Preface

It is not too difficult for an outsider, whether one who is not a Singaporean or one who is not a musician from Singapore, to obtain a concise overview of the country. By this, one means getting a general sense of the types of music that are performed and a sense of their beginnings. A look at the highly regarded New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians would suffice.¹

Because of the richness it offers, the sheer diversity of musical culture that is the reflection a largely Asian population in a post-colonial setting that boasts a mixture of cultural attributes is an intimidating prospect for any writer on music in Singapore music. Yet for Lee's creditworthy list and descriptions, his entries on music in Singapore can safely thus to be said to represent the tip of the iceberg. In fact, much of the research undertaken by this current work has revealed that much which is practised is ‘hidden’ or not as readily available to us as knowledge of or about musical practices in Singapore.

Given that any discussion of music in Singapore needs to be prefaced by definitions of music, both denotative and connotative, our view of music in this work is based on that of educator David Elliott’s who sees music being, “…at root…a human activity…something that people do……a diverse human practice.”² This study of musical practices in Singapore as such then is interpreted as human generated practices, understood in relation to meanings and values evidenced in actual music making and music listening in specific cultural contexts.

Elliott’s views are shared with that of ethnomusicologist John Blacking: Although every known human society has what trained musicologists might recognise as music, there are some that have no word for music or whose concept of music has a significance quite different from that generally associated with the word music…“Music” is both the observable product of human intentional action and a basic human mode of thought by which any human action may be constituted. The most characteristic and effective embodiment of this mode of thought is what we would call music.³

The challenge posed to any researcher looking at the music scene of Singapore has to address at the onset: that of the availability and distribution of knowledge about music in Singapore. Beyond just being an issue of methodology, knowledge about music - how it is made known and what is made known to a wider public - is telling about the significance which is given to music, regardless of genre or practice, and perhaps equally telling of the place of music in Singapore society.

As such, this study proposes to identify and study the musical practices that were found to exist in Singapore from their earliest recorded entry to the present; their functions, how and why did they emerged; and, how they changed over time.
By relying on Elliott’s suggestion of a musical practice, this study hopes to present a view of musical practice in Singapore as an activity through which the unique processes of societal formation and practice are identified. The work involved in making out an even more comprehensive search is a challenge and an opportunity for further and future research. The resulting musical practices which this research identifies are:

1. Bangsawan
2. Bhangra
3. Chinese Orchestra
4. Chinese Traditions
5. Heavy Metal and Rock
6. Hip-hop
7. Javanese Gamelan
8. Jazz
9. Keronchong
10. Malay film
11. Malay traditions
12. Music for State
13. Pop Yeh Yeh
14. Shiyou
15. South Indian Classical traditions
16. South Indian film
17. The Band
18. Euro-American Art Music
19. Minstrel party
20. Wayang
21. Western popular culture
22. Xinyao
23. Zafin

It is hoped that through these musical practices, we would be able to understand the significance and meaning of music as it happened in societies in Singapore and how this understanding can assist in the funding, promotion and production of the entire gamut of musical activities ranging from performance through composition to recording.

REFERENCES


2 David Elliott, op.cit., chapter two, particularly pp.39-42.

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27. Amar Singh
28. Rudra
29. Shatriya
30. Narasimha
31. Vernon Cornelius

32. Recollections by Lawrence Francisco (Latin Six) as recorded by his grandson Jeremiah before Lawrence passed away in October 2002.

Our thanks are due to them in providing clues to reconstructing the many practices. While every care has been taken to ensure correctness with spelling of names, locations, places and events, dates and times, there have been differences and we accept responsibility for any errors resulting.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; a beginning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Bangsawan</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Bhangra</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Chinese Orchestra</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Chinese Traditional Musics</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Heavy Metal and Rock</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Hip-hop</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Javanese Gamelan</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Jazz</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Keronchong</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Malay film</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Malay traditions</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Music for State</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Pop Yeh Yeh</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Shiyue</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; South Indian Classical traditions</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; South Indian film</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; The Band</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Euro-American Art Music</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; the Minstrel party</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Wayang</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Western popular culture</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Xinyao</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Zafin</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Practices; Epilogue</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>516</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Musical Practices in Singapore; beginnings

Literature on the music of Singapore may not be voluminous. As musicologist Joseph Peters noted in 1995 when writing the chapter on Singapore for a book about the music of ASEAN countries:

*Very little has been written about the music of Singapore, the reason for which is sometimes hard to explain or understand.*¹ Peters further noted that while many ethnomusicological treatises on aspects of music in the Southeast Asian region have been churned out, Singapore seems to have been by-passed. He attributed this to the size of the country: *Perhaps, it was its diminutive stature on the world atlas which caused it to be overlooked.*² Yet, as ethnomusicologist Lee Tong Song would acknowledge five years or so later in his entry in the respected *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Singapore's largely Asian population in a post-colonial setting which boasts a *mixture of cultural attributes*³ has resulted in a diversity of musical cultures.

It is indeed a diversity that in fact has posed challenges for those writing about the music of Singapore. Given this very diversity, questions arise: Where and how does one begin to chronicle the music of Singapore? Whose and which type or genre or tradition of music does one begin with?

Perhaps lyricist, writer and advocate of Malay music, Yusnor Ef had hinted at such issues when in his article *Perkembangan Muzik Melayu Singapura 50-an hingga 90-an* (Development of Malay Music of Singapore from 50s until 90s) he began with the simple question: "Muzik, apa itu muzik?" (Music, what is this that is called music?)⁴ In seeing the necessity to define "what is music" within so specific a scope of exploration, perhaps Yusnor acknowledged that even within a particular communal or cultural group, the notion of what exactly is music may not be universally accepted. What are the ramifications of a writer faced with articulating the diverse practices of culture *within* and *among* communal groups of Singapore?

**Existing Narratives**

There has been a tendency, maybe temptation, to begin with and to focus on the influence of the musical traditions from the West and their legacy in an attempt to provide a broad overview of music of Singapore. Alex Abisheganaden's attempt called *The Music Score: 82 Years in Tune* was written for *The Straits Times* in celebration of the country's 17ᵗʰ National Day celebrations in 1982.⁵ Regarded by many as the "Father of Guitar" in Singapore for his advocacy of the instrument for more than 30 years and one of the leading figures in music education in Singapore, Abisheganaden's article was an ambitious one for a newspaper article. His work traced 82 years of music history, starting from 1900. What was interesting in Abisheganaden's article however is an emphasis on Western music; or rather how the *music scene* of Singapore and *western music* becomes synonymous in the discourse.
This sudden shift takes place as if when talking about the “music scene” in Singapore, “music” could not have been anything else except “western music”:

While we reflect on all aspects of life and take pride in our achievement in the arts, let us trace our beginnings and follow the development of our music scene over the years. In doing so, we will appreciate better the efforts of leading musicians, the role of government, the contribution of private music societies and schools and the effect of music through the mass media. We can chart the development of western music in four periods …

In Abisheganaden's article, the various types of music understood as being "Western" are:

- Music that were performed in the churches by the British community
- Music that were performed in hotels by European musicians. This was also called ‘light’ music
- Pop music which was Hawaiian music in the 1930s as well as songs which were from the early period of Hollywood musicals
- Classical music performed by serious musicians and students in amateur string/wind ensembles. Such ensembles could also include amateur orchestras such as the CKT Orchestra, Singapore Philharmonic Orchestra, Singapore Youth Orchestra
- Music performed by professional ensembles such as the Singapore Symphony Orchestra
- Music drama which included works by Gilbert and Sullivan and Broadway shows

This replacement of the more comprehensive and broader “music” by the more specific “Western music” is all the more significant especially when the article appeared on National Day issue of the mainly English daily. It is a substitution that cannot be taken lightly especially when the article served a double function as a historical piece and as a tribute to the efforts of the present and a past generation. As if to reinforce the point, the article begins with descriptions of performances of Western music:

In early Singapore, western music was performed in the churches by the British community and in the hotels by European musicians contracted from abroad.

Twenty years later, little has changed. In 2002, in composer Bernard Tan's essay *Sounding Board: Music and Cultural Heritage* written for the National Arts Council's publication *Narratives*, it is the introduction of Western music that heralds the beginning of music being integral to life in Singapore society:

Music has been an integral part of life in Singapore since its founding by Sir Stamford Raffles, when Western music entered the island to join the indigenous Malay musical traditions of the region. The arrival of Chinese and Indian immigrants added their musical cultures to an already rich multi-cultural mix, which
included the surviving traditions of the Portuguese from an earlier colonial occupation.\(^9\)

In Joseph Peter's contribution to the *Musics of Asean* seven years earlier in 1995, the music of Singapore is broadly divided into two categories: "Traditional Music in Singapore" which comprises Malay, Chinese and Indian music and "Western based musical composition" which comprises mainly compositions by Singapore composers. In his conclusion, there is no doubting the significance Peters places on the influence of Western musical traditions:

*There is an energetic purposefulness in Western-based musical composition in Singapore, despite the lack of long tradition and the infrastructure of academia.*\(^{10}\)

Even in the face of the varied musical cultures of Singapore that arises from the various communities of the country, for Peters, Western music provides the foundation for Singapore composers to begin their work:

*The Singapore composer relies heavily on the language of Western music. He sees this as the foundation upon which he could be innovative even to the point of incorporating elements from other musics in relation to the multiracial cultures of Singapore.*\(^{11}\)

Writing four years after Peters in 1999, Joseph Pereira in *Legends of the Golden Venus: Bands that rocked Singapore from the '60s to the '90s* acknowledges the influence of the West in Singapore pop music, as he states in the first paragraph of the Introduction:

*Not surprisingly, when you look for the origins of Singaporean pop, rock 'n' roll, blues, and R & B music, the road leads back to Britain.*\(^{12}\)

The legacy and influence of the West is one that is hard to deny; made all the more evident with the formation of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), a Western classical music ensemble as the first professional performing arts group in Singapore. In his essay *Sounding Board: Music and Cultural Heritage*, Bernard Tan regarded the year of the founding of the SSO, 1979, as a "watershed year in Singapore's musical development".\(^{13}\) Moreover, the two of the first recipients of the Cultural Medallion, Singapore's highest arts award, were men who were, and still are, involved in the practice of Western music: Choo Hoey, the first music director (and subsequently conductor emeritus) of the SSO and David Lim Kim San, one of the founders of the Singapore Youth Choir.

Even architecturally, the landscape of the performing arts in Singapore is one that is shaped by the influence of the West. The nation's first purpose built concert hall, that of the Concert Hall of the nation's main performing arts centre, Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay which opened in 2002, is one which was built upon the construction principles of the best of 19th century and 20th century concert halls in the West. For the acoustician Artec Consultants, the Concert Hall was built primarily as a space for a Western symphony orchestra.
When asked in an interview if Artec considered the specific cultural situation and needs of the community where a hall is built, Russell Johnson, who had also designed the Morton H Meyerson Symphony Centre in Dallas and the Kimmel Centre, home of the Philadelphia Orchestra, said:

*When one of the goals is to provide a place for symphony orchestras to make music, to build one of the four or six best concert halls in the world, there are basic requirements which must be fulfilled. Good acoustics for Western music are good acoustics for other genres.*

In fact, even within the music of other communal groups, the influence of the West cannot be denied. Here, Yusnor Ef notes the influence of the Beatles and Rolling Stone on the Malay music scene in the 1960s:

*Diawal tahun 60-an muncul pula suatu tren baru dalam dunia muzik Melayu moden. Pengaruh Beatles [sic] dan Rolling Stone [sic] telah mula dirasakan ramai penyanyi dan pencipta lagu serta penulis lirik yang dapat tempat di hati peminat-peminat lagu-lagu Melayu moden ...*  
(In the early 1960s, there emerged a new trend in the world of modern Malay music. The influence of the Beatles and Rolling Stones were beginning to be felt by many singers and composers as well as lyricists who had fans of modern Malay songs …)

Among a portion of the Mandarin-conversant community, as will be shown later in this book, the music of American folk singers such as Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul and Mary exerted an influence on the Xinyao movement. In the face of the overwhelming presence of the West, ethnomusicologist Lee Tong Soon in his entry on Singapore for the highly regarded New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians provides a different approach. Here, Lee begins with an important assumption, that of Singapore being a multi-cultural society:

*With a largely Asian population in a post-colonial setting, Singapore boasts a mixture of cultural attributes, reflected in its diverse musical culture.*  

Eschewing a chronological account and avoiding discussion of "traditional" versus "contemporary", Lee, views music in categories that are at once communal, cultural and genre-specific:

- Music of the three major ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, India)
- Euro-American classical music
- Popular Music in Mandarin and English
- Musicals by Singaporean composers that arose in the late 1980s
- Locally composed, produced and performed rock music in the 1990s

In Lee's entry, "European art music" receives the least space and he concludes with Singapore as a nation that since its independence has been "negotiating its musical identity."
Music: A Working Definition
Given the various narratives mentioned above, the challenge that faces any attempt to understand and present a history or overview of the music of Singapore would be quite simply: How does one want to begin? Would it be chronological or communal? Or is there another way to begin, hence a return to the question that Yusnor Ef asked in his own chronicle of the development of Malay music: What is Music?

The view of music in our book is based on that of music educator David Elliott who sees music as...at root...a human activity...something that people do.....a diverse human practice. Elliott essentially sees music as a four dimensional concept that is comprises: an activity, a "doer" of the activity, an outcome of the activity or that there is something done and the complete context within which the activity (and the doers) is performed.

Conceived in this way, the notion of "music" goes beyond just being a work that is performed or what emerges out of a musical performance. In this concept, the "doer" or the music maker, makes musical works to be listened to for the intricacy of intramusical design, musical expressions of emotion, musical representation of people, places and things and expression of various kinds of belief, whether personal or political. As such, no matter how individual or non-utilitarian, all works of music incorporate social and practical realities. Here, music is a human practice that is a formed of activities, which exhibit a range of internal goods and standards of excellence, which are recognisable by those participating in the practices. It would also see musical works as being inherently communal constructions–expressive of the social and cultural practices through which composers compose at different times and places.

Elliott, however, is not alone in holding such a view. Ethnomusicologist John Blacking has admitted to a deliberate use of inverted commas with the term “music”: Although every known human society has what trained musicologists might recognise as music, there are some that have no word for music or whose concept of music has a significance quite different from that generally associated with the word music... “Music” is both the observable product of human intentional action and a basic human mode of thought by which any human action may be constituted. The most characteristic and effective embodiment of this mode of thought is what we would call music.

Blacking reasoned that if music was understood from such a perspective, we ought to be able to learn something about the structure of human interaction...by way of the structures involved in music, and so learn more about the inner nature of man’s mind....observation of musical structures may reveal some of the structural principles on which human life is based.
Here, an instance of this can be found through the work of Anthony Seeger who worked amongst the Suya of the Upper Xingu in Brazil who called his study **musical anthropology**, which counters renowned ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam’s seminal description of ethnomusicology as a *study of music in culture*. For Seeger, music is not just a thing which happens *in society* but a society might be conceived as something which happens *in music*. Here, Seeger has argued that it was through *music and dance performance* that fundamental aspects of Suya social organisation...are recognised. For Seeger, *Suya society as a totality might be understood in terms of their music...Suya society was an orchestra, its village was a concert hall and its year a song.*

Developing and expanding an argument along similar lines as articulated by Seeger, ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes further reinforces the place of music as not only an activity within society but one which actually constructs societies: *Music does not reflect...music is not simply a marker in a prestructured social space but the means by which this space can be transformed. Music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them.*

If music is, *at root level, a human activity,* context dependent and practice-specific, then a consideration of musical practice is dependent on situating either observable processes or products of such human behaviour. As Elliott suggests: *Each musical practice produces music in the sense of specific kinds of musical works-identified as the outcomes of particular musical practices because they demonstrate the shared principles and standards of the practitioners who make them.*

Our study of musical practices in Singapore is reliant on an interpretation of musical practices as *human generated* practices; practices to be understood in relation to meanings and values evidenced in actual music making and music listening in situated contexts: *The noun *praxis* derives from the verb *prasso*, meaning (among other things) ‘to do’ or ‘to act purposefully’. But when we use the term *prasso* intransitively its meaning shifts from action alone to the idea of action in a situation. As Aristotle used the word in his Poetics, *praxis* connotes action that is embedded in, responsive to, and reflective of a specific context of effort.....the term praxial emphasises that music ought to be understood in relation to the meanings and values evidenced in actual music making and music listening in specific cultural contexts.*

Here, a parallel can be found in Ruth Finnegan's study of music-making in Milton Keynes, England, who produced a series of searching questions equally relevant to a discussion of musical practices in Singapore: What do they consist of? How is it sustained and by whom? Are the kind of events mentioned earlier one-off affairs or are there consistent patterns or a predictable structure into which they fall? Are they still robust or now fading away? Who are these local musicians – marginal minority or a substantial body? Who are their patrons today? What is the significance of local
music-making for the ways people manage and make sense of modern urban life, or our experience as active and creative human beings? We could extend these questions to include: How can we consider such public events a feature of life in Singapore, mainstream or marginal? What relevance do they hold for the individuals who participate in these events? Do they make a contribution to society? How?

Aims and strategies
Given the context and justification, this work aims to achieve the following:

- Identify musical practices that have existed in Singapore since 1819;
- Functions of these practices;
- How and why did they emerged; and
- How they changed over time

Three possible strategies lay in front of us for such a study:
One such way was to pursue musical practices in the various communities of Singapore: primarily Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian. However, as our study will show, members from the various ethnic communities participated in musical practices considered the purview of a single or particular community. Wells and Lee note that in some cases, in certain musical practices, members of some communities were highly overrepresented, in contradistinction to a demographic majority where one community is bound to dominate by sheer numbers. Moreover, a communal approach to the study of a musical practice may engender a view that the right to teach or engage in musical practice of a specific community is the sole purview of those within that community; that it is highly unlikely for someone else to understand a musical practice outside of their culture. This is a view that is redolent of arrogance and ignorance of intelligent and perceptive musicians who are highly motivated in their gravitation to musical practices outside of their cultural affiliation. In our experience and explorations, music-making has been able to transcend ethnic and religious boundaries. As our study hopes to do justice to this transcendent quality of music-making with an approach to understanding musical activity that transcends the communal lines, this strategy was eschewed.

A second approach, a chronological one, also presented difficulties. The main reason for this is that one immediate consequence of a chronological approach is in a possibly teleological account that sees musical activities in terms of growth, development and or decline. Additionally, a chronological approach considers less a vertical configuration of apprehending a musical practice in favour of a more a linear time-based approach that can prove contentious. For instance, if one were to chronicle a history of a particular musical practice through public performances, issues arise. Public appearances are not only sites of individual hearing/s but also expressions, whether they involve individuals who act as individuals or individuals who represent a community. Here one is reminded of the Foucauldian “event” which involves the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it…the entry
of a masked other. The “event” in public therefore suggests a deeper level of this collective action, namely ways in which it may have been documented, initiated, nurtured and supported. Beginnings in a public sphere usually conceal genealogies in the domestic or private sphere. Moreover, other questions arise; namely the supporters of such endeavours, and in what ways. Throughout the research for this study, in the absence of written documentation, oral interviews - while unable to fully determine this genealogy - for now has sufficed to draw sufficient attention to the phenomenon of the musical practice, its continuity and the interviewees understanding of an origin from his/her perspective. Such perspectives allow for a vertical configuration which enable chronological perspectives to act as one of the many dimensions of a musical practice.

The third approach was to study the practice of music based on the categories proposed by ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam who proposed ten functions ascribed to those who use Music:\textsuperscript{30}

- **Emotional expression**

Considerable evidence has indicated that music functions widely and on a number of levels as a means of emotional expression, providing a vehicle for the expression of ideas and emotions not revealed in ordinary discourse.

- **Aesthetic enjoyment**

Here, Merriam concedes that the study of music concerns the concepts of aesthetics and the interrelationship of the arts although it must be borne in mind that the definition of aesthetic and that it is also a culture bound concept.

- **Entertainment**

A distinction has to be drawn between pure entertainment–which Merriam suggests is a particular feature of music in Western society–and entertainment combined with other functions, the latter, of which is more a prevalent feature of societies that privilege orality more than literacy.

- **Communication**

Of all the things that music might be, Merriam is convinced that music is not a universal language but rather shaped in terms of the culture it is a part.

- **Symbolic representation**

Music functions in all societies as a symbolic representation of other things, ideas and behaviours.
• Physical response

Here Merriam suggests that music eliciting physical response is clearly counted upon in its use in human society, though the responses may be shaped by cultural conventions; whether they may elicit, excite or channel crowd behaviour through dance, trance, rituals, cohesion, to name a few.

• Enforcing conformity to social norms

This refers to the use of songs at initiation ceremonies, songs of protest, and other songs that call attention to social propriety and impropriety within a community.

• Validation of social institutions and religious rituals

Here music becomes a means via recitation of legend and myth in song, through which religious systems are validated and percepts expressed.

• Contribution to the continuity and stability of culture

If music allows emotional expression, gives aesthetic pleasure, entertains, communicates, elicits physical response, enforces conformity to social norms and validates social institutions and religious rituals, then, as Merriam points out, contributes to the continuity and stability of culture.

• Contribution to the integration of society

Merriam suggests that in providing a solidarity point around which members of society congregate, music functions to integrate society. Music then provides a rallying point around which members of a society or community gather to engage in activities that require the cooperation and coordination of the group. Not all music is this performed but every society has occasions signaled by music which draws its members together and reminds them of their unity.

Merriam’s neutral approach to the way in which music functions are indeed tantalizing prospect where the functions draw the musical practices. However, there are fundamental problems in addressing such a configuration. First, we are likely to find overlap; more than one community may be found to use music to function in a specific context—for instance, the use of music in contexts of ritual or worship. Second, it is not clear that we can assume music functioned for a particular community in the same site-specific way when re-situated among heterogeneous communities in Singapore.
When Dr. Eugene Dairianathan was invited to make a presentation of Musics of Singapore at a Music and Sociology Conference in Gothenburg in 2002, it was premised on a view, “there are four different races and therefore...four different musics”. In fact, an important corollary of this research project is the emergence of lesser-known practices. If anything, this research has revealed that musical practices in Singapore do not fall neatly into the four above-mentioned groupings. Describing practices as ethnic-based activity draws in more than those who were said to be most naturally affiliated to it via ethnicity. Secondly it also borders on privileging discourses in music. Nowhere is the difference between cultural practice of the displaced home and re-placed home more pronounced when re-presentations become the purview of national discourse. Gayatri Spivak expresses her concerns in the following way:

*Certain practices of...arts in the broadest sense are said to inhabit the private sector. But institutions of...art, as well as the criticism of art, belong to the public.*

When applied to a Singaporean context of ethnic-based studies, the potential problem of highlighting certain practices more than others is tantamount to privileging one practice over another or highlighting the practices in such a way as to suggest that an entire community subscribes to this one practice. This is further exacerbated when the representation is taken up at institutional and even public levels of discourse. For instance mention of Indian music in Singapore may create an impression that there is one type of music that all Indians subscribe to – out of a diversity of musical practices, classical, folk and popular culture, of an equal diversity of Indian ethno-linguistic groups in Singapore. That also makes an assumption that all Indians will not have participated in musical practices of the culturally diverse communities living in Singapore.

Our explorations indicate musical practices here have, by and large, been able to transcend these boundaries. Our attempt therefore, is to see how best we can reflect this fluidity of communities, *in* and *among* communities. As such we intend to present our study of the various musical practices in Singapore as musical practices, bearing in mind though, Merriam's ten functions as significant points of homage and departure.

**Methodolgy**

That which we propose to do then in this study is to identify musical practices as the phenomenon in which they appear as, across communal lines and genres. Here, music appeared in the following:

- As a passing reference to other issues, like crime or legal action or even controversy surrounding issues involving thing musical
- In publications where for instance music fell under entertainment or leisure or even sports sections.
• A significant place in the newspapers if the musical event, personality merited the significant space like the front section usually reserved for more important events. Such events could be local or performed locally. More often, such events/personalities were from overseas and the newspapers acted as a publicity machine.
• As a way of establishing hegemonic discourse (as in the case of western art music).
• As a silent or silenced component of events in writing. This comes about when practice is not documented or recorded because practitioners are only too well aware of their audience reception and practitioners feel there is little to gain about an evanescent practice such as theirs. Hence, music appears to be alive in oral accounts far more than documentary evidence.

Our study has taken on board these concerns and attempted procuring materials from two directions:

• Data collation and information on activities involving music in newspaper collections. Besides the English medium, every attempt has been made to checking resources in Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, where possible. For the most part of our research, the English language newspapers and documents in English have acted as our primary source of information. Further and future research will invite more thorough documentation and translation from sources in Jawi, Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and the possibility of other languages, based on the strength of documentation in local settings. The collected data helped to form the basis for a comprehensive yet concise account of the various music-making activities in Singapore through written discourse, which includes newspaper reports, programme leaflets, reminiscences, musical scores if made available to name a few, including the Oral History Archives. If a practice has musical scores and such data, that can be used profitably. Any documentation surviving as recordings serves as archival material for further research.

• Oral interviews conducted with practitioners who contributed by leading, facilitating, creating or participating in music-making activities in the various communities. The transcripts of the interviews are given back to the interviewees for their agreement to publish quotations which may be extrapolated from their interviews. It is also hoped that other forms of evidence may be obtained such as poster information, photographs, CD resources, cassette resources, video-taped performances and any other useful sources.

Our research findings have led to the view that a more in-depth search is required; we recommend further and future research work is pursued along these lines. The same too applies to research which requires researching archival material overseas. Given the relative scarcity of documentation and discourse in some of the practices, we
have relied on both written documentation and oral interviews to yield information which contributes to an emerging profile of the practice in spite of gaps between one fact and another, one event and another, the space of the known and the silent, ways of knowing such a practice, and value and belief systems not easily amenable or accessible to an outsider. With respect to oral interviews, enquiries were made through contacts and their networks. Interviewees were selected out of names suggested in our field research as well-known practitioners in the scene. Interviewees were informed of the nature of the search and were asked for any form of documentation or photographs or recorded material that may have proven useful in corroborating claims and account. As there were those who obliged, there were those who declined.

In the course of our research, we have also noted that some practices have been better documented than others. Hence the content of each practice differs in length and approach from another practice. For convenience, we have decided to list these musical practices alphabetically, as the practice is commonly known in the English language.

Finally, this work aims to provide another way of looking at music in Singapore and as such, aims less to be in-depth in all the practices than to open up areas of new research and different ways of understanding music in Singapore. In laying out these practices side by side and not one favouring the other and not within communal lines, what has emerged is the possibility of a way of understanding the music of Singapore that transcends communal and cultural lines.

In doing so, and because society can be conceived as something that happens in music, perhaps such a view of music of Singapore reveals perhaps the possibility of the emergent of a society that transcends the very same communal and cultural boundaries.
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2 Ibid., p. 93.


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


11 Ibid., p. 93.


13 Tan, Bernard, op.cit., p.80.


15 Ef, Yusnor, op.cit., p.357, translation by Phan Ming Yen.


19 Ibid., pp.39-42.

20 Ibid., pp.39-42.


24 Stokes, Martin, op.cit., 1994, pp.4-5.

26 Ibid., pp.41-42.


30 Merriam Alan, The Anthropology of Music, Evanston, Northwestern University Press,

31 Spivak, Gayatri, Explanation and Culture, Marginalia, in Other Worlds, p.103.
Musical practice of Bangsawan in Singapore

The term literally means “of good birth, noble”.¹ For Joseph Peters², Bangsa (rasa) and wan (royal lineage) has come to collectively refer to Malay opera. Chopyak informs us Bangsawan refers to a form of musical theatre which arrived in Penang but known in Indonesia as stambul.³ According to Mustapha Kamil Yassin, this form can be traced to a visit in 1870 by an Indian theatrical group whose, repertoire consisted of well known classical stories from the Middle East and India...the [musical] pieces played were Indian and Arabic at the beginning...Later they adapted Malay classical music and in turn produced numerous tunes which today have become Malay classical pieces.⁴

A full-length article on Malay Opera by Shaik Othman bin Sallim draws on its similarity with Bangsawan in the Straits Chinese Magazine of 1898.⁵ In his introductory remarks:

Although the Malays form a large section of the population of this colony and by far the largest section of the people of the neighbouring states of the Malay Peninsula, they are nevertheless little known and still less understood. One reason lies, I think, in the fact that the literature relating to them, their manners, habits and thought in other than the native tongue is scanty and not yet popularized. It does not require a very careful observer to see that the Malays holding antiquated and old-fashioned views of things, are fast disappearing before the path of European civilization. And the Malays themselves have perhaps shown the least care and taken the least interest to gather and preserve in a literary form the superstitions, folk-lore, manners and customs of their own people which will soon be lost in oblivion.⁶

When I was asked to write something about my own countrymen for the Magazine, I remembered reading Mr. Wilkinson’s intensely interesting paper on the “Poetry of the Malays”. From the nature of the essay, it was necessary that the “Bangsawan” or Malay opera should have had but a short paragraph devoted to it. But as during the last few months, there has been a “Wayang Bangsawan” performing nightly to large audiences. I am of the opinion that a paper on the Malay opera, as presented on the stage by the Jawi Peranakan Theatrical Company in North Bridge Road will be read by some with interest.⁷
I suppose most playgoers who might after night found their way to the theatre referred to, would go home quite pleased that they had succeeded in getting hold of the words of a couple of the songs sung to tunes which had caught their fancy. So far as the plot of any particular play was concerned, it would indeed be difficult to say how much of it was understood by the majority of the audience who sat out of hearing of the words very frequently spoken in a sort of mumble, or sung in a voice too small or too low to compete with strong orchestral accompaniment. The handbills, printed both in Malay and Romanised characters and intended to contain the Argument of a play, would not reflect much credit on the party responsible for their appearance in regard to the style and class of words used in the description of the plot.

