

# Senyawa



Compound Lyricism

What is the sense  
of power  
when the end is coming?



*Minor Compositions*

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# Senyawa

Compound Lyricism

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## **Senyawa**

Compound Lyricism

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## Compound Lyricism

Stephen Shukaitis

I first encountered Senyawa in Singapore in 2013. It was like nothing else I had ever heard: a combination of Wukir's handmade instruments and Rully's other-worldly vocals channeling Javanese melodies with the intensity of punk and metal and an avant-garde / DIY approach to constant experimentation and boundary pushing. While the music industry continues to churn out cookie cutter performers, Senyawa truly does not sound like anyone else. Ever since then I've continued to listen to Senyawa as they have developed, evolving their sound and approach. They've changed labels, worked with different collaborators, and popped up in rather unexpected places – for instance, providing music for the soundtrack to the action-adventure western video game *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

Across albums their sound shifts in relation to the instruments Wukir builds. Unfortunately for people who do not speak or understand the various Indonesian dialects that Rully uses, while you can appreciate their music and performances, you can still be left feeling that you're missing something. You can appreciate the aurality of Senyawa – the sheer force and wonder of their music – but not the lyrical content. This project is intended to rectify that by translating Rully's lyrics for Senyawa into English for the first time. The intent is to make accessible the fuller experience of Senyawa to the English-speaking world. It would be interesting to do the same for more of Rully's

lyrics, for instance other projects such as Zoo, but this will have to wait for now.

It is not the place of this short introduction to say much about the lyrics themselves, but rather to leave you, the listener-reader, to engage with them and make of them what you will. But I do want to highlight a few things that Rully said to me as we prepared to put together this booklet (our conversation is available as a podcast, via Firefly Frequencies, that intersperses our conversation with a recording of Senyawa performing in Folkestone). For Senyawa, the nature of the lyrics is specific to each project and release – this is how they evolve. Over time Rully’s lyrics shift to a more focused approach, exploring a theme or idea in depth. As compared to the more general lyricism of the first releases, this closer focus can be seen in lyrics from *Sujud* (meaning to bow or prostrate oneself towards the Earth) and *Alkisab* (exploring themes of catastrophe). There is also a strong spiritual component of the lyrics, though perhaps less in a recognizably religious context, and more in the sense of appreciating the condition of being part of something bigger than yourself, particularly in relationship with the natural world.

Earth, ecology, catastrophe: perhaps Senyawa are the musical embodiment of catastrophe of the Anthropocene? Perhaps. That would be one way to appreciate Rully’s compound lyricism, but certainly not the only one. The beauty of poetic forms lies in their open nature. Finding one way in doesn’t mean that there aren’t many more to explore. And that’s what this booklet is for: to present Rully’s lyrics for Senyawa, so now we can read, understand, and discuss as we listen.





### AFTERNOONS (Pada Siang Hari)

A middle-aged man rows his canoe  
Before the darkness falls before him  
To his trawl and fish hook  
He trusts his fate unquestioningly

Sun-scorched is an old lady  
A whole afternoon amid the greenness of the field  
To the tea leaves in her basket,  
She trusts her fate unquestioningly

Way up high is a young man  
On a half-finished building  
To his steel hammer and the bricks  
He trusts his fate unquestioningly

Bathed in dust is a little girl  
Amidst buses in the city streets  
To her hoarse voice and tambourine,  
She trusts her fate unquestioningly

Drenched in sweat are people  
From up in the mountain and down to the sea  
From the countryside to the city  
Never bothering to ask  
“What is it all for?”

