

Melodi Misi: Translating the Missionary Life of Joseph Kam into Contextual Program Music in Maluku

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Abstract

This study aims to interpret and translate the historical-spiritual narrative of Joseph Kam, a Dutch missionary in Maluku, into a structured programmatic musical composition titled *Melodi Misi*. The research addresses the need to explore alternative mediums for presenting church history in a way that is affective, contextual, and communicative, especially for contemporary audiences. Using a qualitative artistic approach, the study employed narrative analysis and historiographic interpretation combined with compositional experimentation. Data were drawn from biographical sources, historical documents, and ethnomusicological references related to Maluku's local culture. The main findings show that Joseph Kam's life journey—his early years in the Netherlands, missionary transition, and ministerial work in Maluku—can be musically expressed through three narrative-based sections. The composition integrates minor motifs, dynamic contrasts, and traditional Malukan instruments (such as *tifa* and *totobuang*) to represent emotional, theological, and cultural dimensions of Kam's mission. This work illustrates how music can function as an affective-historical medium, bridging individual spirituality with collective memory. The research contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by connecting historiography, theology, and music composition into a cohesive artistic model. It offers pedagogical implications for contextual church history education and expands the creative possibilities in character-based program music. The originality of this study lies in its methodology for translating non-musical religious narratives into sonic forms, which remains underexplored in both musicology and religious studies.

Keywords: Program Music, Missionary Narrative, Joseph Kam, Contextual Theology, Music and Historiography.

Introduction

In the historical development of Christianity in Indonesia, Maluku holds a significant place as one of the earliest regions where the Gospel was introduced (Lumintang, 2022; Marzanna Poplawska, 2011; Steenbrink & Aritonang, 2008). A central figure in this process was Joseph Kam, a Dutch missionary who dedicated more than two decades of his life to serving congregations in Maluku. His mission extended beyond spreading Christian teachings; he also championed access to education, healthcare, and community empowerment through both spiritual and social services. Kam's legacy illustrates that missionary activities

played a deeply historical, cultural, and theological role in shaping the face of Christianity in Eastern Indonesia.

To this day, the legacy of missionary service continues to resonate. According to 2024 data from Katadata (2025), the Christian population in Maluku Province numbers 894,860 people—763,247 Protestants and 131,613 Catholics. This demographic represents over half of Maluku's total population, underscoring that Christianity has become an integral component of the region's cultural and spiritual identity. However, historical narratives regarding the spread of Christianity in this area, including the pivotal role of figures like Joseph Kam, remain relatively obscure, particularly in popular representations through the arts.

Amidst the rise of musical works addressing social, cultural, and historical themes, narratives about missionaries are often overlooked—especially in the realm of program music. Yet figures like Joseph Kam contributed not only to the spiritual life of the region but also to its humanitarian and social transformation. His story, including mystical tales such as *Haman Pardidu*, contains profound symbolic and spiritual value—making it a compelling narrative for musical interpretation. Translating Kam's life experience into musical composition offers a contextual and imaginative medium to reconnect this history with contemporary audiences.

Previous studies related to this topic can be grouped into three main categories. First, studies on church history and mission. Key works such as *The Early Church* (Chadwick, 1993), *The Mission of God* (Wright, 2020), and *Transforming Mission* (Bosch & Scherer, 1991) highlight the strategic role of the early church and Christian mission in spreading the Gospel and fostering social solidarity. These works frame mission as an integral part of church life but tend to remain within a historical-theological discourse, with little attention to artistic expression such as music.

Second, biographical studies of missionary figures. In this category, *Evert Simon Patty's* 2018 dissertation on *Molukse Theologie in Nederland* and Enklaar's *Apostle from the Moluccas* (1963) provide in-depth historical accounts of Joseph Kam's life and ministry. While rich in contextual and biographical details, these works do not explore how Kam's story might be artistically rendered—particularly through music composition.

Third, studies on Christian-themed musical works. Pieces such as *Tragedi di Bori* by Julian Saputra and *Karma* by Cerry Fresly Nanuru demonstrate a new trend of musical compositions rooted in historical and religious narratives (Bodden, 2016; Okundalaiye, 2023). These works combine Western and traditional instruments within complex, narrative musical structures and are set against the backdrop of Protestant church history in Eastern Indonesia (Handoko et al., 2025; Werstler, 2025). However, no known composition has specifically

narrativized the journey of a missionary like Joseph Kam using a musical approach that engages with Maluku's cultural context.

