

What's the Time? Deciphering "Meter" in Razak Abdul Aziz's *5 Early Songs*

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Abstract

The concept of meter in music has existed probably as old as music itself. Scholars had a variety of ways of categorizing meters in music. Recent investigations on the element of meter in contemporary art music show that scholars were more Europe-American-centric and only *10 Pantun Settings* and *Maria Zaitun* by Razak Abdul Aziz were previously discussed academically, hence justifying the need to conduct this investigation. *5 Early Songs* by Razak Abdul Aziz were written in 1980 (3 songs) and 1988 (2 songs). The researchers had chosen to conduct a systematic theoretical analysis of the chosen work using music theories proposed by Kostka et al. (2013), Kostka and Santa (2018), and Locke (2010). The analysis found that the use of the metric element is more complex in the two songs that were composed in 1988, suggesting that the 8-year gap the composer had given him time to acquire more musical materials, maturing over the years. It is hoped that this investigation would spark some interest among other scholars to conduct studies on the similar or other work(s) of Razak Abdul Aziz and possibly expand this to other Malaysian contemporary composers.

Keywords: *5 Early Songs*, meter, music theory, Razak Abdul Aziz, theoretical analysis

Introduction

Meter in music refers to the pattern of beats that are consistent throughout a passage (Kostka et al., 2013), as it is also a perceptual phenomenon that is usually characterized in terms of an internal sense of accent or strong and weak beats (Lerdahl & Jackendoff, 1982). The concept of music meter has probably existed as early as the music itself. Wiessner (2014) proposed that humans in the pre-historic era had danced to music as early as 40,000 years ago, suggesting that there were patterns of beats used to play dance music for social functions.

Killin (2018) argues that the timeline goes far back than Wiessner suggested, as he documented the findings on musical activities of pre-historic humans through archaeological artefacts from 400,000 years ago, stating that the function of music during this pre-historic era was similar to what Wiessner proposed, hence agreeing to the existence of pattern of beats during the said era. This concept is still relevant to this day, as composers and music theorists had developed it to be more complex and intricate.

Though Kostka et al. (2013) proposed that these patterns of beats are consistent throughout a passage, Kostka and Santa (2018) argued that meter for most tonal pieces is relatively consistent and easy to comprehend, unlike its post-tonal (sometimes called “contemporary art”) counterpart where meter and rhythms are frequently varied and complex. Hasty (1981) acknowledged the difficulty of theorizing rhythm in twentieth-century music, as well as the central role of meter. He stated “A useful place to begin is to ask what is meter if this music can depart from it (in various degrees) yet still be rhythmic” (p. 185). This is consistent with Sullivan (2018) when he discusses the opposing perspectives of Krebs (1999), Temperley (2001) and London (2012) when discussing the use of meter in Barber’s *At Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* from *Hermit Songs, Op. 29*. Krebs (1999) argues that the perception of multiple metrical layers in this song is possible, stating that the layer could exist in two ways: metrical consonant or metrical dissonance. Temperley (2001) states that (when discussing the said piece) “It is difficult to entertain two metrical structures at once, even in cases where either one can readily be entertained on its own” (p. 228). London (2012) disagrees with Krebs and Temperley, stating that such attending (of two metrical structures) is not possible.

Benward and Saker (2009) generalised the types of meter into two categories: (i) changing meter – referring to the frequent change of meter within a piece of music, (ii) asymmetric meter – referring to meters in which the beats are not grouped into units divisible by two or three. Though this categorisation is easy to comprehend, this oversimplification does not represent the real situation. Kostka et al. (2013) and Kostka and Santa (2018) categorized meters in greater detail, that are:

1. Asymmetrical meter – based on regular recurring pulses could not be subdivided into groups of two (2) or three (3). This includes the use of 5 or 7 in the numerator of a meter, with common denominators 4, 8 or 16.
2. Composite meter – indicates recurring irregular subdivisions on its numerator, such as 3+2+3, 2+2+3 and 3+3+2, while the common denominator is 4, 8 or 16.
3. Mixed meter – refers to the rapid change of meter in succession within a piece of music. As the name suggests, the “mix” could include symmetrical meter, asymmetrical meter and composite meter.
4. Polymeter – happens when more than one music meter is used simultaneously. This involves two (2) or more types of meters being executed concurrently.
5. Ametric music – Music that lacks an aurally perceivable metric organization. It does not seem to imply a regular series of recurring pulses (visibly and/or aurally), despite some ametric music using meter.
6. Metric modulation – used to describe an immediate change in tempo created by equating a particular note value to another note value, usually located in the next bar. Elliott Carter is generally credited with being the first to use this particular method of changing tempos.

