

# From Rehearsal to Performance: Generating Knowledge through Practice in Malay Art Song

Khairunnisa Diyana Md Noor

Universiti Teknologi MARA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800155>

Received: 14 August 2026; Accepted: 19 August 2026; Published: 29 August 2026

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how knowledge is generated through rehearsal and performance in Malay Art Song, focusing on the performer's embodied, interpretive, and culturally situated experiences. The study investigates rehearsal and performance as interconnected sites of inquiry rather than merely preparation and presentation. A qualitative practice-based approach was adopted, involving four Malay Art Song recitals in which the researcher served as the principal singer, supported by reflective documentation, score and textual analysis, performance recordings, and semi-structured interviews with experienced composers, singers, and pianists. The findings demonstrate that knowledge developed progressively through the interaction of musical scores, poetry, the singing body, rehearsal, performance, and reflection. Three interconnected forms of knowledge were identified: embodied knowledge, developed through experimentation with vocal production and physical sensation; interpretive knowledge, developed through transforming musical and poetic materials into expressive performance; and cultural knowledge, developed through engagement with Malay language, poetry, musical characteristics, and culturally situated meanings. The study further demonstrates that these forms of knowledge contribute to the continual development of artistic identity through the negotiation of existing musical training, cultural heritage, innovation, storytelling, and emotional expression. The study argues that the performer functions not merely as an interpreter of the score but as a knowledge producer whose practice contributes to the ongoing understanding and development of Malay Art Song. The findings highlight the value of practice-based research for investigating musical knowledge that emerges through doing, reflecting, and performing.

**Keywords:** Malay Art Song, Practice-based Research, Artistic Identity

## INTRODUCTION

Malay Art Song occupies a distinctive position within Malaysia's vocal repertoire, bringing together Malay poetry, composed music, vocal interpretation, and elements of Western art-song practice and local musical traditions. The repertoire provides composers with opportunities to engage with Malay literary and cultural materials, while performers negotiate musical, textual, technical, emotional, and cultural dimensions in bringing these works to performance. Consequently, Malay Art Song can be understood not only as a body of musical repertoire but also as a space in which artistic meaning and identity are constructed through performance.

The performer's role is particularly important in this process. Although a musical score provides essential information concerning melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, structure, and articulation, performance requires interpretive decisions that cannot always be fully determined through notation. The singer must engage with poetic meaning, vocal colour, phrasing, articulation, breath, emotional expression, and culturally situated musical characteristics. These decisions develop through repeated engagement with the repertoire and through interaction with the pianist and the performance environment.

This creates an important methodological consideration. Score analysis and textual analysis provide valuable knowledge about musical structure and poetic meaning, but they cannot fully capture the knowledge that emerges through the embodied experience of performing. A performer may understand a particular musical characteristic analytically but develop a different and deeper understanding when attempting to embody that characteristic through the voice. In this sense, rehearsal and performance provide opportunities for

experimentation, discovery, evaluation, and reinterpretation.

This perspective is consistent with Practice-as-Research, which recognises artistic practice as a means through which knowledge can be investigated and generated. Penny (2014) argues that practice-led research in music performance can reveal knowledge emerging from within artistic practice when the process is documented, contextualised, analysed, and critically reflected upon. Nelson (2013) similarly positions practice as a form of inquiry in which knowledge emerges through the relationship between doing, thinking, and reflecting.

The issue addressed in this paper is therefore not a lack of existing knowledge about Malay Art Song, but the need to better understand how knowledge is generated through the performer's engagement with the repertoire. In particular, the movement from rehearsal to performance provides an opportunity to investigate how technical, musical, interpretive, emotional, and cultural knowledge develops through practice.

It argues that rehearsal and performance are not merely preparatory and presentational stages but interconnected sites of inquiry through which embodied, interpretive, and culturally situated knowledge is generated. This process also contributes to the development of the performer's artistic identity.

## PRACTICE AS RESEARCH IN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

Practice-as-Research provides the conceptual foundation for understanding performance as a form of inquiry. Rather than separating research from artistic activity, practice-based approaches recognise that knowledge can emerge through the processes of creating, rehearsing, performing, experimenting, and reflecting (Nelson, 2013; Smith & Dean, 2009).

This perspective is particularly relevant to musical performance because some forms of knowledge are embodied in action. Dahl (2017), for example, discusses performerly knowledge as practical knowledge developed through ongoing engagement with musical activity. Such knowledge is not necessarily fully captured through verbal explanation or written notation because it develops through the interaction between the performer, the musical material, and the physical act of performing.

In the present study, the performer therefore occupies a dual role as artist and researcher. The researcher does not simply apply existing knowledge to the repertoire but investigates the possibilities of the repertoire through practice. The score and poetic text provide the starting point, while rehearsal becomes the space in which interpretive possibilities are tested.

