Heavy metal effect construction is designed to be able to fill Low and High sounds. It feels very tube when entered in the solid state amp settings (as in figure 3). Note the interview with Rhoma, he was so fanatical about the Roland Jazz Chorus-120 amps and Boss HM-2 Heavy Metal Pedals. Here's the words of Rhoma about the sound and gear she uses:

*"I don't like to use effects like that. I used only the Heavy Metal effect for a long time and now there is no effect that has the same character. I do not find it. In the envelope, I also only use the chorus and a little reverb. And I don't intend to explore again."* (Noviana interview with Rhoma, August 14, 2017)

Sound guitars that are formed using Heavy Metal effects have contextual meanings. Metal music itself, is a music genre that comes from American Popular Music. The music began in the development of Blues music at first, which later developed into rock n roll and rock. Metal music has different characteristics from rock music. Rock music has strength in musical and hard accents, while metal music has tempo speed, greater distortion from rock music, darker nuances, sometimes lyrics that are out of love, and metal music has a segmented mass. Metal music can be a place for self-existence and also actualization. In Indonesia the development of metal music is more directed at the lower class, and the periphery, even teenagers often come in metal shows for expression. Not a few teenagers use the attributes of their proud metal band.

Rhoma is aware that rock music will emerge. Sophisticated tools and great sound cover the show. Rhoma was motivated to be more creative in combining Malay music with the Rock genre, Rhoma called it *'Musik Gila'* (crazy music), especially from

its influences namely deep purple, rolling stones and Led Zeppelin.

*"Our music at that time was melodious (soft). But hard rock was something foreign and noisy, and it could make people crazy. That was "crazy music".... At that time, our music was very polite. I was afraid our music orkes melayu would be overtaken. So, I changed everything. Before, our instruments were acoustic: guitar, drum, accordion. But I had to complete with rock"* (Rhoma Irama, pers.comm., 14 July 2005; in Weintraub, 2010:99)

This situation does not stop at the entry of the rock genre in dangdut. Rhoma also added that in the presentation the performance was in the form of a sound system device that was equivalent to Rock music performances. The Dangdut show uses a 6,000-watt sound system which is actually bigger than the sound system used by rock music at the time ("Dua raja", 1978: 41). Rhoma imitated the sound of Richie Blackmore, guitarist for the band Deep Purple: "if you look at my songs, you'll see the colors of Deep Purple. The color of my guitar playing is the color of Richie melodious hard rock sound" (pers.comm., 21 August 2006; in Weintraub, 2010: 99). Sound referred to by Rhoma is felt by musicians and guitarists in general interpreting it as shrill (*cempreng*) or kettles (*ceret*), which means that the sound of the guitar is sharp and uncomfortable in the ears, different from the pop music guitar that uses overdrive and is more "warm".

The "shrill (*cempreng*) / kettles (*ceret*)" sound can be seen based on the composition of the instruments used by Soneta including vocal, guitar, bass, drum, keyboard, flute, mandolin, saxophone and trumpet. If these instruments are categorized into frequency regions, they are divided into three regions, namely Low, High and Middle. High frequency instruments filled with flutes, trumpets, saxophone, mandolin; middle-high frequency instruments filled by guitars, vocals, keyboards; while low frequency instruments are filled by bass. The composition shows that the position of the guitar lies between the middle and high regions. The sound of the Heavy metal guitar tries to approach sound harmony with trumpet accompaniment, saxophone, mandolin and flute instruments. This also needs to pay attention to what Smith (2008, p. A1) calls 'ear fatigue'. A more consistent sequence of sounds resulting from compression can cause the ears to become uncomfortable (Devine, 2013: 164).

Assessing guitar sound based on a historical view of Heavy Metal. Heavy metal was called a rock critic Robert Duncan (1984: 36-37), as an unsophisticated, anti-intellectual, gloomy, bad, horrible and stupid music, like death music. A similar opinion was conveyed by Joe Stuessy, a music professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio, according to him heavy metal music is categorically different from previous popular music forms, and contains elements of hate (Testimony of Dr. Joe Stuessy, US Congress, Record Labeling (Senate Monitoring 99-529), 117). Both of these assumptions explain how hard the meaning and purpose of heavy metal is. If true, the concept of sound was made as a symbol of resistance, then the intended intentions of Rhoma and situational forces at that time, namely precisely the New Order era, with fierce competition in the music industry between pop, rock and Malay genres caused by the arrival of music popular from the West. Another symbol of the intent of Heavy Metal is possible as a representation of marginalized and opposition low-class people from the government. Dangdut music with heavy metal nuances becomes very honest music. A path to individual freedom and equality of social classes in society can accumulate through the soundness of heavy metal.