## THE AFTERMATH (Pasca)

The dusk swallowed the sun at the end of the day  
The clouds rippled for a loss of life  
Rays of light vanished quietly  
Leave a kiss at the corner of the eyes

Ashes faded to dust, and the sand blew away  
Say good bye to the rain and the lightning  
Disasters, you're done here!  
Save a dream in your folded praying hands

The sun arose so bright in the morning  
Leaves were all cheering, welcoming the day  
We are in the aftermath of the disasters  
Let there be love at the corner of the eyes

## REMNANTS (Sisa)

Ruins and remnants  
Are all that is left

How aching this heart  
How sorrowful  
For an Earth that can never be renewed  
How my heart is yearning  
Yearning, so deep  
For an ocean that is no longer blue

It's all over now  
Nothing is left  
But the darkness of the night

## FUSION (Senyawa)

Being united out of everything  
Becoming one to stand up to the world  
A fusion, an amalgam of souls

## IN THE FADING TWILIGHT (Di Pudarnya Senja)

Hidden in the fading twilight  
Reciting rhymes to console her grief  
How fragile she seemed for her sins  
How she longed for the salvation of a prayer

Darkness fell on her in the fading twilight  
Like a quiet menace  
How long nights haunted her  
How she needed to muster up her courage

Be dauntless, O the lady in hiding  
Darkness is just a friend you fear  
But when the sun rises again on the morrow  
There will be the singing birds and the drenching dew for  
you

## TIDINGS (Kabar)

Swim away to the next isle  
And bring the tidings:

“Brace yourself, the high tide shall arrive  
When the full moon reaches its peak  
When birds leave their nests  
Brace yourself!”

“Storm and lightning will strike  
When the air is chilly and the night is thick  
When dogs bark somberly  
Brace yourself!”

## HEROES (Pahlawan)

He keeps singing  
Every night incessantly  
Lamenting quietly  
Remembering all time past, indulging his heart

An elephant's ivory will be eternal  
One's honor will be lauded ceaselessly  
Melodies will echo endlessly

Heroes do not die here



## ECLIPSE (Gerhana)

The second my yearning burst into foamy regret  
The ink strokes of my poetry were stammering  
Disjointed  
The second memories were flooding out of your scent  
from the far end of the room  
My nights turned into bitter void,  
All in curdles

Whenever I listened more closely to the random rustling  
around me  
There was something it often seemed to convey  
Some kind of rhyme, some vague message  
Like a secret depicted in a lunar eclipse

When the lips spawned a string of curses  
In you, my angel, there grew horns  
And that was when, in love, one went down submissively  
on one's knees

Chastise me for my failure in grasping a message  
For being oblivious to thousands of poetry  
For faltering in the embrace of a suffocating love  
For being covered deep in regret, thickly encrusted

...It seemed that this is the secret they wanted to convey  
Something depicted in the lunar eclipse

## TADULAKO (Tadulako)

To malanggai

To manuru

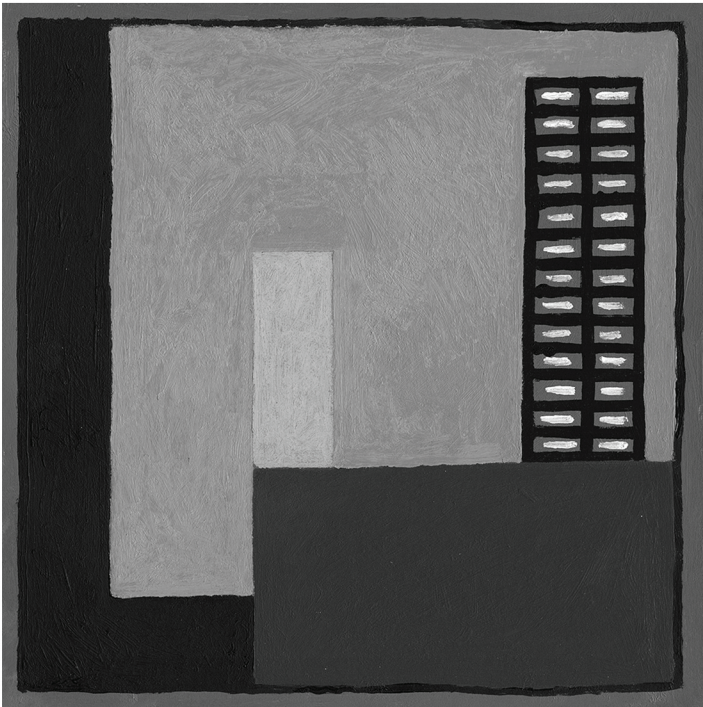
He came to answer

Uprightly bearing, uprightly walking

To malanggai

To manuru

Tadulako



## CALAMITY (Bala)

From up the mountain descends a black cloud  
From far at sea there comes a gloomy wind