These gaps in the literature reveal an absence of interdisciplinary approaches that combine historiography, theology, and music to represent missionary figures. The lack of artistic exploration of Joseph Kam suggests that his contributions remain underappreciated as a source of inspiration in creative practice—particularly in the realm of musical composition.

This research aims to understand and interpret the life story of Joseph Kam as a missionary through a narrative-musical approach, and to translate the non-musical elements of his life experiences into a communicative and expressive musical structure. Furthermore, it seeks to develop the creative process behind a program music composition titled *Melodi Misi* ("Melody of Mission") (1963) as a medium for appreciating and educating the public about the history of Christian mission in Maluku. This composition is expected to serve as an artistic medium capable of reintroducing Joseph Kam to a wider audience while conveying spiritual and historical messages in a contextual way.

This article argues that the biographical narrative of a missionary like Joseph Kam can be effectively communicated through program music. By combining traditional Maluku instruments with Western musical forms within a historically grounded narrative structure, *Melodi Misi* becomes not only a vehicle of artistic expression but also a means of conveying spiritual, cultural, and historical values. In this context, music functions as an alternative medium of historical documentation—capable of broadening public understanding of the vital role missionaries played in the development of Christianity in Indonesia. Thus, *Melodi Misi* emerges not only as an aesthetic work, but also as a scholarly and cultural contribution that reinforces collective memory of the spiritual legacy left by Joseph Kam.

Methods

This study focuses on the creation process of a program music composition titled *Melodi Misi* (*Melody of Mission*), which serves as an artistic representation of the life story of *Joseph Kam*, a Protestant missionary who played a significant role in the spread of the Gospel in Maluku during the 19th century. The unit of analysis in this research is the musical artwork developed from the historical and spiritual narrative of Joseph Kam's life, including the symbolic spiritual conflict reflected in his legendary encounter with the figure *Haman Semper*. The composition is analyzed not only from its musical aspects but also from the creative process behind its construction as a form of narrative-musical interpretation.

This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in *artistic creation research*, with an experimental approach (Lune & Berg, 2017; Setia & Haq,

2023). This method enables the composer to engage directly in the production process, from historical data exploration to the development and evaluation of the musical work. It is particularly relevant to a composition that integrates two musical traditions—traditional Maluku instruments and Western string instruments—requiring technical experimentation and stylistic contextualization. This approach allows the composer to not only represent data but also interpret it emotionally and aesthetically through music.

The sources of information consist of both primary and secondary data. The primary data derive from direct observation of historical locations associated with Joseph Kam's ministry in the city of Ambon, including places connected to his evangelistic efforts and local myths, such as the *Wai Tomu* River and the *Pulo Gangsa* area. The secondary data include academic and historical literature, such as *Molukse Theologie in Nederland* (Patty, 2018) and *Rasul dari Maluku (Apostle from the Moluccas)* by Enklaar (1963), which provide detailed accounts of Joseph Kam's life, work, and influence within the social and religious context of Malukan society.

The data collection methods consist of two main techniques: field observation and literature review. Field observations aimed to capture the geographical, cultural, and emotional atmosphere of the narrative to be translated into musical form, identifying symbolic and contextual elements suitable for composition. The literature review was conducted systematically across books, dissertations, and historical documents related to the figure and events that served as the primary inspiration for the composition. Both observation and literature review provided the conceptual and thematic foundation for the musical creation process, with specific attention to the cultural aspects of Maluku.

The data analysis process followed an exploratory and experimental sequence. This included: (1) interpreting narrative data into musical ideas; (2) experimenting with compositional techniques, such as non-traditional harmonies, integration of traditional and Western instruments, and rhythmic development; (3) developing musical ideas conceptually and emotionally; (4) composing the full musical work; and (5) conducting a final evaluation through personal reflection and feedback from musicians or performers. This evaluation aimed to assess the cohesion of the musical structure, the strength of the narrative, and the effectiveness of the spiritual and historical message conveyed through the composition.

Results and Discussion

Narrative Interpretation of Joseph Kam's Life in a Musical Framework

The musical composition *Melodi Misi* draws its foundational inspiration from the life journey of Joseph Kam, a Protestant Christian missionary sent to the Dutch East Indies, specifically the Maluku region. Joseph Kam was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1769 into a family influenced by the *Herrnhut Pietism* tradition. Although he felt a calling to ministry from a young age, his plans were initially delayed by his parents' wish for him to continue the family business. However, after experiencing deeply personal upheavals—the death of his parents and a failed marriage—Kam returned to his spiritual calling and enrolled in the *Nederlandse Zendeling Genootschap* (NZG) in 1807. After completing his training and ordination, he arrived in the Dutch East Indies in 1814 and was assigned to Ambon.

