

## Sufistic Symbolism in Popular Music: A Study of Noe Letto's Lyrics Through Eero Tarasti's Perspective

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Article History	ABSTRACT
Received 24-10-2025	<b>Background:</b> Song lyrics serve as a medium for reflecting on a composer's spiritual and existential journey. There is a need to understand how Sufi symbolism constructs the concept of self (Dasein) and its relationship with the Transcendent.
Accepted: 05-11-2025	<b>Purpose:</b> This study aims to examine the Sufi symbolism in Noe Letto's songs "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati," focusing on how he reflects his existentialism to construct Dasein and Transcendence using Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics.
Published: 08-12-2025	<b>Method:</b> This qualitative study employs Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics as the main analytical framework to examine Sufistic symbolism in Noe Letto's song lyrics. The analysis focuses on two selected works, "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati", using lyric-based qualitative data to trace how symbols articulate dimensions of Dasein and Transcendence.
	<b>Results and Discussion:</b> The findings of this study indicate that Noe Letto, through his lyrics, effectively reflects his Sufi journey. He successfully illustrates the concept of Dasein (self-existence) while connecting himself to the transcendent domain. Further discussion indicates that Noe Letto is able to strengthen the bond between God and humans, making the relationship feel close and affectionate. Although this study is limited to two song lyrics, these findings provide deep insight into the mechanisms a composer uses to articulate his spiritual journey to achieve transcendence.
	<b>Conclusions and Implications:</b> In conclusion, this study confirms that a composer's creative process is a unique and authentic means of self-expression. Consequently, this article contributes to a new theoretical understanding of the significance of a composer's work and offers a method for deducing (obtaining) the existential meaning of song lyrics.
<b>Keywords:</b>	<i>Existential Semiotics; Sufistic Literature; Sufi Aesthetics; Eero Tarasti; Noe Letto.</i>
ABSTRAK	
	<b>Latar Belakang:</b> Penelitian ini didorong oleh fenomena penggunaan lirik lagu sebagai media untuk merefleksikan perjalanan spiritual dan eksistensial komposer. Ada kebutuhan untuk memahami bagaimana simbolisme sufi diungkapkan dalam karya kreatif untuk membangun konsep diri dan hubungannya dengan Yang Transenden.
	<b>Tujuan:</b> Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis simbolisme sufi yang muncul dalam lirik lagu Noe Letto, khususnya "Sebelum Cahaya" dan "Sandaran Hati." Analisis ini berfokus pada cara Noe Letto merefleksikan eksistensialismenya untuk membangun konsep Dasein dan Transendensi dalam lirik, menggunakan semiotika eksistensialisme Eero Tarasti.
	<b>Metode:</b> Penelitian ini menggunakan semiotika eksistensialisme sebagai alat analisis. Pendekatan ini diterapkan untuk menganalisis data kualitatif yang bersumber dari lirik

lagu karya Noe Letto, yaitu "Sebelum Cahaya" dan "Sandaran Hati". Ia berhasil menggambarkan konsep Dasein sambil menghubungkan dirinya dengan domain transenden. Pembahasan lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa Noe Letto mampu memperkuat ikatan antara Tuhan dan manusia, sehingga hubungan tersebut terasa dekat dan penuh kasih sayang. Meskipun studi ini terbatas pada dua lirik lagu, temuan ini memberikan wawasan mendalam tentang mekanisme yang digunakan oleh seorang komposer.

**Hasil dan Pembahasan:** Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Noe Letto, melalui lirik lagunya, secara efektif menggambarkan perjalanan spiritualnya sebagai seorang Sufi. Ia berhasil menggambarkan konsep Dasein sambil menghubungkan dirinya dengan domain transenden.

**Kesimpulan dan Implikasi:** Secara keseluruhan, studi ini menegaskan bahwa proses kreatif seorang komposer merupakan sarana ekspresi diri yang unik dan autentik. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman teoretis baru tentang signifikansi karya seorang komposer dan menawarkan metode untuk memperoleh makna eksistensial lirik lagu.

#### Kata Kunci

*Semiotika Eksistensialisme; Sastra Sufistik; Eero Tarasti; Noe Letto*



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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of the spread of Islam in the Nusantara (the Archipelago of Indonesia), the significance of songs and music in the process of da'wah cannot be denied. Islam, historically, entered the Nusantara through the approach of Sufism, a discipline that in Islamic scholarship refers to spirituality and mysticism. In the scope of historiography, there is no doubt that through the Sufism method, Islam managed to gain wide acceptance in the Nusantara.<sup>[1]</sup> Concrete evidence of this can be seen in the classical texts written by Nusantara scholars, which are often in the form of poems. These poems, in the context of modern linguistics, can be interpreted as lyrics. When these lyrics are combined with musical elements, they produce what we recognize as songs.

