

# **BIOGRAPHY STUDY OF IDEAS OF SULTAN SULAIMAN (HEAD OF SERDANG SULTANATE V, 1880-1946) FOR ARTS (MUSIC) DEVELOPMENT IN SERDANG SULTANATE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This work presents an academic study of the musical biography of Sultan Sulaiman, the fifth head of Serdang Sultanate, North Sumatera, Indonesia, in period 1880-1946. The discussion will lead to discussing the impact of his musical thinking and activity for the arts (especially on music) atmosphere in the Sultanate. It will be concern on anything he did for music development in Serdang Sultanate during his commander and the impact after his period. In addition, this study will be presents in brief the correlation between Sultan's music activity and the political situation at that time. The method used in this research is the qualitative method with biography approach. The data and information will be obtained in two ways, primary and secondary. The data and information which include in primary method will come from interview which use the in-depth interview approach. While the secondary method involves data collection via secondary sources which will come from books, journals, articles, conference papers, published dissertations, audio or video recording, diary book, music hand-sheet and other sources which support the research topic. This study find that Sultan Sulaiman is the root of arts development in the Serdang Sultanate. This is evidenced by the many art activities he conserve and develop such as Nobat Diraja, Mak Yong, Brass Band, and Serampang Dua Belas dance. The activities he did on the past give many impact for art development in Serdang in nowadays. It also stated that the art's idea of Sultan Sulaiman is a part of political strategy.*

**KEYWORDS:** Musical Biography; Sultan Sulaiman; Serdang Sultanate

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Before become a country named Indonesia in 1945, North Sumatra province known as East Sumatra (some literatures said Northeast Sumatra). It was, as well as other region in Indonesia, a state which life with traditional rules. Reid (1979) states that, “*Under the colonial umbrella the people of northern Sumatra, like those of neighbouring Malaysia, retained an extravagant array of traditional rulers-sultans, rajas, datuks, and uleebalangs*”.

As long as region of East Coast Sumatra dominated by Melayu people. This Malaynese build the Malay Kingdom which consisted of *Deli, Serdang, Asahan, Langkat, Kualah, Bilah, Panai, Pinang, Indrapura, Tanah Datar, Pesisir, Lima Puluh, Suku Dua, Pelalawan, Bedagai, Padang, and Rokan, Tambusai, Kepenuhan Rambah, Kuntur Dar Es Salam and Senggigi, and Lima Urung Deli, Sinembah, Sunggal, Pertjoeut, and Hamparan Perak* (Ommar, 1999; Suprayitno, 2001)

Serdang – the topic area of this research - is one of the Malay Sultanate in the East Sumatera. Starting from 1717 until 2019 Serdang Sultanate is now 302 years old. Throughout this period Serdang sultanate has been led by 8 leaders. The name and command period of Sultan of Serdang, regarding to Basarshah (2002), are respectively *Tuanku Umar Kejeruan Junjungan (1717-1767), Tuanku Sultan Ainan Johan Alamshah (1767-1817), Tuanku Thaf Sinar Basarsyah (1817-1850), Tuanku Sultan Basyaruddin Syaiful Alamsyah (1850-1880), Tuanku Sultan Sulaiman Syariful Alamsyah (1880-1946), Tengku Rajih Anwar (1946-1960), Tuanku Abunawar Sinar (1997-2001), Tuanku Luckman Sinar Basarsyah (2002-2012), Tuanku Achmad Tala'a Shariful Alam Shah (2012-now)*

## **SULTAN SULAIMAN AND PERIOD OF COMMANDER**

Sultan Sulaiman is the fifth generation of the Sultan from the beginning of Serdang Sultanate. He was born in 1866 in Serdang palace, Rantau Panjang, Sumatera, as the one and only child of Sultan Basyaruddin and Enzik Rata (a woman who came from Pantai Cermin). After his father died, in accordance with the tradition rule, Sultan Sulaiman was crowned by *Wazir Berempat* became the Sultan of Serdang V in 1880, succeeded Sultan Basyaruddin. At that time Sultan Sulaiman was still very young who was 14 years old (Sinar, 2016).