Several visits to the “Bangsawan” gave Shaik Othman the opportunity to make careful observations and to take mental notes:

It is not my desire to be hypercritical but there are many directions in which slight improvements would make the three or four hours spent in watching any of the plays more pleasurable and less monotonous. It need hardly be said that a set of ten or twelve curtains could not possible suffice for a company whose repertoire consisted of twenty or more pieces; nor could one avoid a sinister smile to find “Bombay” staring in large characters on a curtain intended to represent a scene in Baghdad. For all these shortcomings, if the water colour paintings on these curtains are not works of art, they at least do not offend the eye and appear to have been done by a person who knows something of perspective drawing. In so far as the use of these curtains obviates the necessity of sticking up boards announcing to the audience, the locality of each scene as is still done on the Chinese stage and used to be on the English stage of Shakespeare’s day, it is an indication that the Malays have made more progress in histrionic art than the Chinese.

Here one is given some insights into his observations of a staged performance by the Jawi-Peranakan Theatrical Company in North Bridge Road. Shaik Othman notes how the Bangsawan Company confined its attention exclusively to operatic pieces excessive in length and took up to six nights to finish it. In this case, it is the reputable romance called Panji Samerang, which is filled in his words “deliberately narrated to the minutest details”; and he takes to task the versifier for not having used his discretion to keep the main plot of the story, eliminating all matters of minor importance. He in fact draws attention to all the surface elements which he
found most annoying – the poetical portions of that and other pieces might with advantage be curtailed, while the chorus parts which are sung without any sense of time or harmony, need not be repeated more than once or twice.\textsuperscript{11}

Other instances that invite his irate responses include the following: it is again unfortunate that the majority of the poetical passages are sung in a sort of monotonous chant with the disadvantages of a feeble voice and of a strong orchestra consisting of a trumpet, drum and two fiddles within two yards of the actor or actress. The Company itself suffers from the disadvantage of having a small selection of airs. Now and again a pleasant change is given to the audience of hearing popular English tunes, but as these latter have been learnt by ear, it is not to be wondered at that often they are incorrectly rendered. Besides “Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay”, I have heard attempts at singing “Daisy Bell”, “After the Ball” and “Two little girls in blue”. These tunes have been used by an actress who always played the role of the heroine of every piece I have seen – one of the very few members of the Company who had a fairly creditable voice – and in ignorance of better things, she sang the first verse of one of her songs to the chorus of “Two little girls in blue” and the subsequent verses to the air of “Daisy Bell”. I have no doubt that the principal performers would greatly benefit by taking lessons in part-singing (which is such a nice feature of Western music) and also in the art of public singing. Improvements might also be made by doing away with the silly practice of putting out first one hand then the other by way of gesture while a song is being sung; and by insisting on the actresses singing with their faces to the audience and not to the curtain forming the background of the scene. When it is borne in mind that the “Bangsawan” puts only opera on its boards, then these criticisms will be seen to be quite legitimate.\textsuperscript{12}

The Malay opera not being arranged into acts and scenes, a breathing interval is unknown. Nevertheless to gain time for preparing the stage for the next scene, a comic interlude is introduced which is often more loudly applauded than the other parts relating to the plot of the piece. The Malays cannot resist the temptation of popularizing a piece on the stage by the introduction of a clown whenever one can safely be brought it. There is of course the danger that the ludicrous antics of such an actor might spoil the impression which a particular scene was intended to make on the minds of the audience. That was the feeling I had when I saw the opening scene of Hamlet on the only occasion that this Company produced it. Instead of a
sense of awe and solemnity pervading the audience on the appearance of the
ghost on the stage, there were roars of laughter owing to the antics of the
watchman each time the ghost brushed past him.

A nightly source of annoyance to those who wish to follow a play closely is
the interpretation of the ice-cream or lemonade vendor who appears every
ten or fifteen minutes below the stage walks across the hall and shouts
“Sherbert, ice-cream”, quite unconscious that he is thus spoiling the
evenness of temper of some of the people in the front seats. Perhaps he is
indifferent to it. It is curious indeed to notice how many people are suddenly
reminded that their throats require to be moistened. I do not blame the ice-
cream vendor but the bad arrangements of having no intervals during the
play for refreshments.  

Having said thus much of the Bangsawan in the way of adverse criticism, I
will now proceed to give some points in its favour. The Malay opera is, so
far as I know, the only kind of dramatic performance for the large section of
the community speaking the Malay tongue. It is as popular among the Straits
Chinese as among the Malay people: and it is no uncommon thing to see the
ladies galleries filled en masse by the Straits Chinese women. I used to
wonder why the Straits-born Chinese themselves have never taken to acting,
even in the shape of private theatricals. On enquiry, I was informed that the
stage was regarded as a low and degrading profession, and that the actors
on the Chinese stage come from the lowest and poorest ranks of the people. I
suppose therefore that so long as such is the current opinion, there is no
likelihood of the Straits Chinese going on stage. And yet I think it cannot be
denied that even the stage may be utilized for the purposes of educating the
people towards higher views of life, domestic happiness and morality. One
fault which an European or a native with a proper sense of delicacy will
instantly detect in the Bangsawan plays is the exhibition of rude and filthy
manners as well as the use of coarse, if not indecent language. It is not
unfair to say that some of the plays would lose much of their popularity were
these objectionable portions to be left out.

I must confess however that I am not altogether satisfied with the
explanation given to me by my Chinese friends as to the reason why the
stage is shunned by their people. Not only the “Bangsawan: but the Chinese
theatres or “wayangs” are largely patronized by the Straits-born Chinese
who do not thoroughly understand the language of the actors. I take it
therefore that the passion of the Straits-born Chinese for the drama is just as
strong as that of any other class of our community. Why should not some of them form themselves into a dramatic company and act popular English pieces, translated into fairly good and intelligible Malay to start with? They will not do so, because they are too independent and dislike anything that demands a constant mental strain. I may be wrong in venturing this statement, but that is my honest impression.\textsuperscript{15}

But to return to my subject. In the Bangsawan plays, one finds ingenuity and resourcefulness called into action in the attempt to make the scenes as natural and true to life as it is possible on a narrow stage. Even the appearance of the winged steed in the “Indra Bangsawan” or of daintily dressed fairies riding on swans or perched on the lotus flower, one of the good genius from the clouds in the “Hawai Mujlis” or of the ghost of Hamlet’s father from half a dozen Malay tombs is not beyond the scope of the stage management.\textsuperscript{16}

There is no doubt that the patrons of the Bangsawan get the full value of their money: for as I have already said, a play is performed without intermission for at least three hours and sometimes for an hour longer. One would be willing to excuse any sign of exhaustion in the performers in the latter part of the play but as a matter of fact the principal dramatis personae sing and act with spirit all throughout the piece. They all must needs have good memories, for their plays exist only in manuscript form and there is no possibility of any of the performers studying his or her part except at rehearsals.\textsuperscript{17}

The final telling remark is that The Bangsawan Company which is the subject of this paper hails, I believe, from Penang.\textsuperscript{18}

In an advertisement in the Singapore Free Press: Friday, 7th April 1905, the Opera Yap Chow Tong (according to Tan Sooi Beng, the oldest bangsawan troupe in Malaya, originating from Penang) featured a very special Band Performance under the patronage and in the presence of Major Phra Rajahwarmthr** and A.D.C (aide-de-camp) to the King of Siam.\textsuperscript{19}
Interestingly, regulations of the Straits Settlement Ordinances of 1895 do not include bangsawan in its ‘regulation’ and demands for licenses to be applied for its staging. Yusnor Ef informs us of the first appearance of records featuring Malay music in 1914. In it are featured bangsawan songs like Jula Juli Bintang Tiga, Inderagiri, Bintang Terbit, Pularu Pandan and Mata Setan Tango. Yusnor informs us it became popular and retained popularity till the 1950s.\textsuperscript{20} 

The introduction of the Indian bangsawan was a highpoint in the influence of Hindustani songs on Malay society and enjoyed a golden age of popularity between 1920 and 1935 but according to James Chopyak, faced stiff competition from the film industry. Bangsawan is described by Chopyak as process-story telling in which the actors have no actual scripts, only a basic story line and are required to improvise their lines.\textsuperscript{21} 

Mustapha Kamil Yasin informs us of the way music was used in bangsawan: 

\textit{Every Bangsawan troupe would have an orchestra consisting of five to fifteen...instruments. At the beginning, there were only the percussion (drums, tambourines, cymbals) and stringed instruments (lute, mandolin) and also harmoniums. Later on the instruments became more sophisticated like the flute, clarinet and saxophone.}\textsuperscript{22} 

According to Joseph Peters\textsuperscript{23}, immigrant surroundings and foreign cultures were merged with Malay drama, music, dance and silat (martial arts). The indiscriminate manner of drawing of sources were aligned with the original purpose—to entertain. When Singapore gained independence, Minah Bakar and Din-Tijah Bangsawan remained as the two groups performing in New World and Happy World. The poetic elements of the Malay language are used foremost in the speech aspects of the performance. However, music is the focus of presentation and the bangsawan could have up to a much greater content, Peters speculates up to 80%, delivered in a manner approximating. The most common musical instruments used were the violin, harmonium, tabla, drums, saxophone and piano. In 1978, the former Radio Television Singapore, together with some of the local cultural bodies including the Sriwana, staged Jula Juli Bintang Tiga, a classic bangsawan from the 1920s. This production particular work is considered the beginning of modern bangsawan in Singapore.

Bangsawan troupes, Craig Lockard argues, \textit{toured the country combining music and drama in their performances. Bangsawan was an eclectic, even
multi-ethnic, urban popular theatre developed for purely commercial purposes in the early 20th century, with influences from Western, Arab, Latin American, Turkish, Indonesian, Indian and Chinese cultures. Tan Sooi Beng argues Bangsawan.....emphasised variety and heterogeneity, constantly adapting to the changing tastes of urban audiences....As a product of the time, bangsawan articulated the transformations in Malayan society in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. Its emphasis on variety, novelty and innovation corresponded to the social, political and cultural processes of change.

Peters informs us that in 1982, Janaka Bangsawan (comedy opera) came into being with the staging of Raja Dangdut by Sriwana, created by M. Saffri A. Manaf who had been experimenting with comedy a few years ago. By 1986, there was a consensus to return to more traditional forms largely because the comedy, which had been inserted to sustain an audience, was reducing the plot, the use of language and the music.

More recent attempts have been initiated by Sri Warisan to re-introduce bangsawan into the Singaporean consciousness, its socio-historical context and eventually how one needs to be engaged in its teaching and learning in its entirety. Perhaps this might well be the appropriate response to Shaik Othman when he observed in 1898, in the course of this sketch of the Malay opera, I have casually referred to the absence of Straits Chinese drama; but I do not forget that the local Malays themselves have nothing to show in the shape of a local operatic company. If the above remarks should lead my Malay readers to organize themselves into a dramatic company which would in time, win as great a popularity here as the “Bangsawan” has already won, my paper will not have been written in vain.
REFERENCES


6. Ibid., p.128.

7. Ibid., pp.128-129.

8. Ibid., p.129.

9. Ibid., p.129.

10. Ibid., p.129.

11. Ibid., pp.129-130.

12. Ibid., p.130.

13. Ibid., p.130.


15. Ibid., p.131.

16. Ibid., p.131.

17. Ibid., p.131.

18. Ibid., p.132.


21. Chopyak, op.cit., p.129. The effect in Malaysia may not have been the same as in Singapore where newly emerging film industry in the 1930s was likely to have been a contributing factor in the decline of bangsawan.


24 Lockard, Craig, op.cit., p.212.

25 Tan Sooi Beng, Bangsawan, quoted in Lockard, op.cit., p.212.

26 Shaik Othman bin Sallim, op.cit., p.132.
Bhangra

Bhangra is given some descriptive space in Peter Manuel’s work, Cassette Culture: “..Noteworthy among Punjabi folk-music genres are narrative ballads (Hir, Mirza Sahiban, Sohini-Maiwal, Sassi-Punnu, etc.), women’s genres like giddha, and bhangra, which accompanies a vigorous male dance performed at the vernal Baisakh festival (in April) and at weddings and other occasions. All these genres are especially associated with the jar cultivator caste, which comprises some three-quarters of the Punjabi population (of all religions).”

Bhangra is identified as one of the musics in the Indian community in Singapore: The Sikh community is known for its bhangra music and dance, a genre said to have originated in Punjab and performed during Sikh weddings, harvest and other joyous occasions. Traditional bhangra is usually accompanied by the thundhi (some writers refer to a thumbi) and dhol (drums), while the pop bhangra, popular in several clubs in Singapore, features electric keyboard, drum and guitar.

The description here is both informative and tantalising. This attempt at recounting the presence and practice of bhangra draws on both oral interviews with practitioners as well as literature on bhangra. Moreover, it is our express intention to concentrate on the local praxis first.

Brief Chronology

An understanding of the emergence of Bhangra in Singapore is necessarily prefaced by an understanding of the Sikh community which is pieced together from at least two sources. Further research will be required for a more exhaustive investigation into its practice in proliferation. The first source by Surjan Singh suggests that the first Sikhs to arrive in Singapore were Bhai Maharaj Singh and Bhai Kharak Singh in 1850 as political prisoners, interned at Outram prison. This roughly corresponds to the 1849 annexing of Punjab by the British in India. Records also indicate the presence of a private police force known as the Dock Police in about the 1870s; some Sikhs were employed by the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company. These Sikhs had their barracks in Tanjong Pagar where they had a small sacred site or gurdwara. In 1881, 165 Sikhs were recruited to form the Sikh contingent of the Straits Settlement Police Force in Singapore adding considerably to a very scarce Punjabi population.

The second is in the Khalsa Association report where its history is traced to the efforts of a group of determined persons from Raffles Institution. The result was the Sikh Sports and Cultural Association. Khalsa Association bears the date of existence as 1931. Its efforts were primarily to look after the welfare of its members. Its presence in Singapore statistical information is listed at 0.064% of the population in the early 20th century to 0.63% in the 1980s. The interviewees in this project indicated that their parents arrived from India and worked as watchmen, trying to improve their financial position in Singapore, often holding down two jobs. A major support system was the Gurdwaras or the temples.
Oral accounts from older practitioners in Singapore seem to have a more traditional view of Bhangra which as they believe...in India...was usually performed after the harvest...people in the village used to work very hard towards a harvest...and this also coincides with Baisakh...good crops...good pay...celebration...liquor, drums, good food, instruments...that is what it was like in India.7 There was an approximate site in Kampung Sungei Seletar that proved fruitful for a community known as the Bihari Dairymen that survived into the middle of the 1980s before they were resited.8 However, it is unlikely that an entire Sikh community might have found a similar village setting in Singapore. Moreover, their presence in Singapore would not have meant looking for alternative agrarian sites.9 Almost by default, the gurdwara seems to have been the site for at two encounters which would have been instrumental towards an understanding of Bhangra in Singapore. Since the gurdwara was essentially a sacred site, the use of the voice for the incantations as well as for singing holy songs, required the use of specific musical instruments like the tabla, the harmonium and sitar besides the voice. It is not clear if there were any further instrumental requirements but a photograph in the Khalsa Association book describing the late 50s and early 60s indicates the presence of at least these three instruments.10 The temple was also marked by another site in the outer reaches of the temple where the kitchen was located and food was served. This outer space also had with it additional space for people to interact. During mela, or gatherings, this space would serve as a site for interaction among fellow Sikhs and their families as well as activities that came during festivals which included kabbadi, gusti and a host of other activities. Given the absence of a dedicated space for festivities, the external temple grounds were more likely to have been early sites for social activities. Tai-yong elaborates, The Sikhs established their gurdwaras in areas where they were concentrated to meet their spiritual and other needs. The Sikh gurdwaras were not only places of worship but functioned also as community centres where social, education and other charitable activities were carried out. This latter function was particularly crucial for the migrant Sikh community as gurdwaras provided a rendezvous where fellow Sikhs could gather to discuss affairs of their community or events in India as well as to aid newly-arrived migrants to adapt to their new environment.11

The setting up of Khalsa was preceded by the formation of a Sikh Cultural Club in Singapore (Singapore Sikh Cultural Club) by four Sikhs from Raffles Institution in 1927.12 Khalsa itself was established in 1931. Some distance would have passed between its formation and the presence of a dedicated social space for Punjabi mela of which the first to be advertised in public space appeared in the 1961 poster; the fruit of a year’s labour by the Cultural section of Khalsa. A first site that was set up at Jalan Bahagia seems to have been the appropriate space and later at Tessenssohn Road.13

An early poster of a Punjabi Mela dated 1961,14 shows two persons, the first in a dance pose with one of his ankles strapped with little bells; and another with a dhol strapped around his neck and shoulders. That 1961 poster carrying this advertisement would have been easily described today as bhangra was subsumed under a caption Punjabi Mela. Yet the picture of a dancer responding to a dhol instrumentalist made for a unique signifier in Punjabi culture. Curiously, it came across as just another of a whole range of exciting events organised by the cultural section of Singapore Khalsa. This first Punjabi mela, as an organised event in 1961, becomes a watershed for both Khalsa and Punjabi Culture and perhaps even bhangra. At the time, however, the songs and dances were not identified as bhangra nor were they singled
out. The songs and dances shared its space with a variety of other robust and physical activities, including martial arts.

But what if the bhangra marker was used only figuratively? Did Bhangra exist at the time? All we had was a poster not of real people but perhaps an attraction that would serve its only purpose; to do no more than attract. If that was the case, what do we make of the item songs and dances? Given this relative absence, we begin with oral accounts. There was a Bhangra group according to oral interviewees developed across Malaysia and Singapore through the efforts of a Mr. Seva Singh. Surjan Singh identifies Seva Singh Ghandharab as a very accomplished singer of Gurbani, or Sikh hymns. His contributions to cultural activities and temple activities are largely known from the post war period and there was much he initiated to encourage the young to participate in cultural activities. In fact Seva Singh played an active role in the People's Association Cultural Section. Baldev Singh remembers being told that Seva Singh ran a group across Peninsula Malaysia. When Singapore became independent, Seva Singh arguably took charge of or was charged to look after the Singaporean side. With members leaving for a variety of reasons, this bhangra group is said to have mustered support through Mr Seva Singh’s immediate and extended family. Sarwan Singh remembers that this post-Independence bhangra group was started by an elderly man here called Seva Singh...he used to do a lot of singing of holy songs at temples...he used to play a couple of Punjabi musical instruments...he got a (Bhangra) group going which was more family group...they did participate at National Day celebrations...the period I am referring to is around the late 1960s and early 1970s....then in the late 1970s...one of our troupe members...Shokdarshan Singh was in Seva Singh’s group...this group was slowly dying out...so Shokdarshan Singh came out and formed Dharam Veer. This group was reportedly formed in late 1977 and early 1978....we chose the name Dharam Veer which stands for Blood Brothers... I joined the group in 1981/2.

According to Sarwan Singh, Dharam Veer comprised the following persons:

- Shokdarshan Singh (from Seva Singh’s group)
- Sarjit Singh (from Seva Singh’s group)
- Sardol Singh
- Sarwan Singh
- Gucharan Singh
- Saranjit Singh (now the owner of Roshni and Chandini Restaurants)
- Tarcholan Singh
- Sukhdev Singh
- Darshan Singh
- Baldev Singh (transition between DV and DV2)
Bhangra as Dance
Britannica Online informs us that Bhangra is performed on all festive occasions, particularly at sowing and harvest celebrations. The brightly dressed villagers dance vigorously in a large circle, accompanied by powerful drumming and also by clapping and singing. Dancers in pairs give spontaneous solo displays that include virile jumps. An article ascribed to Wikipedia offers a little more: The dance...graduated to being performed on almost every Punjabi social occasion...the exclusively male dancers dress in bright colourful attire made primarily of a white shirt, a cloth wrapped around the waist (called lungi) and a turban. A performance is normally accompanied by singing and most significantly, the beat of the dhol and an instrument reminiscent of an enlarged pair of tongs called chimta. The accompanying songs are small couplets written in Punjabi called Bolis. They related to celebration, love, patriotism, or current social issues. Charanpal Singh’s interviews on the third generation Punjabis in Singapore identify one such function of a boliyan by DCS to make a poignant yet ironic call for home.

From the oral accounts, interviewees could more or less be distinguished by their affinity for two aspects of bhangra; those who are interested in the dance and those interested in the music. For those who were keener on the dance, Bhangra is a very robust dance...it involves the movement of your ankles and shoulders...mostly the lower legs...actually the whole leg, the knees and shoulders...that makes your movements differentiate between each step and all that.....and also the movement of the shoulders is very important...because when the upper body doesn’t remain still...you have too much movement at the lower body and not much at the upper body...you need the shoulder movement to create the motion of the upper body so as to balance the overall body movement...Bhangra is mostly a rhythmic dance...once we pick up a song...we think of the choreography of the steps with the song...we go through with the song, we see what is good, where we can come in, where we can put in the steps...and slowly we build up on the song with the different steps and all that....that normally can take a week, two or even three weeks depending on how creative we are...once we have all the steps for the whole song...our practice session goes into time, rhythm, perfection of steps, when you’re dancing, the steps are going to be together, coordinated,...that takes another 2-3 weeks...to get it down...in between...some of the steps...when we put it in doesn’t coordinate with the rhythm too much...try to adjust them a bit here and there and we get the whole thing...when we have the whole thing formed together within 4-6 weeks...everything...then we go for perfection...we just practice for perfection and memory of the steps by hearing the rhythm....change of the rhythm, change of the steps.....we get into that....once we are on stage we do not depend on fellow dancers....it becomes too obvious if you are looking at your fellow dancers and their steps.....when you are dancing on the stage, you are hearing the rhythm, the music and everything that you must know yourself by then...you must know when you are changing the steps...everybody follows that same rhythm of changing, when to change a step, when to break a step...when to coordinate....and all that....this is the result of all these practices...and if we all agree this step is right, then we carry on with it....if we think this step is not right, then we think of something else....what other different movements or steps we can do, what variations we can put into a step....it is a group effort. For musicians Sarwan explained...it goes with the rhythm of the music This is most evident in the configuration of the instruments...in Bhangra we have the chimta...a clapper...makes a maracas sound...then there is the dhol or dholki (smaller dhole)...Bhangra
is a dance relying on the beat of the dhol which is played by sticks...normally begins on a slow beat.....and starts slow...and as it goes shorter the beats become faster. ²⁴

The Dhol is a bulky barrel-shaped percussion instrument with roots in Indian province of Punjab played mostly as an accompanying instrument to the traditional Punjabi dance of Bhangra. The open ends of the dhol are fit with patches of animal hide or given present technology, mylar, stretched over its open ends and covering them completely. These patches can be stretched or loosened with a tightening mechanism made up of either interwoven ropes, or nuts and bolt. Tightening or loosening this can change the characteristics of the sound of the drum. The stretched animal hide on one of the ends is thicker and produces a deep low frequency (higher bass) sound and the other, thinner one produces a higher frequency sound. The drum is played using two wooden sticks, one for each end of the drum. Of the two, the heavier, more rigid stick called the dhaga ²⁵ is used to play the bass side of the drum is a bit thicker (roughly about 10 mm in diameter) and is bent in a quarter-circular arc on the end that strikes the drum. The other playing stick is much thinner and flexible and used to play the higher frequency end of the drum and is known as the thili. ²⁶ While playing, the drum is slung over the neck of the player with a strap usually made up of ropes or woven cloth. The surface of the wooden barrel is in some case decorated with engraved or painted patterns. ²⁷

Bhangra as Music/Textual considerations

Peter Manuel refers to traditional bhangra, which is primarily instrumental, having only occasional shouted vocal stanzas bolis. ²⁸ In the local context, Sarwan Singh refers to Boliyan as choruses of songs...it’s a chorus of 5-6 lines....where you describe certain things.....in a wedding or something or some situation....its very rhythmic...Usually this text is taken from people who know how to put words together.....somebody can come out with something which rhymes and that’s alright...boliyan is actually very short phrases of a song.....from India....its a folk–thing....separate from bhangra...normally sung at engagements and weddings...when ladies get together...its short and sharp...describe the wedding boy and girl....you can even tease the couple, couple’s parents, parents-in-law...just for the fun of it...its humorous...you only need a dhol...and chimta...today they just use a tambourine...simple instruments... tabla...those are the thing...also you need singers...actually singing boliyan is not a very difficult thing to do...you listen...and you pick it up...the style and the manner and way it must be done...is already built into the Punjabi culture...sung only by women...Usually,...but men can also sing it...after the women...this tradition is based on creating a humorous situation...for fun and enjoyment....it comes into weddings and engagements...its entertainment...and the boliyan can be used here as well....its something that can be used for any occasion ²⁹...but here in Singapore, people like to hear Indian, Hindi and Punjabi music mixed so we don’t often use the dhol...we use songs from film... ³⁰

Repertoire

Manuel’s study of Bhangra in the postwar decades in North India inform us Punjabi non-filmi popular music emerged as a dynamic regional tradition. The various duet and solo songs recorded by Asa Singh Mastana and Surinder Kaur were particularly appreciated for their tuneful melodies and soulful, often philosophical lyrics. Other singers, such as Jamla Jat, Prakash Kaur, Madan Bala Sindu, Kuldip Maanak, and Mohammad Siddiq
popularized similar newly composed songs using characteristic Punjabi modes, melodies, and rhythms; in doing so they promoted a modernized, slick kind of music which was at once distinctively Punjabi, and yet sophisticated and professional enough for middle-class urbanites to enjoy (Pushpa Hans, interview, January 1990).

Sarwan recalls the repertoire of his time when he visited his uncles’ bhangra groups in KL….I used to hear more folk music…folk bhangra music from India…K Deep Singh, Asa Singh Mastana, A.S.Kang, Kuldip Maanak, the late Harjit Gandhi…those days there were singers not groups… my uncle gave (these records) to my dad the LPs….. the big thick ones…..the picture of the dog…(78s)…I can’t find any of that material now… Gurcharan Singh remembers his father taking the family to Odeon…Cathay…to see Hindi films like Ganga Gemina [sic] or Leeder [sic]…or those old Hindi pictures. In Sarwan and Baldev’s generation at Dharam Veer, the traditional singers ruled the day with lyrical lines laced with a catchy rhythm, arresting lyrics and melodies. Baldev describes some of the songs. Chenchel’s songs are taken and modified by a lot of UK singers…I was 8/9 years old when I listened to this Gurdas Maan…he sings the songs with the lyrics from Chenchel…..his songs are not famous but his lyrics are…Fateh Ali Khan…these ghazal guys take from him…these London guys they go to India…they get the lyrics from …. In India they are called amlis…they sit in one place and they can create….there are lots of people who take their lyrics….they come out with fantastic songs with wonderful meaning…the song Silly Silly Ondehe—the first few words are “a very slow breeze is coming from somewhere but I can hear a voice crying”….and if I am a singer and sit with them, I’d love to hear what they joke….they will take it and make in into their songs…..the best songs to me come from the amlis….they are not stoned (drunk)….they know what they are doing… I went to a place in Bombay called Ranjit Singh Tabar…there are two guys down there singing ghazals…singing Pankaj Udhas songs better then Pankaj Udhas….there is a famous song Chetty Ai Hare…(a letter arrived) in this movie when Pankaj Udhas sang this song….I am sure any one in the cinema will cry….a very touching song with the lyrics...

Amar Singh, singer and band leader of his Hindi band, Roshni Jeevans, cites his influences: Kishore Kumar, I love Mohd Rafi’s songs…but I don’t have the Rafi voice…but I can sing Kishore Kumar songs….now I even sing ghazals….Pankaj Udhas….When Mohd Rafi passed away…..then Pankaj Udhas came up….his songs are very pleasing to hear and meaningful….have a nice melody….the words are beautiful….and they are mostly on drinks….when they drink….they will glorify beauty…beauty of a woman….a lot of people like that and I get many requests…but I sang ghazal in Roshni Jeevans much later...