The history of music in the Islamic tradition is inseparable from important figures such as Al-Farabi, a revered philosopher and composer. Al-Farabi is known as the author of *Kitab al-Mūsiqā al-Kabīr*, a work on music theory. Al-Hifnī says in the introduction to this work that it is the greatest musical work ever written in Arabic.<sup>[2, p. 50]</sup> Al-Farabi stated that the term *mūsiq* (music) means *alḥān* (melodies), see.<sup>[2, p. 51]</sup> In addition, he also argued that music is not the result of learning or discovery, but rather comes from human instinct.<sup>[3, p. 15]</sup> Music was created by humans in response to the need to express and process emotions.<sup>[3, p. 15]</sup> It cannot be ignored that the theories developed by Al-Farabi play an important role in the structure of modern music that we enjoy today. Al-Farabi was a great composer. He could create melodies that made us feel a variety of emotions, from sadness, to happiness, to more complicated feelings.

Even in the Nusantara, the saints in Java were masters of the arts. We can mention Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Giri and others who were Sufi-artists who were very skillful in creating poetry and tones. Dandhanggula, Maskumambang, Asmarandana and others are all poetic concoctions by these philosophers of Java. Even for the song lir-ilir and cublek-cublek suweng is proof that this song is already very legendary, it is inconceivable that a song can last for more than 500 years. Even Imam Al-Ghazali in the book *Iḥyā' Ulūmud-dīn* emphasized that music can help a person increase his religious feelings and experience mystical experiences.<sup>[4]</sup>

When looking at human history, music has been an integral part of human life since ancient times. Music has its own charm that can affect a person's mood and emotions. However, not all music is just entertainment, there is music that also has a deep meaning and is full of spiritual

messages. Lauzon, in one of his articles, states that there can be a strong correlation between music and spirituality, especially when music is used as therapy.[\[5\]](#) One example is Sufism-themed music that has deep spiritual values.

Letto is a music group from Indonesia that is known for its meaningful and heartfelt songs. Letto's songs often have lyrics that are full of Sufistic symbolism and have deep meaning. Letto not only expresses love in the sense of a romantic relationship between humans but also discusses the theme of love universally and philosophically in their work. In other words, Letto is not limited to the context of a romantic relationship between two humans but also considers other aspects of love that can be widely applied in human life. Letto's works on the theme of love can be applied to many aspects of life and not just focused on one area.[\[6\]](#) Therefore, examining Letto's song lyrics can be an interesting and useful research object in understanding the relationship between Sufistic symbolism and popular music.

In addition, the existence of Sufism-themed music can also help introduce the spiritual values and beauty of Sufism to the wider community, especially the younger generation. In general, both Muslims and followers of other religious beliefs still have a great need for spiritualism.[\[7, p. 19\]](#) On the other hand, popular music as a medium that is very popular among the public can be an effective medium of da'wah in spreading the messages of Sufism.

As a predominantly Muslim country, Indonesia has a strong tradition of Sufism. Sufi groups have been present in the Nusantara since the 6th century on the island of Sumatra and began to spread through trade, marriage, and the teachings of Sufism itself.[\[1\]](#) Sufism has had a great influence on culture and art in Indonesia, including music. Sufi music, as a genre recognized by the global music industry, has gained widespread popularity due to its Islamic themes and transcendental values, enjoyed by listeners from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds.[\[8\]](#) Furthermore, the words utilized in the lyrics are not slang, as Novita and Ibnu Rawandhy points out in their research [\[9\]](#), despite the fact that slang is commonly used by youths. This shows that Noe's song is indeed intended for all audiences.

Therefore, research on Sufistic symbolism in the lyrics of Letto's songs entitled "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati" can provide new insights and enrich the study of art and culture in Indonesia, because matters related to Sufism in Letto's music appear from a conversation between Habib Husein Jafar and Noe Letto on a podcast on a YouTube channel.[\[10\]](#)

In the context of this study, researchers are interested in exploring the meaning of Sufistic symbolism in Letto's song lyrics and using Eero Tarasti's view in looking at the lyrics of the song. In detail, the researcher raises research questions to find out what Sufistic symbolism is contained in the lyrics of the songs "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati" by Letto? In addition, researchers want to investigate what the concept of Dasein and the concept of Transcendence contained in the lyrics of the songs "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati" by Letto? So, the purpose of this research is to identify Sufistic symbolism contained in the lyrics of the songs "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati" by Letto and the concept of Dasein and the concept of Transcendence that appears in the lyrics of the songs "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati" by Letto can be revealed.

On that basis, the researcher is interested in making an article with the title: "**Sufistic Symbolism in Popular Music: A Study of Noe Letto's Lyrics through Eero Tarasti's Perspective**". This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between Sufistic symbolism and popular music and contribute to the development of art and culture in Indonesia.