Schön's (1983) concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are particularly useful in understanding this process. Reflection-in-action occurs when the performer responds to a problem while engaged in practice. For example, a singer may recognise that a particular vocal colour does not adequately communicate the intended emotional meaning and consequently modify the approach during rehearsal. Reflection-on-action occurs when the performer subsequently considers the experience and evaluates what has been learned.

The process can therefore be represented simply as:

**Score and poetry → Rehearsal → Experimentation → Performance → Reflection → Revised interpretation**

This process is iterative rather than linear. A discovery during rehearsal may influence performance; a performance experience may generate new questions; and reflection may lead to further experimentation.

Within Malay Art Song, this process is particularly significant because the performer negotiates between Western classical vocal knowledge and musical and cultural characteristics associated with Malay poetry and musical traditions. The performer therefore does not simply reproduce a musical score but actively interprets and negotiates its musical and cultural meanings.

The performer becomes a knowledge producer, while practice becomes the means through which that knowledge is generated.

## RESEARCH THROUGH MUSICAL PRACTICE

The study adopted a qualitative, practice-based approach. The artistic practice consisted of four Malay Art Song recitals, in which the researcher was the principal singer working with a pianist. These recitals constituted the central practice through which the researcher's experiences of rehearsal, performance, interpretation, and reflection were investigated.

The practice was supported by several sources of evidence from the doctoral research, including reflective documentation, score and textual analysis, performance recordings, and semi-structured interviews with experienced composers, singers, and pianists. These sources were not treated as separate forms of research operating independently from performance. Instead, they provided different perspectives through which the practice could be examined.

The process began with examination of the musical score and poetic text. Musical features such as form, melody, harmony, rhythm, vocal range, modality, and expressive markings were considered alongside the meaning and imagery of the poetry. This provided an initial interpretation of each work.

The interpretation was then tested through rehearsal. During rehearsal, the researcher experimented with vocal production, breath, phrasing, articulation, vocal colour, dynamics, rhythmic delivery, pronunciation, and emotional expression. The effectiveness of these decisions was evaluated through listening, physical sensation, musical interaction with the pianist, and reflection.

Performance provided another stage of inquiry. The interpretation developed during rehearsal was enacted within the actual performance environment, where acoustic conditions, interaction with the pianist, physical experience, and communication with the audience could influence the result. Following performance, reflection enabled the researcher to reconsider the effectiveness of the interpretation and identify possibilities for further development.

Thus, the methodological process was:

**Analysis → Practice → Experimentation → Performance → Reflection → Revised practice**

The use of multiple sources of evidence also strengthened the trustworthiness of the inquiry. Score analysis provided musical evidence, textual analysis provided poetic and semantic evidence, performance and rehearsal provided embodied evidence, reflective documentation provided experiential evidence, and interviews provided perspectives from other experienced practitioners. This form of triangulation did not seek to establish one objectively correct interpretation but enabled the researcher's practice to be examined from multiple perspectives.

Because the researcher was simultaneously performer and researcher, reflexivity was also essential. The researcher's musical training, performance experience, aesthetic preferences, and cultural understanding inevitably influenced the interpretation of the repertoire. Rather than attempting to remove this subjectivity, the research acknowledged the researcher's position and used reflection and multiple sources of evidence to examine it critically.

## FROM REHEARSAL TO PERFORMANCE: KNOWLEDGE GENERATED THROUGH PRACTICE

The four recitals demonstrated that knowledge developed progressively through the interaction between score, poetry, body, voice, rehearsal, performance, and reflection. Three interconnected forms of knowledge became particularly evident: embodied knowledge, interpretive knowledge, and cultural knowledge.

Embodied knowledge developed through the physical and sensory experience of singing. The rehearsal of *Enigma Hati* by Marzelan Salleh provides a clear example. The use of a whispering voice with quasi-pitched qualities required experimentation with vocal production, breath, vocal intensity, and colour. The score indicated the intended vocal effect, but practical knowledge concerning how the effect could be produced and

integrated expressively into the musical phrase emerged through repeated experimentation. The experience therefore transformed an abstract musical instruction into embodied performance knowledge.

Interpretive knowledge developed through the process of transforming musical and poetic materials into expressive performance. In *Korban Tanah Air* by Yusran Yusoff, the presence of Melayu Asli rhythmic characteristics required the researcher to consider how rhythm, articulation, phrasing, and vocal expression could communicate the stylistic character of the work. Identifying the rhythmic characteristics analytically was only the beginning. The practical challenge was determining how these characteristics could be embodied and communicated through the singing voice.