Kostka et al. (2013) and Kostka and Santa (2018) also discussed the rhythmic characteristics of post-tonal/contemporary art music, mentioning additive rhythm, non-retrogradeable rhythm, polyrhythm, and displaced accent (among others) that were developed during this music era.

As this paper intends to conduct a systematic investigation on the use of meter in Razak Abdul Aziz’s *5 Early Songs* (1980-1988), we would not be discussing rhythmic characteristics as proposed by Kostka et al. (2013) and Kostka and Santa (2018). It is vital that we focus the investigation on the use of meter in this piece so that the readers would have a clear comprehension of how the composer perceives meter in this work and not be deviated.

Razak Abdul Aziz (b. 1959) is arguably one of the earliest contemporary art composers in Malaysia (Zamani et al., 2019). He received his academic trainings at Skidmore College (USA) as an undergraduate and at Columbia University (USA) and University of Edinburgh (UK) at postgraduate levels. Zamani and Gani (2020) documented the list of works by Razak Abdul Aziz as follows:

1. *5 Early Songs* for voice and piano (1980-1988)

2. *Quintet* for strings (1981)
3. *10 Pantun Settings* for combinations of soprano solo, alto solo, SATB chorus, violin, piano four hands and two pianos (1981-1990)
4. *For Violin and Piano* for violin and piano (1982, revised 2019)
5. *The Wedding* for Orchestra (1986)
6. *Do Take Muriel Out* for soprano solo, alto solo, SSAA chorus and orchestra (1994)
7. *Etudes* for solo piano (2002)
8. *Maria Zaitun* for voices and chamber orchestra (2002)
9. *The Fisherman* for solo voice, chorus and chamber ensemble or piano (2015)
10. *Pepatah Episodes* for solo piano (2019)
11. *Prisms No. 1 and 2* for 1 piano 4 hands (2019-2020)
12. *Haiku* for soprano solo, SATB chorus and piano (2020)

His compositions had received premieres and performances on national and international platforms. Among notable performances of his work include *The Wedding* by the Shinsei Nihon Symphony Orchestra at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space (20 November 1986), *For Violin and Piano* at the Asian Contemporary Music Festival in Seoul, Korea (20 October 1993), selections from the *10 Pantun Settings* by the Zelianian Ensemble in Wellington, New Zealand (2 December 1992) and *Fairuz Zamani PhD Recital 2 – Music of Razak Abdul Aziz* in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (26 July 2019) (Zamani et al., 2019; Zamani, 2021b).

This article will now be focusing on the review that would consist of recent studies of meter in post-tonal music and existing studies on Razak Abdul Aziz. As we shall see later, the review will reveal the gap in the literature (specifically in understanding the elements of meter in the said work), providing a necessity for this investigation to take place, hence, making this investigation relevant and contributory towards understanding the elements of meter in Razak Abdul Aziz's *5 Early Songs*, specifically, and enriching academic documentation on Razak Abdul Aziz, in general.

Review

The review would be divided into two themes: recent investigations of time in contemporary art music and existing studies on works by Razak Abdul Aziz. The first theme discusses the importance of understanding the element of time and meter in contemporary art music by 20th and 21st century composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, Elliot Carter, George Crumb, Tigran Hamasyan, and Craig Taborn. This is then followed by the second theme that would discuss existing studies on works by Razak Abdul Aziz by scholars that would ultimately disclose the need of investigating his *5 Early Songs* from a metrical perspective.