However, empirical studies on how Sufi symbolism is articulated in contemporary Indonesian popular music through an existential semiotic lens remain scarce. This research fills

that gap by offering a detailed analysis of Noe Letto's lyrics, bridging the realms of spirituality, art, and existential philosophy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sufism and religious representations in the arts, notably music and literature, have emerged as areas of multidisciplinary study. Previous studies have demonstrated that works with Sufi undertones appear not only in ancient literature but also in contemporary artistic forms such as popular music. Several previous studies related to this research, which are:

Fitria (2023) investigates the Sufi meaning in Letto's song lyrics [11], particularly "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati." She demonstrates how the lyrics' representation of love extends beyond interpersonal connections to include theological ideals that symbolize the bond between people and God. Fitria makes a distinction between the songs' textual and non-textual interpretations. At the non-textual level, she defines love as heavenly love that serves as a vehicle for introspection. The potential of popular music as a platform for Sufi expression is confirmed by this study. However, Fitria does not link the meaning of the lyrics to the personal backdrop or spiritual experiences of the author, therefore the origins of the symbols and motivations for producing the lyrics remain unexplained. This gap is important because the context of the creator's life can strengthen or test the validity of Sufi interpretations and will be one of the focuses developed in this study.

Sansidar (2020) analyzed the song "Sebelum Cahaya" using Charles S. Peirce's semiotics.[12] She found a message of preaching that affirms God's presence in human life. Sansidar shows that even though Letto is not a religious music group, its lyrics contain divine and Sufi values that are effective as preaching for the younger generation. However, this study only uses Peirce's framework and has not examined the lyrics through Eero Tarasti's musical semiotics, which highlights meaning as a narrative process and musical experience. This difference in perspective opens up new avenues for analysis, and the research in this article aims to fill that gap.

Hia (2023) examines the metaphorical style of language in Noe Letto's album Letto Best of the Best.[13] She finds that anthropomorphic metaphors are most dominant, such as the humanization of God's nature or role, to express the spiritual and emotional relationship between humans and God. This finding confirms that Letto's lyrics are not only aesthetically valuable but also contain deep religious reflections. However, Hia has not examined the dimension of Dasein or the subject's experience of existence in the lyrics, even though this element can explain how spiritual meaning is present as a concrete life experience. This gap is one of the focuses continued in this study.

Gaind-Krishnan (2020) traces the transformation of qawwali music as it moves into the diaspora and onto the global stage.[14] He shows that qawwali has been reinterpreted in a Western context through changes in performance format, audience, and world music circulation, but it still keeps its main function as an expression of divine love and a way to experience transcendence. The voice, rhythm, and repetitive patterns of qawwali still function as a spiritual medium even though they are not always present in shrine rituals as in their original context. This study confirms that music can carry spirituality across cultural spaces. However, the study focuses on the Sufi traditions of South Asia, so it does not explain how spirituality is constructed in Indonesian popular music. This gap is important to examine in the lyrics and musical experiences of local pop music, which has a different social and aesthetic context.

Beck (2023) examines the relationship between music and spirituality through the concept of shared religious soundscapes. He shows that Indian raga music can function as a shared religious soundscape used by the Bene Israel Jewish, Catholic, and Chishti Sufi Muslim communities in South Asia. Certain melodic patterns, such as the Bhairava raga in devotional compositions of each

tradition, enable spiritual experiences that transcend theological boundaries through sound and rhythm.<sup>[15]</sup> In line with this, Qian (2021) in his study of the hälqä-sohbät ritual of the Uyghur Sufis explains how singing, žikr, and body movements are used to achieve an altered state of consciousness or transcendental awareness. Music becomes the primary means of connecting humans with the divine dimension in these Sufi practices.<sup>[16]</sup> Similar to Qian, Kirkegaard's research also discusses music and transcendence in East Africa.<sup>[17]</sup> This study provides a theoretical basis that music can be a medium for cross-traditional religious experiences. However, Beck, Qian, and Kirkegaard does not discuss Indonesian popular music, so the workings of spirituality in local pop lyrics and musical experiences have not been mapped. This article will fill this gap by examining Indonesian popular music using Tarasti's semiotics as a framework for seeing how spiritual experiences are shaped musically and culturally.

Based on the findings and gaps in literatures review, this study focuses on the spiritual meaning in Indonesian popular music, particularly Letto's songs, using Eero Tarasti's musical semiotics. The following section describes the research design, data sources, and analysis steps used in this study.

