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The Power of Dara Puspita: How Four Girls From Indonesia Brought Rock ‘n’ Roll to the World

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The Power of Dara Puspita:
How Four Girls From Indonesia Brought Rock ‘n’ Roll to the World

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SIT Study Abroad
Indonesia: Arts, Religion, and Social Change
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How Four Girls From Indonesia Brought Rock ‘n’ Roll to the World

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Note: Many sources were translated from Bahasa Indonesia into English for the use of this paper. Translations are approximate.
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Prologue: Jakarta, December 18\textsuperscript{th} 1971

Surrounded by her ever-growing vinyl collection, twenty-year-old Ingga is sprawled on her bedroom floor with her ear pressed closely to a small transistor radio. An announcement on RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia) has caught her attention, but she fears she misheard the DJ. Could it be true? Are they finally coming home? She is in disbelief, but indeed the famed all-female Rock ‘n’ Roll band Dara Puspita is scheduled to play two shows in Jakarta in just a few weeks. A smile flashes across her face. Her heroes have returned.

After what seems like eternity, it is finally the night of December 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1971. After hitching a ride from her suburban town, she finds herself at Istora Senayan in Jakarta. Surrounded by a teeming throng of 15,000 people, Ingga suddenly swells with excitement. And she is not alone. The effervescence of the crowd is more than palpable. For the past three and a half years, Dara Puspita was busy touring Europe and their fans missed them dearly. The youth of Indonesia have anxiously waited for this night.

When the four Indonesian girls finally take the stage, they are met with a deafening roar from the crowd. It has been three and half years since Dara Puspita performed for their own country. Back in 1967, Titiek Hamzah was merely eighteen years old. Now at twenty-two, the youngest member commands the audience with her thumping bass lines and incorrigible confidence. The lead singer Titiek A.R. assumes her place behind the microphone and strums her guitar with an ease and aggression that instantly makes her fans cheer. Perhaps a subtler performer, rhythm guitarist Lies slings her guitar strap around her shoulders and faces the audience with a smile.
The final member Susy Nander situates herself behind the drum set and nods to her fellow members that she is ready.

The band launches into their opening number “Surabaya” to wails of joy from the audience. Ingga finds herself pushed and shoved as young boys and girls press up against the stage, craning their necks for a better view of their heroes. The blissful devotion of the crowd reverberates around her as Indonesian youth sing along in unison. Looking around, Ingga sees tears plastered on the faces of her peers and she feels herself fill with similar emotion. After a few more songs, the air is thick with energy. As the band breaks into “Get Ready”, Titiek Hamzah shouts from the stage, “Let’s go, who wants to dance? Come here now. Throw away your embarrassment!” and with that the crowd floods the stage.1 Everyone dances wildly and happily to the music. Susy bashes away so hard on her drum set that she breaks a drumstick. Audience and band alike revel in the glory of Rock ‘n’ Roll. For the power of Dara Puspita is indescribable. There is just something pure and honest and genuine about their music, and their fans will always love them for it.

As Ingga sits in front of me more than forty years later, she tells me something similar. She is a quiet and gracious woman, who happily shows me her vinyl collection. She owns every Dara Puspita release to date, including some that she has even bootlegged herself. We listen to their music and discuss exactly what it was like to be part of the Rock ‘n’ Roll scene in Indonesia in

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1 “Darpus: Djakarta 18 & 19th Desember 1971.” *Aktuil*, No. 89, January 1972, 28. This phrase also has a double meaning. The Bahasa Indonesia word “kemaluan” can simultaneously be translated as “embarrassment” as well as “penis” or “vagina.” This nuance adds to the flavor of the phrase and highlights Titiek Hamzah’s unabashed stage presence.
the late 1960s. As I lean close to hear, she says, “for anyone who has had an encounter with Dara Puspita, it just stays with you.” And I believe her wholeheartedly.²


**Four Girls Shake Up the World of Rock ‘n’ Roll**

Dara Puspita was unprecedented in Indonesian music history. They were the first all female Rock ‘n’ Roll band to both sing and play all their own instruments. Although the band was nothing more than four girls who loved to play Rock ‘n’ Roll, they revolutionized music in Indonesia and proved that they deserved a place in rock history. While not overtly political, they were rebellious in their own way. From their heavy sound to their primal screams to their wild

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² The author has taken some creative liberties with this opening story. The anecdote should be taken as emblematic of the reunion of a die-hard Dara Puspita fan with her heroes rather than a precise recapitulation of the exact events of December 18, 1971.
³ All photos courtesy of the personal collection of Handi and Inggawati A.W (except for the one noted exception).
stage antics, they carved a place for women in rock culture. Additionally, existing at the peak of political transition, these four girls were at the forefront of cultural change, not only in Indonesia but also throughout the world. In retrospect it is clear that Dara Puspita symbolize something greater than women playing rock music. They represent a nation emerging as a viable player in a global sphere. Dara Puspita proved that females could conquer the world of Rock ‘n’ Roll. Their story exemplifies the triumph not only of young women in Indonesia, but all over the globe.