The late 1970s into the 1980s saw the transformation of bhangra into group configuration. In the UK, Harjit Gandhi, who had been making a career for himself singing at Indian weddings and parties in the mid 1970s went on to found a pioneer bhangra band called Alaap with Channi Singh. This group like all others that followed reconfigured their instrumentation to include singer/s, dhol, tabla, electronic organ, bongos, congas, bass guitar and tambourine. By the 1980s, the repertoire that sustained the earlier group had been significantly altered by developments no longer from Punjab but the UK. Sarwan explains, with migration….they brought their culture….in other countries….today….bhangra today is a mixture of samba, African drums….Indian drums….this was done in the 1980s in the UK….we had a lot of Punjabis in Africa who moved to the UK…that is how the first group in the UK, Alaap
started....they were Indians from Africa and UK...they came up with the combination of African, Western and Indian instruments...and applied it to Punjabi songs...and all that....and they started this form of bhangra...Other UK groups that became the repertoire base were Apna Sangeet, Premmi and Heera...in effect the disco beat in the bhangra and hence the label disco bhangra. This configuration also marked a change in listening preferences. According to Swapna Ghosh and Santha Oorjitham, Bhangra was reincarnated by a Punjabi performer in London, Apache Indian, who about a decade ago (late 1980s) mixed bhangra with reggae to get “bhangramuffin”. Since then it has been mixed with rap, rock, pop, even techno. Notable names like Gurdas Maan whose Apna Punjab Hove has become a sort of anthem for Punjabis around the world even in the discos of today, the lately departed Surjit Bindrakhya for whom it was said that as with a stage dance on his song, Malang Baaniye, he could carry a whole song with just a dhol, a tumbi, and his voice and it could be a crossover pop hit, just by the way he sang it. His latest album Ishqee di agg was also a typical Bindrakhya masterpiece with "teth panjabi" mixed with nice beats and meaningful lyrics and more recently Daler Mehndi (who apparently managed to upstage Amitabh Bachchan), to name a few of the outstanding ones.

A more recent local practitioner, Ranjit Singh, considers the Alaap generation old music because today there are bhangra practitioners like, Bad Boys and Sukhbir not to mention Bollywood compilations, who are MCs and DJs more than actual performers and who have appropriated technological innovation for bhangra.

Emergence in the Public Sphere
Oral interviewees suggest Bhangra in its earliest appearances seemed to make its way in two settings; the first is at Punjabi melas. At this event, bhangra formed part of an entire array of activities known to the Punjabi community. The second appearance seems to focus on bhangra as a unique expression of Punjabi culture. Seva Singh was already involved with the Peoples Association cultural section. Baldev remembers his first assignment after being drafted into Khalsa while he was in the SAF Boys school: when I [just] joined the Bhangra group....we had a performance in Brunei...the birthday celebrations of the Sultan of Brunei.....in the plane I had to learn a traditional Punjabi song (its about the way in which the dress fits snug into her attire)...when I got off the plane....I performed in front of a huge crowd....the whole field was as large as our Padang....there were four sides, one Muslim, Korean, one-Malay non-traditional and we were on the Punjabi, Eurasian and others...you know when the Bhangra begins all the focus will shift here....so I sang and all that, played the drum...at that time I couldn’t play with the stick....so I used my bare hands....after the show my hands were double with swelling....slowly I learnt the sticks and I can do the sticks now....but when I played with bare hands, I was louder than those with sticks....One activity I helped with was the training of a group of Chinese, Indians and Malays from the PA to perform bhangra on board a ship it was called the Youth Ship and the troupe had to be on board for quite a few months...we personally could not go...so Gurcharan Singh, Sarwan Singh and I trained those who could go, Punjabis and non-Punjabis...we taught them how to put on the uniform and how to dress up and all that....we also taught the non-Punjabis as well....we even trained Punjabis in Changi...we went there to give them some lessons on Bhangra...we went to teach the prison-boys how to dance...I wasn’t involved but others did....so they even had a Prison Bhangra group....this was in the late 1970s...we have been involved in Chingay...a photo of my niece appeared in Newsweek or Asia magazine....one of these...her face was on the front...for me that was recognition for our culture...then I started
bringing in live bands with giddha girls, bhangra boys and live band music… I performed in Perli…12 hours by bus…only one hotel…Pans Hotel…but 5 Star hotel…its quite good….they had a ballroom which could hold 200…the Menteri Besar appeared as guest for the show…it was arranged by a girl called Manjit Kaur who was secretary to the Menteri Besar…it was a fund raiser for temple renovations…we gave them the show….sold out…our President was so impressed that he declared a donation to the fund…then we did more shows like at Club Amaan in KL and so many others…live band singing…in 1978 I performed in National Stadium…we had an item signifying a wedding and we also had the Giddha girls…then we had a girl sitting in a special sedan carried by a group of people….and when we reached the ministers she pulled the curtain aside and waved to all and I was playing the drum which was bigger than me…after that we started performing for a lot of charity shows…we also performed Bhangra for Ramakrishna Mission…we performed at the Japanese Gardens at the invitation of the Japanese Association and then they would have a special Festival of Lights….all these Japanese tourists will be taking photos…the Japanese gardens closed in the 1980s and our bhangra became more modern… in 1997/1998 Friday night at the Festival Market…we were given a slot (STPB)…so we were dressed up in full costume and we would carry on performing around the market…

Gurcharan Singh remembers:
I did [perform at] Chingay, National Day 1975/6…..at the National Stadium…..later on we got involved in the Festival of Arts… and then our groups performed in Brunei, Indonesia…and even Australia…so we carried on for almost ten years…..then everybody started splitting and forming their own group…..Dharam Veer, DV2, BDS…and many other groups…some of these groups are working with PA…

Sarwan Singh recalls, we had cultural shows, cultural occasions, like Chingay, Indian Culture month, Deepavali, Christmas, contracts with Tourism Board…on certain performances….we performed at Sentosa from 7.30-8.00pm or something like that on the podium….½ hour performance weekly, and it was gazetted in the tourist culture events…..We have gone to Kampong Glam, Kolam Ayer, Pek Kio, Tanjong Pagar, Sembawang, Yishun,…all over Singapore….every CC used to promote cultural events during their calender year….and they wanted to promote it and make their residents watch the performances…

Emergence in Commercial Endeavour
Among the pioneering effort of musicians, Amar Singh who plays and leads his band Roshni Jeevans, at functions and gigs, we have the drums that can play the bhangra beat…Baldev can play dhole…but he is more interested in singing and dancing…so my son Bobby did it with the drum set. This largely suggests that when his band was doing gigs at a variety of events, he located an alternative sound with the drum-kit when a dhol-player was unavailable. As with developments in the UK, bhangra was to find itself curiously through negotiating the same space with other cultures. Sarwan Singh related one positive impact of negotiating bhangra in a totally different setting in the Singaporean context. We did a contract at Brannigans at the Hyatt Hotel for a tea dance for two months, every Sunday 11am-3pm…Brannigans had a samba band there. What we did on Sunday was to bring in Bhangra and bhangra musical instruments and combined with the samba band for a unique mixture. We had a very good drummer by the name of Bobby Singh, Amar Singh’s son, who
was playing in Roshni Jeevans….he loved playing traditional instruments….I played tambourine….this samba and Punjabi traditional mix happened in the late 1980s….people who came looked forward to the Sundays…..mixed crowd……those who heard….told others and there were long queues…possibly 200/250…..you could see the long lines….in Singapore people come they see, they go back and talk about it…..this for me was good promotion for bhangra through other cultures…After this, we formed our own singing band….bhangra dance and singing band…Bobby was with us…the organist was an Indian-Muslim called Rahim…..tambourine…we had three singers….Baldev Singh, Iqbal and Johnny—they are Pakistani Punjabis…half of Punjab is in Pakistan….Bhangra is not only a Punjabi culture…it is a Pakistani, Muslim culture……we had 10 dancers…we also saw that people liked live singing…we used to build this up together with entertainment for occasions….Punjabi Bhangra as well as Punjabi disco….because it is the youngsters we want to get involved with…

A much younger Ranjit Singh found out the extent of his commitment: the Bagpipers from PA were there and they needed a dhol and drum players to accompany their performance…they claimed that it went well with their bagpipes……that’s why our performers were at Jakarta…playing to a large expatriate audience…From 1983-1987, we did a lot of shows…Khalsa…a lot of CC shows….Khalsa recommended…we did for National Day, Chingay, one big event in Serangoon Road, Deepavali night…when I left DV, my group rehearsed at Whampoa CC…Moved into Whampoa in 1989/1990 until 1996, Rochor in 1997 then Kolam Ayer in 1998…up to now…My audience has been quite wide……National Day, Live on 5 with Gurmit Singh…did a few shows from CC to entertainment companies….Whampoa CC was closing for renovation, so we moved to Rochore CC……..Malkit Kaur at Whampoa got my group a performance at Chingay…..from Rochor….at that point, I got my nephews…we became very famous…there were 20 of us for a 1 minute 30 second bit for the Chingay…fringe performance…then Rochor gave us an opportunity at Kolam Ayer…we met the IA group…there was one guy in the committee…who was with me at my first performance at Medan…and he welcomed us in…ever since, we have always done shows for Kolam Ayer CC…for four years, we do a lot of shows, performances for entertainment companies…CCs…we dance free for the CCs because we don’t pay for the use of the premises…National Day, Lunar New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali…1999 we were doing a two week show at Changi Transit lounge for Deepavali Night…we’ve done Ponggal…those days we carried cassettes, now we carry CDs…we have done Chingay and National Day shows four times through Kolam Ayer CC…National Day 1999 and 2002…we already started with bhangra in the schools…Westview primary School (2001—for the SYF) and Maha Bodhi Primary school (2002—towards the SYF)…..they already had Chinese and Indian dance and wanted something new so Bhangra came along… the primary schools won Gold medals…about 2003 we did something on the Jubilee Hall, we come out with traditional Bhangra dance, then Breakdance, then Indian dance….then all of us combined in one dance…

Bhangra and support systems of everyday life
For many Punjabis in Singapore, Dharam Veer seems to be associated with the emergence of bhangra, particularly so in the 1970s and moreover, as a cultural group resident at the Singapore Khalsa Association. Dharam Veer has reportedly participated in many National events like National Day, Chingay Parade, Indian Cultural Month, performances at the
opening ceremony of the South East Asia Games (if in the 1970s would have been 1973 with the commissioning of the National Stadium). Dharam Veer has performed in countries like Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand and Indonesia. Movies stars and singers from Bollywood have chosen the next generation of Dharam Veer, DV2 to perform for their concerts here in Singapore. The concerts of well known Malkit Singh in Singapore had also featured DV2. DV2 have also made its debut in movies, the most recent being a Pakistani movie entitled Dewaaray. Other groups like Jigiri Yaar (formerly the NCO Club Bhangra troupe), BDS an offshoot of DV2 and Kohinoor have all emerged in Punjabi space by performing for charity shows, weddings and even corporate functions gaining in experience in financial and cultural capital via contacts with various segments in commercial entertainment industry. No location seems to have been considered untenable; Singapore Turf Club, Senior Citizens Nite 2001.47

Many of these bhangra troupes may be found presently find both structure and infrastructure in the various community clubs. Ranjit Singh, through BDS, is currently located at Kolam Ayer Community Club, having been at Whampoa CC previously. Sarwan Singh recalls...We have gone to Kampong Glam, Kolam Ayer, Pek Kio, Tanjong Pagar, Sembawang, Yishun,...all over Singapore....every CC used to promote cultural events during their calendar year....and they wanted to promote it and make their residents watch the performances...48

Bhangra and issues of Authenticity

Mohd Rafee, a local Indian musician and composer who now works in the film music industry in India for the highly profiled A.R.Raman, made an interesting observation about bhangra when he was growing up in Singapore during the sixties. Even when the Northern Indians had their major functions they would have bhangra and they danced or listened. He noted the paradox: Bhangra that came directly from India no one wanted to listen to...then when it came thumping...with the bass lines (from the UK)...then people listened...49

Peter Manuel makes some telling observations:

Punjabi pop music underwent a dramatic surge in creativity and popularity in the early 1980s, concurrent with the spread of cassettes. In musical terms the primary development was the emergence of pop or "disco" versions of so called bhangra, consisting of characteristically Punjabi vocal melodies set to bhangra's lively eight-beat kaherva meter, with various disco-derived percussion effects in the background. Aside from the rhythm and the accompanying dance style, the new Punjabi pop songs bore only a loose relation to traditional bhangra, which is primarily instrumental, having only occasional shouted vocal stanzas (bolis). Nevertheless, the faddish up-tempo dance music came to be called disco bhangra, and Punjabi pop music entered an unprecedentedly active and vital phase.

What is regarded by Manuel as modern Punjabi popular music emerged more or less simultaneously in India and Great Britain. What is common to both is the dance dimension in it. The differences are on a very general level those of geography, culture and technology. The UK emergence was conditioned by an immigrant experience. Banerji and Bauman suggest that the coalescence of a hybrid music genre served to express a syncretic social identity that eventually became seen as Punjabi and modern, one could have thought almost simultaneously. The emergence of pop bhangra in Great Britain is dated specifically to 1984, when Alaap, a Punjabi immigrant folk-music band, released an LP Tere chunni de sitare, which, like the torrent of imitative subsequent releases, was as genuinely Indian as it
was recognizably disco. Bhangra groups subsequently proliferated throughout Punjabi immigrant communities, performing at nightclubs and at "day timer" concerts. In this context, animated social dancing engendered and encouraged spirited performances; countering a previously held view of Indians as shy and repressed members within the UK community. Although none of the groups were able to support themselves by music alone, the bhangra musical scene became quite active, with its own recording labels, radio programs, concert venues, and eventually curious attention from the mainstream pop media. South Asian grocery-store chains ended up purchasing distribution rights to many hit records so the musicians themselves profited relatively little. Moreover, the recording industry remained disorganized and plagued by piracy, Groups like Heera and Holle Holle, nevertheless, enjoyed star status among Punjabi immigrants, and the music grew in sophistication, building on imaginative use of sampling techniques and high-tech synthesizers.

Punjabi pop music in India developed in a manner parallel to, although distinct from its British counterpart. As in Great Britain, the new music emerged as a syncretic hybrid, synthesizing disco rhythms and instrumentation with characteristically Punjabi modes, melodies, and bhangra meter. Similarly, it can be said to have evolved as a symbolic expression of social identity for Punjabis (and especially the young) who had access to and become interested in modern Western culture, but who wished to retain some sense of Punjabi identity. Pure rural folk music was considered too old fashioned, plain, and backward, and Western pop music, although attractive, did not in any way affirm Punjabi identity. The consequence therefore, like many syncretic popular musics, was a practice developed as a felicitous creative fusion of old and new, rural and urban, and Western and indigenous. Although pirate cassettes of Heera, Alaap, and a few other British groups are found in Delhi markets, these bands are not well known in the Punjab proper particularly since concertising accounted for very little, by way of marketing strategies, in India.

At least two fundamental differences have been noted between the UK as new centre and the Indian (authentic) centre. Differences in the details of dance meter, choreography notwithstanding, Punjabi pop music is not commensurate with social dance or at least the way it developed in the UK. There is no tradition of social couple dance in Punjab; Manuel informs us that nor it is the case elsewhere in India. Manuel’s observations are that at Punjabi weddings a few men may dance excitedly around the drummers, and occasionally a woman will dance a few steps, to applause and cheers from those standing by, before returning, giggling, to her sahelis (female friends). At stage shows by top performers, men often start dancing in the aisles or even on stage with the band, but there are no nightclubs in India where couples can dance to Punjabi music (or any music, except Western pop, in discotheques located in urban five-star hotels). Rather, the music is heard on cassettes and at weddings and other festivities where professional groups perform.

Secondly, with Punjab as point of origin, depending on perspective, some of the leading Indian performers, Surender Shinda and Sardool Sikander, empathise and emphasise rural Punjabi culture in their textual topics, stage attire, and audience orientation. Sikander, as Manuel points out, is from the mirasi caste, which traditionally provides music at rural weddings. In this environment, lyrics are very much an important facet of Indian-based Punjabi pop than in its UK-based counterpart, whose texts are generally short and insignificant, of
the "Hey let's dance" variety.

The Indian songs, although fast and rhythmic, are meant more for listening and less for dancing. The emphasis on texts, they are thus much closer to the songs of Asa Singh Mastana, or, for that matter, to most of Punjabi traditional music, which, with the exception of bhangra, tends to be text-oriented. As such, the texts of Indian Punjabi pop songs are much richer, longer, and generally more interesting than those of the British groups; singers occasionally use lyrics of renowned writers like Shiv Kumar Batalvi, Amrit Preetam, and Prakash Sathi. Many songs, as mentioned above, are more or less ribald doggerel about jija-sali relationships. Others, even those sung by urban performers, are in one way or another evocative of rural life, which remains the perceived hearth of Punjabi identity. Most songs are in some way suggestive of rural Punjabi attitudes, values hard work, hard play, humour, machismo, and a distinctive combination of earthiness and wistful philosophy. Quite a few songs deal with the inexhaustible topic of the interface of traditional and Western culture; a typical example is Dilshad Akhtar's "Desi bandri vilayati cheehan" (Native girl, foreign style) describing the familiar figure of the village girl returning from Great Britain who speaks an unintelligible mixture of Punjabi, Hindi, and English, and who is chased by the local men, revered by her girlfriends, and utterly exasperated by life in India.52

One name has dominated modern Indian Punjabi pop music scene; singer, poet, and actor Gurdas Maan. Maan was the seminal figure in the inception of the style in 1980-81, and remains the most creative, popular, and dynamic composer and performer. Photogenic, intelligent, and gifted with a fine voice and a charming stage personality, Maan offers something to everybody. Musically, his cassettes (generally produced by Charanjit Ahuja) contain the same slick, professional, harmonious fusion of Western pop and Punjabi ethos as do those of other leading performers like Surender Shinda. In some cases, his evocation of traditional culture is distinctively self-conscious, and deliberately intended to expose young Punjabis-via modernized pop music-to the richness of their traditional culture. A fine example is the commencement of his "Mela char din ka" (A festival of four days), where he sings a few poignant couplets of Waris Shah to the traditional melody of Hir, over a disco-type rhythmic accompaniment. Such expressive combinations of old and new, of Punjabi and Western, endear Maan to Punjabis of all generations and backgrounds, and, via cassette dissemination, have won him an audience vastly larger than that of Mastana or any other Punjabi performer. Maan is particularly celebrated for his lyrics, which, in the best folk tradition, deal with a wide variety of topics. Maan is explicit in his intent to comment on a broad spectrum of issues and sentiments, saying, "I try to present reality in my songs, not just love. How long can you go on presenting a man praising his sweetheart? So I look for new things" (interview, January 1990). His best-known songs have dealt with such subjects as the tragedies of Partition ("Chulla"), the hypocrisy of back-biting and gossip ("Chugliyan"), the conflicting values of urban youth and the older generations ("Mamla garbar hai"), and, perhaps above all, the meaning of jat identity in a changing world, typically presented with an affectionate humor. A typical example is Thora thora hansna; describing a husband slinking drunk into his house, and being set upon by his wife wielding a rolling pin:

*He ducks as she strikes, and she smashes the television. He shouts You've broken it! and she screams It was your fault for ducking!* If the Americans and Russians want to fight, they should use our Punjabi women.53
Given the various changes that took place particularly in the 1980s and beyond, there is clearly a difference of the perception and reception of bhangra between the first offspring of resident Punjabis in Singapore and another generation that receives the world from a global perspective in terms of affirmation and influence. For most of the interviewees whose ages range from the late thirties to the fifties there is little empathy and understanding particularly when it involves the pop or disco bhangra. A clue to this difficulty is found in Ranjit Singh’s responses to the shift from traditional to disco/techno bhangra. There is a group Bad Boys and so many groups...Saaqi...Sukhbir...different from Alaap, Apna Sangeet and Heera...we have Bhangra Mix Vol. 1, Vol.2 Vol. 3...Sukhbir and Bad Boys are musicians...singers...so they bring in more musicians...electronic sounds ...And they use English words...while the old ones (Apna Sangeet) sang old songs...traditional nice songs...although we have never been to India, we can imagine what it sounds like through the songs...these people come from Punjab...have gone to the UK and brought with them their own tradition...

It is curious to imagine home in Punjab inspired by a Bhangra group based in the UK particularly if Singapore is geographically closer to Punjab than the UK....for the younger Ranjit, images of home were not drawn from what would logically have been an authenticated place; a Punjabi village. In drawing the distinction between two crucial components of bhangra, Ranjit’s clarification reveals the distance between these two previously inseparable components of song and dance: *I observe the dance steps....the music is not my priority so I get the steps from India...We try to keep the traditional steps but have the Westernised music and try to keep the culture there...For BDS, I used Punjab steps but use UK music.*

The demarcation between Bhangra as cultural dance and Bhangra as music can only be understood as a breaking down of its previous totality. Chanranpal Singh observes too the changes in consumption patterns the primary flow of Bhangra from these locations to Singapore came in the 1980s when Bhangra CDs, vinyls and cassette tapes were imported and sold at shops, mainly in the Serangoon Road area. While there are differences in social impact and symbolic meaning of bhangra in comparing their consumption in the UK with consumption here in Singapore, the oral interviews themselves suggest a closer correspondence between Bhangra from the UK rather than Punjab and that choice is seen to be a difference between bhangra as dance-music and bhangra as music with text (albeit the danceable rustic rhythm).

The cultural section of Khalsa working with DJs to promote disco bhangra to persuade Punjabis to return to the cultural fold would have engendered the perception that Top Ten and Fire and other discotheques had their hold prior to disco bhangra. Perhaps a clue here might have been its volume of consumption but that would require Music shops to reveal sales/volume figures of bhangra imports from the UK market. This requires a separate and more intensive search that lies beyond the scope of this exploration for the moment. By the late 1970s and early 1980s it is not difficult to imagine the impact of Saturday Night Fever on a community of youth particularly with musical rhythm. Given the explosion on the international front of Bhangra, Punjabi youth were less likely to have heard the earliest vibrations of pop-bhangra in the UK. By the 1990s, anything with Heera or Alaap would have been considered dated. Not surprisingly, Chanranpal recalls Bhangra artist Ranjit
Kaur’s view of Punjabi music as really old and staid…it wasn’t ours…hence the term Asian Kool coined by Bally Sagoo cool as in the western sense and distinctively Asian. 57

The “Recovery” of Bhangra

If Bhangra were to offer some level of attraction via musical rhythm, it would have been very difficult to think of a traditional setting let alone its comparative lack of attractiveness. This difficulty was not likely to be won by a counter-revolution and evangelisation of the old value system. Sarwan Singh made this astute observation by the mid 1980s we realised that many Punjabi girls and boys were going to English discos…Fire, Top Ten….all these famous places…we realised they were getting away from our Punjabi culture and music…so Singapore Khalsa Association set up a first…bhangra disco…If the English can have their own disco, so can the Punjabis, through disco Bhangra…bring the kids over to their side and let them hear our side…they can have fun with our music…that is what we did…we put up a proposal…we got $1500 to organise this event….it was a free event….they only needed to come here, listen to the music and enjoy themselves…we felt we could do better with our music than the English music…we had close to 1200-1500 youth attending…a real success…the money was well spent….after that we got feedback…and asked when there would be a second…so we said for the second, there would be a minimum charge of $2 per person…the first event was covered by Khalsa…the DJ whom we hired, was willing to work with us…when we hired him, we told him we were not going to make money out of this event…we just wanted the Indian crowd to come back to Indian music and listen to what you are playing and be able to dance and enjoy….he was willing to work with us, he gave us a pretty good deal….we needed to cover him for his transportation and expenses…just do a simple….thing tea and drinks….but the second time, we charged $2, plus we had $2000 from Khalsa…we put up a stage here, for the DJ….big dance hall…food going on the second occasion also good turnout…same kind of numbers….money well spent…the success in bringing Punjabi kids back to Punjabi culture was mediated not by traditional Punjabi music and dance but actually disco bhangra and it was not from Punjab but the UK. Sarwan’s response was they came and danced and listened….they enjoyed it….they might not have understood what the words were all about…but the rhythm was good enough to get them…Baldev believed that another age old battle needed to be won; culture is not easy for Punjabis to get involved. Some parents don’t like the place (Khalsa Association)…sometimes you get fights at weddings and all that…but they forget their kids don’t know Punjabi culture…also worse may be happening in Orchard Road…so we even introduced Culture nights with bhangra nights with the DJ in the 1980s….to attract our children to come here…so we started this to pull our Punjabi kids out of town outlets and let them come here to Khalsa…when our kids meet in town, they might meet other kids who get involved in glue-sniffing or pills and other things…so we tried to organize a lot of cultural programmes for our Punjabi culture. 58 Ranjit Singh growing up in the 1980s has a different perspective, for BDS, I used Punjab steps but use UK music… Punjabi steps and Punjabi music…its not exciting enough…slightly slower…their tempos….are also slower…westernisation actually has made Bhangra more lively….59 Yet he reiterated the care with which the choreography to ensure the steps to be conformed to.
Bhangra and negotiation of cultural ideals

How was it possible for adherence to take place with the dance steps but not with the music? Sarwan offers his views: if you ask me, I prefer the traditional way...that is what got me going in Bhangra...but then again...you have to find out what the kids are tuned to...and its not bad music....its something bad I won’t even promote it....the kids like it...its still within the Indian culture....Punjabi songs....In Singapore, you go to the discos, they are playing disco bhangra.....in 1980s....one of the songs sung by Alaap or Premmi...they hit the UK charts....no.4 in the UK Charts....that song was played in every disco after that...in those days, you walked into Singapore discos...you could hear that song at least twice...And that’s the beauty of it...able to adapt to the new environment and still call it bhangra....when I go occasions and weddings, I see Punjabi and Indian kids dancing to our music...I feel proud of it... we are still looking to adapt to the new generation......we cannot say that the old is still the best way...those days were the old days and those were our limitations...today our limitations are different because the possibilities are vast...we cannot lock ourselves into that small corner and ignore that vast land of opportunity...60

In a strange sort of way, bhangra from the UK rendered Punjabis in Singapore the sort of rejuvenation traditional versions could not have at the initial stages. Charanpal’s respondents indicate a resurgence in things Punjabi with the remixing of bhangra with other ‘western’ elements.61 It is however, debatable whether this will lead Punjabis back to Punjab in a way only understood by the first wave of migrants. Even then, bhangra has become so popular that the current selections of bhangra not only arrive from Canada, Australia and the United States but also Bombay. Gurcharan Singh observes the change everybody sees this film, they want to follow and take up the steps...[in] every Hindi film there is at least one bhangra.62 Ranjit also points out that in the Singaporean context, there are factors which allow for bhangra to intermingle with other rhythms...about 2003 we did something on the Jubilee Hall, we come out with traditional Bhangra dance, then Breakdance, then Indian dance...then all of us combined in one dance.63

For Gurcharan Singh, the next step is to create an environment that will see a smoother flow of cultural negotiation between traditional and the current cultural re-mixed version of bhangra....at present we have an instructor from Punjab, India...Molok Singh (reportedly from Chandigaar University, India)...he is teaching Punjabi folk dance...he coached the boys and girls on the folk dance steps...and then the boys came to complain...why like that...the folk dance is very tiring...so I told them that the folk dance steps is different...1/2/3/4...and the steps are different...I told them don’t complain, just learn it...If you go to a village (in Punjab) they will see things differently....if they see our modern bhangra, they will say it is like monkeys jumping up and down...but in a Punjabi village you don’t know what pictures there are...for them if they can hear the music, they say it is the music of bhangra but we have listened to other things as well...you know Indian foreign workers in Singapore, when they see our bhangra they say this is not the real one.... Because the new bhangra is from the UK and for DJ’s this new bhangra is disco dancing.64

There are also other forces at bay. Some more recent attempts have been bhangra-aerobics, or bhangra in combination with other dance forms, to name only two forms of fusion. Suffice to say that the music is no longer in a position to determine issues of authenticity else it will require the attractive force of a musical person or group to lead the Punjabi community
towards retaining their unique identity while acknowledging the irony of the means. It is therefore extremely difficult to determine the place of authenticity for music or dance associated with Bhangra. In its present state, it is likely Bhangra will have to negotiate that tension between the older identity of Punjabi folk dance and the global desi-beats. It is not our place to be able to predict an outcome of this negotiation; nor predicate the most appropriate strategy that will enable Bhangra to garner an identity at once Punjabi and at once cosmopolitan. Quite clearly, the sites of contestation and manner of performance will continue till at some point, there emerges a unique enough expression to be identified as Singaporean, if only because it is practised differently than anywhere else in the world.
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1 Manuel Peter, Cassette culture: popular music and technology in North India, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp.178-180.


3 Singh, Surjan (compiler and editor), They died for all free men. Supported by the National Heritage Board, Published by the Sikh Missionary Society Malaya, p.18.