## THE UNSEEN (Gaib)

A voice without a body  
A world without reality

## PURITY, WASH OVER ME (Hadirlah Suci)

Stain, dredge, and mud

All disperse into clear water

Crust, scab, and slough

All dry out, ossifying into stones

## A LIFE OF PEACE (Hidup Damai)

Stars are fading, dawn is here  
Dawn is coming, stars disappear  
In life never seek an enemy  
But when one comes, never flee

## WISDOM (Bekal Ilmu)

Sandalwood barks on the rock surface  
Brought home once wrapped up so as not to fray  
That is the way the world is  
All things foul are thrown away

A machete was swung at a senna tree  
Split a bamboo and put a rhizome  
All things you do won't be a beauty  
If they do not involve wisdom



## WHEN THINGS ARE DONE (Di Kala Sudah)

O the ones yonder

O you the youngster

No use living a long life

At the end of the road no more strife

If you don't prepare a nice tombstone

To guide you when things are done

**IN THE NAME OF GOD THE HOLIEST (Demi Tuhan Yang  
Maha Suci)**

Kneeling down to the divine in earnest  
Submission without death  
Put out the envy, put aside the hatred  
In the Name of God the Holiest



**SHED IT ALL BEHIND IN THE WORLD (Tanggalkan Di Dunia)**

Shed your name behind, all the rest in the world

## PROSTRATION (Sujud)

Down to Earth we face ourselves  
Let our foreheads fall to the ground  
Bury the light behind the eyes  
See nothingness  
Be with the universe

Release your mind off time  
This very second, hopes, and the past  
Let darkness guide the way  
Release the rein of the memories

**BLESSED BE THIS LAND (Terbertaktilah Tanah Ini)**

Blessed be this land  
And all things she enables to grow  
All things she holds up  
All things drenching her  
All things illuminating her  
All things protecting her  
All things respecting her

**ALL CORNERS OF THE WORLD CONVERGE (Penjuru  
Menyatu)**

All corners of the world converge  
Find a connection at the centermost  
Rooted in all the might and light  
One direction, all in harmony

Harmoniously united at the middlemost  
Let it all mingle into one  
All corners of the world converge

## **DESIRE (Kehendak)**

Nothing is heavier than a desire

The will for the self

The will for becoming

Nothing is more difficult than humbling oneself

The dead desire

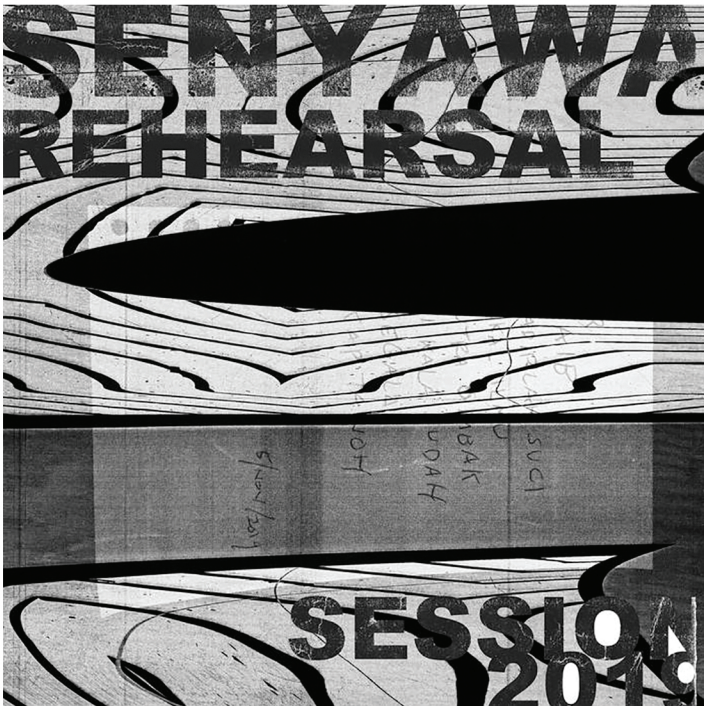
The quelled desire



**KINDNESS GROWS OUT OF THE EARTH (Kebaikan  
Tumbuh Dari Tanah)**

Only kindness grows out of the earth  
The one you stand on, not the one you stomp on  
The one for the forehead, not the feet