Sultan Sulaiman married a woman named Tengku Darwisyah on March 21, 1891. His wife is a descendant of Baharuddin, the King of Pagaruyung. This marriage did not give a child, then Sultan Sulaiman married for the second with Enzik Kurnia Purba. Not take a long time, the Sultan married with Enzik Raya Purba and *Tuanku Hajjah Zahara* respectively as the third and fourth wives (Nasution, 2004).

Sultan Sulaiman served in the period 1885-1946. This is a dramatic reign, because Serdang Sultanate faced to three different situation. Firstly under the Dutch colony, secondly under the Japanese colony, and thirdly transitions time to merged into the Republic of Indonesia as well as the tragic situation of the social revolution whereas all of Malay sultanate of East

Sumatra was annihilated. However, Sultan Sulaiman take a longest time commander period under the Dutch power which was sixty-two years from 1880 until 1942.



TUANKU SULAIMAN SYARIFUL ALAMSHAH (1895)

***Sultan Sulaiman Syariful Alamshah (1895)***

(Source : Family Collection of Serdang Sultanate Institute)

Relation between Sultan Sulaiman and arts (especially music) in Serdang is a something 'unique'. Specially, Sultan Sulaiman himself is a great violinist and composer in the same time. Then, it hypotise that Sultan Sulaiman is the root of art development in Serdang Sultanate. This phenomenon of Sultan Sulaiman make a sense to writer to take it as a research topic. This research presents an academic study of the musical biography of Sultan Sulaiman. The focus of the research is to identify the impact of Sultan Sulaiman's idea for music (art) development in Serdang Sultanate.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

This part present the previous research related to this study include the point of view of some experts. Indeed, study about musical biography of a leader is very limited. However, many studies discussed about biography and musical biography which help researcher in this study.

***Biography***

Study about biography is like a story about somebody or group's life. This type of study leads researcher to find something new and important from the subject which never know before to tell to the reader.

Biographical research has both *general* and *specific* purposes. The *general* purpose is to provide greater insight than hitherto into the nature and meaning of individual lives or groups of lives. The *specific* purpose of the research will be the analysis of a particular life or lives for some designated reason—for example in examining the world of work of teachers, nurses, prostitutes, librarians, actors, etc (Erben, 2005).

Biography professes to bring the reader into intimate personal association with each of its characters, to draw aside the veil that conceals from the world their domestic life, and to exhibit all their actions, great and small, without reservation, without exaggeration. But while the biographer, by combining the details of public and private life, attempts a faithful delineation of individual character, he intends to afford the reader something more than a source of mere pleasure. Portraits of distinguished men are eloquent in their teachings to posterity (Renders, & Haan, 2014).

Noer (2015) made an autobiography novel about Mr. Habibie's, fifth president of Indonesia, story life and find the result that the brilliance of Mr. Habibie is come from the big interested in book during his childhood. This behaviour form his young adult character when well-known as a genius student who create an airplane in the future.

Cavally (2000) did a biography study for presidential case in the United States in the year 2000 and found that research on the variation in presidential (biography) approval ratings can help explain presidential behavior. We can explain the presidency using the basic framework developed by Richard Fenno in 1973 which suggests that behavior is a function of goals and constraints.

These two examples of study show how the biography study work. It comes into personal or group's live, even into very intimate thing. It is covered story about life as well as the idea of research subject.

### ***Musical biography***

Musical biography help to know the composer and his composition intimately. No man can comprehend everything to be understood about Kochel 543, the great E-flat Symphony, if he

knows only how to parse its musical sentences, chart its formal design, and read its signposts of pitch, speed, volume, phrasing, and instrumentation. To become intimate with its inmost nature, even merely to be introduced to that nature, he must also know under what circumstances, at what stage in its creator's development, and in what sort of emotional weather it was composed (Weinstock, 1966).

Childhood is the one of important period to analysis when doing a biography research. When examining Mozart's biography, Wiley (2008) found that Mozart had a big talent start from his childhood, his endeavours to write a clavier concerto at the age of four, the speed with which he learnt new keyboard pieces, his ability to detect and remember discrepancies of violin tuning as subtle as an eighth of a tone, which are a form of consistency for his adult character.

Some researchs provide evident that environment and political situation where the composers life give effects to them when writing music. Chopin present the unique Poland character on his music as a Nationalism for his mother country. He introduce the unique style of his native Poland music to the world. However, it was also found that his music influenced by the music that he heard in the aristocratic salons while living in Paris (McKay, 1999).