When Kam landed in Ambon on March 3, 1815, he was warmly welcomed by the local community and immediately faced the heavy task of ministering to tens of thousands of Christians scattered across the Maluku islands. Although his initial ministry was confined to the city, he quickly built relationships with local communities, learned the Malay language, and began preaching in Malay just two weeks after his arrival. Within a short period, Kam was leading worship services, baptizing thousands of children and adults—including enslaved people—administering Holy Communion, training evangelist candidates, and organizing prayer meetings. He also established a Bible Society and requested a printing press to produce tracts and Bibles in Malay.

One particularly significant fragment of Joseph Kam's narrative—rich in symbolic and emotional value—is the mystical story of Haman Semper, a young man who committed violence against his mother and was cursed before his death. His spirit, known as *Haman Pardidu*, became a terrifying figure haunting the Ambon cemetery, inciting such fear that the local government offered a reward to anyone who could stop him. After a failed attempt by a prisoner, the community turned to Reverend Kam with hope. On a decisive night, Kam prayed at the Waitomu bridge and, invoking the name of God, spiritually ended the terror of *Haman Pardidu*. This episode illustrates the encounter between Christian spiritual authority and local belief systems, positioning Joseph Kam as a spiritual figure whose role extended beyond ecclesiastical administration.

Over the course of his 20-year ministry, Kam devoted his entire life to the church and society of Maluku. He was known not only as a pastor but also as an educator and evangelist who did more than spread the Gospel—he helped shape the structure of Christian life through leadership training, school establishment, and liturgical practice. He passed away on July 18, 1833, yet his legacy lives on in the collective memory of the Christian communities in Maluku, even to this day.

His life story forms the core of *Melodi Misi*, not only because of its historical significance but also due to the emotional and spiritual depth that can be expressed musically. His biographical journey is summarized in Table 1 below.

The data presented above demonstrate that Joseph Kam's life embodied more than the ordinary journey of a missionary; it reflected a complex interplay of spiritual, social, and cultural dynamics within the early context of Christianity in Maluku. From his religious upbringing in the Netherlands and theological formation under *Pietist* influence to the personal struggles that led him toward transcontinental ministry, Kam emerged as a historical figure with a rich and symbolic narrative (Larsen, 2006). Upon his arrival in Ambon, he immediately engaged in intensive ministry: teaching, baptizing, training local evangelists, and strengthening ecclesiastical institutions through the production of liturgical materials. The spiritual dimension of his service—particularly the exorcism of *Haman Pardidu*—revealed the confluence of local belief systems and Christian doctrine, enriching the narrative texture of his mission.

From the analyzed data, several key patterns and tendencies emerge. First, a pattern of personal sacrifice as a pathway to spiritual vocation is evident in Kam's decision to abandon his former life in order to serve God and the people in a culturally distinct region. Second, a pattern of cross-cultural and linguistic integration is visible in how quickly Kam adapted to the local context of Maluku, preaching in Malay and adopting an inclusive approach toward the congregation. Third, his ministry exhibited a pattern of transformative and community-oriented service; he not only delivered the Gospel but also enhanced the congregation's capacity through education and evangelist training. Fourth, Kam practiced a form of contextual spirituality, particularly in his response to local mystical phenomena, such as the *Haman Pardidu* case, which he addressed not through rational dismissal but through prayer and theological engagement. These patterns suggest that Kam's life was not only historically significant but also rich in emotional and dramatic structure—providing abundant material for musical interpretation.

The above findings reinforce the argument that Joseph Kam's life story possesses both narrative and symbolic qualities that can be effectively transformed into musical form. His biography encapsulates elements of struggle, courage, and devotion, while also containing emotional tension, deep spirituality, and profound local contextuality. In the context of composing *Melodi Misi*, Kam's life serves as a kind of “biographical score” layered with tonal colors: from the muted notes of suffering and sacrifice to the stirring dynamics of spiritual encounter exemplified by the *Haman Pardidu* episode. These findings imply that program music can function not merely as an aesthetic medium but also as a bridge connecting history, theology, and local culture. By responding to historical data through the language of music, the composer does not merely

retell Kam's story but reanimates it in a new form—emotional, reflective, and communicative for contemporary audiences.

