



## Growl Technique in Saxophone Performance for Accompanying B.E No. 754 *Goklas Ni Roha* at GKPI Pagar Beringin Church

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze and describe the application of the growl technique in saxophone performance when accompanying the hymn Buku Ende (BE) No. 754 “Gok Las Ni Roha” at GKPI Pagar Beringin Church, Resort Sipoholon I. The background of this research stems from the significant role of music in Protestant worship, particularly within the GKPI congregation, and the need for expressive variation in church music ministry. The growl technique was chosen because it produces a distinctive sound color-rough yet emotional—that enriches musical nuances while reinforcing the theological expression of the sacred song. The research employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews with church musicians, documentation, and score analysis. Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the growl technique on the saxophone contributes significantly to the accompaniment of Gok Las Ni Roha. First, this technique enhances the character and expressive power of the music, especially in sustained notes and the climactic sections of the song. Second, the application of growl aligns with the march-like character of the hymn, thereby creating a more dynamic and spirited atmosphere of worship. Third, the congregation’s response indicates a positive reception, as the resulting musical nuance deepens the spiritual experience during worship. The growl technique on the saxophone is not merely a technical variation but also a means of spiritual expression that enriches church liturgy. The author recommends that church musicians, especially saxophonists, continuously develop this skill and combine it with other techniques such as vibrato, legato, and staccato to support a more creative, varied, and meaningful music ministry.*

**Keywords:** *Growl Technique, Saxophone, Buku Ende*

### INTRODUCTION

Music constitutes an integral component of Christian worship, functioning not merely as aesthetic enhancement but as a vital medium for theological expression and spiritual engagement. Within the Protestant tradition, particularly in the Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia (GKPI), congregational singing accompanied by instrumental music serves as a

primary mode of corporate worship, facilitating both vertical communication with the divine and horizontal fellowship among believers. The hymnal *Buku Ende* represents a repository of theological and cultural heritage for GKPI congregations, containing hymns that articulate Reformed theology while incorporating indigenous musical elements reflective of Batak cultural identity. Among these hymns, *BE No. 754 "Gok Las Ni Roha"* (translated as "The Joy of the Soul") occupies a significant place in the worship repertoire, characterized by its march-like rhythmic structure and triumphant textual content that celebrates spiritual victory and divine grace. The role of instrumental accompaniment in congregational singing has evolved considerably within Protestant worship practices. While traditional organ accompaniment remains prevalent, contemporary church music ministry increasingly incorporates diverse instruments to achieve varied timbral and expressive possibilities. The saxophone, originally developed in the mid-nineteenth century and subsequently adopted across multiple musical genres, has gradually found acceptance in sacred music contexts due to its expressive range, dynamic flexibility, and capacity for both melodic clarity and harmonic support. However, the integration of jazz-derived extended techniques, such as the growl technique, into church music performance remains relatively unexplored in academic literature, particularly within Indonesian Protestant worship contexts. The growl technique, characterized by the simultaneous production of instrumental tone and vocal sound resulting in a distinctive rough, raspy timbre, emerged from jazz and blues traditions as a means of heightening emotional expression. Technically, the effect is achieved by humming or singing into the instrument while maintaining proper embouchure and air support, creating a complex acoustic phenomenon involving the superimposition of vocal harmonics upon the instrumental fundamental pitch. While this technique has been extensively employed in secular musical genres to convey intensity, passion, or raw emotion, its application in sacred music remains limited, raising questions about appropriateness, theological congruence, and congregational reception. Nevertheless, proponents of stylistic diversity in worship music argue that extended techniques, when applied judiciously, can deepen expressive capacity and enhance the affective dimension of liturgical music without compromising theological integrity.