In similiar case, Ching (2012) when doing a musical biography of P Ramlee found that P. Ramlee's music got influences from British music as consequence of colonialism in Malaysia at that time. His music is a fusion of Western music, looking from the instrument such as the violin, saxophone, accordion, trumpet, double bass, conga, and bongo, with Malaysian tradisional music observed in *ronggeng* or *joget*, *keroncong*, and *asli* songs.

Study for biography of composers possible to do in many side. Allman (2004) in his work of Mozart's biography is common to discuss about subject from all sides including his childhood, young life, musical work, and musical idea. While researcher like Autexier (1992) was feel better to focus on musical work only when doing study in musical biography of Beethoven.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

A qualitative research method choosed by researcher in a reason more representative for this descriptive (documentative) research. Qualitative research applies in more narrative form than number. It use for researcher who want to discuss about social phenomenon in descriptive way. The social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and

situations, as well as the meaning people embed into texts and other objects, are the focus of qualitative research (Hesse, & Leavy, 2011). Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretative. This means that the researcher makes an interpretation of the data. (Creswell, 2003)

The data and information will be obtained in two ways, primary and secondary. Primary method refer to all of information that obtained by researcher's first-hand. In the meaning, the data is original, objective, and contain new thing that has yet published before. In this research, the data and information which include in primary method will come from interview which use the in-depth interview approach.

Interview doing by direct communication with interviewee for a deep information. The qualitative researcher often goes to the site (home,office) of the participant to conduct the research. This enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants. (Creswell, 2003). However, the in-depth interview is more suitable because researcher want a more focused interview with him to know about Sultan Sulaiman regarding to his history knowledge or perspective. The interviewees are consists of two from Sultan Sulaiman's offsprings, they are Tengku Mira Rozanna Sinar and Tengku Ryo Riezqan.

Video-audio recording is needed in order to record the information of data collection during the interview process. The researcher conducted video recordings from the interviews. By this method, the data collection from the interviewees that have been recorded can be repeatedly for many times. It will be helpful in order to recall the information obtained during the interviews for make sure no data will be missing and get more accurate data.

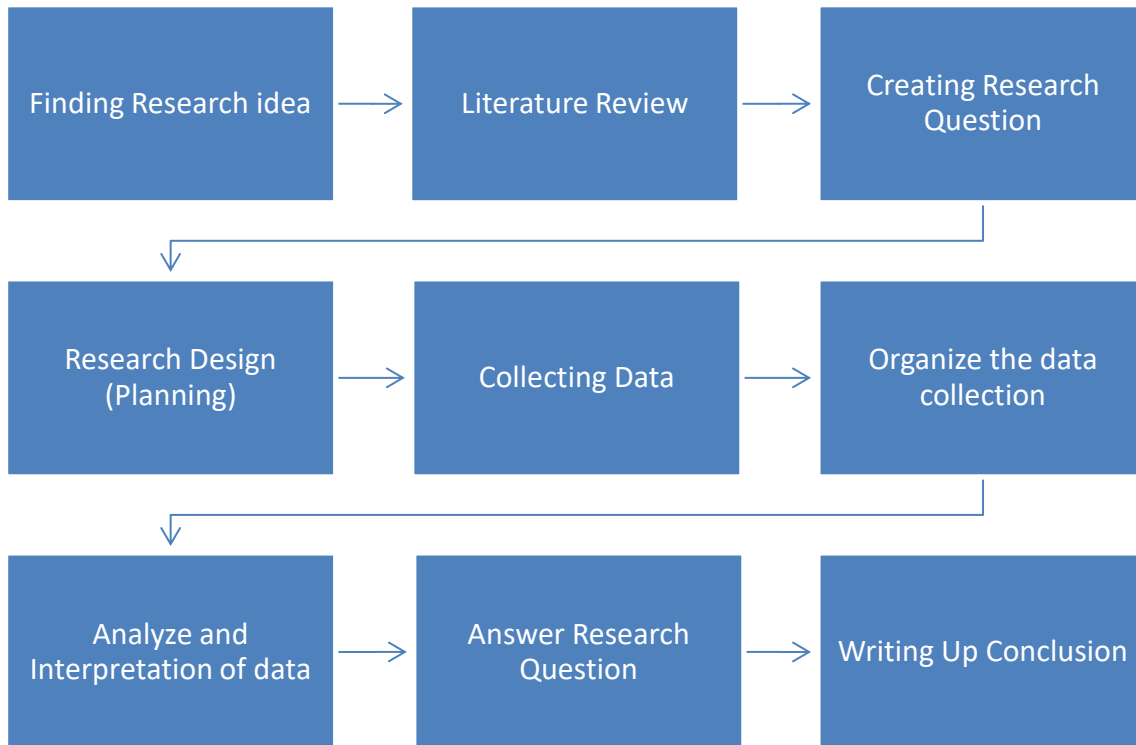
The secondary method involves data collection via secondary sources. For this research, the data from secondary will come from books, journals, articles, conference papers, published dissertations, audio or video recording, diary book, music hand-sheet and other sources which support the research topic. Additionally, the Internet is accessible to obtain information that may not be available in other sources. This will allow the researcher to ascertain that there is enough evidence and data to make the primary method of qualitative research worthwhile.