## METHOD

The methodology used in this study is as follows: Research approach: This research will use a qualitative approach that prioritizes in-depth data collection and analysis, focusing on the meaning and interpretation of Sufistic symbolism in Letto's song lyrics. The data collection techniques used in this research are literature study, watching YouTube videos, and analyzing song lyrics. Literature study was used to gain an understanding of the concept of Sufism and Sufistic symbolism. Watching YouTube videos was done to get information from the main source, namely the songwriter, in order to get a *behind-the-scenes* view of the lyrics he created. Analysis of song lyrics was conducted to identify Sufistic symbolism and life messages contained in Letto's song lyrics. The data analysis techniques used in this research are qualitative descriptive analysis and interpretative analysis. Qualitative descriptive analysis is used to identify and describe the Sufistic symbolism and life messages contained in Letto's song lyrics. Interpretative analysis was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of Sufistic symbolism in Letto's song lyrics. The population of this research is all songs by Letto that contain Sufistic symbolism. The research sample will be taken from two songs by Letto which are the focus of the research, namely "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati". Data validity in this research will be maintained by triangulating data through different data collection techniques. In addition, the researcher will also verify the results of the analysis with experts in the field of Sufism concepts and Sufistic symbolism. Researchers will maintain research ethics by paying attention to the right to privacy and confidentiality of information provided by respondents. In addition, researchers will also pay attention to the data sources used and include relevant references to avoid plagiarism.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Studying a text and social phenomena can be done with semiotics because semiotics treats text as a collection of signs.<sup>[18, p. 4]</sup> This approach can reveal the deepest and hidden meaning in a text. However, in the early 1960s semiotic studies were dominated by structuralism and borrowed directly from linguistic methodology.<sup>[19, p. 5]</sup> However, the approach used in this research will draw heavily from the thoughts of Eero Tarasti who has written the book *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*.<sup>[19]</sup> A slightly different view from the structuralist view, this method will rely on inner icons/symbols. In order to understand iconicity in music, it is necessary to consider Ferdinand de Saussure's view that mentions two aspects of the sign, namely the signifier and the signified.<sup>[19, p. 11]</sup> According to some scholars, music can be considered a language of gesture, and in this way it is almost seen as the result of actions performed by an "organism", not only in the process of its

creation, but also in the content of the music itself.<sup>[19, p. 12]</sup> Tarasti proposes a semiotic theory of music that includes the role of memory, musical models, musical space, and musical actors. In developing music semiotics, there are two approaches that can be used. The first is an approach that pays attention to the history of music and the second is an approach that applies semiotic theory in general to music. However, according to Tarasti, a more appropriate approach is to combine the two approaches and adapt general semiotic concepts to specific or historical issues related to music. Thus, a more ideal approach can be found in the development of music semiotics.<sup>[20, pp. 19–51]</sup>

In everyday life, symbols, signs, and emblems are considered to have the same meaning, any object or thing that functions to represent something else. As a result, indirect, implicit, connotative and ambiguous statements are made. Among these three terms, the most popular and widely used is symbol.<sup>[21, p. 170]</sup> Aristotle divided the levels of symbols, including *poetical/aesthetic* symbols, namely symbols that are influenced by mental conditions, emotional attitudes, and feelings.<sup>[22]</sup> 'Atif Jaudah explains further about the aesthetic value contained in the human longing for the highest standards and goals in order to achieve the highest balance and harmony.<sup>[22, p. 86]</sup>

Mysticism is widely recognized as a spiritual journey in search of hidden truth or wisdom, with the ultimate goal of achieving union with the transcendent realm. While it is commonly held that mystical encounters are subjective to each person, there exist notable commonalities in these encounters that transcend the confines of race, creed, social status, and religious affiliation.<sup>[23]</sup> Human endeavors to access the realm beyond the earthly plane can be accomplished via the medium of culture, as exemplified by the poems of Blake and Tagore, as unveiled by the insightful findings of Samantaray.<sup>[23]</sup> This phenomenon is similarly observed within the Islamic sphere.

Sufism in the history of Islamic development is a movement of Sufism. The beginning of the emergence of Sufism in Islam during the *Tabi'in* period <sup>[24, p. 3]</sup>, in other opinions there are those who mention the initial period of Sufism in Islam from the 3rd century AH / 9 AD. to the 6th century AH / 12 AD.<sup>[25]</sup> In addition, there are opinions that mention around 850 AD or more than 200 years after the death of the Prophet PBUH in the Baghdad area.<sup>[26, p. 15]</sup> The terms Sufi and Sufism when referring to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) actually also refer to the same concept, in the Islamic tradition, namely the Islamic mystical tradition. The term "sufi" is referred to as an expert in the science of tasawwuf / expert in the science of suluk <sup>[27]</sup>, while the word "tasawwuf" is defined as a teaching (method and so on) to recognize and get closer to God so as to gain a direct relationship consciously with Him.<sup>[28]</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn Ajiba have different views on Sufism. According to Ibn 'Arabi, Sufism is about behaving in the manner of God, and through faithfulness to the Qur'an and God's laws, one can continuously improve one's spiritual position and draw closer to God. Meanwhile, according to Ibn Ajiba, Sufism is the science of praiseworthy behavior that brings the presence of the All-existent God through inner purification and good deeds. Basically, the beginning of the path of Sufism is knowledge, the middle is charity, and the end is divine grace in the form of closeness to God.<sup>[7, p. 80]</sup>