Recent investigations of time in contemporary art music

Contemporary art music consists of tonal and post-tonal music. Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold (2020) defined contemporary art music as “Current genres and aesthetics connected with or departing from earlier European art music and its tradition” (p. 74), which “Developed principally in the 20th century and occupied a niche in the post-war decades” (p. 60). Hence, this section of the review would be discussing recent investigations of time on tonal and post-tonal contemporary art music of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Sullivan (2018) develops a theory of meter that responds to the rhythmic irregularities of post-tonal music by seeking metric regularity at a moment-to-moment level in his dissertation. In doing so, Sullivan adopts Danuta Mirka's theory of meter perception. Mirka (2009) developed a model to account for meter perception and the manipulation of meter. Though she used the chamber music of Haydn and Mozart in developing this model, it suitably adapts and handles meter perception in a wide variety of music, including rhythmically irregular post-tonal music. Adopting this model in a more recent context, Sullivan analysed selected 20th century post-tonal works by Western composers Webern, Bartók, Britten, Barber, and Adés. Through this study, Sullivan made four primary contributions to the field of music theory:

1. Developing a precise, rigorous, and testable model of meter perception for a repertoire in which meter often proves elusive.
2. Developing the perceptual relationship between meter and streaming and between meter and melodic parallelism.
3. Extending the perceptual and historical purview of three specific metric manipulations typically associated with 18th century theory and practice: imbroglio, close imitation, and free fall.
4. Applying its theoretical machinery in the analysis of familiar and under-studied works.

Boyle (2021) analysed three pieces (*The Broad Day King*, *Avenging Angel*, and *Neverland*) from Craig Taborn's solo piano album *Avenging Angel* (2011). As a result, she coined the term "flexible ostinati" which comprises a repetitive, omnipresent stream within the overall texture, provides a rapid isochronous pulse and implies higher-level metric levels, as opposed to strict ostinati. In *The Broad Day King*, Boyle mentioned that the deceptively simple ostinato persists for the entire piece. Boyle describes this ostinato as "A single upper-register pitch that repeats in a few basic durations" (p. 6). One might label this piece as "minimalistic" and like many minimalist works, the essence of this piece is in its dynamic metric sensations, which allow constant reinterpretation of its recurring pitch materials. However, the flexible ostinato never succumbs to a single metric interpretation. Instead, with its shifting rhythms, deceptive simplicity and delicate articulation, it floats freely above the texture, compelling entrainment to possible pulse streams. *Avenging Angel* utilises two contrasting ostinato (coined as Ostinato 1 and Ostinato 2). While Ostinato 1 is in the low register and strongly projects a simple quadruple meter, Ostinato 2 is the opposite of Ostinato 1 in almost every way—complex and freewheeling bassline, prominent with the use of dyadic thirds, fifths and sixths, suggesting tertian chords that interlock in a flexible manner. This piece is structured around the interaction between both ostinati in three phases, with Ostinato 1 becoming the material for the first phase. In the second phase, fragments of Ostinato 2 begin to intrude and destabilise Ostinato 1. Finally, in the third phase, Ostinato 2 emerges as dominant, cycling continually without variation. In *Neverland*, Boyle describes the flexible ostinato as "subtle and short-lived", as opposed to the first two songs where the ostinati are "long-lasting and obvious" (p. 15). Within the overall composition, the flexible ostinato serves as "An unusual climax, briefly offering a particular focus and momentum that stand in stark contrast to the heady counterpoint of the piece's opening and the diaphanous pianism of the middle phase" (p. 17). Yet, a stable groove remains constantly out of reach, probably depicting the distant and carefree *Neverland*.

Schumann (2021) studied the use of asymmetrical meter, ostinato and cycles in the music of Tigran Hamasyan by identifying, transcribing, and analysing at least 39 cycles from 137 tracks from 13 studio albums of Hamasyan's compositions from the year 2006-2020. Schumann discovered that the use of cycles only becomes prominent after Hamasyan's third album *Red Hail*, while the use of asymmetrical meter and ostinato has been consistent throughout his 13 albums. Hamasyan's use of asymmetrical meter can potentially be thought of as deriving from two sources related to his musical background: the folk music of his native Armenia and his love for progressive genres. Schumann found that the use of cycle in the selected works of Hamasyan could be divided into three categories: phrasal cycle, structural cycle, and developmental cycle. Compositions using phrasal cycle use one metric layer throughout most of the piece, while another layer is introduced in the middle of the composition to conflict with the first layer, creating a cycle. Compositions with structural cycles are constructed using metric dissonances throughout a significant portion of the composition and are defined in part by the tension created by multiple cycles. Pieces in the developmental cycle category introduce one ostinato at the beginning of a piece that is later juxtaposed with a second ostinato to create a cycle. Schumann concluded that although this article demonstrated asymmetrical meter, ostinato and cycles play an important role in Hamasyan's music, it only scratches the surface of Hamasyan's approach to rhythm and meter, inviting additional study of other aspects of Hamasyan's music.