The researcher then make an analysis for the data collected. Content analysis is needed to do a critical thinking, interpretation, and analysis to noninteractive data. Related to this study, the researcher analysed and compiled information from books and literatures about Sultan

Sulaiman. Analysis is helpful for researcher to make an interpretation for musical influence of Sultan Sulaiman and also his idea in music.

### 3.1 Research Process

The process of this research step by step showed by diagram below :



***Research Process in Diagram***

## DISCUSSION

Sultan Sulaiman is remembered as a king with a big concern to art. He is known as a personal leader who is firm and innovative. By the sultanate's family, it is recognized that the peak of Serdang's art glory was happened in the reign of Sultan Sulaiman. The big attention of Sultan Sulaiman's to music and art in Serdang region is evidenced by many art activities at the Sultanate. In detail, the ideas of Sultan Sulaiman for music and art development in Serdang are explain as follow :

### 1. *Nobat Diraja*

In every Malay Kingdom, an ensemble of traditional musical instruments called *Nobat Diraja* is a Kingdom ritual, not excepted in the Serdang sultanate. *Nobat Diraja* is a music ensemble

used to ritual of the new King's crown. *Nobat* is the relic of Kingdom. The king is not legally appointed without this ritual music.

In Serdang, the tradition of *Nobat Diraja* music is used since the beginning era of Sultanate. There is no reference how this musical instrument could present in Serdang. The songs used for *Nobat* Sultan (Basarshah, 2012) are:

1. The song "*Iskandar Syah Zulkarnain*", is played when procession of the king to Balairung Sri to be crown.
2. The song "*Ibrahim Khalilullah*", is played when the King was crowned and the ritual of "*Menjunjung Duli*".
3. The song "*Palu-Palu*", is played when the ritual of "*Tepung Tawar*".
4. The song "*Sri Istana*" is played when the King wear the Kingdom greatness clothes.

As the tradition of Sultanate time by time, *Nobat* in Serdang is well maintained by Sultan Sulaiman. However, this Serdang's *Nobat* was last time used at the crowning Sultan Sulaiman as the Sultan of Serdang V. After Sultan Sulaiman died, Serdang was no longer present as a Sultanate, the Palace was destroyed, and the Sultanate changed its function as a Cultural Institution (*Lembaga Adat*). So then, the ritual *Nobat* is not play anymore.



***Serunai : Wind Instrument of Serdang's Nobat Diraja***  
(Source : Family Collection of Serdang Sultanate)





## ***Gendang Gedombak Induk dan Anak: Percussions of Serdang's Nobat Diraja***

(Source : Family Collection of Serdang Sultanate)

### **2. Opera Theatre and Boria**

In his reign, Sultan Sulaiman formed *Bangsawan* (opera theater) named Sri Indera Ratu. This theater group reached the peak of their success in the early 20th century. They often held shows to region outside Serdang in Sumatra, Malaya, and Java as well, perform stories about *Melayu*'s culture, heroism, and loyalty for kings and homeland.