The Early Days and the Old Order

1960s’ Indonesia was not exactly the ideal climate for Rock ‘n’ Roll musicians. With the country’s freshly realized independence, Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno, tried to foster a sense of nationalism and Indonesian unity. Though not a communist himself (he was part of PNI, Partai Nasional Indonesia), he strongly sympathized with other communist countries (like China) and was frequently accused of being a Marxist. While his political leanings are somewhat murky, it is clear that Sukarno obstinately maintained a “fierce paranoia toward Western influence” and condemned that “terrible ngak ngik ngok sound from abroad.” Sukarno was adamant about this dreaded music from the West, so much so that leather shoes were confiscated, barbers were prohibited from giving Beatles’ style haircuts, and long hair on boys was promptly cut. Other political officials adopted his views, going so far as to organize a

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Both quotes were derived from the above source.
5 Hsu."Blame That Tune.(MUSIC)(Indonesian pop music)," 127.
public bonfire in Semerang, Java of records by Elvis Presley and Tommy Sands. However, the sounds of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones were infectious and Indonesian youth could not be prevented from filling their ears with the righteousness of rock music. They refused to forfeit their beloved records to the police as the government suggested. Rock was everywhere and teenagers scrambled to get their hands on any music that they could. Frequently they had to be secretive about their membership in rock bands since the older generations scorned the music as a bad influence. In their formative years, Dara Puspita also had to remain covert. When they first moved to Jakarta to kick-start their career, they lied to their parents, claiming that their schooling required it.

Rock ‘n’ Roll represented a global counterculture. Elsewhere throughout the world, hippies were making flower necklaces, flashing peace signs, and protesting the Vietnam War. It was a time of freedom and youth. While Rock ‘n’ Roll might have been merely countercultural in the West, it was “potentially counterrevolutionary elsewhere.” In order to keep his country in order, Sukarno aimed to stamp out the music and its surrounding culture. Indeed, “Sukarno’s greatest scorn was reserved for Rock ‘n’ Roll.”

These were the political circumstances in which Dara Puspita first began to make music. Hailing from the city of Surabaya in East Java, two sisters set out to conquer their wildest

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8 David Tarigan (music journalist) and Denny Sakrie (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 17th, 2012.
10 Hsu.”Blame That Tune,” 127.
11 Hsu.”Blame That Tune” 127.
dreams. Little did they know that decades later they would be hailed as “the truest expression of Sukarno’s feared ‘‘Beatlesism’.’” Titiek A.R. and Lies A.R. were only two years apart, Titiek being the elder. Sitting on the back porch of their family’s house on Jl. Welirang one night in 1964, the sisters decided to form a band that would play music just like their favorite musicians, The Beatles. They recruited their friends Susy Nander to play the drums and Ani Kusuma to play rhythm guitar. Titiek would be the lead vocalist and lead guitarist while Lies would play the bass. At this time they operated under the name Irama Puspita, or Rhythm of Flowers. Irama Puspita gained preliminary experience by playing at the parties of their friends.

These girls were dedicated to their craft. When they heard that the famous band Koes Bersaudera (Koes Brothers) were to have a gig in Surabaya, they knew that they must go to seek their help. After the concert, they approached the brothers and told them that they wanted to

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become serious musicians. They even picked up the band’s instruments and played for them. Tonny Koeswoyo was immediately intrigued by their sound and saw the potential of a female rock act. Never before in Indonesian history had there been an all female rock band that both sang and played all their own instruments. With some finagling, Tonny convinced the hiring committee of Koes Bersaudera to allow Irama Puspita to open for them at a gig in April 1964.

This first concert was at Taman Hiburan Rakyat in Surabaya, a famous amusement park. The crowd instantly loved the brash confidence and honest simplicity of Irama Puspita. This first performance went so well, that they were invited to play a New Year’s show with Koes Bersaudara in Jakarta. Thus Irama Puspita embarked on their maiden voyage to play a real gig outside of Surabaya. As December 31st approached, the concert sold out. The two bands played at Kemayoran International Airport Restaurant, a renowned venue. It was Irama Puspita’s first real chance to show Indonesia that they could be “bold and daring and not ashamed.” For the event, they sewed their own clothes in the style of The Beatles. When they took the stage that night, they shocked their audience. These were girls who could rock! That show was “truly a breakthrough in the music world.” While Koes Bersaudara made it possible for Dara Puspita to get some time in the spotlight, the girls had the style and charisma to prove they deserved it.

With Tonny Koeswoyo’s encouragement, the girls were convinced to stay in Jakarta. They played a variety of gigs that required them to lie to their parents about the true purpose of their time spent in the capital. They also traveled throughout Java to play cities like Semarang, Solo, and Malang. Eventually Lies, who was still in high school, had to return to Surabaya to finish her exams and graduate. In her absence, the young fifteen-year-old Titiek Hamzah was

recruited to play bass. Titiek was a true live wire. A spirited performer and talented bassist, she quickly captured the attention of her fans. When Lies returned from her exams, Ani Kusuma left the band. Though Lies originally played bass, she switched to rhythm guitar and Titiek Hamzah remained on bass. It was with this final lineup that Irama Puspita would tour and record.

However, the band would undergo one more change before their real career took off. At one of their gigs at Istora Senayan, they were accidentally signed up as Dara Puspita (Flower Girls) instead of Irama Puspita. This name seemed to stick and the girls decided to keep it. Thus from this point on the band would consist of Titiek A.R. on lead guitar and lead vocals, Titiek Hamzah on bass and vocals, Lies A.R. on rhythm guitar and vocals, and Susy Nander on drums and vocals under the name Dara Puspita.