Translating Non-Musical Narratives into Musical Structure

The primary data in this subsection derives from the experimental process of composing the first part of the musical work *Melodi Misi*, which aims to translate the narrative of Joseph Kam's early life in the Netherlands into musical structure. Part I is divided into two subsections: Subsection A portrays Joseph Kam's life before becoming a missionary, while Subsection B illustrates the challenges he faced in responding to his calling as a preacher of the Gospel.

Subsection A, spanning measures 1 through 32, opens with the use of a minor pentatonic scale (D–E–F#–A–B) in 4/4 meter at a moderate tempo (85 bpm). The instrumentation includes trumpet, bass drum, timpani, snare drum, cymbals, *belira*, piano, and a full string section. In measures 1–2, the section begins rhythmically with a bass drum strike, followed by trumpet phrases continuing through measure 10. On the fourth beat of measure 10, Violin I enters and plays the note F# as part of the primary melodic theme. This combination seeks to evoke an atmosphere reflecting Joseph Kam's disciplined and structured upbringing and the familial pressure he experienced to pursue a commercial career rather than a spiritual one.

Melodi Misi

Onche

♩ = 80

A

Figure 1. Opening Melodic Structure Illustrating Joseph Kam's Early Life in the Netherlands

Measures 11–20 present a musical exploration of Kam's life in the Netherlands before his turning point. The harmonic progression includes B minor, A major, and G major chords. Violin I develops the melody introduced in measure 10 and continues carrying it through measure 20, accompanied by rhythmic instruments such as bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, *belira*, piano, and strings. Dynamic variations highlight shifts in emotional tension, including *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo piano), and *crescendo* markings to reflect Kam's internal struggle and confusion. In measures 15–16, a rhythmic change occurs as Violin II, Viola, and Cello play a unified rhythmic pattern, while Violin I retains the

melodic line. This motif is repeated in measures 18–20 to reinforce the same narrative theme.

The continuation of this section—measures 21–27—shows a musical shift as the trumpet assumes the melodic line from the fourth beat of measure 20 through measure 27. The chord progression remains the same: Bm–A–G. This transition symbolically represents the early stirrings of Joseph Kam’s internal conflict regarding his missionary calling. In measures 27–30, Violin I resumes the melody, while the harmonic structure shifts to D–Bm–A–G, signifying a narrative transition toward deeper spiritual conflict. This section concludes with a musical transition in measures 31–32 using timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, and chimes to bridge into Subsection B.

Suling Bambu	31	32
Tpt.		
Timp.		
S. D.		
B. D.		
Cym.		
Tifa ritem		
Tifa potong		
Chim.		
Bells		
TB		
Pno.		
Vln. I		
Vln. II		
Vla.		
Vc.		

Figure 2. Transitional Section Marking the Onset of Spiritual Conflict

Subsection B comprises measures 33–47 and thematically represents the internal family tensions and social pressures Joseph Kam encountered before deciding to become a missionary. This part features a denser and more dynamic musical texture. Instruments include snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, piano, and the full string section. The harmonic progression becomes more varied, featuring Bm, F#m, G, D, and A chords, providing a complex and emotionally rich harmonic color. From measures 33 to 40, the piano, Violin II, Viola, and Cello

introduce new rhythmic patterns, while Violin I continues to carry the primary melody with greater assertiveness. The dynamic marking *forte* (*f*) is used to reflect the intensifying emotional conflict in Kam's life. Measures 41–46 serve as the concluding segment of Part I, summarizing the initial conflict before Kam embarks on the spiritual journey that forms the thematic foundation of the subsequent musical sections.

The translation of Joseph Kam's historical narrative into the musical composition *Melodi Misi* was carried out by constructing musical themes that represent the emotional and spiritual experiences of the figure. The first part of the work serves as a strong narrative foundation, where the musical structure was designed to reflect two critical phases in Joseph Kam's early life: the period before he became a missionary and the phase when he began to face pressure and challenges in following his divine calling. The translation process involved the selection of a minor pentatonic scale to represent his melancholic inner state, reflective chord progressions, and the use of rhythm and dynamics to portray narrative tension. The motifs that emerge are not literal or descriptive, but rather symbolic and emotional, allowing the music to function as a "second language" that reanimates Joseph Kam's story through sound.