5 Ibid., p.14.

6 A brief description by Tan Tai-yong indicates an emigration either by attraction; of employment in Malaya as policemen, or being forced into seeking some form of employment to redeem their newly colonised land by the British in 1849. According to Tai-yong, the early émigrés came from the poorer section of the Jat community of Central Punjab. With virtually all interviewees, their fathers more often than not held two jobs, one in the day and another at night.


9 Oral interview with Sarwan Singh. He speaks of a significantly large Sikh community in Medan. A reason, he suggests is its similarity to that of village settings back home in Punjab.

10 Tan Tai-yong, op.cit. p, 18.

11 Tan Tai-yong, op.cit. p.15. The first gurdwaras in Singapore were established by the Police contingent. Religious services were held at the barracks. The congregation was limited to the Sikh policemen and their families. Once that was seen to be insufficient, a committee of Sikhs led by a Sindhi named Wassiamull bought a small bungalow with a large bungalow with a large compound at 15 Queen Street. In that same year, the bungalow was converted into a gurdwara and became by the mid-1910s, the Central Sikh temple that all Sikhs started congregating at Central Sikh Temple.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p. 38. According to Tai-yong, the cultural section of Khalsa held a Punjabi Mela, their first which featured folk songs, dances, games, a food fair and a kabadi exhibition. The encouraging response prompted Singapore Khalsa to run it annually. An estimated 4000 attendees at the 1965 event indicated the level of community support.

15 Surjan Singh editor and compiler, They died for all free men, National Heritage Board, Singapore.

16 Oral Interview with Baldev Singh, June 2004

17 Surjan Singh identifies Seva Singh Ghandharab as a very accomplished singer of Gurbani, or Sikh hymns. His father Hari Singh Choney came to Singapore in 1885 and was employed as a watchman with Lim Hoe Chiang at Tanjong Pagar.


26 Ibid., p.66.
39 Punjabi Songs website address: http://www.punjabisongs.com/profiles/Profiles/jan2200407065.shtml
40 Swapna Ghosh and Santha Oorjitham, Bhangra is back, Asiaweek, op.cit.
41 Interview with Baldev Singh, June 2004.
42 Interview with Gucharan Singh, June 2004.
44 Interview with Amar Singh, 22 June 2004.
51 Ibid., p.146.
52 Manuel, Peter, op.cit., pp.178-180.
53 Ibid., pp.178-180.
54 Interview with Ranjit Singh, June 2004.
55 Ibid.
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61 Charanpal Singh, op.cit., p.35-36.


63 Interview with Ranjit Singh, June 2004.

64 Interview with Gurcharan Singh, June 2004.
Musical Practice of the Chinese Orchestra

Although the concept of a Chinese orchestra seems rather odd, it is a practice which has gathered sufficient momentum to emerge in its own inimitable way. We are not given much information of its emergence in Lee Tong Soon’s description in Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Its initial association, as instrument/s of the Chinese community in Singapore to its present status as one of the few professional orchestral ensembles with an ever-expanding scope of performances and spaces for its performance, has only engendered gaps. This brief overview and description will do no more than invite scholarship on the emergence of the Chinese Orchestra in the present context and address socio-historical perspectives surrounding its presence and practice.

We are informed of some interesting facets surrounding the entertainment scene in 19th and 20th century Malayan and Singapore societies. One primary source has been written observations, constructing detailed and often graphic narratives of the various activities...imported into Malaya from India, Java, China and Europe and then adapted and some transformed to suit local tastes and habits.\(^1\) While the cultural hybridisation is a logical consequence, Gullick notes the source of this early entertainment which seems to have been associated mainly with significant religious festivals and events such as weddings and state ceremonies when rituals and entertainment, as spectacle and display of skills, dexterity and talents could scarcely be separated. The element of recreation and drama was part and parcel of the ceremonial event itself. The most telling point is its site of purview, performances of rituals ... were often held in open spaces, in the streets, where people can easily gather...\(^2\)

Two events across the 19th and 20th centuries in Singapore raise interesting issues of what defines a Chinese orchestra. The first identifies a Chinese concert. If the writer is familiar enough, the Chinese concert separates such a concertising ensemble from a wayang and the writer does that in a newspaper report on Monday, 30th August 1886 Singapore Free Press:

On Saturday night last night the ‘spirits of the departed’ were suitably entertained by the Hokkien Ghee Hin Kongsee, whose display of the good things of this part of the world was one of the largest and most magnificent that has been held this year. The whole affair was brilliantly illuminated with gas consisting of various devices. And with the good arrangements noticeable throughout, gave the show a remarkably pleasing effect. The weather was all that could be desired and the crowd mustered strong from an early hour to scrutinise minutely even the most trifling details. Several English-made toys placed at one end of the table served to amuse many of the ignorant Chinese to a considerable extent, who seemed astonished and puzzled at their well-timed motion and movements. There were altogether 21 sets of wayangs in full play placed at a good distance from one another, including several Chinese
concerts. Notwithstanding this unusually large number, there were enough spectators to see and criticise the merits of each. Their genial headman Mr. Gun Kum Lian, assisted by Mr. Gun Chok, received a large number of residents at the Kongsee house, who were most hospitably entertained. We understand that the amount expended for the whole affair exceeded $3000. This closes the sumbayang season of 1886 which has been altogether very successful and creditable.³ (emphasis mine)

The instance where one is informed of Chinese concerts is dependent on a definition of a Chinese concert as that represented by concerted efforts by a number of instrumentalists. It is also significant and instructive for us that Chinese Concerts are described in contradistinction to wayangs.

Singapore Free Press, 17 December 1892

Once more the Chinese year is drawing to its close, once more the clash of cymbals, the squeal of fifes and the sound of tom-toms is heard in the land and once more according to a time honoured custom in the flowery land, the clans Teo-chews, Hailams, and Khehs and Macaus repair to the house of supremest Joss in Phillip Street there to join in united thanksgiving service. The prospect of fine weather is somewhat remote, but the Joss himself decreed it and his wooden will is law, for the time being in all events. All the streets leading to Phillip Street this morning were thronged with processions, with Chinamen with clean washed faces and gala costume children on horseback decked with endless frippery by indulgent parents, and gaily decorated conveyances crowded with singing girls and instruments of fullest discord, while the streets themselves were radiant with innumerable and costly silk banners and all manner of emblems and paraphernalia. The proceedings will be continued until the return of the different Josses to their respective temples during Chinese New Year....(emphasis mine)

What was, in the previous account, clear descriptions of Chinese concerts is replaced by descriptions of sounds from instruments of fullest discord presumably accompanying singing girls.

In another instance, the music played is described in the most sarcastic tones:

Singapore Free Press

DISTURBERS OF THE PUBLIC PEACE (Tuesday) 31 October 1899

TO THE EDITOR

SIR:--The inhabitants of houses in River Valley Road, Killeney Road, Institution Hill and that neighbourhood generally, have had a magnificent opportunity presented them, during the last few days, of studying the technical intricacies and intense beauties of Celestial music even when living in recognised European localities. The writer is informed that the occasion giving rise to this unusual order of things is the occurrence of Chinese nuptial jubilations. The celebrations appear to be on a large
scale, as is testified by the number of guests continually arriving at the house where the happy pair is staying. The civilised West prefers to spend its honeymoons in quietude and comparative solitude but the enlightened Celestial evidently likes to make as much show and noise as possible during such happy periods. After melancholy and irritating banging of gongs, interspersed with the accompaniment of drums, and lasting for some five days, the neighbourhood above mentioned was on Sunday (the quiet Sabbath of happier England) treated from 5.30pm to midnight, to the incessant charivari of a high Celestial order, varied occasionally by shrill Chinese songs. The latter appeared to be mainly comic, to judge by the shouts of boisterous laughter that greeted the various verses, especially towards midnight. It is true that the monotony of the Chinese music, which to the uncultivated mind resembles the noise usually met with a working smithy, was interspersed with music given by a band of musicians playing European instruments. The two orchestras evidently vied with each other as to which could make the most bunyi-bunyi. They followed each other in incessant rotation. The writer has just been awakened this (Monday) morning by more Celestial music from this same house at the hour of 5 am, and the intolerable row has already lasted nearly an hour. He trusts his “boy” is right when he states that to-day sees the close of this unexpectedly rich musical treat given gratis to the community at large. The un-musical and those whose ears do not appreciate the beauties of Celestial music, especially when such appreciation entails the total banishment of sleep during ordinary sleeping hours, will doubtless desire, with the writer, if they live in the neighbourhood in question that the enlightened Chinese would spend their honeymoon in European fashion, or in neighbourhood un-infested by the orang-puteh, or say at Selitar, by the sea, or any such places, so long as these be out of sight, out of hearing and out of mind.

ONE WHO HAS SUFFERED

By the late 19th century, there was an increasing number of Straits Chinese who were adopting Western customs, taking on to European sports and past times. In 1885 a Straits Chinese Recreation Club was founded and in 1897, Lim Boon Keng, a third generation Straits Chinese born in Singapore who was the first Chinese Queen's Scholar and legislative councillor from 1895 to 1902, founded the Philomathic Society. In 1897 also, Lim, together with Song Ong Siang, started the The Straits Chinese Magazine, published in English, which "aimed to promote intellectual activity amongst the Straits-born people" and will "afford room for the discussion of useful, interesting and curious matters connected with the customs, social life, folklore, history and religion of the varied races who have made their home in this Colony." We know that both Mr. Salzmann and members of the Straits Chinese community had been in contact. In 1898, he had written an article on Chinese music for the magazine as well as made no apology in attempting to harmonise a Chinese melody: It is well understood that Chinese music is, as music, in quite a rudimentary state...the European orchestra of the present day...must be allowed to be a most beautiful combination of musical sounds, even if the music played be beyond
comprehension. Judged by this standard, Chinese music cannot stand...it must be admitted that no beauty can be claimed for Chinese music at the present time...in the opinion of many people competent to judge, there is plenty of talent in music among the Chinese, if they were properly trained. Should they be begin to study the western system, there is little doubt but that before long a very great improvement would be heard. 

What follows in this article is a footnote commentary by the Editors of the Straits Chinese Magazine of the “Chinese melody” harmonized by Salzmann which makes the following observations:

The above [music] is practically a popular Cantonese air usually played as an accompaniment to the singer’s voice. It is commonly known by the name of “Ji Hong”. A Chinese orchestra, it may be added, usually consists of a gong, fiddle, cymbals, drum, trumpet and flute. The effect to a sensitive ear can scarcely be called musical and forms a great contrast with the music here given as arranged and harmonized by Mr. Salzmann. Salzmann had also been giving violin lessons for two years before the classes were "suddenly abandoned." 

The nonchalance of such a description is striking because there is no tone of surprise (neither is there enthusiasm!). The description also adds the word usually—which is telling of a familiarity of its practice. Given that the commentary is made by the editors of the Straits Chinese Magazine, it is likely there was such an orchestra in existence. Whether or not the Chinese orchestra was a name used by those outside it to refer to an ensemble of musicians supporting wayang or other festival occasions or an ensemble of musicians, numbers notwithstanding, is one that requires further research.

According to Joseph Peters, up to 1911, Chinese traditional music of the just-intonation-pentatonic variety had a strong foothold in Singapore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This coincides with the period when Chinese migrant communities were living in clan-based communes and their social and cultural needs were met through arrangements with hometowns in China. After the 1911 revolution in China, a tempered pentatonic form (from the equal-tempered diatonic system in Western Europe) became dominant in China and in Beijing. The indelible image of a western symphonic ensemble must have had considerable influence in relation to the conscious development of a Chinese Orchestra. This was to spread to other parts of China and overseas settlements. Both the just-intonation and Western-tempered practices were to be found in Singapore with the former, while being sustained by clan-based associations somehow diminished in stature and popularity to the latter. The notion of Chinese orchestra, according to Goh Ek Meng, seems to have begun as a number of other smaller groups, like the tong luo which reportedly began in 1939 when there was raised sentiment about Japan’s invasion of China. This group then composed songs to rouse spirits of the Chinese against the Japanese. The second instance of a Chinese orchestra allegedly begins around 1953 where it appeared in large enough numbers to justify the label.
With the paucity of evidence, it is hard to reconstruct the dynamics of such a group and its attitude towards music-making. However, there are some indications that joining a Chinese orchestra was social and ethically not dissimilar to joining dance groups among the Mandarin conversant community. Subscribing to such activity was seen as the means to enabling a larger, noble purpose in life. It was this attitude that prompted Chua Soo Pong to identify such a group with its attendant characteristics in the Chinese dance traditions as ‘wholesome cultural associations’ and its participants were committed art workers…animated by the idea of creating dances which reflect social reality and their aim has been to pass their message to the people…adopting a kind of social commitment clearly different from that of women’s clubs leisure classes…critical of the present social system arguing that their art should reflect the hard facts of life and encourage people to reform society…disapproved of individualism and advocated collective creation. They believed strongly that theatre dance must be created for the people and tried hard to establish a close relationship with the audience.\textsuperscript{11}

It is suggested that such descriptions of those in the dance traditions are applicable to those in the Chinese Orchestra.

Purposes could range from making a political stand against the Japanese, to creating "good art" in the face of sentiments of "unsavoury" yellow musics generated through the Shanghai film industry. Usually not reflected but worthy of question is the reception of the Chinese who were performers in the Western art tradition by their larger community. Interestingly enough, in the 1950s, the wholesome culture association saw their movement as part of an anti-Yellow (anti-Colonial/Western influence) Culture Campaign. Dances performed in Singapore by both associations were reconstructed by using dance scores which were imported from China or by repeatedly observing the choreography from the dance films. Several Chinese dance films in the early sixties indicated strong and direct influences from China. Many other documentaries from the same period include folk dances of different ethnic groups in China. These dances contained no explicit political message and the folk dances were presented in a light enough manner to appeal to a broad spectrum of the audience in Singapore. Given this seemingly unobstructed access, why was there a need to articulate an anti-yellow culture? One possible view is the lack of confidence in the Colonial government especially after the Japanese Occupation and disdain with all the value systems.

Another possible reason was the proliferation of popular form of music-making and dance in cabarets and dance bands. Arguably the most popular entertainment during the 1950s in Singapore was to be found in the New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night. ‘Getais’ enjoyed the best business in New World during the 50s. There was the “Man Jiang Hong” Getai, the Shangri-La, the New Nightclub, Feng Feng Song and Dance Troupe, and Broadway.\textsuperscript{12} The Man Jiang Hong ‘Getai’ was used by the famous Zhang Lai Lai Song and Dance Troupe, which met with enthusiastic crowd response. Part of the show included the performance of a series of
love ballads between Zhang Lai Lai and the male lead, which was a crowd-pleaser. Zhang eventually moved to the Hong Kong motion picture scene. Despite her considerable success and fame as a singer locally, the troupe was subsequently dismantled. The Man Jiang Hong Getai was then replaced by the Dong Fang Getai. Moreover, Joseph Peters’ overview of musics in Singapore reveals that, Bunga Tanjong at the New World Amusement Park, New World, Great World and Happy World were venues around which a thriving nightlife in Singapore revolved in the 1950s. People flocked to these clubs every night to participate in contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, tango to name a few. Live popular band performances sufficed for all of these types of dances, thus making it economically lucrative and at the same time characterised variety and ‘local’ flavour in entertainment. It would not have been surprising to have speculated on the loss of ‘wholesome’ Chinese in the community to these popular forms.

In his article on Chinese Theatre Dance in Singapore from 1946-1976, Chua explains that in Singapore, different dance companies tended to identify themselves as either ‘wholesome cultural associations’ or ‘art associations’; the former identifying themselves as committed art workers...critical of the present social system arguing that their art should reflect the hard facts of life and encourage people to reform society. These wholesome associations comprised students societies in the 1960s, old boys associations, the workers cultural troupes, student drama societies of the early 1960s, and many left-wing amateur companies in the 1970s. Chua suggests that for this group, their art was a means with which to express their social thoughts and a means to promote a kind of social interaction and in the process educating themselves and their audience. The large audiences they attracted provided financial support for their continuing artistic creation.

Art Associations on the other hand, viewed their activities as a form of artistic endeavour rather than a means of promoting social reform. Moreover, Chua says art associations were well disposed towards and satisfied with the current political environment, often expressing pride in the economic success and social stability...achieved...art associations were dominated by individuals – teachers and choreographers. Chua notes that despite their differences in social and political outlook, attitudes toward art and society, dance content and innovations, both associations saw themselves playing a useful role in society and their work was appreciated by the different sections of the society.

The turning point in the 60s was a variety show in 1962 by the Singapore Amateur Players which featured folk dance, folk songs, poetry recitation and dances choreographed by its members, which severely criticised the authorities for ignoring the needs of the people and neglected their duty to depict the peoples’ lives and express their thoughts. In February 1963 the PAP government cracked down on left-wing extremism, trade unionists, student leaders and activists of the wholesome cultural associations; fuelling the speculation of the rivalry between the PAP and oppositions party Barisan Socialis. Most of the groups within the wholesome cultural
associations were abolished by law between 1964 and 1969 because of their political alliance with the outlawed Communist Party. As a result, wholesome cultural associations transferred their links to the ‘art associations’.

It was also during this period that a Chinese song book entitled “Revolutionary Songs” had been proscribed by the Singapore Government. Any person selling, distributing or possessing this publication is liable to prosecution. This publication consisting of 104 pages has red covers of which the front cover carries a picture of four armed men killing their enemy. Most of the songs are quotations from Mao-Tsetung. The publication has been banned principally because it is intended for use by local pro-Communist elements as paraphernalia for organising riots and destruction of public and private property in Singapore. These songs call on people to resort to violence in order to establish a Communist regime and there is little of musical worth in them. This publication will therefore serve as a stimulus to get teenaged children to go on the rampage at the behest of adult pro-Communists who plan these disorders in the safety of their homes and offices.\(^\text{17}\)

On the other hand, when the National Theatre was first commissioned, there was support to initiate many practices found in the Chinese community in Singapore. Ho Hwee Long remembers, that there was a strong concentration on Dance…there was a NT dance troupe…there was a NT choir but it was not very popular…because they sang mostly Mandarin Art songs and choral music…there was a National Theatre Chinese Orchestra…that started in 1963…it was a very strong Chinese orchestra…the conductor was a Chinese-born Hong Kong person (Mr. Cheng Si Sum—resigned from NTCO in 1971)...can’t remember his name...he returned to Hong Kong....\(^\text{18}\)

According to the Annual Report of the National Theatre Company of 1968, the National Theatre Chinese Orchestra is mentioned for the first time under this description:

\textit{After three months of intensive rehearsals, the three sections of the Company, viz. the Singapore National Orchestra, the National Theatre Company Chinese Orchestra and the National Theatre Company Choir performed to a very receptive audience at its inaugural concert in August. By the end of the year, plans were finalized to launch the National Theatre Dance Company. The possibilities of forming the National Theatre Malay Orchestra and Drama Companies were also under consideration.}\(^\text{19}\)

In the annual report of 1969, the Chinese Orchestra seems to have grown:

\textit{National Theatre Company Chinese Orchestra and Junior Chinese Orchestra}

\textit{The Chinese Orchestra has at present 30 members but it is hoped that in the near future it will be expanded to 50. The strong support from the public has encouraged the Chinese Orchestra to present a series of outdoor concerts during the current}
year. In August 1969, the National Theatre Company undertook another project for the promotion of Chinese music. The Company organized instrumental classes for Er Hu, Pipa, Ku Ch’ng [sic] and Flute for both children and adults. The tutors were the conductor and leading members of the Chinese orchestra. As these classes were successful, the National Theatre Company now intends to organize new classes for beginners and at Intermediate levels jointly with the Adult Education Board. In addition to the staging of concerts, the Company also cut several discs. The first disc was “Chinese Festival Music” which was a selection of traditional Chinese orchestral music. The Company hopes to produce more recordings of other serious music in the near future.  

By the annual report of 1970, the reports have gone a step further: The music section of the National Theatre Company made further progress in its performing standard and crowned another year of success...Senior members of the Chinese Orchestra were invited to instruct the Youth Junior Chinese Orchestra of the Ministry of Education, the Nanyang University Chinese Orchestra and the Ngee Ann Technical College Chinese Orchestra. It was evident that Chinese instrumental music had gained a marked increase in popularity in our Republic.

A curious statement appears in the next year: After two-and-a-half years, the National Theatre Company has firmly set its foot in the cultural field and proved its importance in helping to promote and enrich culture in the Republic. The establishment of the Management Committee by the Board for the Choir and Chinese Orchestra had contributed to the improvement in the organization, discipline and performing standards of the two sections. For the first time, the Trust and the Peoples Association worked closely and jointly presented a variety cultural show “July Melody” and it is hoped that this co-operation would continue to avoid duplication in the Trust’s efforts of promoting a national culture.

We are also informed of the appointment of Mr. Lee Suat Lian as Acting Conductor from 16 June 1971; the expansion of the Chinese Orchestra from 35 to 41, of which it is observed the majority came from the Junior Chinese Orchestra. It was hoped that with new talents recruited and better instruments bought, the Orchestra was able to perform more sophisticated works.

By March 1980 however, The Chairman’s foreword to the Annual Report of that year included the following: The Trust continued to provide a varied programme of cultural activities. The cultural units continued to have a good year...The Chinese Orchestra still provides an avenue for enthusiasts to participate in their musical interests.

What is most curious is that under list of cultural activities, only Mr. Au Yong Puay could be seen to provide Ku Ch’ng classes. However, under the National Theatre Club activities, we learn of a Chinese Orchestra concert with a very curious brief: In
commemoration of its Anniversary, the two-year old Chinese Orchestra provided a concert on 27 March 1979 at the Singapore Conference Hall. Members consisted of amateurs from all walks of life who strived and made the concert a success.  

From hereon, the Chinese Orchestra came under the purview of the National Theatre Club’s Activities, producing during the 1980 season A Chinese Wind Ensemble on 18 May 1980 at the DBS auditorium; a fund-raising concert for the Singapore Cultural Foundation on 29 June 1980 featuring five artists from Hong Kong at the Singapore Conference Hall; and the Chinese Orchestra’s third anniversary concert on 20 July 1980 at the Singapore Conference Hall; Chinese Instrumental Music Festival from 14-22 March 1981 and two performances by the Chinese Orchestra on 20 and 22 March 1981 at the Singapore Conference Hall.  

The first noticeable absence of the Chinese Orchestra from one of the main sections into the National Theatre Club Activities is now replaced by an absence of the Chinese Orchestra from the Club activities by the 1987/8 Annual Report. Nothing is seen or heard of the National Theatre Chinese Orchestra after that.

The People’s Association Chinese Orchestra (reportedly formed in 1968) which had worked together with the National Theatre Chinese Orchestra emerges towards the mid-1990s as the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. In 1996, with the recommendation of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra Company Limited was set up to transform the SCO into a national orchestral ensemble of high international standard. Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was named its Patron. In 1998, the Orchestra, under music director, Hu Bing Xu, toured Beijing, Shanghai and Xiamen to critical acclaim. In January 2002, the SCO appointed Shanghai-born, US-based maestro, Tsung Yeh as its music director. A major initiative of the director of the SCO, according to its website, is to reach out to new audiences, to win the hearts of non-Chinese music listeners and cultivate the affections of existing audience. As a non-profit professional organisation, the Orchestra has been extending its presence in the community with Community Series concerts at Community Clubs, Arts Education Programmes in schools and Outdoor Concerts at National Parks. The SCO has a current membership of 31 musicians and augments that when having to perform works requiring larger forces.

Besides the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, the City Chinese Orchestra has also emerged from virtual non-discourse. Originating from the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation Chinese Orchestra which was founded in 1974, the City Chinese Orchestra was established in 1993 and is today, according to its website information, a fully developed Chinese orchestra comprising 165 energetic and vibrant young musicians who are either undergoing tertiary education, or are at the commencement of their professional career. Most members started formal Chinese musical training in their secondary school days, and have extensive performance experience both in concerts and competitions. A large proportion of the orchestral members were known first as either solo or ensemble prize winners and grand finalists in the National
Music Competitions. The conductor of the orchestra is Mr Tay Teow Kiat, recipient of the 1993 Cultural Medallion. Renowned Chinese composer, Mr Li Chongwang, is the orchestra composer. Since its founding, the orchestra has performed from a repertoire of more than 600 compositions consisting of Chinese classical music, local folk music, and contemporary compositions. The City Chinese Orchestra remains firmly committed to its long-standing principle of “amateur organisation, professional standard”. Other groups include the Hsinghai Arts Association, another amateur group formed on 14 June 1973 whose members have, like the City Chinese Orchestra, distinguished themselves in the National Music Competitions. The Music and Drama Company has a Chinese Orchestra.

However, it is in the school system that the Chinese Orchestra has seen the critical mass. Together there are reportedly over 200 active Chinese orchestras in Singapore spread out among the schools, community centres and civic organisations. The success of this program is largely due to a system of operation, which has facilitated the process. Like the Euro-American system, replication, documentation and continuity are possible because of a numerical system established and practised in the manner of traditional Chinese music. From the point of view of orchestration, there has been a tendency to adapt the symphonic tradition found in Western Art music to suit a Chinese Orchestra. Anthetical concepts like counterpoint and a sense of vertical configuration arising from a harmonic view of the music (rather than melodic) prevail. However, the manner of expressing music in Chinese aesthetic practices, together with a reinterpretation of ancient scores, has allowed for its uniqueness and proliferation. Extended repertoire can only be described as tone-poems, suites and concertos while the smaller works are those of folk songs and theme and variations.

Some of these issues are poised between an ever-evolving state that continues to challenge the nature and identity of a Chinese Orchestra as a parallel Western orchestral ensemble while other means keep the tradition rooted to its original identity – although the question of authenticity roots it either in courtesan practice or even accompanying ensemble to staged or street-wayang or festivities or ‘sumbahyang’ rituals, rather than its later authenticated practice of being an ensemble of performing instrumental musicians. Perhaps these issues will be dealt with in further scholarship.
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10 Peters, Joseph E.E., Evolving traditions of ASEAN, Chapter on Singapore, Malay Music segment on Traditional Music in Singapore, p.106.


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Chinese Community

We are informed of some interesting facets surrounding the entertainment scene in 19th and 20th century Malayan and Singapore societies. One primary source has been written observations, constructing detailed and often graphic narratives of the various activities...imported into Malaya from India, Java, China and Europe and then adapted and some transformed to suit local tastes and habits.¹ While the cultural hybridisation is a logical consequence, Gullick notes the source of this early entertainment which seems to have been associated mainly with significant religious festivals and events such as weddings and state ceremonies when rituals and entertainment, as spectacle and display of skills, dexterity and talents could scarcely be separated. The element of recreation and drama was part and parcel of the ceremonial event itself. The most telling point is its site of purview, performances of rituals...were often held in open spaces, in the streets, where people can easily gather...²

By the late 19th century, there was an increasing number of Straits Chinese³ who were adopting Western customs, taking on to European sports and past times. In 1885 a Straits Chinese Recreation Club was founded and in 1897, Lim Boon Keng, a third generation Straits Chinese born in Singapore who was the first Chinese Queen's Scholar and legislative councillor from 1895 to 1902, founded the Philomathic Society.⁴ In 1897 also, Lim, together with Song Ong Siang, started the The Straits Chinese Magazine, published in English, which "aimed to promote intellectual activity amongst the Straits-born people" and will "afford room for the discussion of useful, interesting and curious matters connected with the customs, social life, folklore, history and religion of the varied races who have made their home in this Colony."⁵

Both the Straits Chinese community, or at least a segment of members, and Mr. Salzmann had been in contact. In 1898, he had written an article on Chinese music for the magazine as well as harmonised a Chinese melody: *It is well understood that Chinese music is, as music, in quite a rudimentary state...the European orchestra of the present day...must be allowed to be a most beautiful combination of musical sounds, even if the music played be beyond comprehension. Judged by this standard, Chinese music cannot stand...it must be admitted that no beauty can be claimed for Chinese music at the present time...in the opinion of many people competent to judge, there is plenty of talent in music among the Chinese, if they were properly trained. Should they be begin to study the western system, there is little doubt but that before long a very great improvement would be heard.* ⁶

Some of this disparaging discourse has had long precedence in the reception of Chinese traditional musics and their relationship to another practice, Wayang. In certain texts, usually Imperial, an ensemble that accompanied the wayang was considered an orchestra (Chinese by default) while at times it was a band or at worst, some form of hideous noise or civil disturbance. A sample of some of the letters to be...
found in the Singapore Free Press between 1885 and 1900 offers us a context of the perception and reception of Chinese traditional music. Two excerpts from the Singapore Free Press inform us of the sumbayang (prayer) festival (known to us today as the Hungry Ghost Festival). Despite the rather disparaging remarks made, mention is specifically made of the presence, attendance and support of the event by the highest ranked officials of the British Empire in Singapore:

*The Ghee Hok Society held their sumbayang last night in Carpenter Street under very favourable weather ... A number of our leading European residents visited the show, amongst whom we noticed the Hon’ble, the Colonial secretary, Dr. and Mrs. Rowell and Mr. Hole. The great sumbayang of the season, that of the Opium and Spirit farms, comes off tonight, and it is to be hoped that its success will not be marred by the weather.*

*On Saturday night last night the ‘spirits of the departed’ were suitably entertained by the Hokkien Ghee Hin Kongsee, whose display of the good things of this part of the world was one of the largest and most magnificent that has been held this year... Several English-made toys placed at one end of the table served to amuse many of the ignorant Chinese to a considerable extent, who seemed astonished and puzzled at their well-timed motion and movements. There were altogether **21 sets of wayangs** in full play placed at a good distance from one another, including several Chinese concerts. Notwithstanding this unusually large number, there were enough spectators to see and criticise the merits of each. Their genial headman Mr, Gun Kum Lian, assisted by Mr. Gun Chok, received a large number of residents at the Kongsee house, who were most hospitably entertained. We understand that the amount expended for the whole affair exceeded $3000. This closes the sumbayang season of 1886 which has been altogether very successful and creditable.*

Another major festival noted was the Lunar New Year, the observation of festive ritual behaviour. Unfortunately, descriptions of the music are not equally complimentary:

*Once more the Chinese year is drawing to its close, once more the clash of cymbals, the squeal of fifes and the sound of tom-toms is heard in the land and once more according to a time honoured custom in the flowery land, the clans Teo-chews, Hailams, and Khews and Macaus repair to the house of supremest Joss in Phillip Street, there to join in united thanksgiving service... All the streets leading to Phillip Street this morning were thronged with processions, with Chinamen with clean washed faces and gala costume children on horseback decked with endless frippery by indulgent parents, and gaily decorated conveyances **crowded with singing girls and instruments of fullest discord**, while the streets themselves were radiant with innumerable and costly silk banners and all manner of emblems and paraphernalia. The proceedings will be continued until the return of the different Josses to their respective temples during Chinese New Year.*

(emphasis mine)
Letters to the Editor also form an impression in the newspapers and through them an English-conversant and English-enabled community in Singapore of what Chinese music sounds like or is judged to be:

“And the night shall be filled with music,  
And the cares that infest the day,  
Shall lift up their tents like the Arabs  
And as silently steal away.”