There is no written reference explaining when and how this theater group is present in Serdang for the first time, but it's just that there are some notes explaining its existence. Yassin (1968) noted, In 1913, during the reign of Sultan Sulaiman in the Serdang Sultanate, there was a group of theater named *Indian Ratu* or *Indera Ratu* where some of the players and musicians are the foreigner (Goa, Indo Europe, Philippines and others) who live in Serdang. The golden age of this theater between 1920-1935. They held shows to Sumatra, Malaya and Kalimantan.

Once a year the group returned to Perbaungan after their tour to getting rest and repairing the equipment. When they arrived at the train station in Perbaungan, they marched in a variety of beautiful clothes accompanied by music and sang along the courtyard of the Serdang palace to face the Sultan.

This music is called *Boria*. They played for next several nights in the courtyard outside the palace, also played in several places around Serdang to entertain the people for free (Basarshah, 2012).

### **3. Brass Band**

The biggest idea of Sultan Sulaiman for art development in Serdang is forming a Western Brass Band in the 1930's named *Serdang Brass Band*. A music ensemble which not common played by Sultanates in *Nusantara* at that time. The instrument consists of Horn, Contrabass, Oboe, violin, drums, harmonium, piano, drum, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, and trombone.

This contemporary band is initiated and fully funded by Sultan Sulaiman. The leader was Tengku Moenzir, a Serdang music expert, clarinetist and saxophonist. They practice in the

music room in the Palace. Generally they play mars and western classic songs. But for several times they also collaborated with Melayu, Indian and Arabic music (T.M.Sinar, personal communication, July 17, 2018).

The player of the Brass Band are consists of Serdang's young man. They come from various social and cultural backgrounds, from aristocratic to ordinary people (Sinar, 2016). This shows that the Brass Band is not only presented for the Palace, but also for the Serdang's people entirely.



*The personil of Serdang's Brass Band*

(Source : Family Collection of Serdang Sultanate Institute)

Serdang Brass Band became the official band of the Sultanate. They often perform in official royal ceremonies. In 1931, during the golden jubilee celebration of Sultan Sulaiman Shariful Alamshah's government, the Brass Band amazed thousands of Serdang people who crowded in Perbaungan field. The main song that was sung is "Jubileum Sultan" created for Sultan Sulaiman. The band is also invited to the palace to entertain the Sultan and Sultanate's employees.



***Serdang's Brass Band perform at Jubilee celebration***  
(Source : Private Collection of Serdang Sultanate Institute)

This Brass Band became phenomenal when playing the song *Senam Serdang*, the national gymnastic song of Serdang Sultanate created by Sultan Sulaiman. This Royal national gymnastics is often done every day in the morning by students in Serdang. It was also played in every official Sultanate events. As the effect, this song becomes popular to the people, especially students, in Serdang (T.Syahruwadi, personal communication, February 24, 2012).



***Serdang's Brass Band***  
(Source : Private Collection of Serdang Sultanate Institute)

The existence of the Serdang Brass Band is important for the music history of Indonesian. At that time, when the other Sulatanate guarded the traditional arts with a conservative attitude, Sultan Sulaiman is one step ahead.

Aside as an entertainment, the Brass Band was also formed to show the authority and prestige of Serdang. This is how the Sultan proved that Serdang people are also capable of playing European musical instruments. By this, he want to show powerity of Serdang front the Dutch. This is the part of anti-dutch attitude from Serdang, as I wrote in chapter I (Reid, 2017 & Basharsah, 2003).

**4. *Mak Yong***

*Mak Yong*, a *Melayu* theatrical art with a mystical element, the stories relate to life around the Royal and Sultanate. The characters in *Mak Yong* roles as kings, empresses, crown princes, royal daughters, warriors and maids. *Mak Yong* developed in the North Peninsula region including the countries of Kedah, Perlis and Pattani.

There are two versions about how Serdang got the *Mak Yong*. T.M.Sinar (personal communication, July 3, 2018) tells that Serdang got *Mak Yong* from Kedah Sultanate as a gift when visiting Kedah (Malaysia) in the late 19th century. Regent Kedah, Tengku Mahmud, looked a deep interesting of Sultan Sulaiman when watching the show. Therefore, a set of *Mak Yong* theater equipment along with the artists was presented to Serdang.

However, Yousof (1992) said that *Mak Yong* was bring of by Kedah-Perlis groups in their short duration travelling in the north Sumatran kingdoms of Serdang and Deli. Both, Sinar and Yousof clearly stated that this happened in the 19th century during the reign of Sultan Sulaiman (1888-1946).