The present study emerges from observations at GKPI Pagar Beringin Church, Resort Sipoholon I, where the worship music team has experimented with incorporating saxophone accompaniment featuring the growl technique in selected hymns. Preliminary observations suggested that this approach generated distinctive musical effects that appeared to resonate with congregational worship experience, yet systematic investigation of this practice has not been undertaken. Given the significance of music in facilitating worship engagement and the ongoing discourse regarding innovation and tradition in church music ministry, scholarly examination of such practices becomes necessary to inform both theological reflection and practical application. This research aims to analyze and describe the application of the growl technique in saxophone performance when accompanying the hymn "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" at GKPI Pagar Beringin Church. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how the growl technique enhances the expressive character of the hymn accompaniment, to evaluate the congruence between the technique's sonic qualities and the hymn's theological and musical characteristics, and to assess congregational reception of this instrumental approach. By investigating these dimensions, the research contributes to the limited body of literature addressing

extended instrumental techniques in sacred music contexts and provides practical insights for church musicians navigating the intersection of musical innovation and liturgical tradition.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This investigation employed a qualitative research design utilizing a case study approach to provide in-depth examination of the growl technique application in a specific worship context. The case study methodology was selected as most appropriate given the study's focus on understanding a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This approach enabled comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of the research problem, including technical, aesthetic, theological, and communal aspects of the musical practice under investigation. The research was conducted at GKPI Pagar Beringin Church, Resort Sipoholon I, over a period of three months from July to September 2024. This timeframe allowed for multiple observations of worship services and adequate interaction with key informants. The primary research participants included the church saxophonist who performed the growl technique, the worship music coordinator, the pastor responsible for liturgical oversight, and a purposively selected group of ten congregation members representing diverse demographic characteristics including age, gender, and length of church membership. Selection criteria for congregational participants included regular worship attendance (minimum twice monthly) and willingness to provide reflective feedback on musical aspects of worship experience. Data collection proceeded through four complementary methods to achieve triangulation and enhance validity. First, systematic observation was conducted during six worship services in which "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" was performed with saxophone accompaniment featuring the growl technique. Observation focused on the saxophonist's technical execution, the musical interaction between instrument and congregation, visible congregational responses, and the overall integration of the technique within the worship flow. Field notes were recorded immediately following each service, documenting both descriptive details and preliminary interpretive insights. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the saxophonist (two sessions of approximately sixty minutes each), the worship coordinator (one session of forty-five minutes), the pastor (one session of thirty minutes), and the ten congregational participants (individual sessions of fifteen to twenty minutes each). Interview protocols were developed based on the research questions and included open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the growl technique's application. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Third, documentary evidence was collected including the musical score of "*Gok Las Ni Roha*," the saxophonist's annotated performance score indicating where growl technique was applied, video recordings of three worship services (obtained with appropriate permissions), and church bulletin materials referencing the musical selections. These documents provided contextual information and enabled detailed analysis of the technical aspects of the performance. Fourth, musical score analysis was undertaken to identify structural, harmonic, and expressive features of "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" that might inform understanding of why and how the growl technique was applied. This analysis

examined the hymn's melodic contour, harmonic progression, rhythmic character, textual content, and formal structure, seeking correlations between these musical elements and the placement of growl technique within the accompaniment.

Data analysis followed the iterative process characteristic of qualitative research, involving three concurrent flows of activity as described in established qualitative analysis frameworks. Data reduction commenced during the data collection phase and continued throughout the research process. Initial coding of interview transcripts and field notes identified recurring themes, patterns, and significant statements related to the research questions. These codes were then organized into broader categories reflecting key dimensions of the phenomenon under study, including technical execution, expressive function, theological appropriateness, and congregational reception. Data display involved organizing the reduced data into formats facilitating pattern recognition and conclusion drawing, including thematic matrices comparing perspectives across different participant groups, chronological displays tracking the development of the musical practice, and conceptual diagrams illustrating relationships among identified themes. Conclusion drawing and verification constituted the final analytical stage, wherein patterns, explanations, and meanings emerging from the data were formulated into coherent findings. Preliminary conclusions were tested against the data through negative case analysis, searching for instances that contradicted emerging patterns, and through member checking, wherein key findings were shared with selected participants to verify accurate representation of their perspectives. Triangulation across multiple data sources and participant perspectives enhanced confidence in the findings' validity. Throughout the analytical process, reflexive attention was maintained regarding the researcher's own musical background and potential biases, with efforts made to privilege participants' voices and interpretations over predetermined theoretical assumptions. Formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from church leadership, and informed consent was secured from all individual participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, with identifying information removed from transcripts and reports. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasized, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Given the public nature of worship services, general observations were permissible, but specific quotations or identifiable references to individuals required explicit consent. Video recordings were used solely for research purposes and securely stored. The research aimed to respect the sacred nature of the worship context, ensuring that investigative activities did not disrupt or detract from the congregation's spiritual experience.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of saxophone performance during the accompaniment of "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" revealed systematic and intentional application of the growl technique at specific points within the hymn's structure. The saxophonist employed the technique primarily during sustained notes in the accompaniment line, particularly on the dominant and tonic pitches that function as harmonic anchors within the hymn's harmonic progression. Observational data indicated that the growl was most prominently featured during the final phrases of each stanza, where the textual content reaches its theological climax expressing themes of spiritual triumph and divine faithfulness. The technical execution