Left, Lies A.R. at Jalan Bulungan 7, Jakarta, 1965
Right, The final lineup of Dara Puspita at Jalan Bulungan 7, Jakarta, 1965

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Gaining Traction in Southeast Asia

In September of 1965 Dara Puspita was granted their first opportunity to play outside of Indonesia. Navy official Colonel Koesno had originally recruited Koes Bersaudera to play a series of gigs at his Monte Carlo Nightclub in Bangkok but the brothers were jailed three months before they were to travel to Thailand, allowing Dara Puspita to replace them. Curiously, the band was also present at the same event that resulted in the Koes Bersaudara’s arrest. In June of 1965, the two bands were invited to play a house party in Jakarta hosted by Colonel Koesno. When Koes Bersaudera started playing “I Saw Her Standing There” by The Beatles, Sukarno supporters started harassing the brothers for playing the forbidden music. The following morning they were jailed without explanation and remained imprisoned for three months. For reasons unknown, Dara Puspita avoided punishment even though they too played rock songs.

However, for the next month the girls had to report to a government committee that determined which songs were acceptable to play. Every day from 7 am to 2 pm, Dara Puspita would stand in front of the committee with their instruments while the government officials asked them to play different songs. They were not given water or food. These interrogations were somewhat pointless, as the officials did not know the difference between songs. They forbid Dara Puspita to play tunes by The Beatles and Koes Bersaudara while somehow “Satisfaction” by The Rolling Stones slid under the radar. Eventually Dara Puspita was

19 David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 19th, 2012.
released and the band prepared to depart for Thailand on September 29, 1965, the same day that Koes Bersaudera were released from jail.

October 1, 1965, just two days after Dara Puspita arrived in Bangkok, marks "the single most essential date in the country’s post-colonial history."21 On this day, six army generals were killed in Jakarta, ending Sukarno’s Old Order as a military coup placed General Suharto in power.22 Suharto’s New Order Regime (under the Golkar party) set out to cleanse the country of communists and communist sympathizers.23 In the following years, hundreds of thousands of people suspected of communist leanings were killed.24 Suharto quickly aligned himself with Western powers (the US included) that had already adopted their own anti-communist consciousness and were well immersed in the Cold War. Thus he ushered in a new “shock of freedom” to Indonesian culture.25 Western influences that were once condemned under Sukarno were now encouraged. Youth had the freedom to wear their hair long, their skirts short, and listen to as much Rock ‘n’ Roll as they pleased.

Under these new political circumstances, Dara Puspita embarked on a three-month music spree in Bangkok. The band frequented Colonel Koesno’s Monte Carlo nightclub where they quickly gained traction. Their time spent in Thailand gave them the opportunity to refine their sound and even write new songs, like “Puyaili,” a Thai welcome song. It became readily apparent that if Dara Puspita were going to have a serious music career, they had to produce an album soon. Before long, the band started experiencing strange circumstances after their gigs.

22 Alan Bishop, Liner Notes from *Dara Puspita 1966-1998*.
25 David Tarigan (music journalist) and Denny Sakrie (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 17th, 2012.
Cars filled with gangsters would frequently trail them on their way home. After they departed Thailand on December 23rd, 1965, they realized that Colonel Koesno might have been in cahoots with Sukarno sympathizers to oust the Rock ‘n’ Roll musicians. When the girls returned home, the new Suharto government offered them a national Indonesian medal of honor for their bravery. On principle, Dara Puspita wholeheartedly refused.  

Back in Jakarta, the band quickly got to work on recording their first album in January of 1966. Entitled *Jang Pertama* (The First), it was recorded on the Mesra Records label. Mohamad Sidik Tamimi owned the label as well as Dimita Moulding (the pressing company) and Dimita Studio (the recording studio). The album was recorded live in a one-week session. Because the recording studio was located close to train tracks, the girls had to record during the midnight shift when the area was quiet. A. Rahman of Dimita Records was hesitant to release their album at first because it was too rough and aggressive, even though Suharto was now in power and musicians had more freedom. Despite Dara Puspita’s protests, he toned down the rawness of their music in the process of post-production. Indeed few people had faith in the girls, including Mr. Tan, the king of the music industry at the time. When the girls heard about his skepticism, they immediately picked up their instruments and forced him to listen to their rendition of “Pantai Pataya.” They would not let anyone tell them that they could not play Rock ‘n’ Roll simply because they were girls. Mr. Tan was instantly blown away by their energy and power. These four girls all less than twenty-five years old knew how to command an audience.

And their record sales proved this. Released in February of 1966, *Yang Pertama* sold 500 copies in the first week and went on the sell over 40,000 copies total, a feat for any band from

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26 Alan Bishop, Liner Notes from *Dara Puspita 1966-1998*. All information regarding Dara Puspita’s departure from Thailand can be found in Alan Bishop’s liner notes.
Indonesia. Young people across the country flocked to their local ice cream parlor to buy Yang Pertama or tuned in to RRI where they could hear all their favorite hits. And indeed their enthusiasm was reflected in record prices. Initially priced at a mere Rp. 125 (comparable to about 10¢), the price shot up to Rp. 500 shortly after released. People everywhere began paying attention to Dara Puspita and their catchy rock songs. Nearly every single track from their first album received airplay and Dara Puspita embarked on a demanding tour throughout Indonesia.