Indirectly or directly, symbols play an important role in speech and pronunciation. Symbols are defined as signals conveyed through facial expressions or body movements and something implied in words.<sup>[29, p. 22]</sup> Symbolism is a literary technique that uses tangible language to convey intangible concepts. It involves the use of objects or events to represent ideas beyond their literal meaning, which requires the reader to interpret the intended meaning in the context of the work. Symbols are used to represent concepts and attributes through the use of figurative interpretations that distinguish them from their literal connotations.<sup>[29, p. 22]</sup> In terms of musical discourse, one can find various relationships between semiotic-level and semantic level symbolism, within the music itself the same semiotic network can articulate different symbolism.<sup>[19, p. 17]</sup>

Sufistic symbolism is a form of prophetic symbols used in a Sufistic literary work. The Sufi symbolic lexicon is "closed" to the public, so that all writers and readers of Sufi poetry quickly understand the famous series of "esoteric signs" - both in the form of imagery and metaphors - used by the poets and described by them in detail.[\[30, p. 17\]](#) Khairul Fuad quotes Javad Nurbakhsh as stating that symbols play an important role in Sufistic literature as they are used to reveal the highest beauty in the object being symbolized. Later, writers and Sufis were inspired by the stanzas to express the ultimate beauty through symbols. The concept of ultimate beauty in an object is the premise of symbolism. Symbols are a means to represent the image of the *Peak Beauty of the Divine Beloved* and also an appropriate metaphor to describe the elusive Peak Beauty. By using symbols, the meaning of Peak Beauty can be represented or referenced.[\[31\]](#)

The term literature in Arabic is called *Adab* which originally meant an invitation to a "banquet" and then the word evolved in meaning with the changing times. Today, the meaning of *Adab* is the concept, style, content, and form of thinking about social realities, dreams, and aspirations of the people, and it has a beautiful, interesting style, and has a rhythm like music.[\[32, pp. 46–48\]](#)

A Sufi is someone who constantly strives to maintain sincerity towards Allah and good morals towards creatures, because one of the signs of a Sufi is when he is willing when he has nothing and cares for others when he has.[\[7, p. 80\]](#)

Sufistic literature, according to Abdul Hadi WM, is literature that expresses transcendental aesthetic experiences that are closely related to tawhid, the testimony that God is one, or in other words, God is the only one who actually exists, while other than Him there is nothing.[\[33, p. 238\]](#) Sufis, such as Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūm wrote *maṣnawī*,[\[34\]](#) Sunan Bonang wrote suluk [\[24, p. 81\]](#), [\[33, p. 239\]](#) and Hamzah Fansuri wrote *rubā'ī* [\[24, p. 44\]](#), all their literary works contain praise and expressions of love for the Creator. In addition to those mentioned above, there was also a great Sufi and gazal poet, Umar Ibn Farid (d. 632 AH), see Shaleh [\[35, p. 259\]](#), Abu Madyan Al-Talmisani, Abdul Karim al-Jīlī and Abdul Ghani an-Nabulsi.[\[22, p. 12\]](#) They wrote various literary works with various genres, so it can be said that Sufistic literature is not a *genre*.[\[33, p. 239\]](#) However, in general, their literary works carry the main theme of *'isyq* (love), their love for the *Khāliq*.[\[33, p. 239\]](#)

Born in Helsinki on September 27, 1948, Eero Tarasti is a Finnish musicologist and semiologist. He is currently Emeritus Professor of Musicology at the University of Helsinki. Tarasti has written extensively on the semiotics of music and published a number of books on the topic.[\[36\]](#) One of his works that is widely referred to by music semiotics researchers is his book entitled *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, published in late 1994 and *Existential Semiotics* written in 2001. Starting from the book and discussed in more detail in an article entitled *Musical Semiotics - a Discipline, its History and Theories, Past and Present*, written in the journal *Recherches Sémiotiques* in English in 2018. He reads a lot of philosophical thoughts such as Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, Arendt, Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Marcel Wahl.[\[37\]](#) Also, he often engages in philosophical thinking that examines the subject, Dasein, transcendence, situation, being and value.[\[37, p. 25\]](#)

Eero Tarasti's attention to the field of semiotics is quite deep, in addition to existential semantics and musical semantics. In his opinion, musical semiotics is so close to the epistemology and theory of semiotics in general, namely the Peirce or Greimas or Barthes approach, that it can be applied directly to music.[\[20, p. 33\]](#)

In his study on existential semiotics, Tarasti reveals two domains that are discussed in his existential semiotics, namely: Dasein and Transcendence. Dasein comes from the German language which means existence/ *being there* [\[37, p. 26\]](#), Dasein refers to humans as "subjects" who are involved in the process of making meaning from the signs around them.[\[38\]](#) The human world of Dasein is always based on the presence of the subject; even its absence is a significant fact [\[39, pp. 804–805\]](#)

[4–5], certain individual and communal values have been instilled in the object, as a result of which the object has become something desirable in the universe of Dasein.[39, p. 6] Meanwhile, "Transcendence" refers to a philosophical concept that describes the state in which humans transcend the limits of their existence in the physical world, which can be achieved through two actions, namely negation and affirmation.[37, p. 26] Anything that does not exist but is present in our consciousness is transcendent [37, p. 27]. Transcendence has emerged as an important concept in the field of semiotics. The dialectical relationship between 'being' and 'non-being' (or Nothingness) is a fundamental aspect of existentialism.[39, p. 11] In existential semiotics, transcendence is considered important in the process of meaning-making, as humans are able to transcend physical boundaries and refer to broader and abstract things in meaning-making.[38] In addition, in Tarasti's view, value is considered as the origin of semiosis, although studies related to semiotics rarely discuss value.[40, p. 140] Also, Tarasti gives his opinion on Moi and Soi. Moi and Soi are two inseparable entities, Moi is "me/ body" and Soi is "self/ form" [37, p. 30].