Despite the growing number of theoretical works on the music of George Crumb, Knowles (2022) criticises scholars for almost disregarding the elements of rhythm and meter in the said scholarly body. As many scholars have addressed many features of Crumb's music such as the use of set classes, transpositional combination and unique timbral language (among others), relatively few scholars have discussed his use of rhythmic and metric elements. Knowles analysed selected works of Crumb such as "Notturmo I" from *Four Nocturnes*, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" from *Apparition*, excerpts from "Ancient Voices of

Children” and “Notturmo V” from *Night Music I* to investigate the rhythmic gestures in each work that generates varying levels of metricality. A detailed analysis of rhythm, time, and meter of *Sea Nocturne (...for the end of Time)* from *Vox Balaenae* was made. From this analysis, Knowles found that Crumb used the elements of metric ambiguity, metric emergence and ametric in composing this work that is written in Arch form. Knowles concluded that approaching the music of Crumb through the lens of metrical spectrum draws attention to manipulations of the recurrence and consistency of a perceived pulse and conflicts in rhythmic groupings – highlighting an array of rhythmic and metric structures. Knowles also described her study as “An initial inquiry into Crumb’s use of rhythm and metre, sketching the outlines of how these temporal elements are applied throughout his (Crumb’s) oeuvre” (p. 49).

Hahn (2021) investigated the projections of higher-dimensional lattices in Scott Joplin’s music using the description of generated rhythm (Pressing, 1983) and metric matrix (Locke, 2009, 2010). Pressing (1983) in Hahn (2021) stated that:

For a rhythm to be generated, every onset in the rhythm must be connected to every other onset in the rhythm by an unbroken chain of onsets that are separated by a constant duration called the “generative interval”. Generated rhythms are said to be prime generated rhythms when the generative interval’s length in pulses is coprime with the number of total pulses per repeated cycle of music (p. 4).

Locke (2009, 2010) developed metric matrix to quantify the simultaneous multidimensionality of African music. To simplify, the metric matrix is similar to hemiola, but with more ability to characterize off-beat pulse. In hemiola, we can assume that the rhythmic ratio is 3:2 and will coincide together on the downbeat. However, this is not often the case in African music. To solve this, Locke introduced the metric matrix system that could notate the rate of the notes unfolding and the temporal displacement relative to the downbeat. Hahn adapted Pressing (1983) and Locke (2009, 2010) into investigating the projections of higher-dimensional lattices in Joplin’s music and concluded that analytical insight into Joplin’s music could be gained through lattice structures as proposed by Hahn. Though Hahn selected a set of Joplin’s late works for this study, he claimed that this method of understanding Joplin’s music is applicable throughout the composer’s body of work.

Existing studies on works by Razak Abdul Aziz

Academic studies on the works of Razak Abdul Aziz are scarce, despite starting to gain academic attention in recent years. This section will discuss the existing studies of the works of this composer and ultimately reveal the need to undertake the investigation of this academic paper not just to decipher the meter in *5 Early Songs* but to also enrich the academia in matters relating to Razak Abdul Aziz.