Because Yang Pertama was such a success, Tamimi of Mesra Records put pressure on Dara Puspita to record a follow up album. Thus they went back to the studio and in November 1966 their self-titled special edition second album was released. Though rushed in its’ recording, Dara Puspita Special Edition also earned release in Malaysia and Singapore. Unlike the first album, this one was recorded with vocal overdub and mixed up front. This album was less revered as fans were still digesting Yang Pertama.

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27 Handi, Mengenang: Dara Puspita, 17.
And also Alan Bishop’s liner notes: Alan Bishop, Liner Notes from Dara Puspita 1966-1998.
28 Handi, Mengenang: Dara Puspita, 17.
29 Handi, Mengenang: Dara Puspita, 18.
30 David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 19th, 2012.
Between their second and third album, Dara Puspita toured frequently through Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. They even earned a morning slot playing live on a daily Malaysian television show on RTM (Malaysian National Television). Their songs continued to be hits on the radio and more and more young people, girls especially, were listening to their music. They even won a spot playing alongside the Dutch rock group The Blue Diamonds at the infamous Hotel Indonesia in Bali. The career the girls had imagined was beginning to materialize.

The girls during their time spent playing in Bali and meeting the governor’s wife.

In late 1967 Dara Puspita found themselves returning to the recording studio once again. This time they would release their first album with a title in English, symbolizing the growing popularity of their music. *Green Green Grass* was released on Mesra Records, featuring two songs in English. Like their previous records, fans quickly devoured *Green Green Grass*, and the album easily sold 5,000 copies in the first week.

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31 David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 19th, 2012.
1968 proved to be a formative year for the band. It began when Aktuil, a famous music magazine at the time, named Dara Puspita the most popular band in Indonesia through a voter poll.\footnote{Handi, Mengenang: Dara Puspita, 22.} And not just the best female act, the best popular act, men included. In June they recorded their fourth album entitled \textit{A Go Go}, but this time with El Shinta Records. They decided to change labels because they were not satisfied with the texture of their music under Mesra Records. The Dimita Studio insisted on toning down their sound and making it smooth around the edges. But the girls of Dara Puspita wanted to capture their raw sound and El Shinta made this possible.\footnote{David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2012. All information regarding the switch in record labels devolve from this source.} \textit{A Go Go} was the last album Dara Puspita recorded.

![A flyer declaring Dara Puspita to be the #1 female band.](image-url)
The year of 1968 was also ripe with the opportunity of a lifetime. Representatives of Mr. Wilhem Butz, a music manager from Germany, approached the girls in July. He offered Dara Puspita a one-year contract to tour Europe with the potential to extend the tour if things went well.\(^3^6\) Just one month later the girls left for Iran, the first stop on their international tour. They brought along Mr. Moerdono to act as their manager, translator, and advisor. Little did they know that they were embarking on a tour that would span nine countries, countless cities, and occupy three and a half years of their career.

**Dara Puspita Takes on Europe**

Their international adventures began in the unlikely location of Teheran, Iran. Here the girls of Dara Puspita were forced to adjust quickly to life on the road. Back in Indonesia, the band had many technicians and friends that could help them set up their instruments on stage before a show. But in Iran, they had to do all this themselves in a short time period as the audience watched. Mr. Moerdono helped to the best of his ability, but playing internationally proved to be challenging. Because the girls were inexperienced in handling musical equipment, they suffered broken instruments and short circuits. Their difficulties continued as they toured Turkey and Germany. Sometimes they were required to play two shows in one night, separated by distances greater than 50 miles. It was not uncommon for them to speed from one city to the next to make their gig on time. Additionally, they were on a tight budget as the cost of living in Europe was more expensive than Indonesia.

This new lifestyle quickly resulted in stress and tension between the band members. When arguing amongst themselves proved fruitless, they quickly turned their frustrations to Mr. Moerdono. They accused him of poor negotiations with Mr. Butz, who had failed to fulfill many aspects of the contract. The girls were without the new clothes, new sound system, or hotel accommodations that Mr. Butz had promised them. As the strain of touring grew, Mr. Moerdono’s health rapidly declined. In early 1969, he was forced to return to Indonesia and Dara Puspita had to fend for themselves without their interpreter and manager.

Desperate for help abroad, Dara Puspita wrote to Tonny Koeswoyo of Koes Bersaudara to send their technician, Handiyanto (better known as Handi), to Europe to replace Mr. Moerdono. Tonny agreed and Mr. Handi arrived in Budapest, Hungary in April of 1969. The girls were to play with MACIVA (Hungarian Variety Circus) as part of Circus Luxembourg. In many ways the story of Dara Puspita is the story of the heroism of Handi. A true jack-of-all-trades, he is solely responsible for holding the band together throughout their European tour. He acted as a manager, technician, mediator, cook, and friend.

Handi with Dara Puspita in Hungary

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With Handi in tow, Dara Puspita felt more comfortable in Hungary. Though neither party spoke Hungarian, Handi was able to communicate in his broken German. He quickly learned that so far they had impressed their European audiences and new followers were flocking to hear their shows. Though Dara Puspita only played twice a week and during weekends and holidays, their audiences instantly loved them. Postcards of the band were promptly produced and over 2 million copies were sold. Handi also helped create a slice of Indonesia in Hungary. Early in the morning he would go to the market to shop for groceries so that he could simulate Indonesian meals. Using spaghetti, he cooked an altered version of mie goreng (fried noodles) for the band. They were so relieved to eat food from home! Handi also used his crafty skills to fashion a net out of plastic bags. He would journey to a nearby river and catch fish to fry; just the way the girls liked it. He had a way of comforting their minds and making their abroad experience easier. When the girls no longer had to worry about their physical comfort, they could focus more on their music. And the more they played, the more people paid attention.