MR. EDITOR—Let the music be Chinese tom-tom music and I guarantee the cares of the day will not budge an inch. A Chinaman’s house in the upper part of Killeney Road considerately treated the midnight air last night to a vigorous and lengthened recital on the tom-tom, much to the delectation (?) of the European would be sleepers in the neighbourhood. The quarter is a European one and I think this fact should weigh with the organisers of the entertainment before they attempt a repetition of it. It should certainly attract the attention of the Police authorities.

SUFFERER

TO THE EDITOR
SIR—Permit me to avail myself of the opportunity offered by the letter signed by A Sufferer to corroborate fully all he says regarding the nuisance of which he complains. I regret to say that I am a fellow sufferer to such an extent that I have already threatened Mr. Lee Cheng Yan who is responsible for the annoyance with legal proceedings. One would think that a person who mixes with Europeans and knows their customs and habits so well, would be well aware what an annoyance such nightly performances must be. When Supt. Bell was residing in the neighbourhood he managed to bring some persuasion to bear, which mitigated it a little, but it has now got worse than ever. It is hoped that Mr. Lee Cheng Yan will have sufficient consideration for his neighbours to put an end to the nuisance without obliging them to take steps to compel him.

I am Sir,
Yours truly
E. Nathan

SIR:--The inhabitants of houses in River Valley Road, Killeney Road, Institution Hill and that neighbourhood generally, have had a magnificent opportunity presented them, during the last few days, of studying the technical intricacies and intense beauties of Celestial music even when living in recognised European localities. The writer is informed that the occasion giving rise to this unusual order of things is the occurrence of Chinese nuptial jubilations. The celebrations appear to be on a large scale, as is testified by the number of guests continually arriving at the house where the happy pair are staying. The civilised West prefers to spend its honeymoons in quietude and comparative solitude but the enlightened Celestial evidently likes to make as much show and noise as possible during such happy periods. After melancholy and irritating banging of gongs, interspersed with the accompaniment of drums, and lasting for some five days, the neighbourhood above mentioned was on Sunday (the quiet Sabbath of happier England) treated from 5.30pm to midnight, to
the incessant charivari of a high Celestial order, varied occasionally by shrill Chinese songs. The latter appeared to be mainly comic, to judge by the shouts of boisterous laughter that greeted the various verses, especially towards midnight. It is true that the monotony of the Chinese music, which to the uncultivated mind resembles the noise usually met with a working smithy, was interspersed with music given by a band of musicians playing European instruments. The two orchestras evidently vied with each other as to which could make the most bunyi-bunyi. They followed each other in incessant rotation. The writer has just been awakened this (Monday) morning by more Celestial music from this same house at the hour of 5 am, and the intolerable row has already lasted nearly an hour. He trusts his “boy” is right when he states that to-day sees the close of this unexpectedly rich musical treat given gratis to the community at large. The un-musical and those whose ears do not appreciate the beauties of Celestial music, especially when such appreciation entails the total banishment of sleep during ordinary sleeping hours, will doubtless desire, with the writer, if they live in the neighbourhood in question that the enlightened Chinese would spend their honeymoon in European fashion, or in neighbourhood un-infested by the orang-puteh, or say at Selitar, by the sea, or any such places, so long as these be out of sight, out of hearing and out of mind.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{ONE WHO HAS SUFFERED}

These extracts taken from the one of the local newspapers gives the reader a likely impression of Chinese music from European, predominantly English, ears. Salzmann’s comments, however, disparaging or deprecating, are comparatively much milder than the reports and letters to the Editor. Curiously, though, even with the beginnings of the Straits Chinese Magazine, the tone is decidedly pro-Colonial. Therefore when Salzmann judges Chinese music to be at a very rudimentary level, it should not escape our notice that the article receives fullest approval by the Straits Chinese and who permit it to be written in the Straits Chinese magazine. These are ways in which the Chinese community is divided into an English-supporting and Chinese-supporting groups.

In the 1920s, Alec Dixon recounts how \textit{significantly, perhaps, there was very little talk of what are now known as ‘cultural activities’, although these certainly existed to claim the attention of Europeans and Asiatics alike. The Straits Chinese community was constantly busy, not only with sporting matters, but with philomatic, philharmonic, debating, literary and drama societies, many of which have been described by the late Song Ong Siang in his excellent book \textit{One Hundred Years of the Chinese in Singapore}. When the Macdona Players produced a series of Shaw plays at the Victoria in Singapore it was notable that, at every performance, more than half the audience consisted of Straits-Chinese.\textsuperscript{13}

In the field of creative work, Mo Ze Xi (born 1935) is identified as a composer who came to Singapore at the age of five. He gradually gained recognition as a composer who was also an orchestral and choral conductor. Mo believed traditional musical arts in China began with courtesans. It was generally replaced by other forms of
musical genres such as xi qu, suo chang and ping tan, which involve instrumental accompaniment and action. During the 1920s and 1930s, overseas Chinese musicians introduced the idea of solo and chorus singing into Chinese culture. Mo claims it was a culture that was soon proliferated in institutions and cultural troupes. Music, according to Mo, also mirrored the life of a people of a particular time. Mo claimed Malayans were often abused and ill-treated by both British and Japanese soldiers and provided the impetus for Malayan composers to write anti-colonial and anti-Japanese songs. The text of one such song reads:

*Victory, victory, victory belongs to the people.*

Mo reports that several Malayan composers emerged, Chang Hong, Hong Chang, Li Qiu and many others. They were either from China or local composers. Among the locals, Ye Li Tian, together with Ren Kwang, founded Tong Luo. Ye Li Tian served as the president of the society. His musical style was greatly influenced by the early Russian revolutionary music. Mo relates a composition, Singapore River, as a popular song which was about life during the Japanese Occupation. Unfortunately, most of the manuscripts were missing or lost.

Composers of the 1960s were Li Hua and Qiu Jiu. The lyrics written by them concern the social environment of their time and hence they were not widely broadcast. Music composers were prevented from writing music that helped translate their deep seated desire to be rid of imperial/colonial powers in inflammatory or revolutionary songs. Unfortunately, this only succeeded in hastening the closure of their societies. Mo believed this was the cause for the eventual disappearance of revolutionary music.

On the other hand, Mo condemned what he called unscrupulous, immoral and socially irresponsible intellectuals who encouraged the development of popular music of the time. Mo suggested these pieces focused on non-important issues, were in bad taste and had performers rocking and dancing insanely and demonstrated little or no fighting spirit—a term he used was soul-less. These performers he said made use of music to convey unhealthy emotions. Such compositions, he declared had negative influences on the young and innocent and this would affect the development of the country.

He closed off his article by noting that in the present, societies or associations have sung some form of “art songs”, folk songs (Malayan min yao), Russian folk songs and ‘popular’ music—*liu sing ker chee*—Zhou Xuan from the 1930s to the 1940s, Yu Min between the 1940s and 1950s, followed by Liu Wen Zhen and Fung Fei Fei in the 1960s. Much of this music, Mo felt, lacked life and energy and did not possess the value for fighting for independence or revolution.

Interestingly enough, in the 1950s, the wholesome culture association saw their movement as part of an anti-Yellow (anti-Colonial/Western influence) Culture Campaign. Dances performed in Singapore by both associations were reconstructed by using dance scores which were imported from China or by repeatedly observing
the choreography from the dance films. Several Chinese dance films in the early sixties indicated strong and direct Chinese influences. Many other documentaries from the same period include folk dances of different ethnic groups in China. These dances contained no explicit political message and the folk dances were presented in a light enough manner to appeal to a broad spectrum of the audience in Singapore. Given this seemingly unobstructed access, why was there a need to articulate an anti-yellow culture? One possible view is the lack of confidence in the Colonial government especially after the Japanese Occupation and disdain with all the value systems. That might have been part of the reason.

Tony Beamish also informs us of a number of developments in the post Japanese Occupation period:

...Mandarin music [is] popular far beyond the confines of the...Chinese communities and interesting experiments in Western orchestration can now be heard in both. At the same time, traditional skill is being maintained and the more esoteric forms of communal music continue to be played in Malaya...ancient Chinese instrumental music have an enthusiastic following in the country, and are supported not only by local arts societies but by the occasional visits of distinguished performers from Hong Kong... and other parts of South-East Asia.\textsuperscript{15}

Beamish’s observations highlight two directions for Chinese traditional music, possibly mutually exclusive. The first may have been the older more chamber-like or solo instrumental concerts featuring the er-hu, pipa or qin. At the other end, the tong-luo would have given rise to what is known today as the Chinese orchestra with its newly acquired symbols, status and repertoire.

Another possible reason was the proliferation of popular form of music-making and dance in cabarets and dance bands; precisely the sort of criticism levelled by Mo Ze Xi. Arguably the most popular entertainment during the 1950s in Singapore was to be found in the New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night. ‘Getai’s enjoyed the best business in New World during the 50s. There was the “Man Jiang Hong” Getai, the Shangri-La, the New Nightclub, Feng Feng Song and Dance Troupe, and Broadway.\textsuperscript{16} The Man Jiang Hong ‘Getai’ was used by the famous Zhang Lai Lai Song and Dance Troupe, which met with enthusiastic crowd response. Part of the show included the performance of a series of love ballads between Zhang Lai Lai and the male lead, which was a crowd-pleaser. Zhang eventually moved to the Hong Kong motion picture scene. Despite her considerable success and fame as a singer locally, the troupe was subsequently dismantled. The Man Jiang Hong Getai was then replaced by the Dong Fang Getai.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, Joseph Peters’ overview of musics in Singapore reveals\textsuperscript{18} that, Bunga Tanjong at the New World Amusement Park, New World, Great World and Happy World were venues around which a thriving nightlife in Singapore revolved in the 1950s. People flocked to these clubs every night to participate in contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, and tango to name a few. Live popular band performances sufficed for all of these types of dances, thus making it economically lucrative and at the same time
characterised variety and ‘local’ flavour in entertainment. It would not have been surprising to have speculated on the loss of ‘wholesome’ Chinese in the community to these popular forms.

The turning point in the 60s was a variety show in 1962 by the Singapore Amateur Player which featured folk dance, folk songs, poetry recitation and dances choreographed by its members, which was severely criticised for ignoring the needs of the people and neglected their duty to depict the peoples’ lives and express their thoughts. In February 1963 the PAP government cracked down on left-wing extremism, trade unionists, student leaders and activists of the wholesome cultural associations; fuelling the speculation of the rivalry between the PAP and oppositions party Barisan Socialis. Most of the groups within the wholesome cultural associations were abolished by law between 1964 and 1969 because of their political alliance with the outlawed Communist Party. As a result, wholesome cultural associations transferred their links to the ‘art associations’.

It was during this period that a Chinese song book entitled “Revolutionary Songs” had been proscribed by the Singapore Government. Any person selling, distributing or possessing this publication is liable to prosecution. This publication consisting of 104 pages has red covers of which the front cover carries a picture of four armed men killing their enemy. Most of the songs are quotations from Mao-Tse-tung. The publication has been banned principally because it is intended for use by local pro-Communist elements as paraphernalia for organising riots and destruction of public and private property in Singapore. These songs call on people to resort to violence in order to establish a Communist regime and there is little of musical worth in them. This publication will therefore serve as a stimulus to get teenaged children to go on the rampage at the behest of adult pro-Communists who plan these disorders in the safety of their homes and offices.

On the other hand, when the National Theatre was first commissioned, there was support to initiate many practices found in the Chinese community in Singapore. Ho Hwee Long remembers, that among other activities, there was a National Theatre Chinese Orchestra...that started in 1963...it was a very strong Chinese orchestra...the conductor was a Chinese-born Hong Kong person (Mr. Cheng Si Sum—resigned from NTCO in 1971)...can’t remember his name...he returned to Hong Kong....

In the annual report of 1969, not only has the Chinese Orchestra seems to have grown but also the need to support a growing demand for Chinese traditional instrumental lessons:

In August 1969, the National Theatre Company undertook another project for the promotion of Chinese music. The Company organized instrumental classes for Er Hu, Pipa, Ku Ch’ing and Flute for both children and adults. The tutors were the conductor and leading members of the Chinese orchestra. As these classes were successful, the National Theatre Company now intends to organize new classes for
beginners and at Intermediate levels jointly with the Adult Education Board. In addition to the staging of concerts, the Company also cut several discs. The first disc was “Chinese Festival Music” which was a selection of traditional Chinese orchestral music. The Company hopes to produce more recordings of other serious music in the near future.  

By the annual report of 1970, the reports have gone a step further:

*The music section of the National Theatre Company made further progress in its performing standard and crowned another year of success...* Senior members of the Chinese Orchestra were invited to instruct the Youth Junior Chinese Orchestra of the Ministry of Education, the Nanyang University Chinese Orchestra and the Ngee Ann Technical College Chinese Orchestra. It was evident that Chinese instrumental music had gained a marked increase in popularity in our Republic.

By March 1980 however, The Chairman’s foreword to the Annual Report of that year included the following:

*The Trust continued to provide a varied programme of cultural activities. The cultural units continued to have a good year...The Chinese Orchestra still provides an avenue for enthusiasts to participate in their musical interests.*

What is most curious is that under list of cultural activities, only Mr. Au Yong Puay could be seen to provide Ku Ch’ng classes. However, under the National Theatre Club activities, there was recorded a Chinese Orchestra concert with a very curious brief: In commemoration of its Anniversary, the two-year old Chinese Orchestra provided a concert on 27 March 1979 at the Singapore Conference Hall. Members consisted of amateurs from all walks of life who strived and made the concert a success. From hereon, the promotion of Chinese traditional musics came under the purview of the National Theatre Club’s Activities, producing during the 1980 season A Chinese Wind Ensemble on 18 May 1980 at the DBS auditorium; a fund-raising concert for the Singapore Cultural Foundation on 29 June 1980 featuring five artists from Hong Kong at the Singapore Conference Hall; and Chinese Instrumental Music Festival from 14-22 March 1981.

The first noticeable absence of the Chinese Orchestra from one of the main sections into the National Theatre Club Activities is now replaced by an absence of the Chinese Orchestra from the Club activities by the 1987/8 Annual Report. Nothing is seen or heard of the National Theatre Chinese Orchestra after that. However, there is seen growing demand for instrumental lessons of which the ku ch’ng (qin) maintained one of the most sustained demands.

The People’s Association Chinese Orchestra (reportedly formed in 1968) which had worked together with the National Theatre Chinese Orchestra emerges towards the mid-1990s as the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. In 1996, with the recommendation of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra Company Limited was set up to transform the SCO into a national orchestral ensemble of high
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One of the outcomes of its outreach and education programmes has been a continued focus on Chinese traditional instruments in the school system. Many of the instrumentalists from the SCO are to be found offering lessons on instrumental and aesthetic facility to those wishing to learn. Additionally, the schools provide one of the strongest and most sustainable bases for its proliferation and is seen in Special Assistance Plan Schools (SAP) as a school-tradition. The extent to which the Singapore Youth Festival remains the only reward system for such learning remains to be researched at the school level and perhaps identifying some of these students longitudinally into adult life. What has also become more common is the seeking of further studies in Chinese traditional musics in the PRC – notably Beijing and Shanghai. We know very little of Singaporean proponents. Further scholarship needs to understand if this is a move that will help generate a critical base to support a critical mass.

What is also not easily determined is the extent to which other institutions become part of the learning curve. For instance, there are some Taoist and Buddhist temples in Singapore who offer instrumental lessons in particular Chinese traditional instruments, including the voice and choral singing. These organizations have been known to have carried it out for some time but the extent of their efficacy and lessons imbibed something of an unknown in the written and documented discourse.
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Musical Practice of Rock

Burhanuddin bin Buang records one notable musical practice in the Malay community after Pop-Yeh Yeh. In a sense it is difficult to assess the impact of both across popularity of consumption and production except in hindsight. A fruitful area of research would be to examine record or cassette sales at shops, concert ticket sales, broadcast programmes, programmes flyers and any such material that would help examine these areas in greater depth.

For Burhanuddin, Mat Rock as a social phenomenon was as much a part of the landscape with fashion statements, the problem with drugs, long hair, anti-establishment sentiments. Music’s role in the Mat Rock phenomenon is far more complex than the stereotype that generally attends its subscribers. Did the music cause such behaviour? Did the music accentuate behaviour? Was rock music an unfortunate accomplice in social behavioural patterns that may have had no more than a subscription to the music because it was different from other musics? Lyrics of the great rock songs of the period are entirely different in kind from the lyrics that mark the skill and biting wit of one like Bob Dylan and like-minded, like spirited artists.

Rebellious lyrics are now supplanted by sound worlds arrived at via distortion, wailing, crashing rhythms, amplification and by extension decibel levels approximate what many believe to be the closest definition of noise. Yet noise, as Eno observes, has special significance, even power, and nowhere else is this more keenly felt than in rock music: 

*Distortion and complexity are the sources of noise. Rock music is built on distortion: on the idea that things are enriched, not degraded by noise. To allow something to become noisy is to allow it to support multiple readings. It is a way of multiplying resonances. It is also a way of ‘making the medium fail’ – thus giving the impression that what you are doing is bursting out of the material: ‘I’m too big for this medium’.*

But the energy levels that emanated from these new groups, the cult following thereafter, the marked observable patterns of behaviour which were by comparison significantly deviant and a potential or real threat to social order, gave rise to new levels of panic and anxiety. The indulgent consumption of nicotine, alcohol and narcotic substances was said to be high in this group and its subscribers, bordering on cult followings, were the youth in Singapore; the very youth on whom hopes were placed, socially,
politically and economically, to lift post-independent Singapore out of the threatened existence of third-world status. While the anxiety felt by Dr. Goh Keng Swee in 1973 had its reverberations across Western popular culture of the Euro-American worlds of entertainment establishments, the Mat-Rockers seemed to revel in their situated ‘marginalia’ and were contented to remain accessible to and among themselves.⁡

Of the practitioners in the world of heavy metal and rock, Yusnor Ef recognises Ramli Sarip, who in Singapore garnered the label “Raja Rock” or the King of Rock and contributed one track Ada Kerja Ada Gaji in the Sweet Charity album Batu. Ramli began life on his own after a long period with Sweet Charity, also nicknamed the Deep Purple of Singapore. According to their contemporaries, their lead guitarist was able to sound like the famed Ritchie Blackmore of this hugely successful English rock band. Sweet Charity was also affectionately known as the magnificent seven; Ramli Sarip (lead vocals), Rahman Sarbani, Rosli Mohalim, Syed Hassan, Ahmad Jaafar, Wan Ahmad and Masrom Abdul Hamid.

Sweet Charity began life as a band playing rock covers at the Ocean Bar at Sembawang in 1968. They were spotted by Ken from Musicarama and were invited to play at the National Theatre. 1972/4...during that time it was called Rock Matinee...Saturday after work everyone will go to the National Theatre pay $3...we were the second or third band...people kept shouting balek! balek!...I told the boys, don’t worry, if we are good, definitely they will like us...so after the first song, they shouted balik balik, second song everybody went quiet, third song, they started to clap....and that’s the beginning...whoever wants to play, played before Sweet Charity.....whoever plays after Sweet Charity...no one will be around...³

Their’s was a sound that shocked the establishment. It was said that performance venues were packed whenever Sweet Charity was due to perform and tickets sold out long before the doors of the venue were open. Their albums were also to prove enduring. Pelarian (1980) hit sales of 20,000 units in the first week of its release. In all they released seven albums with hits such as Kamalia, Jangan Tunggu Lama-Lama, Apa-Apa Saja, Datang dan Pergi and Zakiah. Sweet Charity’s impact served as catalyst for the formation of Search, Wings and Lefthanded. The group disbanded in 1985 but several sell-out concerts are the result of Sweet Charity reunion concerts, even if ever so briefly.
Ramli felt he had much more to offer even after Sweet Charity broke up. I know that I don’t have the mentality or attitude of working the same thing every night, wearing the same thing every night...and that’s not me...and when I told Jimmy Wee (WEA—the MD for Singapore) that I wanted to record a solo album...Ramli Sarip....I was a bit nervous so when I recorded my first album that was the first time I produced my own, wrote my own material and did it all below 100 hours...I worked on a very very tight budget...I wanted the company to understand and feel that thing I believed in...we sold about 25 000 copies....during that time the counterfeit was about 1 in 10...despite that I managed to sell 25 000...the company was smiling but I told them that this was not even the beginning....I recorded the second album Bukan Kerana Nama...sold more than 50 000...the rest is history...for me there are four periods Sweet Charity—Rock and Roll; Ramli Sarip; Ramli Sarip—Malay Pop & Traditional; and today Ramli Sarip World music...WOMAD and my latest albums.4

The fact that he managed a comparatively successful solo career and still does to this day, has earned him the reputation of something of a rock legend and that reputation seems to have transcended Singapore.

Mat Rockers
In the 1970s, heavy metal and rock music made its debut with the attendant hippie lifestyle and value systems. Long hair and the ‘noise-like’ music of Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Rainbow and Kiss marked a change from the music and lyrics of Cliff Richard and the Shadows. The anxiety of response was felt clearly at the highest levels of government. For instance, at the opening of the Japanese Seiwan Gardens in Jurong in 1973, Dr. Goh Keng Swee offered his views:
Let us not consider the subject of music as a trifling matter, of no import in the state of affairs. The ancients knew better. Both Plato and Confucius correctly recognised which music as an instrument of state policy could play in producing the desirable type of citizen. Neglect in Singapore on this subject has given rise to serious problems. I refer to the widespread popularity of the barbarous form of music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification. Voice accompaniment takes the form of inane tasteless wailing. It is barbarous music of this kind that is mainly responsible for attracting the mindless young of Singapore to the cult of permissiveness of the western world. It is hardly a coincidence that the problem of drug-addiction has become serious
where performers and audience foregather. I trust the Ministry of Home Affairs will take stern action against this menace.\(^5\)

What is most unfortunate here is when the Ministry of Home Affairs was called upon to take stern action by the Defence Minister, it was not made clear whether the menace was the **music** or the **drugs**. What was clear from the message was the correlation between music and type of citizen. In any case, both drugs and **barbarous music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification** became targets in an effort to deal with the menace. For many trained musicians who had worked in respectable circumstances the emergence of Rock n’Roll, Carnaby Street, Pop (including psychedelic pop) and Rock/Heavy Metal had considerable impact on altering their perspectives, if not their livelihood. Rock and roll musicians had to adapt to playing opportunities at private parties, music festivals and concerts. During the 1970s, private sponsorships allowed for a number of rock-revival shows at the National Theatre with acts by Sweet Charity, Humble Origin, Unwanted, Fragile and Heritage; eventually not sustainable enough both in terms of finance and musicians. This environment was not helped by the interconnection of the music, musicians and drugs. Ho (1999) refers to the period as the **Great Concern about Drugs**. Clubs housing local bands began to close, TV stations refused to feature male performers with long hair, a prohibition of rock concerts and rock songs restricted from airplay and even the restriction or prohibition of rock music and musicians eventually reached the National Theatre. Therefore, the 1970s and 1980s saw local bands in English language having a hard time establishing themselves.

To be a rocker in Singapore during the 1970s must have been considerably difficult. Rapper Sheikh Haikel recalls, *Left Handed are Singaporean, M. Nasir, Rusty Blade....all the famous rock groups in Malaysia are Singaporean and but they had to leave...*\(^6\) Craig Lockard documents the fate of M. Nasir who went on in Malaysia to guide a Malay Rock Group Kembara and produced six top selling albums between 1982 and 1985. One of Nasir’s songs with the group Kembara, Bus number 13, recounts the destruction of Malay neighbourhoods in Singapore...presumably the ones along bus journey.\(^7\) Another interesting group was Rusty Blade who, like Sweet Charity, graced the National Theatre as late as 1975 but found a more empathetic market in Malaysia.
Shirlene Noordin’s exploration of the practices of the Mat Rockers identifies a group or sub-group seen to gather at the void decks of HDB housing blocks, strumming a seemingly tuneless song on an old guitar, or even a riff, or even doing nothing. Their appearance marked their distinctiveness; sporting long hair, unkempt looks and bedraggled in the tight jeans and T-shirts. Even the cigarettes they smoked (an Indonesian brand called Gudang Garam) marked them out. Their choice of music was almost inevitably rock and heavy metal. Given the ‘unforgettable’ image, Noordin informs us the Mat Rocker was regarded a deviant, anti-establishment figure contrasted against other conformist citizens who advocate puritan moral value systems, appropriate work ethics and struggle to emerge victorious in the rat race and paper chase and eventually the wealth owned by a few.

It is argued that was around the 1970s marked the period the Mat Rocker subculture emerged. Participants were likely to be displaced Malay youth from working class backgrounds and large family units and an apparent lack of vigilance in parental control. Poor job prospects, low or almost no educational qualifications, and perhaps a sense of displacement from their familiar homes; here Burhannudin bin Buang reminds us of a massive Urban Housing programme coincides with resettlement and relocation of many of these families and the inevitable socio-cultural re-negotiation in a very different setting of a confines of a flat. The composition of a Malay community as 15% of the local population in Singapore is the second largest after the Chinese 78%, but renders them a minority from a demographic perspective. Moreover, when a value system of hard work, thrift and wealth accumulation in the dominant Chinese culture is juxtaposed with a lifestyle with preferences in earning livelihoods in agriculture and more rural areas away from the economic hub, unfortunate comparisons portrayed the Malay youth as backward, lazy, un-enterprising and pleasure-seeking. This does not of course hide the fact that not too long in Singapore’s history, only those who pursued an English stream education were likely to benefit in changing economic circumstances. This lack of an English education exacerbated an already difficult situation. Since the 1970s, Malay youth were exempted from National Service, which made employers even more reluctant to employ such ‘unprepared’ youth. Noordin argues that in the face of such telling displacement, heavy metal and rock became the centrifugal force for youth of the Malay community. Heavy metal’s association, either as fact or fiction, with satanic worship, the encounter with considerable amplification, read as noise and disorder within a rugged Singapore society only served to
further alienate these youth via discrimination and stereotyping. Noordin refers to work by Will Straw (1983) where such music placed *emphasis on technological effect and instrumental virtuosity...the cult of a lead guitarist, the immediate gratification of self and self-esteem with performing extended solo-playing and in effect, a disregard for the temporal limits of the pop-song.*

The discourse developed puts forward the argument that heavy metal and rock were the sites of respite and refuge for these Malay youth. A sense of identity was further fostered by dress code, which, in the 1970s were blue jeans with alterations; cutting off piece of the jeans at the knee, sewing on corduroy into these cut sections, flared bottoms (fully in keeping with the style). In the later decade of the 1980s, skin-tight jeans were adorned with embroidered patches of heavy metal symbols. Hair was always kept long, sometimes past the waist, symbolically defiant against the government policy on long hair. These youth could be found in numbers and the void decks of the HDB flats were popular venues. Since the lack of money was a real problem, hanging around with activities from idle chatter to guitar sessions/lessons were the only viable ones. Talk centred around music, fashion and friends, as well as dissemination of news of other Mat Rock gangs. Prominent Malay musicians began their journey to fame at these humble beginnings. If there was money, there was a local nightspot for live metal and rock music performances. Rainbow, located at the Ming Arcade was a hotspot. It was also a site for “Battle of the Bands” competitions and drew an audience seen to be predominantly from the Malay community. When the Rainbow closed down in the mid-1980s, *Dreams Disco* at Amara Hotel became the next site. Before long the frequent fights resulted in the location eventually closing down. A last known site was identified at the Hot Line Pub in Cuscaden Road, while anecdotal evidence suggests one along Tanjong Pagar.