There is an opinion that says that music is a phenomenon that contains meaning [20], because words that have meaning and are poetically arranged in art will have a greater impact on the listener than just mumbling words that do not have any meaning.[2, p. 61] In this article, we will analyze two song lyrics created by Sabrang Mowo Damar Panuluh or known as Noe, the vocalist of the band Letto. When Sabrang was a child, he was always amazed by the extraordinary natural events and his father, Cak Nun, accompanied him to look for the contextuality of nature, so that little Sabrang could know that all natural events are related to God, see minutes 02:10 to 02:44 at.[10] Growing up, Sabrang created many song lyrics. One of the processes used when writing song lyrics is that Sabrang must be in a conscious state, see minutes 08:07 to 08:11 at.[10] In addition, Sabrang's interest in the pattern and style of speech in the Qur'an also influenced him in the style of writing the lyrics of his songs. As the verses of the Qur'an can be interpreted in every space and time, Sabrang also wants the lyrics of his songs to be "free" to be interpreted by the listeners of his songs with their various backgrounds (the listeners) so that listeners have their own existential experiences, this can be seen from Sabrang's conversation with Habib Husein Jafar in a podcast in the ninth minute.[10]

The two songs that will be analyzed and interpreted the meaning contained in the lyrics are the songs "Sebelum Cahaya" and "Sandaran Hati", The approach applied is Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics. Here are the song lyrics transcribed from *Letto Band's Official YouTube Channel*,

**Table 1.** The Song Lyrics of Noe Letto

Sebelum Cahaya
<i>Ku teringat hati</i>
<i>yang bertabur mimpi</i>
<i>Ke mana kau pergi, cinta</i>
<i>Perjalanan sunyi</i>
<i>yang kau tempuh sendiri (5)</i>
<i>Kuatkanlah hati, cinta</i>
<i>Ingatkah engkau kepada</i>
<i>embun pagi bersahaja</i>
<i>Yang menemanimu</i>
<i>sebelum cahaya (10)</i>
<i>Ingatkah engkau kepada</i>

*angin yang berhembus mesra  
Yang kan membelaimu, cinta*  
*Kekuatan hati*  
*yang berpegang janji (15)  
Genggamlah tanganku,<sup>1</sup> cinta  
Ku tak akan pergi*  
*meninggalkan mu sendiri  
Temani hatimu, cinta*  
*Ingatkah engkau kepada (20)*  
*embun pagi bersahaja  
Yang menemanimu*  
*sebelum cahaya  
Ingatkah engkau kepada*  
*angin yang berhembus mesra (25)  
Yang kan membelaimu, cinta*  
*Ku teringat hati*  
*yang bertabur mimpi  
Ke mana kau pergi, cinta  
Perjalanan sunyi (30)*  
*yang kau tempuh sendiri  
Kuatkanlah hati, cinta*  
*Ingatkah engkau kepada*  
*embun pagi bersahaja  
Yang menemanimu (35)*  
*sebelum cahaya  
Ingatkah engkau kepada*  
*angin yang berhembus mesra  
Yang kan membelaimu, cinta*  
*Ingatkah engkau kepada (40)*  
*embun pagi bersahaja  
Yang menemanimu*  
*sebelum cahaya  
Ingatkah engkau kepada*  
*angin yang berhembus mesra (45)  
Yang kan membelaimu, cinta*  
*Kan membelaimu cinta*

Source: [41].

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<sup>1</sup> According to author's opinion, the persona "ku" in line 16 should be capitalized as a symbol of "God".