The composer’s 10 Pantun Settings has been a favourite subject in a few academic papers. Zamani and Idrus (2022) analysed chosen texts from this song cycle. As the texts were an adaptation of Ahmad Abdullah’s *Nyanyian Kanak-Kanak* (1938), Razak Abdul Aziz selected ten (10) sets of *pantun* (rhyming poems in couplets or quatrains) and arranged them in certain orders to narrate a story. Zamani and Idrus contextualised the text analysis from the perspective of social (in)stabilities in arranged marriages. They concluded that the analysis and interviews with the composer had revealed “The pervasiveness of wretchedness, peripheralisation and disappointment across arranged marriages that provides real-life snapshots of loss and grief” (p. 13). Though Zamani and Idrus only selected and analysed texts from five songs (No. 1, 2, 3, 5, and 10), they were seen as an adequate representation of the story and argued that “10 Pantun Settings provoked a nostalgic saudade and past instabilities of what it means growing up married in preconfigured environments” (p. 13).

Investigation on the texts of 10 Pantun Settings was also made by Zamani and Gani (2020). Unlike Zamani and Idrus (2022) who had analysed chosen text from this work and incorporate social exchange theory to understand the underlying nuances of this song cycle, Zamani and Gani (2020) were interested in understanding the imagery behind the chosen texts of the said work by Razak Abdul Aziz and how these imageries were translated into music notations. The data for this study were mainly obtained from interviewing the composer, revealing that each song had its own imagery/ies association. These associations were a recollection of the composer during his earlier years, when he observed and participated in certain activities in Penang, Malaysia—the place he grew up in. Though the study focused on the imagery/ies of each song, the authors suggested that 10 Pantun Settings was about an abandoned wife who was daydreaming while swaying

her child in a cradle and only returned to reality at night when she realised that her husband was never coming back.

Zamani (2020) focused on the elements of Malaysian traditional performing arts, *magunatip* (bamboo dance popular in Sabah) and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet play popular in Kelantan) found in two of the songs in 10 Pantun Settings – No. 4 *Jangan Tengok Kami* and No. 6 *Pinjam Dandang*, respectively. As academic investigations on this matter were scarce, Zamani (2020) obtained most of his data from interviewing the composer, besides operating music analysis on these songs to relate and connect the data to the output from the interviews. Zamani (2020) also encouraged further investigations on other local compositions that are inspired by Malaysian traditional performing arts such as Ramlan Imam's *Putera* and Tazul Izan Tajuddin's *Puteri Saadong*.

Opera *Maria Zaitun*, the composer's adaptation of the short story *Perkembalian Seorang Yang Bernama Maria Zaitun* by Fatimah Busu is the centrepiece in Batubara et al. (2021). The analysis of the transformational process of adapting a novel into an opera was recorded by these researchers. Highlighting the selected parts of the short story, Razak Abdul Aziz had made some revisions in the original text to be suited to the libretto and music he wrote. Batubara et al. also discussed how the revised texts were then transformed into music notations, analysing the pitch series and metric and rhythmic elements used in some parts of the opera.

Zamani (2021a) had written an extensive dissertation on the inspirations of Razak Abdul Aziz in selected solo and collaborative piano works. As the major component of his doctoral degree was the academic recitals as documented by Zamani (2021b), he adopted Louise Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory (1938, 1994) into translating these inspirations in the performances of the selected works, being the co-creator of the said works. Rosenblatt said that "the reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment and a particular physical condition" (1938, p. 31). She revisited this later when she adapted the theory into musical performance, stating that:

...even better analogy for the re-enactment of the text is the musical performance...it's only an indication of how the composer was able to come in transcribing her exact thoughts on paper. Beyond that point, the interpreter is on her own (1994, p. 14).

Adapting the theory to the academic recitals, Zamani (2021b) recorded the process as an artist project. Programmes for both recitals were included and preparations for each selected work were documented. He also mentioned that these recitals were the first ones to be dedicated entirely to a Malaysian composer. Both recitals received positive feedback from the composer and other attendees, encouraging more performances and studies on the composer as well as other Malaysian composers.

Reflection

Looking at the review, recent investigations by scholars on the element of time in contemporary art music have been conducted, either in tonal music such as the music of Scott Joplin, Tigran Hamasyan and Craig Taborn, or post-tonal music such as the music of George Crumb, Anton Webern, and Bela Bartók. These scholars investigated various elements of time in their respective research, ranging from analysing the use of meter and rhythm to developing theories to understand the element of time in the selected works. However, the composers and works investigated in this study were heavily leaning towards European and American-centric, not giving any shoutout to composers outside the said region.