During Noordin’s field study, the only prominent Mat Rock gang among the few was *Hell’s Angels*. In general however, the social group of a Mat Rocker was considered loose. There was no leader and each was respected for their individual skill or knowledge. Senior members were usually the musical experts and mentors for the junior members. There were the usual deviants, especially if there was someone who claimed to know other gang members and had ‘inside knowledge’ of them. This was considered cool. On other occasions respect was gained for being known as a ladies man.
Language was generally Malay with borrowed words from the Hokkien dialect and English as well as mispronounced words or given a new lease of life in their language. Relax would become relak. For instance, when one is told to take things easy, its relaklah brudder (relax brother) OR relak one koner (relax in a corner). A compliment comes as “gereklah lu”…meaning you’ve got style or you’re cool. Compression of words formed one other part of their unique vocabulary. Apa macam (how are you?) would become amacam?\textsuperscript{10}

The Mat Rocker image and lifestyle articulated through heavy metal, social mannerisms and material culture is not only deviant from a ‘national culture of conformity’ but also from their parent culture. In short, they were identified as a deviant Malay group. By subscribing to a western cultural influence, indulgence in pre-marital sex, alcoholic beverages and drugs, their un-Malay, un-Muslim lifestyles became values frowned upon by many Malay elders. Noordin sees it as a ‘generationally specific articulation of an alternative value system.’ From her personal interviews with the Mat Rockers, there is acknowledgement of the inadequacy of coping with their marginality in Singapore society despite the common currency of long hair, attire, the gear and ‘hanging out with the boys’. As in a male-dominated social unit, the presence of females is occasional as girl-friends or fiancees of the members.\textsuperscript{11}

In the 1990s, the Mat Rockers, according to Noordin, somehow began to lose their cohesiveness as a marginalised group. A number of reasons were speculated:

- Commercial successes have made heavy metal groups and musicians even more accessible if not aesthetically and commercially fashionable. The sense of being cohesive as a marginalised group of hardcore heavy metal supporters has diminished significantly for the Mat Rockers since the 1970s.

- Since the 1970s, the Malay community as a whole has experienced a very different process of negotiating the demands of a capitalist culture which has always characterised Singapore, of which a large percentage are the Chinese community. The indulgence in nothingness was considered a value system for the Mat Rocker. However, from the 1980s and 1990s, more Malays have gained access, on their merit, to tertiary education and securing professional careers. This has arguably created less of a need to appear cohesive as
a marginalised group since economically, the Malay community has grown in affluence and opportunities are available.

- The inevitable confrontation with government policies. For instance, all males above the age of 18 have to undergo compulsory National Service for a period of 2½ years. If nothing else, a short haircut is one obligatory code of conformity. Those who have completed their full-time service are required to participate in reservist training at regular intervals. The haircut becomes the first step in being made to conform. The setting up of the Vigilante Corp in the 1970s and part of the 1980s and later the Singapore Civil Defence Force only found a way to match their abilities.

- More self-help groups from within the Malay community have helped redress the marginalisation. Malay/Muslim associations like Mendaki, AMP (Association of Malay Professionals) were tasked to assist and support members of the Malay/Muslim community.

- The perception by the community, including law enforcement and other governmental agencies, that heavy metal has somehow lost its strong anti-establishment connotations and has become more accessible, less socially unacceptable, and in some cases, quite lucrative. The Metallica concert in Singapore in 1993, received uncharacteristic publicity in the main English newspaper (although credit was given to the Police for ensuring good order with no violent clashes characterising crowd behaviour at rock concerts in other parts of the world). From 1995, the National Youth Council developed a site around the Orchard shopping zone (near the Somerset MRT) called it the Youth Park and has since provided a venue for youth who wish to express themselves musically. On many occasions, the Youth Park has been a venue for heavy metal genres, besides rap, hip-hop and other youth musical fashions. In 2003 Payment On Death (P.O.D) performed at the Youth Park—a seemingly perfect combination of Hip-Hop, heavy metal and Christianity (members of POD claim to be regular Sunday churchgoers). Other venues for Heavy Metal include the Youth Park, Bishan Skate Park as well a number of Community Clubs.12

Mat Rock; An Alternative reading in two in-depth accounts
Not all of Mat Rock fits comfortably into the trap of the deviant and unsavoury subculture. Ramli Sarip, earning the title Raja Rock (The King of Rock) remained unmoved by the tumult and moral and drug panic of the 1970s. As P. Ramlee had his name inscribed permanently in Malay folklore in the mid-twentieth century, Ramli Sarip earned his hard-won respect first through the group Sweet Charity, described by Lockard as loud longhaired music.\textsuperscript{13} Musically although I am not the director I was spokesman and the mastermind...All of us were the same age...I started with Sweet Charity in 1968, 1969, playing at weddings...beach party, dances, we’d sell our own tickets...we’d hire a hall...from there we got a contract in a club, Ocean Bar in Sembawang...where lots of bars were each playing Country n’ Western, Soul, Pop...we were into Rock and Roll...our audience were sailors...they were six foot, big size, tattoos...but that was where we were taught and we learned...they recommended us Doobie Brothers, Steely Dan, Jimi Hendrix, Black Sabbath...sometimes they became friends among us and they send us all these latest albums...we just wanted to play music and I knew the strength of the band...I liked the style of the hippie but not the culture...I played rock and roll but did not smoke, drink nor take drugs because of my religion, beliefs and my culture...but the local media associated me with yellow culture...the music I played, like sports (I play soccer, sepak takraw, hockey, baseball, long and short distance running), is to me all about energy...rock suits my style, my approach with the band...so we just played...we had no chance to play in clubs with long term contracts like three or six months because we were blacklisted...some promoters or agents said that Sweet Charity...everywhere they play...they are going to have trouble because of the fans...the crowd who are really hardcore and get into fights sometimes...but we were not like that...\textsuperscript{14}

Their faith and fate, added to the fact that Sweet Charity remained in Singapore despite the guilty by association press, eventually saw their acceptance not only within the community at large (they already had a die-hard following). In 1979, they were signed on by WEA and they made sales history for themselves while WEA cashed in on their latest acquisition....Before we became recording artists...we were already a household name...but this is I think part of the mentality of the people at the time...that’s history...With Sweet Charity, basically we were into Rock & Roll, Rock, Heavy Metal, sometimes blues and folk but we did play couple of disco...We were a good live band we could make a crowd stand, dance move and sing...the band had the charisma and style that suited us...suited the environment...We didn’t have a chance to write our own material until a
later time...1979...We had the style and we were considered to have these ingredients to be able to play a Deep Purple song...but I smile when people say “I heard you are Singapore’s Deep Purple”...I’ve seen ups and downs...they banned the album Rentak because of my long hair...long hair was a big problem in Malaysia...Rentak hidup and duet album with Katijah in Zaman....

Rock as Enemy of the State; Another view by Ramli Sarip:
Every song I write and compose is for the future...I did campaigns...sometimes I approached them, sometimes they approached me because of my songs which are related to the theme that they want...In Sweet Charity we used to play for an organisation called Bustanol Arifin—they organised events, helped us sell tickets, dance parties, beach parties, Mosque Building Fund, Ramakrishna Mission...we did a couple of things at the National Theatre, Mendaki, Anor Building Fund at Woodlands, the National Anti-Drugs, Anti-smoking campaign...I even went to the Prisons...I am against drugs because I know the problems associated with them...so in my album cover, I even had the sign...Hapuskan Dadah..I don’t have to tell people but I have to tell you this because some of them are not...I don’t wish to have them have impressions about me or say things about me...but I just feel we have a part to play...it is not easy for an artist to put Hapuskan Dadah on the front cover...What the hell?!?!...the same message is in the song...that should be enough...but I wanted it as a statement...since then, I’ve been doing lots of community work...

Rock and Metal Communities
The myriad followers of Mat Rock culture is in itself an interesting phenomenon. Burhanidin bin Buang was right in the middle of the movement when he was in school:
During my early secondary school days, the Mat Rock culture was very strong...if you were into anything other than heavy rock music...you would be an outcast...you would be accused of being different...but the choice of rock was not because I wanted to escape this outcast tag but more of a new love for a new kind of music...at the time after the demise of Sweet Charity, there was a mainstreamisation of Malay rock bands...like Search, Left-handed, from Singapore, Rusty Blade, Helter Skelter and all that...and that actually added volumes to the impact made...my first band was formed in 1987 with my classmates...I can’t even remember the name of the band...there was about 5 of us...at that age it wasn’t about composing...they formed a band because the handsome guys were looking to impress
girls...and that’s it...I became the lead guitarist...that went on for three years...and developed a liking for heavier stuff...for instance it was Yngwie Malmsteen at Secondary Three...we started listening to Metallica...they were not as big until 1991 because there were not as much melody in their songs as Dio or Iron Maiden...it was very aggressive music...when I started listening to Creeping Death...and they said why not play Creeping death...we got the energy and rawness out of it...when I was in Secondary Four...I started separating myself from the rest of the boys and I wanted to play Metallica and Heroine Archer...I wanted to form a real metal band and I wanted to be the lead vocalist and lead guitarist....at that time I couldn’t find one like that because such a vocalist was hard to get and I had to persuade good vocalists to come...

Burhanuddin offers his own lived experience of the Mat Rock Culture: During the Heydays of the Mat Rock culture...not many were into the music...more were into the hanging out thing...part of looking cool and all that...it was no surprise that more than ten years after I left school, none of the guys who were contemporary and senior profess to be Mat Rock anymore...I went through the thrash metal phase but they totally gave up...it dawned on me the reason they were into Mat Rock was not for the love of music...I did not hang out as much...the focal point of the underground scene in 1990/1991 was Forum Galleria and Plaza Singapura...but I was never part of that hanging-out thing...because I was brought up in a strict manner...I do not attend parties...[or have] overnight sessions with friends...

However, that did not deter his musical pathway: In 1990, my serious metal band was called Metal Trax...we were doing Metallica and Heroine covers.....but to me it was a watershed year, I came upon Death Angel, Exodus and Sodom...by the end of the 1990s Metal Trax was playing songs from these bands...in 1991 first to Violator and Fractured Skull...by this time I was into Death Metal and Grindcore...and the same time, I discovered I had a knack for writing songs...although many of the riffs were derivative of bands we were playing and liked...I retained guitarist/vocalist and band configurations like Sepultura and Metallica...we put up our first demo tape...totally raw...we didn’t have the luxury of recording cheaply in a good reliable studio...it was done using a tape recorder...and taping of the jamming session...but it made us feel good...as we were putting our own stuff out...the thing that set me apart from the contemporary bands and underground bands then...my rebelliousness was
in the music. However, bad the music was perceived by a lot of people, it was for me a positive outlet...with Fractured Skull, we did two rehearsal demos...in 1993, we disbanded after difficulties...there was this big grunge scene with Nirvana...I was not into that...its good music but it had become so mainstream it was becoming trendy and adopted by people who were not even part of the subculture...so in late 1993, after Fractured skull...the band which made me what I am is Manifest...way before Urban Karma...with Manifest...there was this conscious effort not to play Death Metal, generic trash metal, just wanted to be bands like Pantera...Sepultura got this tribal metal who were doing Chaos AD at the time, plus Helmet and we used this as inspiration to do our music...do just what we want...in 1994...a big influence was Machine Head from the US...they came out of the thrash metal scene in San Francisco...they adopted this new sound...aggressive...has this mainstream appeal...when I was in pre-university, I did a lot of the music without my parents knowledge...I dropped out of Polytechnic and got the second life in pre-university doing A-levels...they didn’t support me so I had to do these things secretly...during my NS...got my A-level...got into NUS in 1997...but my music life took a serious blow...I had an industrial accident while serving NS in the Navy...multiple fractures in my left hand....they had metal plates in my fingers for six months.....Manifest were planning to record in a real studio then...but we eventually recorded in September till December 1996...that was a monumental step for myself and Manifest...we sold 300 copies of that humble effort...made a name for ourselves in the underground music scene...actually we were really outcasts...we didn’t fit into metal...not even hardcore...caught in-between...but we felt if people liked us, they liked us...we didn’t have to template ourselves...to backtrack...

The independent spirit...one of the main factors that led to the DIY spirit was that the Malay Music industry in Singapore was crumbling...by the mid-90s the only band in Singapore to be signed on recording label was Teachers Pet...they were the last Mat Rock band to be significant...it happened to a number of the underground bands in the late 80s and early 90s...they may not have realised it...but I guess my love for music and being in a band has always been there...putting up a demo tape...was a monumental thing...especially after the accident...in 1997, an significant thing for the band happened with important live gigs...people who had never seen the band were impressed by Manifest...most metal bands don’t have a lot of showmanship...we changed all that...we incorporated a lot of hardcore showmanship in our performances...that actually set us apart for
good and bad...by the end of 1997 we got an offer from a Malaysian independent label to distribute our first Manifest demo in cassette format--Strange Culture Records...but in 1998 there was quite a lot of unravelling...although the distribution was generally quite good...we received a lot of letters from those who bought the cassette...we were told that the label was a much hated label...they liked to rip people off...back in Singapore 1998...I got my first taste of backlash against the band...some prominence especially in underground circles inflated us and our image beyond reality...hate campaigns...it amazes me to realise how much energy has been expended to run this hate campaign on us...when I was putting Manifest on, there were bands that were overrated...but we strived to do better...rather than use hate campaigns against 'rival' bands...To be honest...I don’t know...but they accused me of being sexist...its juvenile...but that generated a certain amount of bad publicity...again in 1997, although Manifest hadn’t yet released a song called Budaya...people remembered Manifest because of this song although I can remember feeling more for other songs we wrote...actually the uniqueness in Budaya, we incorporated a kind of Dikir Barat singing...into the songs...a lot of Malay and Javanese melodies...towards the centre and end but laced with heavy riffs all the way...song kind of like attracted non-metal fans and those not belonging to the subculture to Manifest...when Manifest were part of Mixed Metal Assault...in 1998, that actually cemented public prominence for Manifest for good and bad...we had the same line-up from 1993-1998...when I changed my lead guitarist...from 1998 things started going wrong...I was accused of being dictatorial or bossy...perfectionist...but that came out of the passion I had for being in the band...this is a very expensive hobby...why waste it away?...I wanted the best not to boast but simply to excel...push the limits and boundaries...another milestone for me in 1998 was getting the Warna Mendaki scholarship got me a job in the broadcasting line...in radio...in early 1999, Budaya became a radio hit...and it was new because...people were wondering what this is...now its quite common to hear heavy stuff on Malay radio.....but at the time...without sounding arrogant...this was the first song that invaded a rather safe Malay music airwave...they hadn’t had that since Adnan Maswan...that song amazed people...although I’m with Urban Karma, people still talk about Budaya...Although, I feel the song was being promoted...RIA, in 1999, had this 13-episode Kegaran 99...there was on air 13 different bands jamming on air and Manifest was one of them...although I felt the song was aired because they wanted this on.....its nothing wrong...good promotion...but it had negative feedback because I was accused of mainstreaming
metal...now when I am on duty, two or three requests for Budaya...I have to be careful...even though my boss tells me its OK because the public want it...by 1999, I was the only original Manifest member remaining...we were planning to release our second album...but it didn’t happen because I found out that the other members did not share the same vision as myself...and they didn’t want to struggle against the hardship that their day-time jobs dictated...so I called it quits with Manifest in August 1999...and at the time, if there were a music formula that would make Manifest more accessible and still heavy...it would be the same formula that made Machine Head famous with Burning Red...the album didn’t go well with their fans...actually watered down in relation to their first two albums...for me personally it was a good album...I always have high dreams...I always tell myself to be content with selling the minimum...the Mixed Metal Assault sold about 1000 albums...but the thing is what I forgot was that in 1998/9 the number of people who had handphones was not as high as now...there was no such thing as downloading of ringtones...at the same time there wasn’t as many houses with CD burners...there wasn’t a culture of sharing music files yet...so after Manifest, there was Urban Karma...it would be my next journey...my next solo project but with the structure of a band...and I guess the best part was when we wrote songs that we didn’t care to be part of the discourse of metal or hard core...just wrote songs that...if I felt it was good then do it...One thing I don’t want to add at the time was the percussion aspect...now I wish I had...we started recording in 2000...it took quite a long time...because I was in my honours year and had to get down to serious business and at the same time, having a band made me a more fun person...compared to the rest who were getting bogged down by the coursework and thesis...choosing a thesis topic on music was a great help...we put out the CD in 2001...it was called Disenchanted, Alienated and Anomic...the CD comprised of Urban Karma and five other bands...I guess by that time, it was a different me when we released Urban Karma...because our target was 1000 copies rather than let the sales emerge...if people want to buy they will buy...this change in attitude created a lot of pressure...I feel a lot of pressure...however bitter you are, you have to face the reality at the end of the day...it’s a changed world...already...we had this experimental song...we wrote in a mixture and jaipong and bit of pop and nu-metal...a parody of love-relationships called Monkey Love...or Cinta Monyet Cinta Duit...it was a dig at a lot of the sappy Malay ballads...so called rock ballads...I guess people remember Manifest because of Budaya and Urban Karma because of Monkey Love...although I would prefer they not identify Urban Karma with Monkey Love...Paul Zach said it
was an intriguing song when he reviewed the CD...2001 was a good year for Urban Karma in the same way it was a good year for Manifest in 1997 because we played in a lot of shows and performed on TV...2000 was good because the live performance at Youth Park wasn’t exactly good and there were a lot of skin heads looking for trouble...and I was shown the finger right in front of me...gigs that succeeded after the Youth Park were quite amazing...we played twice...Pasir Gudang and KL...people were amazed at the things we were doing, they said we were unique...in 2001, we played in the Clash of the Titans gig in KL to a crowd of 1000...it was fun and exciting...I brought two guitars because they had different tunings, in the end the amplifier didn’t work and didn’t manage to play the guitars at all...but it was good...2001 was the best year for Urban Karma...2002 started off on a bad note...we intended to have this gig to sell off stocks of our CDs, T-shirts and other things...the guy who was doing the selling of our stuff (a friend of ours who did volunteer work for us) had an idea of launching a fan club...on hindsight that was a bad thing...it left a bad taste...to make matters worse, we had our gig on the same day as POD had their free gig at Youth park...but we didn’t know about this thing until two weeks to the date...we held our show at show at Marine Parade CC...once you book you cannot back out or change...we had to make it a go...by then...although the artistic and music factors were the dominant...we were thinking of business...at the time we thought why put money into something that we were going to lose...it was quite extravagant...but management guy put his money into it as well...the crowd numbers weren’t good...POD had 5000 at their Youth Park gig.....although I dropped metal out of Urban Karma by calling it an ethnorock band because the term rock is better...not because I am ashamed to be a Metal head but this accusation of selling out...I didn’t want to attract pointless debate...again not many people were into Urban Karma...and we had a fan club called Urbanase...I felt a bit insecure about the whole thing and didn’t want a big failure...my mistake was to post in on Audioreload form (website)...people were saying all sorts of shitty things about the band...I guess that actually started hatred towards Urban karma...I was always advised by this management guy not to do things like that...but again I can’t let people get away with slants like “hey they’re just a bunch of monkeys” or Mats...I couldn’t sit and watch all this said about us...this music is my baby and I won’t let anyone talk bad about my baby...I have had to learn to grow out of that phase...can’t exactly stop them...but the best part of 2002 was to be able to be part of this big Mat Rock—Tribute to Rockers...in which we played and with Rusty Blade...and I always told myself that if I died after this, I would die a happy
man...because these were the bands I followed and was their die-hard fan...and they had a big influence on me...that saved 2002 but again until now...there are a lot of things said about us on the internet...we did the second CD on 2003...cost-cutting move...we didn’t go to mix studio...we recorded drums and bass in a real recording studio...recorded guitars using computers...sounded alright...we had this gig...so we planned on launching Rock on...we organised this gig...we used a lot of the mistakes we made in Urbanaise...we sublet the gig to production house called Flipside production house...to do the gig we ended up having to pay them $8000...so its like...again it was not without any problems...5 July 2003, there was a Music Against Drugs gig...I know the guys who were doing the gig but again there was this war against the group (evident in the website guapunya.com)...this time I was restrained...there were a lot of ghostwriters...but in the end there were more on our side than theirs...again it didn’t simmer down after the show...what was more important was that the album we put out was called Intifada Musika...Intifada was used to denote our struggle...in the music scene...having to tolerate accusations but not responding through violence...but the term was used to attract attention...nothing in the whole album was about the Palestinian struggle...we had a song called Bachalah...in the most easy listening and palatable song of the album...in a way it was like Monkey Love but not talking about trivial things...the importance of reading and acquiring knowledge...despite being a presenter and producer, despite having the airwaves at my disposal, I must say this song did catch on although people did not go crazy over it...maybe the Malay community probably got the impression rock music and religion don’t mix...I feel Intifada Musika has the potential to go across genres but...again Metal guys found fault with it and the Mainstream people didn’t like it because they didn’t get what we were trying to say...we were neither here nor there...although we had a good gig...suffice to say that the same management guy....disappeared with some of the money and some people at the RC still owed us some hundreds of dollars...I wanted to release the CD before I got married...one day after my show...I cut my dreadlocks...I wanted to have a new beginning and prepare myself for my wedding...the battleground was more difficult in 2003 because of mp3 file sharing...kids preferred to buy ring tones rather than CDs...Rock On wasn’t successful on volume but was successful because we were really aggressive on promotion...so we thought if we were aggressive on promotion on a monthly basis...things would actually move...we were brought down to earth...because at that moment, it dawned on me that this thing of promotion could not work anymore...so I feel that CDs cannot sell
for $10 anymore…put them in CD stores they collect dust…With Manifest it was me who did the management and finance…with Urban Karma, I put people in charge of things and I didn’t see the results…it dawned on me that I could not do it the way I had with Urban Karma and we would have to leave this form of mentality…so it was not the end…2004…so far we played three shows…New Year gig Rock of Ages at Thomson CC…again quite a bad show…not many people turned up…because it was one day after the New Year’s Eve events…we had to work the next day…our set was close to 11pm and by the time we played it was totally empty…we sold only about 10 CDs at a reduced price…then we had this show on 15 February at Mendaki Band at Youth Park…I embraced this philosophy…new kids who just release something and don’t get anything in return…I released the CDs at $5 and sold about 20 CDs…it made me happy seeing things move again…

With all the lessons learnt, I am spending my time thinking about what I am going to do next…being a married man…this dream of becoming the Singapore band that is known regional at an international level…will not happen…I am thirty this year fighting a lost cause of trying to be like Sweet Charity…that has this fame and sells a lot of CDs in Malaysia and Singapore…I have given up that dream…whatever desire to play music now…must be more of having a social function…because I find that as a married person, having a serious hobby would actually cement myself and keep myself focussed on maintaining a monogamous relationship…loyal…not to have extramarital affairs…playing in a band now serves that function for me…instead of trying to be that band that succeeded internationally…I must say for all the bands who made an impact outside Singapore, power to them…I wish them all the best in whatever they want to do…for me it is sufficient for me to be as I am…because I am fighting a lost cause…in the recent years of confusion, I discovered that I learnt a lot about guitar playing about amplification and recording…hopefully when I grow older…the world always evolves and changes…maybe when we sign a non-protectionism pact among ASEAN countries…maybe one day I may be contributing to the success of Singapore bands…in a different way like being an engineer or owning a label…at this moment…suffice for me to maintain this expensive hobby and social function…

Discussion
To what extent was the Mat Rock phenomenon a social collective first with rock music as their calling card? What marked Burhan’s preferred direction was his love for rock music and then rock group dynamics. For those in it like the MacDonalds Kids and Far East kids, the Mat Rock had their own contested sites. *Kids were into the tea-dance things...I wasn’t into that because I was into the music...the tea-dance thing was also about getting girls and all that...this was in the mid-1980s...they were playing a bit of rock but mostly the sort of 80s sound...like Madonna...semi-disco...one at Queensway Shopping Centre and another at Amara Hotel...and if you were to look at factors leading to them...if you are a Malay growing up in the 1980s, the main youth culture to subscribe to is Mat Rock...Rock seems synonymous with Melayu...but now we have technology and with the internet people make a variety of choices...back in the 1980s, this tea-dances were the first process of diversifying the Malay tastes for different activities...although it wasn’t only for Malays, participants were mainly from the Malay community...plus all that Swing Singapore...that actually marked events which coincided with the decline of Mat Rock as a big youth culture and introduced the DIY thing in a big way...*

Given that until the advent of technology and prior to its devastating effect cultures were still being formed by physical proximity, Mat Rock culture would have engendered a unitary existence for musicians, motorcycle enthusiasts and the posers; who could altogether claim subscription to a community that was almost all Malay. There was a variation of participants from being entranced, to a nodding acquaintance with Mat Rock culture, who subscribed to the culture and everything in it despite the different factions. The impact of technology would likely to have precipitated musicians, fans and a group of people looking for something to happen, are identified with the Malay community and subscribe to something else.

Burhanuddin felt very strongly about the impact of traditional culture on Mat Rock culture: *Concurrent with Mat Rock culture...a slow evolution of Malay youth forming Dikir Barat groups...these Dikir Barat groups had first been formed as part of school groups...Malay LDDS but soon formed outside the school...eventually it became something that the Malay community and leaders subscribed to...this contributed towards eroding Mat Rock Culture. Also there was the DIY thing [Indie-scene] and Mat Rock culture was seen as something bad...people in the DIY scene [Indie-scene] told you Mat Rockers are lazy people, they are just into it for the glamour and the drugs...not articulate as we are...there was this sense at the time when I was*
younger when people who were Mat Rock were thought to subscribe to Rock...so they set out to do something and set themselves apart and that eroded the Mat Rock culture even more...even among the Mat Rockers, I remember even when I was in secondary school...a classmate who was into English rock songs actually told those of use who listened to Malay Rock songs...“you’re not cool”...you’re not heavy enough...you don’t listen to this...you listen to that kind of crap...I guess the seed was already in place...forces of dissension and rejection from within the Mat Rock community were actually stronger than the external forces acting upon it and demanding it to be changed or dissipating it...

I stuck to the music...Why? Through my journey as a musician, rock music gives me that sense of empowerment...empowerment of the underdogs...when you’re an underdog, you’re not the flavour of the month...it is sweeter to achieve it as an underdog...there are a lot of positive lyrics in the music...when I was a teenager...the music [was] one I subscribed to best...during my University days, I found a lot of lyrics in Machine Head, Sepultura and Slayer actually had a lot in common with [issues in] sociology...and if love songs are like love movies...these songs are like your news on TV...a documentary...there is an intellectual capacity in that kind of music... in such a band you write your own songs, your own lyrics...the way a metal/rock album is produced is different...the producer is usually the engineer...they don’t tell the band how to write the song...they are usually part of the band’s vision to achieve what the band’s vision is...there is a lot of intellectual content and process involved the music...now having the advantage of a university education makes this music far more worthwhile because its something valuable its worth researching and worth looking into...seeing this music in the context of other things...until now it’s the music...not the hanging out...its not the other things...