### Sandaran Hati

*Yakinkah ku berdiri  
Di hampa tanpa tepi  
Bolehkah aku  
mendengarMu*

*Ter-kubur dalam emosi (5)  
Tanpa bisa bersembunyi  
Aku dan nafasku  
MerindukanMu*

*Terpuruk ku di sini  
Teraniaya sepi (10)  
dan kutahu pasti  
Kau menemani  
Dalam hidupku  
Kesendirianku*

*Teringat ku teringat (15)  
Pada janjiMu ku terikat  
Hanya sekejapku berdiri  
kulakukan sepenuh hati*

*Peduli ku peduli  
Siang dan malam yang berganti (20)  
Sedihku ini tak ada arti  
Jika Kaulah sandaran hati  
Kaulah sandaran hati  
Inikah yang Kau mau  
Benarkah ini jalanMu (25)  
Hanyalah Engkau  
Yang kutuju*

*Pegang erat tanganku  
Bimbing langkah kakiku  
Aku hilang arah (30)  
Tanpa hadirMu  
Dalam gelapnya  
Malam hariku*

*Teringat ku teringat  
Pada janjiMu ku terikat (35)  
Hanya sekejap kuberdiri  
kulakukan sepenuh hati*

*Peduli ku peduli  
Siang dan malam yang berganti  
Sedihku ini tak ada arti (40)  
Jika Kaulah sandaran hati  
Kaulah sandaran hati  
Sandaran hati*

Source: [42].

Different from structuralist semiotics in sign interpretation, Tarasti's existential semiotics emphasizes subjective experience and social, cultural, and historical context. She argues that accurate interpretation requires a comprehensive understanding of context and individual human experience as the foundation.

Beginning with the assertion that Sabrang is someone who wants to communicate to the listeners (lyrics) of his songs, but there is a considerable gap between Sabrang and his music listeners. The differences in understanding, experience, and culture between Sabrang and his music listeners are the main factors that deepen the gap between the two. The listener can be said to be a "transcendent entity" for Sabrang, while Sabrang can be phenomenologically referred to as "self" [37, p. 27]. In this context, it can be said that Sabrang is an individual who lives in the world of Dasein where he tries to build meaning from his subjective life experiences through his song lyrics. One of his life experiences can be seen in Sabrang's confession on several occasions, he consciously admits to having been an atheist, See minute 12:54 [43] because the shahada he once said was still in the form of acquisition of the shahada sentence, not yet to his "self" who said shahada. Then, one day in his migration in Canada when he was forced to live homeless, he ended up staying at one of Canada's largest mosques in order to "survive". But it was during his stay at the mosque that he had many opportunities to interact in religious studies, at one point asking a sheikh about the justice of God that could be understood logically See minute 17:01 at [43]. There was a moment when the sheikh's answer moved Sabrang so much that he decided to "return" to Islam See minutes 17:58 at [43].

From the above fragment of Sabrang's life story, it can be affirmed that some of his life experiences have greatly influenced his works. Moreover, he has stated in the interview above that every lyric of his songs is written in a conscious state. Therefore, it can be said that the lyrics of his songs are full of Sabrang's *values* that are poured into the lyrics.

In the lyrics of the song "Sebelum Cahaya," Sabrang has allowed the listener to interpret the lyrics freely but as Dasein, he has put symbols in the lyrics that have meaning too. For example, the writing of capital and non-capital letters at the beginning of words in the lyrics of the song can be interpreted as a symbol of God and His servant. This is quite clear, according to the researcher, because Sabrang in one of his life episodes once walked on a path in search of the Creator, the One who rules this universe.

The persona "Ku" [I] in lines 1, 17, and 27 and the word "Yang" [Whom] in lines 9, 13, 22, 26, 35, 39, 42, and 46 that are capitalized can be a sign that informs about God. On the other hand, there are some personas that do not use capital letters such as: persona "kau" [you] in lines 3, 5, 29, and 31; persona "engkau" [you] in lines 7, 11, 20, 24, 33, 37, 40, 44; persona "mu" [you] in lines 9, 13, 18, 19, 22, 26, 35, 39, 42, 46, and 47. The persona that does not use capital letters is a sign that informs about creatures or humans. The persona diction in this lyric shows that Sabrang implies that God and humans are very close and intimate because he does not use formal persona deixis.

In addition to the persona deixis above, there is also diction that shows a deep sense of love in the lyrics, such as the use of the words "hati" [heart], "cinta" [love], and "mesra" [intimate] to signify the bond of love that is beyond measure from God for humans. The lyrics of this song also try to describe several moments of human life according to Islamic teachings, including in the stanza "hati yang bertabur mimpi" [a heart studded with dreams] can be interpreted as a description of humans who have the mind to be able to explore the world. Followed by the stanza "Ke mana kau pergi, cintaa. Perjalanan sunyi yang kau tempuh sendiri" [Where you go, love. The silent journey you take alone] can be interpreted as human life in the world when they do not know their God and humans will be responsible for themselves. The stanza "embun pagi bersahaja. Yang menemanimu sebelum cahaya" [unpretentious morning dew. What accompanies you before the light] can be interpreted that "embun pagi" [morning dew] is the guidance of the Qur'an and "cahaya" [light] is death, because death in Islam is

the beginning of the eternal afterlife. The words "*angin yang berhembus*" [the wind that blows] can be interpreted as one of God's creations that is full of grace. The stanza "*Kekuatan hati yang berpegang janji*" [The strength of the heart that holds the promise] can be interpreted as a human effort to always hold his promise to God, because from the beginning God never left humans alone without a guide to life as written in the stanza "*Ku tak akan pergi meninggalkan mu sendiri*" [I will not leave you alone]. The song lyrics end with the repetition of the stanza "*membelaimu cinta*" [caress you with love] to emphasize the height of God's love for humans.