A similar process occurred in *Patah Sebelah Sayapku* by Marzelan Salleh, where the use of pelog selisir modal material required the researcher to reconsider familiar assumptions about pitch relationships and musical tension. Through rehearsal and listening, the researcher developed greater sensitivity towards the modal language and explored how vocal colour, phrasing, and pitch could support its musical character.

Cultural knowledge emerged through engagement with Malay language, poetry, musical characteristics, and culturally situated expressive meanings. The process required the researcher to negotiate existing Western classical vocal knowledge with the specific demands of Malay Art Song. This negotiation did not require abandoning classical vocal technique. Instead, the practice demonstrated how established technical knowledge could be adapted and expanded in response to different musical and cultural contexts.

The three forms of knowledge were interconnected. Cultural understanding could influence interpretation; interpretation could require technical adaptation; and technical adaptation could change the performer's embodied experience. The resulting knowledge was therefore not purely technical, musical, or cultural but relational and situated.

Most importantly, this knowledge contributed to the development of artistic identity. The broader doctoral study identified artistic identity through dimensions including cultural heritage, innovation and experimentation, storytelling, emotional expression, and musical training. These dimensions were not merely theoretical categories; they were experienced through practice.

Engagement with Malay musical and poetic characteristics strengthened the performer's relationship with cultural heritage. Experimentation with vocal techniques encouraged innovation. Engagement with poetic imagery supported storytelling and emotional expression. At the same time, existing musical training provided the foundation from which these new approaches could be explored.

Artistic identity therefore developed through a reciprocal relationship:

**Existing artistic knowledge ↔ Practice ↔ Reflection ↔ New knowledge ↔ Evolving artistic identity**

This suggests that artistic identity is not a fixed characteristic that exists before performance. Rather, it is continually negotiated through engagement with repertoire, cultural materials, technical knowledge, collaboration, and performance experience.

The findings therefore support a broader understanding of the performer as a knowledge producer. The composer creates the musical work, but the performer contributes to the knowledge surrounding that work through interpretation and embodied engagement. The relationship is not simply:

**Composer → Score → Performer**

but:

**Composer → Score and Poetry → Performer → Practice → Interpretation → Performance  
→ Reflection → Knowledge**

The knowledge generated through this process is situated within the particular repertoire and performance context, but it can also inform subsequent performances and contribute to the broader understanding and development of Malay Art Song.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that the transition from rehearsal to performance represents more than a movement from preparation to presentation. It is a process through which the performer encounters problems, experiments with possibilities, develops embodied responses, reflects on experience, and generates new knowledge.

The study makes three main contributions. First, it demonstrates that rehearsal can function as a site of research. Rather than merely repeating an established interpretation, rehearsal allows the performer to test and modify artistic decisions. Second, it demonstrates that the performer can function as a knowledge producer. The singer's embodied and interpretive engagement with the repertoire contributes knowledge that is not fully contained within the score or accessible through textual analysis alone. Third, it demonstrates that practice contributes to the development of artistic identity. Through engagement with Malay poetry, musical characteristics, vocal techniques, and performance contexts, the researcher continually negotiated existing musical knowledge with new artistic experiences.

The study therefore proposes the following practice-based cycle:

**Encounter → Experiment → Perform → Reflect → Reinterpret → Generate Knowledge**

This cycle provides a concise way of understanding how artistic practice can operate as research.

For Malay Art Song, the implications extend beyond individual performance. The repertoire provides a space where Malaysian composers, performers, poets, and audiences engage with questions of musical and cultural identity. A practice-based approach allows these engagements to be examined not only through scores and verbal accounts but also through the embodied experience of performance.

For performers and educators, the findings suggest that Malay Art Song can be approached as repertoire requiring not only technical preparation but also cultural understanding, experimentation, reflective practice, and interpretive inquiry. For composers, greater awareness of performer-generated knowledge can contribute to understanding how compositional ideas are realised through the voice. For researchers, the study demonstrates the value of practice-based methodologies for investigating musical knowledge that emerges through doing.

Ultimately, this paper argues that performance is not simply where research ends; it is where further knowledge can begin. In Malay Art Song, the movement from rehearsal to performance creates a space in which musical, embodied, interpretive, and cultural knowledge are continually negotiated. Through this process, the performer does not merely reproduce a musical work but participates in its ongoing interpretation and in the development of an evolving artistic identity.

## REFERENCES

1. Dahl, P. (2017). *Music and knowledge: A performer's perspective*. Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
2. Doğantan-Dack, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Artistic practice as research in music: Theory, criticism, practice*. Routledge.
3. Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice as research in the arts: Principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*. Palgrave Macmillan.
4. Penny, J. (2014). Reflections on practice-led research methods and their application in music performance research. *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 3(2), 84–92.
5. Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
6. Smith, H., & Dean, R. T. (Eds.). (2009). *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*. Edinburgh University Press.