Mr. Handi beside his caravan and with a circus member. Hungary, 1969.

40 Handi, Mengenang: Dara Puspita, 42-43.
In addition to their new European fans, other performers associated with the circus were also curious about the four girls from Indonesia. During their time spent with the company, Dara Puspita grew acquainted with a group of gymnastics called 6 Hartigay. While this initially provided them with much needed friends, it also lead to internal disputes that threatened the coherence of the band. Titiek Hamzah and Lies A.R. soon began dating two of the acrobats. This instantly upset Titiek A.R. who thought that they were neglecting the band and putting their own personal desires first. She went so far as to kick Titiek Hamzah out of her caravan and forced the two outcasts to cook for themselves. However, Titiek A.R. was hypocritical in her accusations, as she previously had had boyfriends while touring. Despite the fact that both sides stubbornly continued their behavior, their concerts never suffered. No matter what conflict was happening onstage, they always performed well. Because the band was equally divided, it was up to Handi to resolve the conflict. Through careful negotiating, he was able to get the girls to compromise and Titiek H and Lies were allowed to continue dating their boyfriends.
Darups in Hungary, 1969

Hungary proved to be a turning point in Dara Puspita’s career. For the first time, they were an established act in a country other than their own. They had friends and boyfriends and attracted more fans with every performance. At this pinnacle of success, they were presented with an important proposition. Their original contract with Mr. Butz had expired and he offered to extend their tour. The new contract would include an album recorded on an 8 track (a new technology at the time), better accommodations, and better pay. However, a Mr. Robert King from London, England also approached the band. Though Mr. King’s contract included a recording session with CBS in England, there were fewer incentives. But England was the land of The Beatles and this instantly attracted the girls. They knew that if they wanted to become famous throughout all of Europe (not just Germany and Hungary), they would have to try to make it in England. Their commitment to Rock ‘n’ Roll was fierce, and they decided to risk everything to find their place among their idols.
Caravan life during Dara Puspita’s time spent with Circus Luxembourg. Left, with Handi. Right, with members of 6 Hartigay. 1969

In front of their van with Handi and a technician.

So after some bureaucratic difficulties, Titiek A.R., Titiek H, Lies, Susy, and Handi obtained government visas and went to London. They moved into a flat in Chelsea, just one street over from King’s Street, center of London’s fashion. Instantly feeling the promise of fame, the girls wanted to change their image to appear more internationally accessible. Titiek A.R. became Tikki, Titiek Hamzah became Takki, Lies became Leese, and Susy kept her name. Along with these “Westernized” names came three new songs in English. They were “Love Has No Cure,” “Change of Heart,” and “Welcome to My House.” The girls also argued for a change in band name, but Handi remained firm in his conviction that they should keep Dara Puspita.
Maintaining their Indonesian roots was important. He claimed that, “Indonesia…should feel grateful and proud to have four girls with great courage and recklessness who have pioneered internationally, prove that Indonesia has a pop group that can compete with those of the West.”

Additionally, the name embodied the idea that “Indonesia has brave, clever women that are not inferior to men.” And so with their new London surroundings, Dara Puspita embarked on the second half of their European tour.

During the first few weeks they spent in England, Dara Puspita did not play any shows. Before long the girls grew restless and confronted their agent in London, Mr. Collin Johnson from NEM Enterprises, about their stagnant tour. They discovered that Mr. King had failed to obtain Dara Puspita’s membership to the Music Union, a necessary requirement for them to perform. After some negotiations, they were finally accepted. The band closed out 1969 by playing for the Indonesian Embassy in London on New Year’s Eve.

While Dara Puspita’s time spent in London ultimately proved to be unsuccessful, it did produce some recordings that highlighted the band’s development. They recorded for BBC Radio One with the Jimmy Young Show as well as BBC Seksi Indonesia. The first single they released on CBS Records was “Welcome to My House” which failed to make the English Top 20 charts when released. Their next session at CBS resulted in their second single “Ba Da Da Dum” and b-side “Dream Stealer.” Their contract with Mr. King also earned them new instruments. Tikki and Takki both bought a Fender Stratocaster (guitar and bass respectively) while Lies affectionately deemed her new Baldwin guitar her “little battle axe.” Mr. King secured them a high paying offer to tour in Israel, but unfortunately Indonesia’s diplomatic relations with the nation made this impossible.

Instead, the band departed for nearly two more years of traveling throughout Europe. Their first stop was the Netherlands, where they toured for less than a month. Shortly after they journeyed to Belgium. In Belgium, Dara Puspita were granted the opportunity to play for the

United States Army base. However audiences in Belgium proved to be more polite then the band would have liked. The girls were frequently asked to play “sweeter sounds” and less “heavy sound.” Titiek A.R. obstinately refused, she wanted to play loud. Undeniably, the band was extraordinarily committed to their sound. When asked to play tamer songs, Titiek H declined, supposedly telling a manager in England that “we are not your slaves, we can still live without you!”

It was clear that despite their frequently impoverished living conditions while abroad, the girls would not sacrifice their musical morals for economic gain.