Only kindness grows out of the earth  
The one you sow seeds on, not the one you spit on  
The one that gives, not the one hinders



## WATER (Air)

Holy water flowed  
Flooding the city  
All at once putting out the ember  
All souls in ablutions, courageously in resignation

The path of the fire kept spreading  
The purity of the water chased it all over  
Upstream, downstream

## SON OF THE WAVES (Putra Ombak)

Born out of the waves  
When stars harmoniously aligned  
In movement, direction, and form

Raised by the wind  
Taking him far and away  
So fast, so strong

Being friends with leaves and roots  
Learning how to fall, how to be firm  
Remaining steadfast and growing anew  
Always

Dying as the rain

## THE FAWN (Anak Kijang)

The fawn was running aimlessly  
Through the field with tall grasses  
A spear flew across the air  
Pierced right in his body

The fawn squealed  
Writhing for help  
Hopes were gone, death menacing  
Darkness loomed in the brightness of day

## SENGKOLO (MISFORTUNE)

White rice, red corn  
Yellow betel leaves, white garlic  
Brown sugar, yellow root  
Arrange them all in a circle  
Let the middle part in a chaotic disarray

Don't let resentment fill your heart  
Let your breath and the surrounding sound of nature blend  
in harmony  
Inspiring, inviting you to listen

When the time comes  
Reap the paddy, pick the crops  
Tie a handful and arrange for three days  
Along with palm flowers yet to unfurl  
Not far from the sun

The fire is quelled, turning to smoke  
The smoke subsides, turning to daylight  
The daylight fades away, turning to dusk  
The dusk is over, turning to night

Before the night comes to an end  
Light a fire by the river  
Put it out before dawn

Come to us, O guardian of the night  
Be patient, O the one who sprinkles salt  
Come to us, O guardian of the night

Please stay even for one night

We're not mistaken when we plead

So humbly we implore

Please take all our sorrow away

Cast away all of the suffering and calamity





## POWER (Kekuasaan)

What is the sense of power when the end is coming?

## TALE #1 (Alkisah I)

There was once a country  
Ravaged by blaze  
So trembling was she  
on the land she stood  
Her land was fertile but scorched  
So many trees but arid  
The water flowed everywhere  
But it's a wonder why everyone's thirsty  
Left-right, south-north  
Everyone said, "What a wealthy country!"  
"Oh, what a pity!"

There was once a country  
Falling apart, consumed by envy  
So shaken by upheaval was she  
In her own arrogance and greed  
The king was gone nobody knew where  
The people were restless, losing their faith  
Oh how everyone was arguing and tussling  
Wrestling with each other, unflinchingly  
When one erred, the other raged  
When one lost, the other acted up

"Oh my, you act like you're the saint. Please put an end to it!"  
"Oh, what a pity!"

## TO THE END OF THE RIVER (Menuju Muara)

Make haste to go to the end of the river  
Where the land is wet and the air is rich  
And though we'd make it out alive eventually  
The rest of us would perish powerlessly  
Into dust and ashes, sinking and forgotten  
Into a legend  
Which would also slowly vanish and disappear  
Buried in the sand of time

Make haste to go to the end of the river  
Where the land is wet and the air is rich  
That is where we would get some rest  
And then raise our children  
Attend to the wounded heroes  
Guard the water spring, let the roots grow  
Dig up the ditches, dry out the salt  
Paint history, sing our lamentations  
Keep oaths sacred, forgiveness a blessing

Make haste  
To the end of the river

## THE PALACE (Istana)

Up high in the cloud they are hiding  
Strongly fortified

All around them is a palisade  
Of the heads of innocent human  
Scattered were names of the warriors  
Those who are forgotten

Right in the middle is a black pond  
Thick with corpses of war and dispute  
Remnants of blood were splattered  
Of nameless human  
Hopes were shattered  
Of a brighter future