When the DIY guys saw us step out of the Mat Rock scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they said this kind of music could not be written in Malay...the Malay language didn’t have the capacity to be brutal as English [anyway] all the bands write [their songs in] English. I wanted to write metal songs in Malay. Budaya was the only Manifest song written in Malay...I proved to a lot of my peers that this can actually be written in Malay...although I have to admit this type of music is best expressed in English...
Discussion
One of the most striking details to emerge is the perception of deviation as deviation. Shirleen Nordin’s study of the Mat Rockers begins with the notion of Mat Rockers as a deviant social group, reinforcing the perception of deviation against the framework of conformity. The descriptions of social and musical behaviour conform almost inevitably towards a form of stereotyping; a group or sub-group seen to gather at the void decks of HDB housing blocks, strumming a seemingly tuneless song on an old guitar, or even a riff, or even doing nothing. Their appearance marked their distinctiveness; sporting long hair, unkempt looks and bedraggled in the tight jeans and T-shirts. Even the cigarettes they smoke (an Indonesian brand Gudang Garam) mark them out. Their choice of music was almost inevitably rock and heavy metal. In the light of this ‘unforgettable’ image, the Mat Rocker is construed as a negative thesis contrasted against other conformist citizens who advocate puritan moral value systems, appropriate work ethics and struggle to emerge victorious in the rat race and paper chase and eventually the wealth owned by a few.21

As in all postcolonial discourse, we are informed of the ways in which marginalia is not only identified but also categorised. Gayatri Spivak informs us of the consequences of explaining other practices. The possibility of explanation carries the presupposition of an explanable (even if not fully) universe and explaining (even if imperfect) subject. These presuppositions assure our being. Explaining, we exclude the possibility of the radically heterogeneous.22 Therefore, in terms of our explanation of a self...the choice of...labels to give myself a shape produces...a common cause....this cause is an espousal of and attention to marginality—a suspicion that what is at the centre often hides a repression.23 If for instance, Western art music practice is valorised as the centre, anything that does not satisfy the same criteria of value potentially marginalises this practice because of a unilateral imputing of a cultural benchmark. Spivak’s concerns, that "certain practices of...arts in the broadest sense are said to inhabit the private sector. But the assertion, that institutions of...art, as well as the criticism of art, belong to the public"24, applied to this context, raises the potential problem of privileging one group over another. By using terms of reference outside of a musical practice, but essentially found within this musical practice, judgments of value are brought to bear on musical practices. Howard Becker devotes an entire book to the sociology of deviance.25
None of these descriptions or even field studies approaches an understanding of “deviance” as an existence with its own logic and praxis. In this respect, Paul Willis’s work has provided quite startling ways of viewing and coming to terms with marginal or marginalised groups.

In one of his more well-known works Learning to Labour, a term he develops called penetrations to *identify the ways in which counter-school culture saw through the meritocracy and individualism in schooling, allowing and helping to form realistic lived assessments of the real collective future of generalised manual labour as it confronted such as “the lads”. Penetrations can be imagined as a means of a culture ‘thinking’ for its members.*

Here Willis uses his fieldwork to suggest that cultures are rich grounds for more detailed observations for further scholarship either in studies in musical practices. This is because *the participants in this culture engage in the practice sensuously, in the greater power and viability of their own practices and in a more secure, bodily and psychic sense of themselves in relation to their circumstances and conditions of existence. There is a powerful argument to be developed to explore the value of a practice being translated in cognitive terms. At the sensuous level, the practice of heavy metal and rock invites us to re-assess material/structural situations from the point of view of the viability of playing with different options.*

Willis’ own study of “the lads” indicated that it was not the fact that they resisted school or exhortations to become socially, culturally and economically relevant to the mainstream discourse but rather their very creative use of the very components of this mainstream culture to give it new meaning in their social settings and value systems. The very things that Noordin describes, the long hair, the Indonesian ‘kretek’ – Gudang Garam, the skin-tight jeans and arresting T-shirt designs helped in Willis’ argument to *make, project and believe in versions of their own worldliness and superiority. They penetrate the shells of fetishized commodities to find new social use values.*

Once these components of a culture are re-defined in their own term, there is a way in which deviance is reinterpreted as difference as Willis points out: *There are other routes to demonstrating epistemological groundings for difference from below; difference on your own terms, classified by you, not as a term deviant from the norm, but as the claiming of your own*
norm...opens up new avenues for meaning and activity showing practical grounds for autonomy and independence.275

What is made clear here is not the use of creative resources but the creative use of resources:

*Informal cultural practices are undertaken because of the pleasures and satisfactions they bring, including a fuller and more rounded sense of self, of “really being yourself” within your own knowable cultural world...finding better fits than the institutionally or ideologically offered ones...the immediate ‘own level’ success of cultural practices lies in...the relatedness, the energy, the excitement of a culture’s members as they find the most productive expressive relation to their conditions of existence, so finding individual and collective feelings of potency, subject senses of dignity and personhood, subjective feelings of authenticity.*28

The social patterns of behaviour with music operate at a variety of levels. The argument that noise in rock music contributes to distortion has an alternative reading for subscribers to Mat Rock culture – a way of *multiplying resonances.*29 However, there are multiple readings of rock music in site-specific settings which remind us to sensitise ourselves to the community in that contested site. For those who are unable to subscribe to this, the component parts and layers found in rock music act as ring-fences around the community, performing both centripetal and centrifugal forces depending on the levels of receptivity of apprehending the music in its totality. For the Mat Rock community, it may have been used to define a sense of collectivity. In a parallel instance, Philip Bohlman’s study of the role of chamber music in the lives of the Yekkes, German-speaking Jews in Israel, observes how the music, in this case absolute music, became as ethically binding:

*Viewed from a performative perspective, the absence of specific meaning within the text allows meaning to accrue only upon performance, thus empowering any group, even an ethnic community, to shape what it will from absolute music.*30

The argument that follows on from here is that once a connection has been made between the community and the music of choice, a meaning has been constructed and sustained at the sensuous level. There is clearly a tension here that draws in three social groups with different motivations, yet the musicians, motorcycle-groupies and ‘posers’ who hang out – are identified with the Mat Rock Culture. That these participants are almost always
members of the Malay community in Singapore fulfils that communal cohesiveness, despite the less-than-convincing coherence.

Given that many of the musicians subscribed to groups well known in the international circuit of heavy metal and rock, one would have expected a subscription, similar to Willis’ study of the biker community of selecting an authentic source for their agenda. For instance, mention of Deep Purple and Black Sabbath would have at the first instance suggested original members who turned their ensembles into icons. However, upon closer examination, many of the Mat Rockers refer to these groups in their subsequent phase – the second group of personnel who assumed places left behind by the founding members. What is curious here is a reshaping of form over content – it didn’t matter who comprised these two groups in the third or fourth phase – what was important was that it was a group still called Deep Purple and Black Sabbath.

In Karl Mannheim’s words:

“Each idea acquires a new meaning when it is applied to a new life situation...this social change of function, then, is ... also a change of meaning.”

Here it is not the words but the sounds that are the subject of this transformation. I would suggest that by listening to Deep Purple or Black Sabbath, changes in band personnel notwithstanding, musicians, motorcyclists or ‘passengers’, validated their affiliations to the Mat Rock culture. Bohlman again reminds us that as a result of a ‘mis-match’ between form and content:

A gap therefore forms between the content of the repertoire and style of performance situations. It is within the mutability allowed by style that differences in meaning and function of music arise, thereby transforming absolute music into a genre that can follow numerous historical paths...clearly this practice reflects different attitudes towards both the repertoire and the communities that lend the music its distinctive functions and form its different histories.

For the musicians, there was sensitivity to the music, albeit a sensous response, that made them feel connected to the music, then the Mat rock culture.
Similarly in Willis’s study of the bikers bears out that their opinions about music:
_We’re not crude, nor without differentiation… they’re feelings about music were so deeply rooted, and so much a part of their world that they didn’t find it necessary to justify them. Their favourite records were simply enshrined within the tradition._ \(^3\) For this group of motor-bike boys, _Music from the post rock n’ roll period was accorded value, in so far as it legitimately embodied and kept alive and gave a style to central contemporary cultural values._ \(^3\) Elsewhere it was the way in which a sensitivity to sound bordered on what Willis believes to be onomatopoeia. _There were frequent attempts to sing part of songs they particularly liked, or to simulate the sound of an instrument: particularly, for instance… noises of a guitar._ \(^3\)

To the charge that the Mat Rock community was a deviant Malay community, Willis explains what has been blindingly obvious as also in the case of the Bikers in his study:
_Early rock n’roll was seized upon by the young in the mid 1950s in America and England as their very own music… because it so clearly was not their parents’… rich in highly appropriate social meanings. This double fit of the music — its prior social inmuenment and its particular objective structure — the attachment to the music [explains] the linked expression of these things in movement, style, in physicality, in handling [one]self._ \(^3\)

Much of these preliminary findings are still initial investigations and currently border at best at the speculative level with the oral interview and related documentary evidence. However, my main point still centres around a view of heavy metal and rock musicians as deviant species of the human race in Singapore – a view which is flawed since the deviation is understood by the way deviation is viewed by mainstream discourse found on economic or ethical discourse that seeks to discredit such a community. Such a discourse has as its base ignorance, intolerance and moral panic and socio-cultural anxiety. There is much here that holds potential in future scholarship that can best be dealt with via fieldwork research and in-depth studies of these groups, how music fits into their lifestyles, their preferences, their value-systems, attitudes and how they see their music, as indeed other component parts of their lived experiences. If this is done successfully we will come to a much clearer understanding of the presence and practice of heavy metal and rock in Singapore on their terms.
Vedic Metal – Indian metal groups

Indian heavy metal groups fusing English and Sanskrit as well but identifying their sound as a uniquely Indian sounds, albeit familiar soundscapes in heavy-metal, have emerged as a new phenomenon in the 1990s. Among the Singaporean bands I interviewed, members of the most prominent of them, Rudra, are mostly in their late twenties, residing at the north side of Singapore. Rudra have been featured in Singapore Jam segment a few times on the now discontinued NAC-run Passion 99.5 FM. They emerged as a new phenomenon in the 1990s as hitherto unheard of Indian heavy metal groups. What makes them interesting is that they are heavy metal groups who subscribe to a sense of Indian-ness in their identity.

Such groups perform mostly at pubs and Tamil variety shows playing original compositions. Sometimes one or two covers, preferably old Tamil movie songs just to stir up the crowd. For rehearsals we try to meet up weeks before a live performance or recording to go through the songs. But other than that we don’t actually meet up very month. They usually rehearse at home mostly, sometimes in jamming studios. Most of their supporters are normally about 18 to 26 years old and from what they have seen comprise Tamil and some Malay listeners. Only a few members actually listened to Tamil movie songs while the rest did not wish to listen to them despite the fact that the group comprised all Tamils. We started about 6 years ago…we have always been interested in metal although traditional music does appeal we have utilised it in Rudra. I reckon traditional music defines the Hindu essence in us. It is about time the Indian community starts breaking away from the more widely listened to movie songs and makes stuff of their own…Originality is what sells and is appreciated.

This much younger group of heavy metal musicians reject models of ‘music’ long part of their sonic environment when they were growing up – South Indian film practice. Given their preference, Heavy metal, engenders an unfortunate association of anti-establishment philosophy and attitude; which requires a little more explanation to the suggestions of rejection. As Kathiresan, bassist in a metal group Rudra, recalls:

I grew up listening to Tamil soundtrack songs as my dad was a singer... was part of Febra [one of the well-known Musical ensembles in Singapore playing music of South Indian film] during its formative years too...during festivals live...Those songs are still etched in my mind. I still love TM Sounderajan's songs and Kannadhasan's philosophical lyrics. In Primary
school I jumped onto English music and my favourite then was Michael Jackson...in my late Secondary education I discovered rock music...in Tertiary education I discovered many difference expressions in rock music – from bluesy tunes to extreme Death Metal/Grindcore. But I not a metal fanatic as in a person who ONLY listens to metal. I do listen to Indian classical music [Carnatic], new age music and a little AR Rahman too.  

When asked about his preference for getting involved in the practice of heavy metal, he admits that it was in heavy metal that Kathiresan found his identity, rather than music of South Indian film, Kathi mused:

*What Rudra presents to the world is ethnic metal, although we prefer to call it Vedic Metal. We were all raised as Indian Hindus and that is our innate cultural (not just religious) identity...We have an ideology. I don't feel any tension being the way I am. I am perfectly fine as I am or at least that's how the way I feel right now.*

In a strange way, it is in heavy metal that have affirmed a creative endeavour in in Rudra as well as other metal groups like Aryans, Shatriya, Narasimha. Many of the band members respect creative work and have concentrated on writing their own material:

*I consider a band which writes their own material much better/superior than any cover band, even if the former may not be as proficient as the latter. A simple comparison would be the rock band Nirvana & Yngwie Malmsteen. Nirvana sold 100 times more than Malmsteen. Febra, Genova were also playing soundtrack covers. So they are no different from other cover bands. But their existence back then was kind of justified when I realize that at that time recorded media weren't that popular. Not all of them had TVs. The only way to listen to their favourite songs would be to watch Febra etc... But now things have changed. I just need to slip in a CD to listen to my favourite track 10 times a day. So their existence now is definitely not justified unless they start playing originals. Just take a look at the our local Vasanatham Central celebrities. They earn their fame by doing covers. I just can't believe that people become stars by imitating someone else. And worst of it all they take pride in it!! My questions are very simple: Why should I try to be someone else? Am I not good enough? Why can't I compose my own music? Actually I feel that among Singaporeans, we don't have the value for appreciating original local music. We are more concerned with 'Branding' than anything else. Like we have people who have notions that anything foreign is always better than local. This slavish mentality has stopped many from writing their own music because we lack listeners or a good consumer*
base. So the bands believe that they can please the crowd by playing familiar tunes rather than originals. My perspective of Indian local cover bands is that they are totally pathetic. They waste their time playing soundtrack hits or covers failing to utilize their innate talents. They...could have become great musicians or even legends. But they are just wasting their time away.  

Another group Narasimha comprises five musicians ranging from 17 to 30 playing guitars, bass and drums and percussion. For Narasimha, it was in experiencing heavy metal genres that gave them the inspiration to work in that performance mode but gained much greater confidence in creative work by coming into contact with Rudra:

To be frank, for an Indian in Singapore to start his own musical band or group is very rare...we are influenced largely by Indian movies and its soundtracks. Thus, in terms of musical entertainment, we depend on Indian movie-makers to give it to us. But, these Indian metal bands here are quite different, in the sense that they grew up listening to Indian film songs and at the same time listening to English heavy metal bands from Europe and America. However, these bands could only appeal to certain group of people, due to its music being of aggressive and intense nature. And because of this, it was very easy to spot individuals especially Indians who listen to heavy metal. And, this was how Narasimha was formed. As for myself, I grew up entirely listening to Tamil film songs. English songs were never appealing to me. And my class mate, Sree, who's one of the guitarists for Narasimha, listens to bands like Nirvana and Guns n’ Roses, which are considered of the rock genre. The breakpoint came when I bumped into this guy who is into heavy metal. We were like teaching in a part time basis in the same tuition centre. I got to listen Rudra...comprising of Indians, to officially release a full length album. For a person like me who had only listened to sweet, soothing melodies, the music in Rudra really fascinated me. Loud and the heavy distorted sound of the guitars mixed with the aggressive drum beats with the touch of the Indian melody did fascinated me. We started listening to heavy metal bands from Europe and America...We started going down to gigs and got to know people down there. And from there, we got to know other Indians who are also in this scene. Every one of us had different bands influences, but still united in that one genre, heavy metal. Well, the birth of heavy metal among Indians down here could be caused by similar experiences like this. In Narasimha, the vision is one which is the Indian culture...we incorporate the Indian philosophy in our music. We never sing about love, because it's already
common among the Indian film songs. What we want to give has to be different and has to have a meaningful message. Even in the music we compose, the Indian Carnatic or Hindustani style is inherent. It's like in our blood and it really turned out beautiful.\textsuperscript{41}

For another heavy metal group Shatriya:

\textit{Well most of us are from the north side of Singapore, one member is from Johor Bahru. Only two of my members actually listened to Tamil movie songs. The rest of us do not wish to listen to it. We are all Tamils...so culture wise we are the same. About 6 years ago...we got together and started looking for the right members to make music. We have always been interested in metal. I reckon traditional music defines the Hindu essence in us...it does appeal to me and it has been utilised in Rudra...I reckon it is about time the Indian community starts breaking away from the more widely listened to movie songs and make stuff of their own. Originalty is what sells and is appreciated.\textsuperscript{42}

Discussion

The presence of such a group or groups in Singapore does come across as a surprise. Many of these youth began in homes where the main discourse was music of South Indian film with notions of music that bore affiliation with Hinduism – music of the Carnatic tradition. From their interviews, it is evident that music of South Indian film is one they seem to have reacted most strongly – criticising it for its endless themes of love and love songs and formulaic strategies. What is not revealed is whether it is the formulaic strategies in the films that cause this reaction rather than the music itself. However, when they have performances at pubs, there is a tendency to play the ‘party’ line by adding songs from South Indian film; to please the crowd and persuade them to listen to more creative work.

The youth interviewed have a variety of educational backgrounds ranging from O and A levels to tertiary level diplomas. Many of them have full-time jobs and heavy metal is a ‘side-line’ which seems, according to their responses, sustains them in ways their full-time jobs do not. Evidently, it is the group Rudra that has become for the other groups, a role model. Musicians interviewed did not possess certified skills in instrumental facility – like ABRSM qualifications or local music school certification in pop and jazz studies.
In this respect, oral and aural transmission has remained the principle mode of learning and teaching among band members. Interviewees came across as articulate and familiar with the Euro-American heavy metal and rock tradition and in recent years a growing attraction towards heavy metal from Scandinavian countries. It is their emphasis on creative endeavour in music which is significant. Perhaps further scholarship will help shed more light on this little known practice.
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Musical practice of Hip-Hop

With reference to the 1990s, it is almost surprising that rap in hip-hop is absent in local narrative in Singapore. Lee Tong Soon does not record its existence in his overview of musics in Singapore while Craig Lockard cites 4U2C and KRU as the Malaysian representatives, while suggesting that in Singapore, it is dominated by material in English or Singlish. Accordingly, Lockard suggests that the rap lyrics are written largely tongue in cheek and tend to take a dig at Singaporean life and living. MC Siva Choy and the Kopi Kat Klan were identified as the two in the rapping community in the 1990s in Singapore. One presumes the presence via CD or sound recording. Herein lies an unusual situation much akin to Xinyao practitioners. Briefly, Xinyao practitioners found out about Taiwan college songs before they discovered a little later the shiyue was already in practice locally.

The parallel here is the way in which Sheikh Haikel and Ashidiq emerged on Asia Bagus as Construction Sight, taking the limelight as arguably the first local rappers in Singapore. According to Music and Movement, Haikel’s agents, Haikel first caught the media’s eye as a singer for Construction Sight, a duo group which went on to win the 1991 Grand Championship in Asia Bagus! A regional talent show...Haikel has performed in several large-scale events such as representing Singapore in the Asian music Festival in Tokyo (1997), Asia Bagus Championship Best of the Best in Tokyo (1997) and Earth Fest (1997). Haikel’s Witulah recently hit the No.1 spot on Malaysian charts.

Their entry into rap is a little less mysterious. In an interview with Paul Zach, Haikel declared, Rap has always been my No.1 thing...my mother intro-ed me to it way back when I was in Primary 3 at St. Stephen’s Primary School. Sheikh Haikel remembers how his mother, Sharifa, accidently bought a Run DMC recording thinking it was Gladys Knight and the Pips without Gladys. Haikel didn’t need much encouragement as he was by that time a break-dance enthusiast and supporter. Run DMC gave him two things it seems, the first was the ability to re-create rap with very little effort and with admirable proficiency. Secondly, and more importantly, it gave him what he wanted in identifying with a personal voice through sound:

I like the ideology of having music and being able to talk over the music and get the message across...because when I listened to them speaking about “My Adidas”...These artists are singing their song and doing their thing...getting their message across and I liked it this way...but what really slapped me in the face was Beat Street Afrika Bambatta performed in that one....the last song...the story of Beat Street was about one of the best graffiti artists who died.....and Beat Street was one of the first raps I memorised...

Beat Street, the king of the Beat Listen
Rockin that beat from across the Street uh huh
Broken Street is a lesson too because uh huh
They can’t let the streets beat you
(this was rapped during the interview)
They had a count (rhythmic pulse) to it...that was the first rap I memorised and I felt...this is ME...all my cousins were saying to me...how do you do that? I was taken aback...you can’t do this? Just listen and you’ll be able to...

Much of the foundations led the way assuredly to the formation of Construction Sight with Ashidiq Ghazali.7 The programme Asia Bagus was probably the most important event in Haikel’s pathway. The mother of one of their Far East friends worked as a translator on Asia Bagus. Haikel was at the SBC reception waiting to meet Najib Ali when they were spotted by K. Hosugi from Pony Canyon Records. Hosugi knew the friend’s mother and wanted to know if Haikel could rap and sing and when it was discovered he could, the reception [area at SBC] was [where] my audition [happened]...he asked me to rap and I rapped Tequila...he asked me to sing and I sang End of the Road by Boyz to Men...and he said “come down to Pony Canyon”...Haikel wanted Ashidiq in on the act and so auditioned further when they met K. Hosugi. They were assured of a recording contract win or lose but they had to join Asia Bagus. Haikel related how they won the first round and second place in the second round and they were still going to Japan.....the winning song for round one was Tequila, and the winning song for the second round was Construction Sight: Criss Cross—Jump:

After we won the second round, we appeared on Live on Five hosted by Leslie Pillay. What is the name of your group? Suddenly we remembered one of our bus rides back home from Our Lady of Lourdes [school]...if we ever became famous what we would we call ourselves? We were passing through Pasir Ris, which at the time was a construction site and they decided to call themselves Construction Sight...construction as in to build, sight as in to see us go up...that’s how we got our name...after the second round...we did a lot of shows...appeared in commercials...we were hot...why...because there was nobody else in Singapore...when we were doing shows or performances back then we were paid $1000 per song...today, I get $300 to do a song...[then] they enjoyed seeing two young boys perform...today there is no money in this scene because we are actually performing to people who enjoy the music...kids who haven’t got money to buy your album...do you know that [back then] Ashidiq and I got paid $30 000 each to do commercials...for a two day shoot? The money was there and there was nobody else...not much else in Asia...there was an upcoming group in Korea who called themselves Soh Tay G and Boys...and we performed with them in Hara Juku...Me and Ashidiq went to Japan like 11-13 times and we were young punks man...and then came about a group from Malaysia called 4U2C...and then KRU and then NIKU. Every time I do Asia Bagus...Too Phat introduce me by saying hip-hop happened because of him [Haikel]...Construction Sight...when we were rapping they were still in school.... The duo released seven singles having won the 1991 Asia Bagus! Grand Championship. We were the only ones doing rap in Asia at that time.9
If Pony Canyon were responsible for the recording contract, why was there nothing available by Construction Sight? *Construction Sight never released anything in Singapore...I know we had 7 singles...it was only released in Japan....why...because in those days...Ashidiq and I had the word *fuck* in the songs...and those couldn't be sold in Singapore.*

Ashidiq quit to further his studies at Temasek Polytechnic and found himself later as an art director at Oglivy & Mather. More recently, Ashidiq has appeared on Lush 99.5 FM performing under a group known as *Shaolin Satellite*. Haikel went on into acting and released *For Sure*, with the hit single *Witulah*, which was at no.5 on the Perfect 10 Charts in 2002. *For Sure* was an album containing seven Songs in English but also contains *Jangan Tinggalkan Daku* which is based on a P.Ramlee Classic. If rap is very much about the present and future, what was the reason for the choice of P. Ramlee?

*I love P. Ramlee, and it came from a movie that I love very much...Ibu Mertua ku...I loved the story so much, and I had a chance to do a song so I chose to do a Malay song...and I told my producer to give it new beats but everything else in it was original...and they only charged me 50 cents for the rights to use the song...I did it because I just wanted to make myself happy...some of the Mak Ciks love it when they tune in to the Malay station...on RIA...I get comments like “Anak, Terima Kasih Nak...Mak Cik ingat...Mak Cik dulu muda muda....”* (Thank you child, Auntie remembers/reminiscences about the time when she was much younger)

Two other prominent groups have since emerged. Urban Xchange had in 2001 the distinction of being the only Singapore band to be signed by Universal, the world's largest music label. Urban Xchange comprises Terence Leong, who writes, produces and raps, guitarist and band leader Syed Munir Alsagoff, 27, deejay Firdaus Bahri, 21, and singers Trisno Ishak, 22, Vanessa Fernandez, 19, Humaa Rathor, 24, Michaela Therese, 20, and female rapper Kimberly Olsen, 18. The members are not full-time with the band, and are either studying or working. The group's climb to fame has been quick. It was put together by Leong in one day for an anonymous audition. This turned out to be an audition to find the face of Coca Cola's *Life Tastes Good* advertising campaign in Singapore. Urban Xchange succeeded and even before the commercial was aired, the group was signed by Universal Music Singapore. Its first album, *How Did We Get Here?*, was released last month and won praise from listeners and critics. One of the songs, *I Wanna Be Just Like Jackie Chan*, was on the soundtrack of Chan's *Rush Hour 2* while an MTV accompanied their next single, *Stupid*. They were also featured in America's *Billboard* Magazine in its August special issue on Asian music. More recently, three boys who call themselves Triple Noize and one of their hits was a rap in Malay, *Mak Minah*. Triple Noize at this point were one of the groups identified with the Speak Good English Movement alongside Dick Lee.
Discussion
In coming to terms with rap, Frith suggests its consideration as a song in the form of a narration with a narrative strategy:

*The song is an argument, drawing on rap’s conventional use as a form of conversation – between performer and media. And this is the context in which power is defined as a way with words. Rap as a necessarily mass mediated form, a commodity, is in effect releasing all the forces of contemporary communications technology onto language, onto the clichés of corporate and political power (appropriated directly, via sampling), onto the vitality of the slang and fragmented, reactive, ugly, utopian language of the streets...significant less for its logical unfolding than for its investment of keywords with force...at once a threat and a promise, according to who’s listening...the most significant political effect of a pop song is...on how people speak. And this becomes a particularly interesting (and complex) effect in a rap, which foregrouns the problematic relationship between sung and spoken language...rhythm and rhyme are material ways of organising and shaping feeling and desire; they offer listeners new ways of performing (and thus changing) everyday life.*  

Simon Frith’s discussions of songs as texts inform us of the ways:

* Songs can be used to explore the relationships of different languages – different ways of speaking – and in pop terms this has often meant challenging linguistic hierarchies, subverting the way words are used to dominate.*  

Roland Barthes suggestion of song texts as being able to provide a framework for permissive language behaviour...is now seen by Frith as a crucial component of rap, a song form which is word rich in its obsession with the empowering and disempowering effects of language.*

In suggesting this, Frith quotes Henri Lefebvre:

*Language endows a thing with value, but in the process it devalues itself. Simultaneously it makes everyday life, is everyday life, eludes it, disguises and conceals it, hiding it behind the ornaments of rhetoric and make-believe, so that, in the course of everyday life, language and linguistic relations become denials of everyday life.*

Frith believes that rap exemplifies a musical use of spoken language rather than being a lyrical form, tracing its origins to:

*Long established rituals of insult in which language is subjected to rules of rhyme and meter, is treated with the skill with words that is a necessary aspect of oral culture...If, in rap, rhythm is more significant than harmony and melody, it is rhythm dependent on language, on the ways words rhyme and syllables count.*

In this context of insults becoming more elaborately rhymed, more metaphorically surreal, more personalised, Ulf Hannerz notes:

*Words were increasingly chosen...for their sound (for their sound in a particular voice, according to a specific rhythm of contempt) rather than for their meaning.*
Rather than take insult rituals through anthropological discourse, Frith believes its most obvious function, and more pragmatic point, was to develop: 

Participants’ verbal skills – skills not just in verbal invention or virtuosity, but also in what one might call verbal discipline, the ability to follow rules of rhyme and meter...related to other verbal skills that are part of African-American linguistic culture...  

There are two levels to contend with in coming to terms with the musical practice of rap. The first is to apprehend strategies of highly stylised sound; onomatopoeia, spoken and sounded rhythms, rhymes, pitch modulations, vocal-timbral characteristics in spoken language, either emulated from African-American ways of speaking or adaptations. Added to the fact that this is fundamental an aural and oral experience reliant on creative and instrumentally facile strategies of virtuosity, I suggest the skill of rapping is a skill in improvisation. In consideration of mental and performance preparation, I refer to improvisation in much the same way as Paul Berliner does reworking precomposed material and designs in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to every creation as opposed to “making something out of nothing” as is so often a definition in English dictionaries. 

The second is to understand rap as a linguistic source of performance convention – or Roger D.Abrahams’s preferred term, speaking behaviour in African-American or African-Carribean communities, in contradistinction to European and Euro-American cultures, where: 

There is not a clear distinction between “dramatic-type performance” and “other types of interactional behaviour”. Rather workday talk and conversation are constantly framed as performance, as the language used becomes formalised...as the street itself becomes the site of a “constant self-dramatisation”, “an entertainment of each by the other”. 

An important corollary of this is the levels of verbal as well as bodily engagement in such performance: 

To stylise is to call attention to formal and formulaic features of both what one says and how in what situation one is saying it... to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak it is not only knowing who is speaking but acknowledging who is listening. 

Abrahams further notes: 

Black slang systematically describes performance as a collective process – “doing your own thing” means taking your own part in a group drama; to “dig it” means not to understand, to get beneath, but to get involved, to get into. And it is this everyday experience of vernacular performance which has made African-American culture so important as a source of popular performing expertise, of popular performing style.
The third is to take cognisance of rap’s propensity, in Adam Krims’s argument of the deep perversity of the economic process I was describing, by which poverty itself becomes a source of surplus value (specifically, relative surplus value) for a certain commodity, namely rap music.  