By Sultan Sulaiman, this theatrical arts was developed in the Serdang Sultanate. *Mak Yong* became an interesting entertainment for the Serdang's people. The performance consist of theater, music, and sometimes dance. This group is often showed in the celebrate days of the Sultanate. Showed in the field as an entertainment for the people of Serdang.

Added by Yousof (1992), the performances took place in the grounds of Perbaungan palace in a stage specially built for *Mak Yong* made of wood, attap and bamboo. They also invited to performed at Istana Maimun, the residence of the Sultan of Deli, for sometime.

Sultan Sulaiman also instruct his children to study *Mak Yong* from Kedah's artists. "*Tengku Luckman Sinar, my father, suggest by his father to learn Mak Yong. Then after Sultan Sulaiman die, he revitalize this art tradition with Sinar Budaya group*" (T.M.Sinar, personal communication, July 3, 2018).



***Music Instrument of Makyong Serdang***  
(Source : Personal Collection of Ifwanul Hakim)

**5. *Serampang Dua Belas Dance***

In the 1930s, Waltz's, European floor dance became hits among young Dutch people. T.R.Rizqan (personal communication, August 11, 2018) stated, “*Seeing this phenomenon, the Sultan wanted to create a Malay dance for Malay young people. Sultan wants Serdang and its people to be confident with local culture, not dominated by foreign culture*”.

Sultan Sulaiman asked Sauti (an inslandschool teacher of the Serdang) to create a *Melayu* creation dance for young people in Serdang. Then, Sauti create several dances namely *Lenggang Patah Sembilan, Lenggok Mak Inang, Lagu Dua, Campak Bunga, Melenggok, Pelipur Lara, Sapu Tangan, and Pulau Sari*. *Pulau Sari* dance originally consists of 13 varieties. Some movement taken from *Melenggok* and *Lagu Dua* dance. These 13 varieties perfected by Sultan Sulaiman became 12 varieties and called *Serampang Dua Belas* (Basarshah, 2003).

In the beginning, the dance only showed in the palace. Then firstly shown to the public at the Muziek en toneel Vereniging Andalas on 9 April 1938 at the Grand Hotel Medan. After Indonesia was formed, President Sukarno often invited Sauti to dancing at the President Palace in Jakarta. Even, the wife of the President, Mrs. Fatmawati and Mrs. Rahmi Hatta studied guided directly by Sauti. Sauti also held a dance workshop in many event. As the result, *Serampang Dua Belas* dance from Serdang is well known in Asia.

All of this long description shows how Sultan Sulaiman gave a big effect for music and art life in Serdang Sultanate. This is for answering my research question about Sultan Sulaiman's contribution for art development in Serdang under his commander.

**SUMMARY OF RESEARCH**

This research concludes that Sultan Sulaiman is the root of arts development in the Serdang Sultanate. This is evidenced by the many art activities he did during his reign, which are from preserving existing musical traditions such as *Nobat Diraja*, as well as developing new traditions such as *Mak Yong*, Brass Band, and *Serampang Dua Belas* dance. The activities he

did on the past give many impact for art development in Serdang in nowadays. *Mak Yong* and *Serampang Dua Belas* still resistant and exist in Serdang until now.

Based on interpretation of the data, the spirit of Sultan Sulaiman to arouse art in the Serdang Sultanate is not only do for entertainment purpose, but also part of the strategy of politic in cultural side. His observation for the European arrived at the conclusion that music is not just an artistic beauty for them, but also functions as a stimulus for intelligence and behavior. Music gives effects for human brain and attitude. Therefore, Sultan Sulaiman wants to create a strong atmosphere of art in the environment of the Sultanate to form the character of the people, people to be good in intelligent, creativity, and attitude.

Music is also a symbol of the honor of a nation. So that, for Sultan Sulaiman music and art also function as Political tool. Music and art became media of Sultan's against the Dutch. Like the Brass Band with *Senam Serdang* songs and movements that were deliberately created to resist the Dutch marching band tradition. Then Serampang XII Dance was created to compensate for the tradition of Waltz floor dance from Europe, which at that time was loved by young Dutch people. The Sultan wants Serdang and its people to be independent with local culture and not dominated by foreign.

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