In the view of cultural sociology of heavy metal, it is clear that in general the sociology of culture can investigate the creation, appreciation and mediation of cultural forms, in this case heavy metal. Heavy metal will involve very many elements that will form meaning starting from the artist, audience and mediator itself (Weinstein, 2000: 4). Heavy metal is also recognized as something more than just a marketing category, besides having a distinctive voice, it also has a visual and verbal meaning that is attached to artists, viewers and mediators who build it (Green, 1988: 33). The sound is allegedly a mystery for musicians and guitarists (where they are very difficult to find sound that feels like dangdut, but this is not only because of pure sound, but can be from how the player feels), is a guitar sound already attached to the cultural order. The sound is inherited indirectly through the community and the artists themselves, in dangdut shows everywhere.

The uncomfortable sound is continuously used in the performance of the show. Is the sound of political value? Or intentionally and used as a means of expressing the people? Dangdut itself has never escaped its involvement with politics. This happened the first time in 1977 and 1982 when Rhoma Irama entered to support the PPP party (United Development Party) (Tempo, 9 April 1977). Dangdut is present not only to look at the quality of the music,

but because dangdut is able to attract and take people's hearts, because dangdut is felt to represent the heart and feelings of the lower class, who live under pressure (Frederick & Kesumah, 1995: 27). In 2018, dangdut also had a political role, the emergence of Java, Reggae and Rap dangdut which was brought by Via Vallen, was also interpreted as a way for musicians to criticize politics. The end of the year was dangdut to be a treat that was not separated from television shows, even the anniversary events of an online company, the birthday of a television station. Until entering at the beginning of 2019 dangdut was still in its political reunion, and did not forget that Rhoma was also promoted to become a presidential candidate.

Does dangdut try to create an alienation of its own people? Is the truth covered with fine music? Lukacs (in Adian, 2011: 26) once said in his theory about partial awareness. Awareness which has two separate views between the bourgeois view and the working class view. Both parties have different intentions, where the bourgeoisie continues to make various interests in maintaining its power (reproductive domination), on the other hand the working class continues to seek justification based on its social totality (Eggleton, 1991, in Adian, 2011: 30). Sound is produced in heavy metal bandages which have a negative tendency, but at the same time as a symbol of the people, in expressing their existence and expression to the reality of life touched by their political, economic and social circumstances.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above explanation the results obtained in the review of guitar sound in dangdut music and its relation to the color of metal music on the guitar sound. So the description of the dangdut guitar sound was originally possessed and produced by Rhoma Irama in the 1970s, amid the heat of popular American music rock genre in Indonesia, after the Soeharto (New Order) leadership in 1966-1967. The entry of the music genre created dangdut colors in rock style with electric guitars at Soneta band stretchers. Rock music that is present in the dangdut music is produced by Rhoma Irama's guitar sound with Steinberger guitar instruments and combined with the distortion effect of Heavy Metal and Booster. Sound Guitar produced from the concept was not only played by Rhoma but also continued by other dangdut guitar players. The direction of musical style and the sound character of the guitar are followed up into the Forsa community (Fans of

Rhoma and Soneta). In the study in the field, it was found that they performed like the idol.

The meaning of heavy metal in Rhoma stretches can be judged from the history, technology and interpretation of the meaning of metal. Judging from its history, the metal color was not intentionally formed by Rhoma, but he did emulate the style of playing Ritchie Blackmore guitarist from Deep Purple as his reference. The style was followed until it entered into several musical works. When viewed from the development of the technology of distortion effects, the first distortion produced was Fuzz and was introduced and used by the Rolling Stones and Jimmy Hendrix bands. The popularity of Rock n Roll music is enlivened by sound distortion. Likewise, the one used by Rhoma in the 70s was an effect that led to Heavy Metal (HM2-BOSS). The color of the sound known as "kettles" (*ceret*) by some opinions of the general guitarist (outside dangdut) is a type of sound that is uncomfortable to hear. Even for dangdut music players, if the guitar sound does not lead to the style and character of Rhoma's guitar sound in dangdut music, it is felt that the music is unattractive and nice to play. Unlike modern music that is more 'warm' using the overdrive effect.

Metal is one of the musical genres resulting from the development of rock n roll music in America. Metal music is very segmented, because it is considered destructive and noisy music. Metal music in Indonesia has not only noise, but the music has a deeper market than other music. Music such as metal, Underground, Grindcore, Hardcore is music whose market segmentation affects the low class, and people who have a background of lack of self-existence and the search for self-identity (formerly), many metal music enthusiasts are thirsty teenagers. self existence and its spread is very large. Metal music describes the marginal class in its sociality. When connected with the color of the guitar sound on dangdut, the metal nuances of the dangdut guitar sound give meaning to the efforts of marginalized people's aspirations and part of social criticism of the government. Therefore, perhaps the sound is a communication medium represented by Rhoma Sound guitar and presented in social themes, criticism, romance, the rich and poor, gender, oppressed, sadness, and difficult in life.

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