## **BUFFALO (Kabau)**

A fisherman boy carried a hoe  
Planting sweet potatoes in the field  
Burden on the basket can be carried  
Little kindness feels heavy

Fries are eaten by bigger fish  
Mackerel fries grow on a fish pond  
Neither gold, nor silver  
Little kindness still deserves respect

Anjalai grows among munggu trees  
Sugi-sugi grows in the rice fields  
To be good, learn from others  
To be wise, have kindness

A pestle falls, broken into three  
Though stepped on, ants don't die

Soaking but dry  
Floating but drifting  
The pumpkin drifts away for being pushed  
When the buffalo is missing, it's the shepherd's fault  
Nodding head in denial  
Yet still no answer

## ELOQUENCE (Fasih)

Eloquently you yell:

“The only good Fascist is a dead Fascist!”  
But you condemn those of different beliefs  
from the one you follow

Eloquently you yell:

“The only good Fascist is a dead Fascist!”  
But you insist that everything has to conform  
to the one truth, the one you believe in

Eloquently you yell:

“The only good Fascist is a dead Fascist!”  
But you silence and vilify  
whatever ideas you fail to understand

Eloquently you yell:

“The only good Fascist is a dead Fascist!”  
But you claim the only one interpretation

Eloquently you yell:

“The only good Fascist is a dead Fascist!”  
But you insist on controlling everything  
including imagination

Eloquently you yell:

“The only good Fascist is a dead Fascist!”  
But you belittle those  
Who audaciously choose their own path

Your eloquence doesn't make you any less of a fascist  
Your eloquence doesn't mean you don't deserve to die.

## TALE #2 (Alkisah 2)

There was once a country  
Of the same world we now live in  
They called each other “Brothers and Sisters”  
They agreed that “Your sin is in the past”

Dry land turned to lush greenery  
Enriched by love and patience to endure time  
Grief and wrath turned to counsel  
Infecting those with the same wounds

The elders were protected  
As to their knowledge, history, and legacy  
The youngsters were blessed  
As to their conscience, mind, body, and all their deeds  
They respected the rain and the sun  
They gave a meaning to every life without exception

Indeed, there was once such a beautiful country  
Different though on the same world we now live in  
And no more of her is left  
Greed consumed her, hatred burned her  
Humiliatingly banished from her own land  
Since humility  
Was misinterpreted as fragility  
It was all for belittling those  
Who cared very little for the rain and the sun

**DOOMSDAY (Kiamat)**

“Doomsday is coming!”



## LAW OF UNIVERSE (Hukum Semesta)

Reality created from the law of universe

Laws of thrust, laws of attraction

Unity, vibration

Pairing action

Cause and result

Compensation, transmutation

Eternity of energy

Woods becoming coal

Water turn to steam

Sounds becoming power

Fire turn to smoke

Then us, human, gradually turn to soil

They inhale it through air

Food for them

For the universe

Such is the law

Center of transformation lies in mind

We are not the only one who are granted

With soul, mind, sense, or intelligence

Solely limited creatures

Temporary inhabitant

Gradually turn to soil

They inhale it trough air

Food for them

For the universe

Such is the law

## LAW OF HUMANKIND (Hukum Manusia)

One is easy to besieged  
Two adds more friend  
Three are unbeatable

One is pure  
Two compromise  
More needs order  
Individual, family, tribes, race, society, state  
More than that, the world has its rules  
Speaking of influence and power  
Like fire  
From the splatter  
It spread, expand, expropriate, perish  
Have we ever imagine how it supposed to be  
Like gravitation  
How big they are, it will centered to the core  
Fall, shrink, solidify

Human  
World, state, society, race, tribes, family, individual  
Human

Human in the beginning  
Human in the end  
Not individual, family, tribes, race, society  
Let alone state

Lyrics in this booklet from the following Senyawa releases

**Albums:**

Acaraki (2014)

Menjadi (2015)

Sujud (2018)

Rehearsal Session (2019)

Anak Kijang (2020)

Sengkolo (2020)

Alkisah (2021)

**Singles:**

Anak Kijang (2020)

Sengkolo (2020)

**More Information:**

<https://senyawa.tumblr.com>

<https://senyawaofficial.bandcamp.com>