After a brief stint in France that occupied May of 1970, the band arrived in Spain. The girls instantly made a splash with their Spanish fans. In Madrid, they played in a dance club called Club Imperator, frequented by young people who loved to dance. Three bands would play every night and the club regularly remained open until the early hours of the morning. Here, Dara Puspita was granted more freedom in their performance. It was with this freedom that the influence of the heavy sound of bands such as Uriah Heap, Deep Purple, War Horse, and Golden Earrings became more prominent. Club owners liked the girls because they would rouse crowds to dance and thrash about, which always resulted in greater sales of beverages and food. Their success at Club Imperator procured them an invitation to play at the famous J.J. Club. This was a luxurious dancing club that attracted many fun-loving youth. Sometimes Dara Puspita would even play both clubs in one night. The girls truly found a home in Spain and quickly became involved with other Spanish bands that would play the same venues. Titiek A.R., Titiek H, and Lies all dated men from bands such as Sona Dores, La Cami, and The Short. There is even a song by The Short entitled “Lies.”

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Dara Puspita would continue to tour Europe for the following year, returning to Germany, Ireland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. They also played at the International Pop Festival in Utrecht to a crowd of 2,000. Shortly after the festival, Susy received a letter saying that her long time boyfriend Yon (originally of Koes Bersaudara) was forced to marry because he impregnated a girl from Yogyakarta. Susy was crushed. This ignited a wave of homesickness throughout the band. It had been three years since they had been back to Indonesia. So when the opportunity to tour their homeland presented itself, they quickly took it. However, Handi had not yet had enough of Europe and when the girls flew home in late 1971, he remained behind.

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45 This photo provided from the personal collection of Luis Miguel Nodar Martinez
Indonesia Once Again

In many ways, December 18th, 1971 represents the end of Dara Puspita. Though it was the first time they would perform to an Indonesian audience in three and a half years, it is also the last time they would truly enjoy the spotlight. Their Indonesian audience had very mixed reactions to this performance. Some claimed that they had improved little and were disappointed while others believed that “those lost girls had been reincarnated into mature and wild musicians on the stage.” After their two concerts in Jakarta in December, the band toured around Indonesia for another year, playing to their fans who had waited so long to see them perform once again.

In May of 1972 Titiek Hamzah left the band and two new girls were recruited. The five musicians played on the name Delima Puspita for a brief stint until Lies A.R. left the band and returned to the Netherlands with her boyfriend in July of 1972. From that point on, Delima Puspita continued to record another two albums under the new name Dara Puspita Min-Plus. The band would never regain the fame of the original Dara Puspita and they eventually broke up. Dara Puspita was never a profitable pursuit, and so after the group disbanded they began their “real” lives as working women. Susy Nander settled down in the East Java city of Sidoarjo and started a family. Titiek Hamzah continued a solo career that made her famous in both Japan and Chile. She also wrote many hit songs for other musicians and today she lives in Jakarta. Titiek A.R. joined her sister in the Netherlands where they both married Dutch husbands. They still live

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48 Handi, Mengenang: Dara Puspita, 151.
there in 2012. Mr. Handi eventually moved back to Indonesia where he married Ingga, one of Dara Puspita’s biggest fans. They raised their three children in Jakarta. In March of 2012, Handi unexpectedly passed away from a heart attack at the age of seventy-two. The loss of such a great man is a sadness felt by everyone that had the opportunity to meet him.

In 2012 few people still know about Dara Puspita. Their career was brief and sensational. Though the girls frequently argued amongst themselves, their music never suffered. Despite a revived interest in recent years, Titiek Hamzah has quickly stamped out any attempts to remember the band. She fears that Dara Puspita will be accused of plagiarism since so many of their songs clearly borrow from Western rock songs at the time. Since she is the remaining member still in Jakarta, she would bear the brunt of any repercussion. Additionally, Titiek Hamzah was always the rowdy, rebellious member of the band. She was not always easy to work with and thus she does not approve of any accounts that portray her this way. Handi wrote and tried to publish a memoir about Dara Puspita, but Titiek Hamzah threatened to take legal action against him and his wife. However, there have been a few recent instances where coverage of Dara Puspita has evaded Titiek Hamzah’s antagonism. Most notably is the Sublime Frequencies release of reissued Dara Puspita songs from 1966-1968. All the hits from their first four albums are included and only about 1,000 copies exist today. Titiek Hamzah (along with Titiek A.R.) even collaborated with Sublime Frequencies’ founder Alan Bishop to release the album. American indie blogs along the likes of Pitchfork and Gorilla vs. Bear have also covered Dara Puspita. The band’s physical albums are extraordinarily rare and sell for hundreds of dollars on online auctions such as Ebay.

49 Sublime Frequencies is located in Seattle, Washington. The label also released a reissue of Koes Bersaudara’s two 1967 albums, The Guilties and Djadikan Aku Domba Mu as well as a reissue of two albums entitled Dheg Dheg Plas and Volume 2 by Koes Plus, the reconfiguration of Koes Bersaudara in the 1970s.
Political and Social Ramifications

Though their career was contained to a mere seven years, Dara Puspita symbolize more than the music that they produced. They represent a changing political and social climate on both a national and international scale. Their career is synonymous with the crux of global change. As the world’s major political powers were engaged in the Cold War, Indonesia quickly found itself in the midst of this tension. While the United States (and its’ allies) and the USSR vied for political dominance in the South Pacific, Indonesia was transitioning from a nationalist, communist-empathizing state to one of military rule and Western alliance. This quickly affected the political climate in Southeast Asia.