From the compositional structure of Part I of *Melodi Misi*, several prominent and consistent musical patterns emerge as forms of narrative representation. First, the use of minor motifs—particularly through the D–E–F#–A–B minor pentatonic scale—serves to evoke an introspective and emotionally charged atmosphere. This motif appears prominently at the beginning of the piece, especially in Violin I, and becomes the thematic foundation throughout Subsection A. Second, the dynamic contrasts between *mp* (*mezzo piano*), *p* (*piano*), and *crescendo* articulate the emotional fluctuations Kam experienced during his period of uncertainty in embracing his life's calling. Third, the integration of both traditional and Western instruments functions as a key element in creating a contextual sonic identity. The use of *belira* and cymbals adds distinctive local texture, while strings and piano provide harmonic depth. Fourth, the harmonic transition from the chord progression Bm–A–G to D–Bm–A–G marks a spiritual shift and a growing readiness to confront internal conflict, anticipating the entry of Subsection B. Together, these elements not only convey the story but also open a space for the audience to feel the emotional intensity experienced by Joseph Kam.

The musical findings in the first part of *Melodi Misi* demonstrate that music can serve as a powerful medium for conveying historical narrative affectively. By structuring the music around the chronology and emotional landscape of Joseph Kam's life, the composer has not merely created an aesthetic work, but has also brought historical experience into the realm of emotional perception. This interpretation reveals that program music can build a bridge between historical

memory and musical affect, expanding our understanding of history as something not only to be read or studied, but also to be heard and felt. The use of minor motifs, dynamic contrast, and cross-cultural instrumentation underscores the notion that Joseph Kam's spirituality was not simply a personal event, but a collective narrative capable of inspiring across generations. Therefore, this section serves not only as the opening of a musical work but also as an invitation to contemplate enduring devotion, sacrifice, and a timeless calling of faith.

Creative Process and Musical Structure in Representing Joseph Kam's Missionary Work in Maluku

The third part of *Melodi Misi* musically represents the missionary period of Joseph Kam's life in Maluku and is divided into two major subsections. The first subsection (measures 123–153) focuses on portraying the atmosphere of hard work and ministerial dedication in Ambon and surrounding areas, while the second subsection (measures 154–165) captures the spiritual climax and emotional peak of his life story, simultaneously closing the composition with powerful resolution.

This section begins with the piano in measures 122–123, introducing a *forte* dynamic that marks the start of an intense and determined phase of ministry. The timpani enters in measure 125, followed by chimes and strings in measure 126. Violin I introduces the main melody, while Violin II, viola, and cello perform full quarter-note figures that establish the harmonic foundation. This pattern continues to develop until measure 135, with a chord progression of F# minor, G major, A major, and B minor, which creates an atmosphere of diligence, dedication, and flowing spirituality. In measure 134, the trumpet takes over the melody, emphasizing the narrative's rising intensity.

Measures 134–137 repeat the structure of measures 126–129, followed by another equivalent repetition in measures 138–141, reflecting the routine rhythm of Kam's ministry, which he carried out with consistency and passion. A significant change occurs in measures 142–145, where the key shifts from D major to C major, generating a calmer, more reflective mood. The chords used—F minor and E minor/F—deepen the spiritual transition that Kam experiences during this phase of his mission. The key then shifts back to D major in measure 146, accompanied by bells striking A and D notes in eighth-note rhythm, supported by G minor and G/F minor chords.

In measure 150, the snare drum introduces a new rhythmic pattern using a combination of quarter and thirty-second notes, which continues for four measures (150–154). This rhythmic change signals an increase in musical tension leading to the closing of the section. The use of F# minor and D minor chords underscores the presence of deep spiritual conflict. Measures 151–152 feature a

fortissimo (fff) dynamic and *staccato* articulations in both strings and timpani, producing a dramatic effect and a powerful emotional climax. At this point, the tonal center shifts from D major to C major, enhancing the sense of resolution and narrative closure.

Figure 3. Measures 152–154: Rhythmic and Harmonic Intensification Toward Climax

Figure 3 illustrates a critical section of the *Melodi Misi* composition, where musical tension reaches its peak. In measures 152–154, the snare drum introduces a new rhythmic pattern that combines quarter notes ($1/4$) and rapid thirty-second notes ($1/32$) in a repeated sequence. This pattern generates heightened rhythmic tension and conveys a strong sense of narrative urgency.