involved the saxophonist simultaneously maintaining proper embouchure and air support while humming in unison with the played pitch, producing a complex timbre characterized by additional harmonic partials that created the distinctive raspy quality associated with the growl effect. Interview data from the saxophonist provided insight into the deliberate nature of this technical application. The performer explained that the growl technique was specifically chosen to enhance emotional intensity without overwhelming the congregational singing, stating that the rough texture added a layer of expressive depth that conventional saxophone tone could not achieve. The saxophonist noted that careful dynamic control was essential to ensure that the growled tones supported rather than dominated the congregational voice, requiring extensive practice to achieve the appropriate balance. Musical score analysis corroborated these observations, revealing that the hymn's march-like character, with its strong duple meter and rhythmically straightforward melody, provided an appropriate structural framework for the integration of timbral variation through the growl technique. The functional role of the growl technique within the accompaniment appeared to operate on multiple levels. At the most fundamental level, it provided timbral contrast that distinguished the instrumental accompaniment from the congregational singing, creating textural differentiation that enhanced the overall sonic richness of the worship music. More significantly, the technique served an expressive function, intensifying the emotional character of particular musical moments in alignment with the hymn's textual content. During the phrase "*Gok las ni roha*" (joy of the soul), where the melody ascends to its highest pitch, the application of growl on the accompanying harmony note created a sense of exuberant celebration that reinforced the text's meaning. Similarly, in passages expressing steadfast faith amid trials, the rough, persisting quality of the growled tone seemed to sonically embody themes of endurance and determination articulated in the lyrics.

### ***Alignment with Musical Character and Theological Expression***

The march-like character of "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" emerged as a crucial factor in the appropriateness and effectiveness of the growl technique application. The hymn's rhythmic structure, featuring strong beats and dotted rhythms characteristic of march tempo, establishes a musical framework that conveys forward momentum, collective action, and triumphant procession. These musical characteristics align with the hymn's textual themes, which emphasize the Christian journey as a victorious march under divine guidance. The growl technique's inherent qualities—its assertive, robust timbre and its associations with intensity and passion—resonated with this march character, creating congruence between musical means and expressive ends. Interview responses from the worship coordinator and pastor provided theological perspectives on this alignment. The worship coordinator observed that the growl technique, while unconventional in traditional church music contexts, effectively communicated the emotional vigor appropriate to songs of spiritual victory and celebration. The coordinator noted that GKPI worship tradition, while rooted in Reformed theological emphasis on word-centered worship, has historically embraced cultural and musical diversity, as evidenced by the incorporation of Batak musical elements in the *Buku Ende* hymnal. From this perspective, the integration of jazz-derived techniques could be viewed as a continuation of this tradition of contextual adaptation rather than a departure from liturgical norms. The