Existing academic studies on Razak Abdul Aziz are scarce, to say the least. Only scholars like Zamani and Idrus (2022), Zamani (2021a, 2021b), Batubara et al. (2021), Zamani (2020), Zamani and Gani (2020) and Zamani et al. (2019) had conducted such studies on this composer. Though his work 10 Pantun Settings became a centrepiece for a few academic investigations, the same could not be said for his other works. Hence, this paper intends to study 5 *Early Songs* by conducting a systematic theoretical analysis on the use of meter by adapting common music theory as mentioned in Kostka et al. (2013) and Kostka and Santa (2018) and possibly integrating Locke (2009, 2010) in one of the songs.

Analysis

The analysis begins with a brief background of 5 *Early Songs*, mentioning the composition year and texts used. It is then followed by the systematic theoretical analysis as proposed by Kostka et al. (2013) and Kostka and Santa (2018) for all songs and integrating Locke (2010) for the fourth song in this cycle. The analysis will reveal the use of meter in each song, hence enhancing the understanding towards the element of time in this cycle.

Background of 5 *Early Songs*

This song cycle was written in the years 1980 and 1988 – “A Song”, “Dead” and “Grace for a Child” in 1980 and “In Winter in the Woods” and “Requiem” in 1988. The texts for these songs were adapted from poems by Percy Bysshe Shelly (1792-1822), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Robert Herrick (1591-1674), Robert Frost (1874-1963) and Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), respectively. The complete cycle has received a recent performance at Fairuz Zamani PhD Recital 2 at Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (ASWARA) in February 2020, besides its inclusion as part of standard contemporary vocal repertoire at this institution (Zamani, 2021a).

A Song. The first song in this cycle, “A Song”, was written for solo voice and cello or piano. Either way, the music is written using two (2) types of meters – mixed meter and polymeter (implied). The use of mixed meter is apparent throughout the song. However, measures 8-10 display the most rapid change of meter in the entire song (see Figure 1).

The musical score for measures 8-10 of "A Song" shows a rapid change of meter. The score is written for voice and piano/cello. The lyrics are: "There was no leaf u-pon the fo - rest bare,". The meter changes from 2/4 in measure 8, to 3/4 in measure 9, and to 4/4 in measure 10. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment that adapts to the changing meters.

Figure 1. The rapid change of meter in “A Song” (measures 8-10).

At all times, the solo and collaborative parts are using similar meters. Nevertheless, at closer inspection, the collaborative part has light accents at odd places throughout - displaced accents. These displaced accents mostly happen in a cycle of three (3) as shown in the figure below, implying the use of polymeter (3/8 meter on the collaborative part against 4/4 meter in the solo part) (see Figure 2).

The musical score for measures 8-10 of "A Song" shows displaced accents on the collaborative part. The score is written for voice and piano/cello. The lyrics are: "A wi-dow bird sat mour - ning for her love". The meter is 4/4. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with displaced accents, implying the use of polymeter (3/8 meter on the collaborative part against 4/4 meter in the solo part).

Figure 2. Displaced accents on collaborative part implying polymeter.

Although the accents are mostly displaced, there are instances where the accents are placed, hence terminating the polymeter suggestion (see Figure 3).

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics "And lit - tle mo - tion in the air". A fermata is placed over the final note of the phrase. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, featuring a complex rhythmic pattern with various accents and dynamics. The dynamic marking *mf* is present in both staves.

Figure 3. Placed accents terminating the suggestion of polymeter (measures 13-14).

Dead. The second song in the cycle is written for solo voice and piano (similar to the rest of the songs in this cycle with the exception of “A Song” as mentioned earlier). There are two types of meters found in this song – asymmetrical and mixed meter. The use of asymmetrical meter is found as early as the first bar of the song (see Figure 4).

The image shows the beginning of a musical score. The top staff is labeled "Voice/Suara" and is in treble clef. The bottom two staves are labeled "Piano" and are in bass clef. The tempo is marked as "(♩ = 66)". The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with a fermata over the final note. The dynamic marking *pp* is present in the piano part.

Figure 4. The use of asymmetrical meter at the beginning of the song (measure 1).