For the West, the destruction of the PKI (the communist party)\(^{50}\) was the most welcome development in Southeast Asia in the context of both the Cold War and the escalation of the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Not surprisingly, when the anti-communist massacres were taking place at full scale in 1966, the US Ambassador to Jakarta is reported to have assured Soeharto that the ‘US is generally sympathetic with and admiring of what the army is doing’. Moreover, with great understatement, his British counterpart is known to have conveyed to the Foreign Office in London that ‘a little shooting in Indonesia would be an essential preliminary to effective change’. No less than Richard Nixon himself once offered the view that ‘Indonesia is the greatest prize in Southeast Asia’ (Pilger 2001).\(^{51}\)

These political dynamics are inexplicably marked on Dara Puspita, from the influences of their music to obstacles they were forced to face to they way their audiences received them. Though purposefully or not, through their music they were smuggling Western influence and power into a country whose government was strongly nationalist. Unmistakably, “they were not political in

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\(^{50}\) Parenthetical explanation added by the author.

\(^{51}\) Hadiz, "The Left and Indonesia's 1960s: The Politics of Remembering and Forgetting," 55.
their lyrics, but the music they played certainly was not in line with the political stand of the
government.”52 A close listen of “Mari Mari” will reveal that the guitar riff is borrowed directly
from The Rolling Stone’s “Satisfaction.” Likewise, “Pantai Pataya” is nothing more than an
Indonesian reinterpretation of Larry William’s “Bony Maronie.” Because the government
condemned this “imperial” Rock ‘n’ Roll, Dara Puspita found ways to defiantly incorporate the
forbidden sound into their music.

This Western influence is evident in the toppling of Sukarno and the subsequent might of
Suharto. Just as The Beatles commandeered the attention of Indonesian youth, so did the
Western world gain the support and cooperation of the Indonesian government. Dara Puspita’s
sound was more than just Rock ‘n’ Roll, it was the West invading and commanding Eastern
Asia. Indeed, “before New Order Indonesia was opened to Western economic activity, it was
opened to American and British rock music.”53 The parallels are undeniable. Thus though not
blatantly political, the band cannot be separated from the historical moment in which they
operated. History is stamped on the music they produced.

Additionally, though not overtly a feminist project, it would be foolish to refute the sheer
girl power that Dara Puspita exuded to their audiences. It was because they were female that they
could get away with their antics. Boy bands such as Koes Bersaudara were assumed to be more
rebellious and unruly, simply because they were male. But anyone that attended a Dara Puspita
show knew that no drummer was as aggressive and swift as Susy Nander and no bassist was as
audacious and brazen as Titiek Hamzah. When they performed they were “screaming and crazy

52 Mannungal K. Wardaya, email to the author, April 10, 2012
53 Farram. “Wage War Against Beatles Music! Censorship and Music in Soekarno’s Indonesia,”
265.
and they could do that because they were girls.” They exploited their gender in order to create the career that they wanted. Those that frequented Dara Puspita concerts did not come because they were polite girls singing sweet pop songs. They came because they knew that the four girls from Indonesia could rouse a crowd through their soaring guitar solos, wild yelps, throbbing bass lines, and bold drumming. In this sense, they exploded the definition of Rock ‘n’ Roll musicians. Dara Puspita may have gotten away with this behavior because they were girls, but that by no means implied that they were not every bit as bold as their male counterparts.

Young girls everywhere looked to Dara Puspita to create a permanent stake for women in rock music. Their fans were extraordinarily dedicated. They modeled themselves after the band, going so far as to shorten their last name to two initials, just like Titiek and Lies A.R.. They cut their hair in the bob style with straight across bangs. Ingga describes hiring a photographer and buying him a VIP ticket so he can snap photos of Tikki, Takki, Lies and Susy. These fans jumped at any opportunity to socialize with the band, frequently following them to their hotel after a concert to mingle with their heroes. The music of Dara Puspita really resonated with not only youth, but their parent generation as well. Ingga, her sisters, and her mother attended concerts together and bonded over countless hours of listening to vinyl. For the first time, there was a space for women to express themselves through music. And not just traditional music, but Rock ‘n’ Roll, the forbidden sound of the West. While perhaps no notable names come to mind, the girls of Dara Puspita certainly inspired countless female rock acts throughout Indonesia in their wake. They paved the way for the 1975 Festival Perempuan (Girl Festival), a music festival

54 Inggawati A.W. (Dara Puspita fan) and David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 23, 2012.
featuring only female bands. Indeed, they were the “missing link” in music history. In the late 1960s, females playing Rock ‘n’ Roll music was a revelation for not only Indonesian women, but for women across the globe.