pastor corroborated this view, emphasizing that musical choices in worship should be evaluated based on their capacity to serve the word and facilitate genuine engagement with divine truth rather than on adherence to particular stylistic conventions. The theological dimension of musical expression emerged as a central theme in understanding the growl technique's function. Several interview participants articulated the perspective that music in worship serves not merely as aesthetic accompaniment but as a vehicle for theological communication and spiritual formation. From this standpoint, the expressive qualities of the growl technique—its capacity to convey raw emotion, earnest longing, and triumphant joy—could be understood as serving the hymn's theological content. The text of "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" speaks of the soul's joy in God's presence, the assurance of divine love, and the hope of eternal glory. The intensified emotional expression afforded by the growl technique potentially deepened the congregation's encounter with these theological themes, moving beyond cognitive assent to affective engagement. However, this interpretation was not universally shared among participants. Three of the ten congregational interviewees expressed initial discomfort with the unconventional sound, describing it as "too worldly" or "more appropriate for secular music." These responses reflect ongoing tensions within Protestant worship music between innovation and tradition, between cultural relevance and sacred distinctiveness. Yet notably, two of these initially skeptical participants indicated that repeated exposure led to greater acceptance, suggesting that congregational reception of novel musical practices may evolve over time as familiarity increases and as the technique's function becomes more clearly understood. This finding points to the importance of intentional music education and theological reflection within congregations navigating changes in worship musical practice.

### ***Congregational Reception and Worship Experience***

Assessment of congregational reception constituted a critical dimension of this study, as the ultimate measure of any worship music practice must include its impact on the worshiping community's spiritual engagement. Data from congregational interviews revealed predominantly positive reception of the saxophone accompaniment featuring growl technique. Seven of the ten congregational participants described the musical effect as "powerful," "moving," or "stirring," with several noting that it enhanced their worship experience by creating a more dynamic and emotionally engaging musical atmosphere. One participant remarked that the distinctive sound drew attention to the hymn's message in a fresh way, preventing the habituation that sometimes accompanies familiar hymns performed in routine fashion. The concept of musical nuance emerged frequently in congregational participants' descriptions of their experience. Multiple interviewees used language suggesting that the growl technique added layers of meaning or emotional texture to the hymn that conventional accompaniment did not provide. One participant described feeling that the rough quality of the growled tones expressed "the struggle and triumph of faith" in a manner that resonated with personal spiritual experience. Another noted that the technique's intensity matched the "strength of conviction" expressed in the hymn's text. These responses suggest that congregational members perceived the growl technique not as mere musical novelty but as an expressive device that enhanced the communication of the hymn's theological content. Observational data from worship services provided additional evidence of congregational engagement. During performances of "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" with growl-enhanced saxophone

accompaniment, congregational singing appeared robust and energetic, with visual indicators of engagement including upright posture, animated facial expressions, and sustained vocal participation throughout all stanzas. While such observational indicators must be interpreted cautiously, as multiple factors influence congregational singing behavior, the consistency of these observations across multiple services suggested positive reception. The worship coordinator noted that "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" had become a requested hymn among congregation members, with several individuals specifically mentioning appreciation for the saxophone accompaniment. The minority perspective expressing reservations about the technique merits careful consideration. Concerns raised by some participants centered on questions of appropriateness and potential distraction. One participant worried that the distinctive timbre might draw undue attention to the instrumentalist rather than facilitating focus on the hymn's message and divine object of worship. Another expressed concern about the technique's jazz associations potentially introducing secular connotations into sacred space. These perspectives reflect legitimate theological concerns about the role of musical performance in worship and the potential tension between musical artistry and liturgical function. The research findings suggest that successful integration of innovative musical practices in worship contexts requires not only technical skill but also pastoral sensitivity, theological reflection, and ongoing dialogue within the worshiping community. The study's findings contribute to theoretical understanding of musical expression in worship contexts by demonstrating that extended instrumental techniques, when applied with artistic discernment and theological awareness, can enhance rather than detract from liturgical musical practice. The growl technique's effectiveness in this case appears to derive from multiple factors: its alignment with the hymn's march-like character and triumphant textual themes, the performer's technical proficiency and musical sensitivity in application, and the technique's capacity to create timbral interest that maintains congregational engagement. These findings resonate with broader discussions in liturgical music scholarship regarding the balance between innovation and tradition, the role of cultural context in shaping appropriate musical expression, and the importance of evaluating musical practices based on their functional effectiveness rather than stylistic categorizations. Practical implications of this research include recommendations for church musicians considering the integration of extended techniques or stylistically diverse musical elements in worship contexts. First, technical proficiency in executing such techniques is essential to ensure musical quality and avoid distraction through poor execution. Second, thoughtful analysis of the specific hymn or worship song is necessary to determine whether a particular technique aligns with the music's character and theological content. Third, gradual introduction of novel musical elements, accompanied by explanation and education, may facilitate congregational acceptance and understanding. Fourth, ongoing evaluation of congregational reception through multiple means—including observation, informal conversation, and formal feedback mechanisms—enables responsive adjustment of musical practices to serve the worship community effectively.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined the application of the growl technique in saxophone performance when accompanying the hymn "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" at GKPI Pagar Beringin