Harmonically, alternating F# minor and D minor chords create a darker and deeper tonal color. These chords intensify the emotional weight of the inner spiritual conflict that Joseph Kam experiences at this climactic point in his journey. Furthermore, in measures 151–152, the use of *fortissimo (fff)* dynamics

and *staccato* articulation—played by the string section and timpani—produces a dramatic sonic explosion. This musical effect symbolizes the emotional climax in Joseph Kam’s story, one that is not only heard but also deeply felt by the listener.

The second subsection (measures 154–165) depicts the climax and conclusion of the work. The trumpet carries the main melody from measures 156–159, while the snare drum performs a complex rhythmic pattern with variations in quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes. The harmonic progression of C major and D minor blends spiritual triumph with profound sorrow. Measures 160–163 feature polyphonic interaction among bells, Violin I and Violin II (both playing the main melody), and the trumpet carrying its own melodic line. In measures 164–165, all instruments converge and play the same motif simultaneously, symbolizing a unified vision and spiritual climax in Joseph Kam’s life story. This final section serves as a stirring, symbolic, and deeply meaningful musical conclusion.



Figure 4. Measures 164–165: Unified Musical Motif Representing Spiritual Resolution

Figure 4 presents the concluding section of the *Melodi Misi* composition—measures 164–165—designed to deliver a complete and emotionally resonant ending. All instruments, including trumpet, strings, piano, chimes, and snare drum, simultaneously perform the same thematic motif. This musical unison symbolizes the unity of vision, faith, and ministerial spirit that defined Joseph Kam near the end of his life.

The synchronized motif functions not only as the structural climax of the composition but also as a symbol of peace and spiritual resolution. It serves as a musical message that Joseph Kam’s life struggles and ministerial challenges ultimately culminated in harmony—both musically and existentially. With a

melody that is simple yet rich in meaning, this section evokes a reflective atmosphere that lingers at the close of the work, inviting the audience to contemplate the spiritual legacy of the figure it portrays.

In this third section of *Melodi Misi*, the musical composition portrays the period of Joseph Kam's missionary service in Maluku by using structured musical themes that evoke his dedication, struggles, and spiritual climax. The first subsection (measures 123–153) presents the atmosphere of persistent work in Ambon, expressed through strong rhythms, layered harmonies, and dynamic instrumental combinations. The second subsection (measures 154–165) closes the piece with a powerful emotional and spiritual resolution, culminating in a unified motif played by all instruments. Through changes in tempo, key, rhythm, and dynamics—such as the use of *fortissimo* and rapid *staccato* articulations—the music translates Kam's spiritual journey into a form that is both audible and deeply affective (Enklaar, 1963).

Several clear musical patterns emerge from this section. First, the repetition of rhythmic and melodic structures—particularly in measures 134–141—mirrors the routine and discipline of Joseph Kam's daily ministry. Second, the shift in key from D major to C major followed by a return to D major represents spiritual transition, suggesting moments of reflection and reaffirmation in his service. Third, the use of contrasting dynamics and harmonic tension (such as F# minor and D minor) intensifies the emotional stakes and builds toward the climactic moment. Fourth, the final convergence of all instruments playing the same motif highlights a symbolic closure, suggesting unity and fulfillment at the end of Kam's journey. These patterns suggest that the musical structure not only supports the narrative but also reinforces it with emotional depth and spiritual nuance.

The findings from this section show that music can serve as a compelling narrative tool for conveying spiritual and historical experiences. By translating key moments in Joseph Kam's missionary journey into tonal, rhythmic, and dynamic structures, the composer offers listeners an emotional access point to a historical narrative that might otherwise remain abstract. This reinforces the idea that program music can bridge historical memory with affective experience, making religious history more immersive and relatable. Furthermore, the symbolic use of unity in the final measures indicates that Kam's life was not just a personal mission but a collective spiritual legacy. In this way, the composition contributes to a broader understanding of missionary spirituality as a lived and embodied practice, resonating across time through the universal language of music.

Discussion

This study has successfully interpreted and translated the life narrative of Joseph Kam—a Dutch missionary who played a significant role in the history of Christianity in Maluku—into a programmatic musical composition titled *Melodi Misi*. Through its three main musical sections, the work reveals the spiritual and social dynamics of Kam’s life: from his early years in the Netherlands before becoming a missionary, to his journey to the Dutch East Indies, and finally his years of ministry in Maluku. The study also demonstrates how non-musical elements such as inner conflict, family pressure, social struggles, and mystical events can be reconstructed in a communicative and expressive musical form. This creative process involves the use of minor and pentatonic scales, dynamic transitions, traditional Maluku instruments, and rhythmic patterns that reflect emotional and spiritual transformation.