The Legacy of the Flower Girls

Despite Dara Puspita’s catchy tunes and infectious personality, many people critique them for their lack of musical skills. Indeed when they first started playing, they had nothing more than a basic understanding of instrumentality and never learned to read sheet music. Progress was hampered by a lack of their own instruments as they were forced to rely on the limited opportunities when friends would lend them theirs. Some music journalists were also disappointed by their performance after their return from Europe, claiming that they were still amateurs. To them, it seemed like they had not improved and were just messing around onstage. However, others will refute this statement. Some reviews cite the band as “miracle girls from Indonesia” or “arguably the best female garage group in the world.” Regardless of opinion, everyone agrees that Titiek Hamzah is the driving force of the group. She showed talent from a very early age and can be credited with a great deal of the song writing. Though frequently temperamental and difficult to work with, “we can consider her a genius…unstoppable

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55 David Tarigan (music journalist) and Denny Sakrie (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 17th, 2012.
56 David Tarigan (music journalist) and Denny Sakrie (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 17th, 2012.
For Titiek Hamzah there were no rules, everything was fair play. Many music journalists will also vouch for Susy Nander’s skill behind the drum set. She was consistent and never failed to hold the band together. So while there may be discrepancy among critics regarding the band’s musicality, it is clear that Dara Puspita was not lacking in charisma, stage presence, or passion.

Indeed, the girls of Dara Puspita never set out to become talented musicians. They were merely in the business for the love of Rock ‘n’ Roll. These girls were just rock fans trying to impersonate the likes of their heroes, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. Titiek Hamzah even claims herself, “back then I don’t think I wanted to make hits. I just wanted to go to London and meet the Beatles. That was our obsession.” Though a simplistic approach, it is also an affective one. Even those that critique their talent, cannot deny the pure energy and passion that these girls have for Rock ‘n’ Roll. It would be unfair to speak of the era of music during the British Invasion without also acknowledging the “Indonesian Invasion to Europe, done by a group of girls from Java, long before the age of multimedia and Internet.”

In all reality, their relative skills are irrelevant. Their genius comes from their ability to remain dedicated to a sound. They had one goal in mind: to play Rock ‘n’ Roll music. It’s simply “their essence, they had everything: fun, innocence, and nothing to lose.” And so they risked everything and for their efforts, they gained a place among the stars. Dara Puspita showed the world that four brash, young girls from Surabaya were in a league of their own. For “Dara

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59 David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 19th, 2012.
60 Titiek Hamzah (musician) in conversation with David Tarigan (music journalist) and Alan Bishop (founder of Sublime Frequencies), 2009.
This quote was relayed to the author from a previous interview David Tarigan had conducted with Titiek Hamzah.
61 Mannungal K. Wardaya, email to the author, April 10, 2012
62 Inggawati A.W. (Dara Puspita fan) and David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 23, 2012.
Puspita represented a possible future: the everyday defiance that consists in recognizing the official symbols for what they are, and choosing the subterranean virus instead.‘’63 Though they may have just been four girls bashing away on their instruments, they symbolized the potential of female Rock ‘n’ Roll. They will always be remembered for dancing wildly at concerts, shredding their vocal chords, fashioning their own outfits, and having fun while doing it. For them it was not about musicianship, it was about passion. Dara Puspita was truly “the purest of Rock ‘n’ Roll expression. It was in your face.”64

Left, Susy Nander, taken by Ingga’s photographer during the sound test, the afternoon before Dara Puspita’s show in Semarang, March 1972. Center, Dara Puspita onstage, 1969. Right, Titiek A.R. on lead guitar in Semang on March 4, 1972

63 Hsu.”Blame That Tune,” 128.
64 Inggawati A.W. (Dara Puspita fan) and David Tarigan (music journalist) in conversation with the author, April 23, 2012.
Recommendations for Further Research

While I would like to think that this paper is comprehensive, I recognize that there is further potential for research on this topic. Though I corresponded with Titiek A.R. via email, I think personal accounts of the band members would add depth to the Dara Puspita saga. My rendition of their musical career is from an outside perspective, one of music journalists and fans. To talk with one of the four girls would definitely give this story the view from the inside.

Additionally, there is much more research to pursue regarding the political and social climate of the 1960s and 70s. Perhaps a close examination of the relationship between the United States (or another influential Western nation at the time) and Indonesia would have yielded further insight to the exact circumstances in which rock music was created in Southeast Asia. My paper provides a brief summary of the politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll, but I think there is still more to be researched in that realm. This paper addresses the Cold War, but fails to explore the nuances of the Vietnam War. The political ramifications of this conflict would also be relevant.

This paper was also very narrow in scope. It deeply addressed one Indonesian rock band in the late 1960s. If Dara Puspita is of interest to the reader, Koes Bersaudara is another similar band existing in that same historical moment. Their story is quite different as it was more politicized and contained to Indonesia. The male gender may also add a different spin to the story of rock music. I am sure there are other rock bands both before and after Dara Puspita to which this paper could readily be applied. Unfortunately I am not well versed in the entirety of Indonesian Rock ‘n’ Roll, so other rock bands would definitely be relevant to further research.
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“Angka Berapa Untuk Dara Puspita.” Tempo, January 1, 1972, 37-44.


Interview with David Tarigan and Denny Sakrie: April 17, 2012

1. How did you become interested in Dara Puspita and Indonesia Rock ‘n’ Roll??
2. How did the political and social circumstances of the 1960s affect music?
3. How were Dara Puspita and Koes Bersaudara received?
4. Was their music considered revolutionary or controversial?
5. Do you view Dara Puspita as part of a feminist movement?
6. How did Dara Puspita change the Indonesian music scene?
7. Do you consider Dara Puspita to be part of a sub-culture or counter-culture?
8. How is Dar Puspita regarded today? What is their legacy?
9. Can you describe the inner-dynamics of the band?
10. Why did the band eventually break up?
11. What were Dara Puspita’s major influences?
12. Are there any bands that emerged since Dara Puspita that have had similar affects?