The meter changes at almost every measure in this song, hence fulfilling the criterion of mixed meter – rapid change of meter. The “mix” also consists of symmetrical and asymmetrical meters (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 consists of two systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled '5', features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are 'The touch of earth - ly years.' The tempo marking *accelerando* is placed above the vocal line. The piano accompaniment also includes a *p* dynamic and *accelerando* marking. The second system, labeled '6', shows a piano accompaniment with a *mp* dynamic. It includes a section with a *pp* dynamic and a tempo instruction: 'Start slowly and gradually accelerate to the original tempo'. The meter changes from 4/4 to 5/4 and then to 8/4.

Figure 5. The use of mixed meter (symmetrical and asymmetrical meter).

Grace for a Child. Possibly the simplest in terms of the use of meter, “Grace for a Child” utilizes mostly common time 4/4. Though there are instances where the composer implied displaced accents at certain spots in the music by beginning the phrases at different beats between voice and piano creating different tactus and probably resulting in polymeter, this was not as clear as the first song in this cycle (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 shows a musical score for measures 10 and 11. The vocal line (treble clef) has a *mp* dynamic and the lyrics 'For a be - ni - son to fall'. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) also has a *mp* dynamic. The piano part features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The meter is 4/4.

Figure 6. Phrases begin at different beats creating an illusion of displaced accent (measures 10-11).

There is also an asymmetrical meter of 5/4 used in this song, which could be found in the last two measures of the song (measures 13-14) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 shows a musical score for two measures in 5/4 time. The first measure (measure 13) contains the lyrics "and on us all." and the second measure (measure 14) contains "Mm". The score includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features triplets and a dynamic marking of *p* (piano).

Figure 7. Asymmetrical meter at the end of “Grace for a Child”.

In Winter in the Woods. At cursory examination, the fourth song in this cycle utilises mixed meter throughout as the change of meter occurs at the beginning of almost every measure in this song, using simple duple, triple and quadruple meters interchangeably. The following excerpt demonstrates the said use (Figure 8).

Figure 8 shows a musical score for four measures. The first measure (measure 7) is in 3/4 time with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second measure (measure 8) is in 3/8 time with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The third measure (measure 9) is in 3/4 time with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The fourth measure (measure 10) is in 4/4 time with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The lyrics are "And lay the maple low." The score includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

Figure 8. An example of the interchangeable use of simple duple, triple, and quadruple meters.

On closer inspection, the composer used complex rhythmic ratios in this song, such as 3:2:1, 4:3:2 and 6:3:2 (among others). These rhythmic ratios result in interlocking. To analyse this, the author would like to adopt metric matrix as proposed by Locke (2009, 2010). Metric matrix is a concept where structured patterns of accentuation are exchanged among instruments (in this case, among solo voice and R.H. and L.H. collaborative piano part), resulting in a set of beats of different durations and locations within a fixed period. This concept is developed to enable discussion of the rhythmic design with precision. Locke also argues that this concept also “points towards a systematic explanation for musical expressiveness in compositions and performance” (2010). Though Locke introduced metric matrix to quantify the complexity of African music, the

author found this concept helpful in understanding the rhythmic complexity of certain measures in this song. For instance, the opening measure of this song begins with 3:2 and then evolves to 3:2:1, as shown in Figure 9.

Pesante/Dengan perasaan berat
(♩ = 40)

Voice/Suara

Piano

mp

Figure 9. The rhythmic complexity in the opening measure of “In Winter in the Woods”.

Translating this excerpt into Locke’s metric matrix, this is the result (see Figure 10):

Voice

RH Piano

LH Piano

Figure 10. The opening measure in metric matrix in simple triple time.

Complex rhythmic patterns are also found in other measures of the song. The author had chosen two (2) more excerpts to demonstrate this complexity and translate them into Locke’s metric matrix. Measure 4 (see Figure 11) begins with 3:1 in the first beat and evolves to 4:3 on the second beat, before escalating and becoming more complex on the third beat 6:3:2.

Figure 11. Measure 4 of “In Winter in the Woods”.

As demonstrated through the metric matrix in Figure 12, it reveals that the rhythm used in the voice part coincides with the piano part on the second beat and on the upbeat of the third beat, where the last quaver on the voice coincides with the fourth note in the sextuplet group on R.H. piano.