The findings indicate that the connection between historical narrative and musical form does not occur by chance; rather, it arises from an intentional artistic and theological consciousness in constructing a musical structure that aligns with the emotional trajectory of the character. The choice of minor motifs, for example, is not merely an aesthetic decision but a sonic symbol of suffering, sacrifice, and steadfast faith. Meanwhile, the inclusion of traditional Maluku instruments such as *tifa*, *totobuang*, and *suling bambu* is not only meant to evoke local color but also serves as a tribute to the cultural context in which Joseph Kam ministered. The musical structure, which develops from tension to resolution, suggests that Kam’s spiritual journey was forged through struggle rather than from a place of absence. This process reflects a deep interrelationship between artistic form and historical substance.

When compared to previous studies, particularly Julian Saputra’s *Tragedi di Bori* and Cerry Fresly Nanuru’s *Karma*, this research offers a more explicit approach in positioning the missionary figure as the central focus of musical narration (Handoko et al., 2025; Werstler, 2025). While *Tragedi di Bori* centers on the tragic death of a missionary and *Karma* emphasizes the collective history of a congregation, *Melodi Misi* presents the personal transformation of an individual moving from a European context to the Indonesian archipelago with profound psychological and spiritual depth (Bodden, 2016; Okundalaiye, 2023). This study also contributes a stronger interdisciplinary approach by structurally integrating historiography, religious studies, and musical arts. This constitutes the primary element of *novelty* that underpins the work’s scholarly contribution and strength.

Historically, this study shows that music can function as more than just an aesthetic or entertaining medium—it can serve as a *living archive* that revives spiritual history through sound. *Melodi Misi* offers a new framework for engaging with the history of Christianity in Indonesia (Marzanna Poplawska, 2011). Rather than relying solely on textual or documentary sources, it allows listeners to re-

experience that history through affective and temporal media. The life of Joseph Kam, as translated into music, emerges not as a static narrative but as one that can be reactivated and reinterpreted across generations (M Poplawska, 2020). This reinforces the potential of *program music* to serve as a hermeneutic tool that bridges memory and embodiment, expanding our understanding of spiritual history (Lorenz, 2015; Rocha, 2023).

Socially, the findings highlight the urgent need for contextual and emotionally resonant ways of presenting church history, especially for younger generations increasingly shaped by visual and musical cultures. Through its emotive structure, *Melodi Misi* invites reflective participation and empathy, which are crucial in today's context where spiritual narratives risk becoming overly institutionalized or detached. However, this approach also demands critical scrutiny. Musical interpretations are inherently performative and subjective. Without grounding in historical documentation—such as archival sources, manuscripts, and performative traditions—such works risk losing academic credibility (Shanks, 2020; Stowell, 2012). Therefore, if music is to function as a historical narrative, it must operate within a disciplined hermeneutic framework that balances affective expression with evidentiary rigor (Markova et al., 2021; Riera, 2015).

Ideologically, the study raises important reflections on the tension between artistic freedom and historical accuracy. Musical compositions inevitably carry the composer's intentions, cultural preferences, and even temporal biases, all of which can lead to anachronistic interpretations or excessive romanticization (Georgii-Hemming, 2007; Malinkowskaya, 2020). This becomes more complex in postmodern musical approaches, which often reject coherent or linear narratives—as seen in experimental jazz or deconstructive compositions—and thereby challenge the historiographical demands for chronology and structure (Blais-Tremblay, 2016; Hersch, 2020). Even within *Historically Informed Performance* (HIP), which aims to faithfully recreate music as it was once performed, there remains an irreducible degree of speculation due to the absence of direct aural evidence from the past (Ferrando, 2018). These considerations suggest that while music can powerfully embody the *emotional truth* of the past, it must be critically positioned in relation to historical discourse.

In sum, the key contribution of *Melodi Misi* lies in its ability to serve as an *affective interpretation* of history—a way of evoking what it *felt like*, rather than merely reporting what happened. This interpretive capacity opens new epistemological space where art meets memory, and where historical understanding is not limited to factual reproduction but expanded into emotional and spiritual realms. As such, the composition becomes not only a product of artistic expression but also a culturally significant form of research-based storytelling that invites renewed reflection on faith, legacy, and

intergenerational meaning-making.