From the intertextuality of the signs above, a semiosis emerges that represents the Sufistic atmosphere in the lyrics of "Sebelum Cahaya" because it succeeds in presenting the entity of God who is full of love and very close to humans.

The second lyric studied in this article is "Sandaran Hati". Similar to the previous song lyric, this song lyric also uses letter capitalization differentiation to distinguish signs for God and signs for humans. From this lyric, we can see the persona deixis "Aku" [I] in line 7; persona "Mu" [You] in lines 4, 8, 16, 25, 31, 35; persona "Kau" [You] in lines 12, 22, 23, 24, 41, and 42; persona "Engkau" [You] in line 26. As for the personas that use lowercase letters, the persona "ku" [i] is in lines 1, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, and 40; the persona "aku" [me] is in line 3.

In this lyric there are stanzas that can be explored as follows: "*Yakinkah ku berdiri Di hampa tanpa tepi*" [Can I stand in a void without an edge] can be interpreted as a human condition that feels very lonely continuously, it is reinforced by another stanza "*Ter-kubur dalam emosi Tanpa bisa bersembunyi*" [Buried in emotions Without being able to hide]. The loneliness arises because he yearns to meet his God. Behind the loneliness, there is a sense of optimism, God will always accompany as written in the stanza "*dan kutahu pasti Kau menemani Dalam hidupku Kesendirianku*" [and I know for sure you accompany In my life My loneliness]. This lyric brings up the story of man's covenant with God before they were born in the lyric "*Teringat ku teringat Pada janjiMu ku terikat*". Bait "*Siang dan malam yang berganti*" [I remember Your promise I am bound to]. The stanza "*Siang dan malam yang berganti*" [The changing day and night] can be interpreted with the time that continues to run no longer ignored when the end will meet God. In the process of meeting God, even though it is dark and lost, they will still live their lives because humans have essentially promised their God before being born on earth, this can be seen in stanzas 24 to 35.

Intertextuality of signs that appear in the lyrics of the song "Sandaran Hati" there is a semiosis that presents a Sufistic atmosphere, because it can realize a human entity that no longer cares about the life of the world due to a deep longing to meet God immediately.

In this study, we used Eero Tarasti's view of existentialist semiotics to see the meaning behind the words in Noe Letto's two song lyrics. This step allows us to analyze and interpret them within the concept of Dasein, and the concept of Transcendence as written in the following table.

**Table 2.** The Concept of Dasein and Transcendence

Concept	Explanation in the Context of Song Lyrics	Song Title
<b>Dasein</b>	Sabrang, the author of the song's lyrics, has a unique religious experience. Although he was born to Muslim parents, he was not satisfied with his religious "gift" through heredity. With a science education background in math and physics, he had to find a reason that made sense to him. His search for God was done consciously, by abandoning everything he believed in since	-Sebelum Cahaya -Sandaran Hati

childhood, until finally he "rediscovered" his God in Islam.

The songwriter's father, who is a culturalist, has introduced artistic life to the author since childhood, both directly and indirectly, so that the ideas and values internalized in the author are then expressed in the form of literary works, including song lyrics.

Sabrang was once in a position of "darkness" when in the process of seeking God, although God's light was always there. Sebelum Cahaya

With an educational background in physics, Sabrang has a strong affinity for the word "Light", which is a scientific concept in the study of physics.

Sabrang was in a state of disinterest in life, longing for God and wanting to meet Him immediately. Sandaran Hati

**Transcendence** -Contains an element of deep *mahabbah* between God and man. Sebelum Cahaya

-A sense of closeness between God and man.

-Contains the element of *al-uns*, which is the intense longing to meet God immediately. Sandaran Hati

-Meeting between God and man

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

By discussing and examining spiritual manifestations in popular music, especially in the works produced by the band Letto, researchers can see that music has a lot of potential as a place to express spiritual values. This phenomenon shows that music, with its various kinds, including popular music, can be an effective medium for conveying the songwriters' spiritual dialog with the Creator. Using Sufistic symbols consistently in his works, Noe Letto offers an interesting perspective on the spiritual path he has taken. Through their lyrics, they are able to create a space for reflection, introspection, and the search for deeper meaning, which serves as a "call" to connect with the spiritual dimension within the individual.

As a follow-up to this study, the scope of research can be expanded to include the relationship between popular music and a wider spectrum of other spiritual elements. An analysis of the lyrics, melodies, and musical styles of various popular music artists and groups could yield interesting insights into how spiritual concepts can be communicated through the medium of music. In addition, research can be conducted to understand how popular music becomes a tool to enhance spiritual understanding and experience, as well as the role of culture, social context, and history in creating spiritual expressions in popular music. By expanding this research, we can make a significant contribution to our understanding of popular music as an influential spiritual medium.

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