Figure 12. Measure 4 in metric matrix in simple triple time.

Possibly the most complex rhythmic design in the entire song (and entire cycle), measure 17 (see Figure 13) begins with 2:1 in the first beat and evolves to 3:2 on the second beat, before escalating and becoming more complex in the third beat 4:3:2 and 6:3:2 in the fourth beat. Despite this complexity, the metric matrix reveals that the rhythm used in the voice part coincides with the piano part (with the exception of the first and third quaver), as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 13. Measure 17 of In “Winter in the Woods”.

Figure 14. Measure 17 in metric matrix in simple quadruple time.

Requiem. The last song in the cycle utilises the most metric elements in the entire cycle and consists of four (4) distinctive sections – A, B, C and D. Sections A, B and C make recurrences in similar or slightly different fashions. Section A is in simple triple meter 3/16 (see Figure 15).

Figure 15. The use of simple triple 3/16 meter in Section A.

Section **B** uses a simple quadruple meter of 4/4. However, due to the vast gap between the denominator of meters in the first section (denominator 16) and the second section (denominator 4), the composer chose to utilise metric modulation, shown on the top left corner of Figure 16 ($\text{♩} = \text{♩}$). This could be perplexing as each semiquaver in Section **A** represents one (1) beat, whereas each semiquaver in Section **B** is treated as one-fourth of a beat for the voice while the collaborative part is playing in groups of semiquaver sextuplet.

Figure 16. The use of metric modulation at the beginning of Section **B** (measure 7).

Section **C** is chiefly written with mixed meter, as the change of meter occurs at the beginning of every bar in this section. Figure 17 exemplifies this change.

Figure 17. Excerpt from Section **C** (measures 9-11).

Section **D** occurs at the end of the song and is written in simple duple time 2/4 (apart from the 2-bar extension) (see Figure 18).

(♩ = 69)
mp
 Here he lies where he longed to be;
mp

Figure 18. Excerpt from the beginning of Section D (measures 33-34).

The 2-bar extension at the end of this section (Figure 19) has an indication of metric modulation (♩ = ♪). Although, on the surficial level, this metric modulation looks similar to the one in Section B (as shown in Figure 16), upon closer inspection, the metric modulation here derives from the tempo from Section D (65 crotchet bpm) rather than 60 dotted quaver bpm in Section A. To measure these two tempi using crotchet as the common denominator, Section D is in 65 crotchet bpm and Section A is 45 crotchet bpm.

40
 ♩ = ♪
ff

Figure 19. Metric modulation at 2-bar extension.

Conclusion

After thorough examinations of each song in *5 Early Songs*, we could conclude that the first three songs used mixed meter, implied polymeter, symmetrical and asymmetrical meters. The use of meter is more sophisticated in the last two songs, where more complex rhythmic and metric organisations are used such as rhythmic ratios that were analysed using Locke's metric matrix and the use of different types of metric organisation and manipulation in different parts of a song. As the first three songs were written in 1980 and the last two songs were in 1988, the gap of 8 years probably had matured the composer to learn and master more music materials,

specifically concerning the element of meter. The maturing up of this composer in the said musical element is apparent throughout his compositional life. This is evident if one were to take a glance at the works by Razak Abdul Aziz after 5 *Early Songs*. The element of meter progressively becomes more complex with time, ultimately reaching its pinnacle in works such as the opera *Maria Zaitun*, *Etudes for Piano Solo* and *Pepatah Episodes*.

As stated earlier in this paper, Razak Abdul Aziz has quite an extensive list of compositions. However (with the exclusion of this paper), only 10 Pantun Settings and *Maria Zaitun* had been studied by scholars, as discussed in the review section. This calls for more research and investigations on other works by this composer from various perspectives such as compositional, analytical, and philosophical (among others) as he is regarded as arguably the earliest contemporary composer in Malaysia (Zamani et al., 2019). It is hoped that the investigation this paper undertook would inspire other scholars to conduct studies in similar and/or different area(s) of interest or composition(s), academically documenting more works of this composer and/or other contemporary Malaysian composers.

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