Although *Melodi Misi* successfully presents historical narrative through a communicative and emotionally resonant musical medium, it also carries potential dysfunctions that warrant critical attention. One of the primary concerns lies in the risk of *over-personalization* of history, in which Joseph Kam's individual experience as a central figure may obscure the complexity of the socio-religious realities in Maluku during that period. According to Harding et al. (2017), historical narratives play a vital role in shaping individual and collective identities; however, the dominance of a biographical perspective can diminish the broader social significance of historical interpretation. Roberts (2004) also emphasizes that personal life interpretations are heavily influenced by familial narratives, popular stereotypes, and dominant ideological structures that limit the diversity of historical readings.

Furthermore, an excessive focus on the spiritual transformation of a single figure can lead to the marginalization of the collective narratives of local communities. In the study of social movements, Kelland (2018) notes that marginalized groups often construct counter-narratives as a form of resistance to exclusion within dominant historical discourses. Yet when these narratives are not granted space in artistic-historical representations, the risk of cultural erasure persists. Gonzales et al. (2022) further demonstrate that narrative frameworks controlled by dominant actors can reproduce power imbalances and erase the historical presence of marginalized groups, including within rural and religious contexts.

From a musical standpoint, an overly affective approach in composition also risks generating biased perceptions of history. Music undeniably possesses the power to evoke emotion and create affective spaces that influence identity construction and religious meaning (Brown, 2009; Garrido & Davidson, 2019; Partridge, 2014). However, when emotional experience dominates without being balanced by adequate contextual and historical understanding, music may lead audiences toward simplistic interpretations that essentialize particular narratives. In a psychological experiment, Ysseldyk et al. (2021) found that religious identity significantly shapes emotional responses to music: when the music affirms the listener's identity, it enhances memory and self-esteem; conversely, identity-threatening music can induce emotional discomfort and rejection.

At the institutional level, historically-based artistic works like *Melodi Misi* also run the risk of being used symbolically to legitimize specific religious agendas. When church history is aesthetically presented without critical inquiry, it can serve as a hegemonic tool to reinforce orthodoxy and exclusion, as shown in Cook's (2019) study on the colonial Anglican church in Barbados and in Travis's (2022) research on the historical marginalization of the Assyrian

community and the *Church of the East*. It is therefore essential to maintain a careful balance between artistic freedom and historical accountability. Music, as a form of historical narrative, must be developed within a disciplined hermeneutic framework—one that is open to complexity and critique of dominant historical structures.

As Wynn (2004) affirms, the power of music does not lie in its ability to explain “what happened,” but rather in its ability to answer “what did it feel like when it happened”—an interpretive mode that is deeply relevant to understanding spiritual and religious histories. To communicate this meaning equitably and reflectively, works like *Melodi Misi* must exist within a space that balances the composer’s intent, the sociocultural context, and historical accuracy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the life and ministry narrative of Joseph Kam as a missionary in Maluku can be effectively transformed into a programmatic musical composition. Through a structured narrative-musical approach, the composition *Melodi Misi* successfully represents the spiritual, social, and emotional dynamics of Kam’s life journey in three major sections: his early life in the Netherlands, his voyage to Ambon, and his years of service in Maluku. This creative process demonstrates that music can serve as an alternative medium for conveying historical narratives and faith-based values in a communicative, contextual, and emotionally engaging manner.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, integrating historiography, theology, and musical composition into a cohesive artistic framework. It introduces a model for translating non-musical narratives into musical structures by incorporating elements of locality (traditional Maluku instruments), affectivity (dynamic structures and minor motifs), and historical chronology (three-part structure aligned with the phases of Joseph Kam’s life). Beyond enriching the repertoire of character-based program music, this study also opens new avenues for church history education and the development of contextual musical arts in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, this research has certain limitations. The artistic approach employed does not permit an in-depth exploration of all historical aspects in detail, nor does it provide literal representation of each event. Furthermore, musical interpretation remains subjective and highly dependent on the composer’s creative sensitivity, which may differ from the perspectives of readers or those engaging with the historical content. Future research could address these limitations by adopting a collaborative approach involving musicians, historians, and theologians, as well as by expanding the scope of inquiry to other missionary figures in Indonesia through diverse artistic forms such as theater, film, or multimedia performance.

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