Church, revealing significant insights into the intersection of instrumental technique, musical expression, and worship experience. The research findings demonstrate that the growl technique, when executed with artistic skill and integrated thoughtfully within the musical and liturgical context, contributes meaningfully to the expressive power and theological communication of congregational hymnody. Specifically, the technique enhances the character and emotional intensity of the accompaniment, particularly during sustained notes and climactic passages, creating a distinctive timbral quality that resonates with the hymn's march-like character and triumphant textual themes. The congruence between the growl technique's sonic qualities and the theological content of "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" emerged as a crucial factor in the technique's effectiveness. The rough, assertive timbre produced through growling sonically embodies themes of spiritual victory, steadfast faith, and joyful celebration articulated in the hymn's text, thereby providing an aural dimension to theological expression that conventional instrumental tone may not achieve. This alignment between musical means and theological ends suggests that stylistic diversity in church music, including the integration of techniques derived from secular musical traditions, need not compromise liturgical integrity when such techniques are employed in service of the text's meaning and the community's worship. Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, as a case study focused on a single congregation and specific hymn, the findings' generalizability to other worship contexts is limited. The cultural specificity of GKPI worship, with its distinctive blend of Reformed theology and Batak cultural elements, may influence receptivity to musical innovation in ways that differ from other Protestant traditions or cultural contexts. Second, the relatively short duration of data collection may not capture longer-term effects of repeated exposure to the technique or evolving congregational attitudes. Third, the study's focus on one specific extended technique limits broader understanding of how diverse instrumental approaches might function in worship contexts. Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across multiple congregations and denominations, examining long-term effects of innovative musical practices on worship engagement, and investigating a broader range of extended techniques and their liturgical applications. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights for both scholarly understanding and practical ministry. For worship music scholarship, the research demonstrates the value of empirical investigation of contemporary musical practices in worship contexts and contributes to theoretical frameworks for evaluating musical appropriateness in liturgical settings. For church musicians and worship leaders, the findings offer evidence-based guidance regarding the integration of extended techniques and stylistically diverse elements in congregational music ministry. The study affirms that musical innovation in worship, when grounded in theological reflection, executed with technical excellence, and responsive to congregational needs, can enrich the worship experience and serve the church's mission of facilitating genuine encounter with the divine through Word and sacrament, prayer and praise. In conclusion, the application of the growl technique in saxophone performance for accompanying "*Gok Las Ni Roha*" at GKPI Pagar Beringin Church exemplifies how traditional worship forms can be revitalized through thoughtful integration of contemporary musical elements. This practice reflects the ongoing negotiation between continuity and change that characterizes living worship traditions, honoring inherited hymnody while embracing expressive possibilities afforded by diverse

musical techniques and idioms. As Protestant worship continues to evolve in response to changing cultural contexts and generational preferences, such examples of creative musical integration provide valuable models for maintaining the essential tension between rootedness in tradition and openness to the Spirit's leading into new expressions of ancient faith. The growl technique, in this particular context, serves not as an end in itself but as one means among many through which the church fulfills its calling to offer worship that is both faithful to the gospel and fully engaged with the cultural moment, singing the Lord's song in contemporary tongues while preserving the theological substance that makes it the Lord's song indeed.

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