Krims’ argument centres around issues of rap and it authentic representation in circumstances of poverty but he argues that this is precisely what is amplified and emphasised in music, particularly hip-hop videos. Therefore:

*It is this deployment of poverty as a use value for the production of new capital – especially though not only, record company profits, which are in turn profits of large entertainment conglomerates – that bring us to the new mutation of surplus value…commodity fetish.*

Going back to musical techniques, sampling techniques, performance techniques, where Krims observes an imbrication *in a dense combination of musical layers which pile up, defying aural representability for musically socialised Western listeners…what I call hip-hop sublime.* Krims goes on further to discuss the implications of such layers in the music:

*its association with “reality rap” and descriptions of ghetto life suggests that the failure of representation itself becomes a figure in inner-city life...the music projects the ghetto not merely as an uncomfortable or dynamic place...it is projected as radically unrepresentable in itself, defeating both conceptual boundaries and unifying descriptions.*

Krims admits though that these descriptions of musical layers with varying levels of consonance and dissonance may be not be totally representative of other genres of rap. However, in pointing towards a ‘particular’ outcome of rapping strategies in hip-hop called ghetto rap or reality rap, Krims points us to the notion that it is significant that its practice is:

In some respects, subsumed by a market economy that values exactly this representation of ghetto life...which...brings us back to the notion of commodity fetish, which according to Marx, both results from and reinforces the more general tendency in capitalist societies to mystify social origins. The marketing of hip-hop paraphernalia is an obvious example of commodified authenticity...projecting “authentic” ghetto “essences”.

There are two consequences for Krims debate. The first, as we know, is the auxiliary equipment that comes with ghetto essence- clothing lines, accessories, etc.. But what Krims observes is also evident in the music:

*Rap fans debate, as do rap artists, what sounds and musical styles are ‘real’ and ‘represent’...suggesting that the musical styles themselves are commodified, in the properly Marxian sense of the word: the ‘layering’ procedures and the construction of the ‘beat’ are themselves considered to embody social conditions...mystifying dynamics of the commodity fetish.*
What lessons bode for us in local practice? First, the notion of poverty apropos the “ghetto essence” is not easily translatable into a Singaporean experience. The notion of “ghetto essence” as a state of being described as disenfranchisement, disengagement and failure of representation amidst urban devastation of a community is only viable as a metaphor. Construction Sight, Urban X’change, Triple Noize, among the many, are at best counter-examples of a ‘ghetto-essence’. The second point, related closely to the sentiments or angst in the face of disenfranchisement, which would be the sounds evident or easily identifiable with a person with “ghetto-essence”: in the lyrics, the sounds, the timbres, textures, the levels of consonance and dissonance, the emotional sublimation through the music, the authenticity of the ghetto-experience, the ‘sincerity’ of the rap and rapper in the delivery, the levels of competence in verbal invention, virtuosity in the rapper’s delivery. All of these factors emerge as a composite of these complexes in the rap track. The research done thus far has not come across a hip-hop group in Singapore rapping with the same angst levels as a gangsta rap group from the African-American community in urban inner-city USA. Socially, this does not explain the growing interest in rap as musical practice here in Singapore. Construction Sight were discovered on Asia Bagus, a Japanese programme with a pan-Asian agenda. Urban X’change came together through an advertisement for Coca Cola, while Triple Noize’s latest claim to fame was to be representatives of the “Speak Good English Movement” in 2005, alongside local superstar Dick Lee; a highly ironic situation considering that rappers might not expend too much energy worrying about grammatical construction or proper use of English whose songs while Dick Lee’s claim to fame, through an earlier Japanese curatorial pan-Asian agenda – Dick Lee is to date the most successful Singaporean musician in Japan – was hugely mediated by the use of Singlish through the well-oiled strategies of diatonic and homophonic musical styles of Western popular culture.

Perhaps where it really counts in Singapore is its notion on the economic front. Karl Marx defined commodity fetish as the mistaking of an object for a social relation, or vice versa. Krims explains the process:

*The commodified image of the ghetto forms a libidinal object...leads...to a surplus value generated from the commodification of a lack of value...the music industry has found a way to refold some of the most abject results of world economic production, through a direct transformation...to multibillion-dollar wealth...this refolding...that constitutes hip-hop’s own mutation in the workings of surplus value...without...materially changing the living conditions at either end.*

Krims wry note does not escape notice:

*The ghetto produces a new use value...a safe, portable image for pleasurable consumption. Through representation, profit is produced that exceeds the value of the crumbling material structures and infrastructures and of course, the congealed value of the workers’ labours, be they rappers, DJs, sound technicians, or record company executives.*

103
This economic potential for rap during a period where good practitioners were a rarity, helped shape Haikel’s own pathway. The fact that Urban X’change were signed on by Universal Music even before the Coca Cola advertisement was aired. Perhaps what emerges from Krims discussion provides the clues: Consumers of rap music (a plurality of whom are white and middle class) are able to enjoy a closely controlled experience of social danger: the oft-remarked desire to consume the exotic may here be mixed with the enjoyment of violence so prevalent in American popular culture.  

It would be too simple an explanation to suggest that economic motivation in the Singaporean context was likely to create or construct a hip-hop community or create rappers. In the case of K. Hosugi and Universal Music, it is very likely that they were keen to promote what they could see as economic potential, practitioners of hip-hop culture and rappers who were not African-American or not unfortunate victims in ghetto-centricity. It would have to take far more scholarship to pursue this line of reasoning but for now, justifications were likely to come from the practitioners themselves.

Haikel’s own pathway into rapping was fuelled by Afrika Bambaata. With Run DMC, he enjoyed the consumption of rap as much as he enjoyed learning how to rap by listening to recorded material and performing raps; on his own terms. Much of Construction Sight’s initial journey indicated modes of teaching and learning via oral transmission. Memorising the rap was only part of the cultural negotiation. With Construction Sight, as he himself admits, the use of expletives were part of a process he was to eventually supplant with a performance style more personal.

Ghetto rap, reality rap, gangsta rap are familiar soundscapes which reverberations of anxiety in parents, whose children consume the music with the same fetish as the recording industry who see profitability disproportionately beneficial in relation to the investment. Consumption of utopia or exotica, notwithstanding, brings with it certain hazards: The hip-hop [scene] sounds like shoot you, kill you, lets sleep with that bitch culture... 

For Haikel at the outermost layer, one is unable to deny access to the violence and sex and drugs. However, beneath these immediate layers, there are elements of sound where if one listens long and hard enough, discovers techniques, musical styles and methods. This was what Haikel found what he was looking when he was attracted to rap, especially with the track Beat Street which he recalled so vividly: It [the Beat Street rap] had a count (rhythmic pulse) to it...that was the first rap I memorised and I felt...this is Me!
Rap, through Run DMC, gave him two things it seems, the first was the ability to re-create rap with very little effort and with admirable proficiency. Secondly, and more importantly, it gave him what he wanted in identifying with a personal voice through sound:

*I like the ideology of having music and being able to talk over the music and get the message across.*

This description puts into sharp focus the nature of personal adaptation and appropriation. Almost paradoxically, music opens up human experience to the potentials and potentialities of life but does not necessarily prescribe, proscribe or even describe them. This point is made when practitioners reveal their attraction for the *secondary process of music* of protest-songs as the *primary* motivation for appropriating musical structures to suit their literary texts.

Therefore in his practice, there was a process in selecting, at the most fundamental level, a method to use to serve his ends. *You know when my single Witulah came out, people were saying now there is American rapper out there who can realise our slang and understand and is using lah in his rap...then I tell them its me [the ‘American’ rapper]...and they said fantastic...they called the radio stations [presumably to request for the song] and that’s how it became Number One...my album talks about me, how happy I am...this is my wife...who says you can’t be in love with two women, I have a daughter...two girls in my life...there is another way of people spreading their songs...spreading what I have to say...who want to know more about my family...the roots I’m in or not...Its just a method...its what he is going through, he would like to rap about that...let him be...I live in Singapore.*

Rap as a practice among Singaporean artists have capitalised on its potential for ‘getting the message across’. One has only to gauge the success of the SAR-vivor rap when Singapore was hit by the SARS virus in 2003. The rap was performed by Gurmit Singh aka Phua Chu Kang, which was released on national television broadcast during the traumatic outbreak; seeking out the most effective method of reaching as wide as possible an audience to exhort them towards social responsibility. What was also significant was the synergistic combination of rap and Singlish, itself aphoristic and enigmatic and frowned upon, in its widespread popularity and consumption. As with the range of social forces and processes prevalent in local and global cultures, local hip-hop retains consonance with syncretic processes in contemporary cultures which use music albeit differently.

While at the international front, there has been a decided focus on the textual and socio-political implication of text in the most sought after fashions in *rap* in “telling it as it is” or the “consumption of utopia” added to its “fetishisation”, especially by those marketing it, local practitioners have become attracted to the sonic dimensions as well as performative dimensions, vis-a-vis the idiosyncratic dance movements here to express themselves. Is the Singaporean version practice of rap likely to reach international levels as entrepot trade? Only time will tell.
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25 Abrahams, Roger, D. Talking Black, Rowley, Massachusetts, Newbury House, 1976, Figure 1, p.46, in a general discussion and argument, pp.5-89, in Frith, op.cit., pp.209-210.


29 Ibid., pp.66-67.

30 Ibid., pp.68.

31 Ibid., pp. 68-69.

32 Ibid., pp.69-70.

33 Ibid., p.70

34 Ibid., p.67.


36 Ibid., p.67.

37 Interview with Sheikh Haikel, 22 June 2004.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.


41 Interview with Sheikh Haikel, 22 June 2004.
In 1827, in an account of the celebration of King George IV's birthday in the April 26th issue of the *Singapore Chronicle* held by the Resident of Singapore, at that time, Robert Fullerton, we are offered a description of the event where we come across an interesting excerpt:

*On the 23rd the Hon: the Resident gave an entertainment in celebration of the anniversary of His Majesty's birth, unequalled perhaps in the annals of Singapore festivity. As night approached, the Government Hill was lighted up with innumerable lamps...spread mats in a square of considerable extent, surrounded by seats which received the visitors as they arrived whilst the area was occupied by a groupe of *Javanese musicians and dancers*. The music of these performances was, to our ear at least, not unpleasing, but the dancing of the Javanese, if this could be considered a fair specimen of it, has little to recommend it....the sex of these professors formed matter of considerable speculation but whichever it may have been formed they formed a curious and characteristic groupe which occupied the attention of the company.*

In a court in Singapore between 5th and 23rd March 1898, a Captain Crauford instituted a suit against a Mr. Wee Soon Chew under Section 290 of the Penal Code. The evidence he proposed to call would show that for the last few months defendant had been holding what was called a *Chinese wayang*, the loud beating of drums, and gongs or other metal instruments, and this had gone on almost every night until the summons was taken out. Further evidence in the proceedings would reveal that Captain Crauford liked music and did not object to the pianos that were played in the houses near. Corroborative evidence said the noise which had been going on for four months could be described as a continuous repetition of "**Kling-klong tan ching clok**" and so on. The Singapore Free Press this records that this description was accompanied by laughter although it does not mention the persons who laughed.

Eventually, it was discovered that the alleged noise and descriptions of “Chinese wayang” turned out to be the sounds of the *gamelang* [sic] by a band of *Javanese musicians*. Wee Soon Chew, the “Towkay Bali” liked it. In fact, when he felt sad, he had the music played. In his view, the big gong was essential to the music. Mahomet Yahya, President of the Malay Club, called upon as a witness against Towkay Bali, who had heard the noise personally said he did not like it. He also said that this music was made occasionally in the Club, but they made more noise as they had a big drum. Interestingly, Mahomet Yahya did not complain about the Towkay’s music. The Magistrate, in eventually dismissing the complaint, said he had to determine whether this was a public nuisance but in his judgment found the evidence so conflicting that he was not prepared to say it was so.
Much of the description in the present context is drawn from Angela Lai’s work on the practice of gamelan, in this case predominantly Javanese.\(^3\) This form of music-making is now regaining popularity in Singapore through the activities of the Pachitan Gamelan at the Kampong Kembangan Community Club. Another gamelan exists at the LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts. Both are of the Javanese variety but the practice involves a balance between traditional repertoire and locally devised or composed ones. A substantial number of the older Malay community, who are of Javanese origin, recall active music-making by the gamelan in Singapore with events like wayang kulit (shadow puppet show), kuda kepang (horse dance), traditional dances and hikayat (folk-story narration). The establishment of the Pachitan Gamelan in 1990 helped to fuel this nostalgia, while significantly re-placing the gamelan in Singapore. A group of Javanese Singaporeans like Pak Nasan and Pak Ali Jafar have initiated the developing of skills for an ensemble, while the organisational infrastructure of the running of the ensemble has been facilitated by the Kampong Kembangan Community Club. There are at least four groups:

1. Kampong Kembangan Community Club Pachitan Gamelan Orchestra,
2. The Peoples Association Malay Orchestra,
3. Krida Taruna Cultural Troupe and
5. LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts

The first two specialise in gamelan music-making while the other two also put up traditional Malay dances. Three of the four groups do not own a complete set. In any case, none of the four possess the full ideal set for the Central Javanese court. The set the Kampong Kembangan Community Club own cost S$35 000. Most of the money for the set is raised through sponsorship while the Singapore Kemuning Society is only capable of raising funds through performance revenues. The other reason is the lack of player facility in the other instruments. One group possesses the complete set but rebab, celempong, gender and slenthem were left untouched because there was no one with the skills to play them. The Singapore Kemuning Society possesses the kulintang, similar to the gambang except the kulintang has two sets of keys (like a harpsichord); a practice incorporating these instruments found in the Minahassa region of North Sulawesi. The voice is an essential part of Central Javanese gamelan but it is not practised in the Singapore context. There is a perception of pesinden as “old ladies with nothing but high, screeching voices and a big harido.”\(^4\) Participants in the Singapore context who voiced such perceptions were in their 20s and 30s while the much older participants lamented their absence of sindhenan (female singing). The Kampung Kembangan group
however incorporate the male singing (gerongan) while playing traditional Javanese music.

The Kampung Kembangan and Krida Cultural Troupe are tuned and practise the slendro equal-spaced 5-note system /pelog scale while the PA Malay Orchestra and Singapore Kemuning Society use the diatonic scale and their sets were custom-made in Bandung. The PA Malay Orchestra has experimented with various combinations of instruments.

Treatment of the instruments as gong ageng is the same; the instruments are regarded as sacred. However, the Javanese mode of sacred respect involves flowers and incense each Thursday night and bestowing a name. The Kampung Kembangan group does this one Thursday a month. The other groups make the offerings either before performance or on Prophet Mohammed’s birthday.

Repertoire of gamelan music in Java consists of traditional classical pieces and new music for gamelan. The latter types have been created in the last four decades. Sutton (1993:47) refers to three categories; traditional; new creations, and; kontemporari/experimental. In the Singaporean context, traditional pieces are played but the contemporary repertoire include traditional Malay songs (Lenggang Kangkong, Dayong Sampan, Tequila and even (xiao ren wu de xin sheng) which have been transcribed onto the slendro or diatonic scale of the gamelan.

In performances in Singapore, gamelan supports kuda kepang but also a number of secular modern day rituals, which are devoid of the sacredness held in Java. There is no issue raised over the participation of females playing instruments other than the gender; an instrument reserved for Javanese gamelan if ever a female was involved besides singing. Additionally, Uyon-uyon are sponsored by either an individuals for entertainment or rituals. There is no concert tradition. In Singapore, the Kampong Kembangan Pachitan Gamelan Orchestra performed to a ticket-paying audience at the PA Auditorium in 1992. Having said that, there was a recorded occasion of the Krida Taruna Cultural Troupe performing during a Malay wedding at the void deck of a flat in Clementi—beginning at 7.30 and ending by 10pm when the guests had left. It was observed that the same music was played continuously. Such a performance for half a day would cost $350 while performances for a full day would cost $600.

According to Angela Lai⁵ most of the respondents indicated no desire to merely perform traditional Central Javanese gamelan but seemed content to adapt some aspects of the
Javanese tradition and saw fit to attempt to infuse traditional Malay and even Chinese folk tunes in their practice. While I hesitate to refer to this form of activity as Angela Lai does to develop a style that is distinctively Singaporean, I would suggest that the efforts to fuse other traditions are possibly efforts of accessibility to an audience that may be less informed of the intricacies and mannered conduct of the practice but are entertained by a sense of familiarity or enamoured of the skill of fusing in practice aspects of different traditions.

Such values seem to bear consonance with the objective of the Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts 1989:15, which states that:

*Singapore has a multi-cultural legacy drawn from the rich traditions of its immigrant peoples. The traditional art-forms are still alive in varying degrees. This collective heritage has always been treasured. Our Government’s policy has emphasised widespread interest an excellence in the pursuit of the arts in our multi-cultural society. It has also encouraged the appreciation of one community’s culture by another.*

The same Report maps out various strategies and recommendations for the realisation of a culturally vibrant society by 1999, including improving cultural facilities, increasing accessibility of arts in the community, and greater assistance to cultural groups. Which makes it all the more curious that gamelan practice has gained in popularity elsewhere around the world but seems not to have gained much of a foothold. Although the gamelan tradition practised in Singapore bears much resemblance to the Central Javanese Court tradition, one is not a clone of the other neither does it lay claim to mimic or emulate the former practice. Certain characteristics of the practice are held common; performers remove their shoes, refrain from stepping over the instruments, treat the instruments with care and respect and musical retained certain musical structures such as using the gongan and certain playing techniques. In terms of the repertoire, respondents in the practice indicate a preference for transcriptions of popular English and Chinese songs. It also helps when the diatonic system of tuning makes such cross-cultural attempts more amenable. The gamelan groups in Singapore are at least influenced by commercial ventures such as private functions, opening ceremonies, exhibitions, weddings and public festivals. Respondents seem to treat gamelan music-making as a source of relaxation rather than a source of community development.

By this point in time, quite a few more Gamelan ensembles have already been initiated; one at the National University of Singapore and another at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and this does not include a few more schools which may have invested in this form of musical activity. Many questions still persist. If the practice of the Javanese musicians and dancers in 1827 correspond to the Javanese gamelan tradition, at which point was the dance superseded by the music? Moreover, there is a considerable gap, narratively speaking, in the practice of the Javanese gamelan between 1898 and the recent present. Was there ever a fading out of the practice or was it ‘hidden’ from
discourse until more recent studies? Finally, the present context brings to bear the collision and convergences of tradition as evolving and tradition as repository of human conditions of their ‘being in time’. Perhaps this is where scholarship may be most helpful in beginning to address these questions and problems.
REFERENCES

1 Singapore Chronicle Issue 80, April 26 1827.

2 Music Hath Charms, Singapore Free Press, 5 through 23 March 1898.


5 Ibid., p.51.
Musical practice of Jazz in Singapore

It is curious that in the entry on Singapore, jazz is mentioned only once and appears in the column on Malay community, with particular reference to the repertory of the Singapore Malay Orchestra which reportedly includes genres from jazz to dondang sayang…  

Definitions of Jazz
We are told of the word jazz appearing in the San Francisco Times newspapers of 1913 in the United States. The appearance of the word by no means announces its birth although in some cases such an appearance presages or preempts association with a number of previously held practices or narrows the practice by defining it in word. For example, it is recorded that American brass bands played a pivotal role in the development of jazz…the brass bands of New Orleans gave jazz its instrumentation and also lent musical techniques and repertoire to this uniquely American musical idiom… a 1917 advertising poster suggested that a jazz band was defined simply as “a brass band gone crazy”.  

Closer to home, in the early 1970s, I watched a half-hour special on RTS featuring a celebrated African American organist who was in town doing a special concert. Sharing the stage with him during that programme was a select TV panel audience of no more than eight. Towards the end of the programme, the organist asked if any panelists had requests. One panel member asked for a jazz number. The organist asked if he had any one piece in particular. The panelist requested for “When the Saints go marching in”. The organist quite diplomatically told him that whatever its arrangement, “When the Saints go marching in” was not a jazz number.

Appearances in Chronology
From our explorations, the word jazz was probably prefaced in Singapore by dance bands which featured quite strongly in the UK. It would also be difficult to deny that these dance bands had their origins in brass bands. Dave Russell’s chapter on the Band movement in the UK from the late 19th to the 20th century informs us of the band’s varied life which fell into four activities:

1. Playing for dancing
2. Public ceremonies
3. Concert work and
4. Contesting

Although the dance band function was likely the least important of the four, it may have eventually proved more significant than previously realised. Dancing in a variety of local spaces in the UK was more a form of entertainment for working-class youth from at least 1860 onwards. Some of their contributions were unintentional; listeners danced to whatever suitable music bands had to offer. By the 1890s public dancing had lost some of its stigma and brass-as-dance-bands became common attractions at pleasure gardens, fetes and a variety of other attractions, including public parks in some areas. Before long, some of these developments would likely have had their impact at the highest possible social level. We learn something of this ‘infiltration’, for instance in an article in the Straits Times 1930:  

1500 invitations have been sent out by Sir Cecil and Lady Clementi for the dance to be held on 3 June in honour of His Majesty’s birthday...the Band of the 2nd Welsh Regiment and Monia Litter’s orchestra from Raffles Hotel will be present. The first dance will be at 9.45pm
after which selections will be played by the regimental band. The second dance will be at 10.20pm. The subsequent items of the evening’s entertainment have been arranged with alternate dance music and selections by the regiment band until 12.40.  

The presence of Monia Litter and his orchestra need an introduction. Raffles Hotel advertised this group as being recognised as the best and most popular dance band east of the Suez.

Elsewhere there is found an advertisement on Thursday June 5th:
The management of the New World Cabaret (Jalan Besar) presented the first fancy dress ball on Monday evening. The Cabaret was prettily decorated and there were special lighting effects. Two jazz bands were in attendance......Dancing was kept up until the early hours of the morning.

On Thursday 21 August 1930, a caption appears Dr. Jazz will make his first Singapore appearance at the dinner-dance-Cabaret on August 27.....it goes on to advertise Dick Adamson’s Famous Orchestra playing on the roof garden. Alec Dixon recalls Dick Adamson’s famous orchestra in the gay and bohemian nineteen twenties. There was no lack of ‘good-looking girls’ in the Singapore of our time, and their dancing partners were certainly not females. Dancing, from the Tango to the Black Bottom, was the order of the day. Singapore’s four major hotels provided tea and dinner dances every week of the year; and the magnificent ballroom of Raffles Hotel was renowned throughout the Far East. There were several good dance bands in the city and others visited the Colony from time to time. The popular tune of the day was Bye-bye-Blackbirds and the Charleston was to be seen in full jiggle on every dance floor. An American, Dick Adamson, came with his band from San Francisco to give us a new song Singin in the Rain.

We are informed of the arrival of Frank George Shiver, otherwise known as Dr. Jazz, an American coloured entertainer who made a very happy impression at his first appearance at the Adelphi Hotel last night. He is an expert pianist, sings in a way which appeals and altogether justifies his description. He will appear at all the dances at the Adelphi during the race season.

We are informed in another caption, “he has had a very successful tour of Java.” The Adelphi Hotel advertisement also carries previous reception of his ability...If he doesn’t give you a thrill no one on this earth can—Vide Press.

CLOSE HARMONY—Jazz Band featured in Picture at the Capitol by our Film Correspondent

“Close Harmony” now being shown at the Capitol is another of back-stage stories which talking pictures have made so familiar. All the old friends are there—the young man who is determined to get on, the girl who helps him, the Jewish manager and the comedy team. So at home are we all becoming with this ensemble that we are almost learning to speak the language. The picture has two popular artistes in the leading roles—Charles “Buddy” Rogers and Nancy Carroll (who had a hit song from the film, I want to go places and Do Things). Buddy leads a jazz band, so there is plenty of opportunity for “glad noises” to be made on many instruments. It is entertaining enough, but the “Cuckoos” set such a high standard that ordinary fare is a trifle flat by comparison. Excellent features of the programme are the Gaumont Super Graphic and the Paramount news. The newsreels were
always popular in the old days, but the addition of sound has heightened their attraction tenfold. Those test match pictures, for example, were a real achievement. Another film “So This is College” a life about American co-eds, is described as a “bright comedy with plenty of jazz” amidst football (American Football), athletics...a special feature here is Cliff Edwards—Ukelele Ike—who “bridges many a gap with his attractive personality and skill in syncopation”.11

Perhaps one of the most revealing advertisements appear on which feature Odeon electric record releases, called New releases from New York. Called Dance Music with refrains:
My Kind of A Man (Mi Clase de Hombre) from the Motion Picture The Floradora Girl (Fox Trot)
You for Me (Tu Para mi) from “Sunny Skies” (Fox Trot)
Happy Feet from “the King of Jazz”
Under a Texas Moon from the motion picture of the same name—Hawaiian instrumental
It happened in Monterey from “The King of Jazz”—Hawaiian instrumental12

It seems from the advertisement that dance music was a craze and available from records and indicative of a source-trendy New York?....popular dances were the fox-trot, with one waltz as well as Hawaiian instrumental music....perhaps the most telling detail was the fact that these pieces with or without special refrains were being marketed out of films.....everyone of the songs featured in the Odeon Electric record releases were from films.....Another film Words and Music, features American co-eds....bathing girls....described as humorous, irresponsible in theme and lots of jazzy rhythm. Another programme at the Capitol “Skinner Steps Out” is a comedy about how a fool egged on by his wife becomes a success. …the Brox Sisters...were entertaining in attractive jazz song numbers. Their rhythmic harmony was definitely pleasing.13 It is difficult to deny the correlation of the dance band craze which arrived in Singapore via new record releases with attractive jazz songs coming out of new film releases. The Capitol Theatre advertisement for “Skinner Steps Out” reveals a significant subtext, A picture that brings Mirth and Merriment in these days of Depression.14

However, another clue to the proliferation of dance bands was the fact that dance halls with big band were also consumed by passive participants. Gerry Mulligan’s big band for instance was considered more of a dance band to be listened to.15 This was helped immensely by the proliferation of the gramophone and sound systems. Most interestingly, the power of the gramophone and its related modes of amplification were evident in a legal case around the same period. Under Section 89 of the Criminal Procedure Code 1926 Part XIV, Section 4, under Public Nuisance, the only Power of a First Class Magistrate, when he considers that any trade is injurious to health or physical comfort, is to require the person carrying on the trade to suppress or remove that trade or occupation. In the case of a dealer in gramophones, a First Class Magistrate has no power to make an order against him prohibiting him from making a noise by means of loud speakers and gramophones, in the course of his trade in selling such instruments.——LOKE KUI THONG v. PUBLIC PROSECUTOR (1932) 2 F.M.S.L.R 337.16 (emphasis mine)

Tony Danker recalls his father’s listening collection which contrasted with his. Those days...he used to buy a particular brand...Brunswick records17....they were more or less orchestrations...it didn’t appeal to me at all...he loved to listen music which featured the
trumpet, saxophone...Artie Shaw...Harry Roy and his orchestra...Artie Shaw is one of the few musicians who did justice to “Begin the beguine” and I picked up some of Artie Shaw’s phrases for the guitar...listening is very important...particularly in my family where there is no one to teach...the individuals who played in big band...I was interested in their solos, lift a few ideas and transfer it to the guitar...  

The Front page of the Syonan Times 1943 reported a song blacklist because of an ideological clash between Asia and Anglo-American nations. As such musical tastes had to be properly directed. Dinah, a jazz number and Aloha Oe as well as numerous songs by Stephen Foster, among others, were banned from public and private playing. Tokyo reported the banning of about 1000 American and British musical compositions. The police were expected to enforce this new band throughout the country.  

Despite these musical restrictions, the programme for the concerts on 25 and 26 December 1943, for instance seemed to let slip an electric guitar solo entitled Ameno Blues. The Syonan Times, 8 August 1942 tells us of truly rare entertainment by a “comfort party”:

A packed house...was given a rare treat on Thursday when they were entertained to a delightful programme of Nippon music and dancing presented by the Comfort Artistes Party at the Dai Toa Gekizyo...that charming songbird of Nippon, Miss Aiko Saida...possessing a pleasing personality and a sweet voice...made an impression with her first number “Komori Uta”, a lullaby. Her second song was “Minami no Watari dori” (Migratory birds of the South Seas) which she sang in Blues tempo; the third “Osima Busi” the most popular folk song of the Island of Osima off Tokyo Bay.  

In the light of the Japanese authorities’ determination to properly direct musical tastes and styles by implication, was this an error? Was it a Freudian slip to indicate that it was a Japanese songbird who delivered the Blues tempo and with it an assumption of proper directing? Or was the blues tempo irrelevant because it was rendered in a Japanese traditional song, the Migratory birds of the South Seas?  

Paul and Alex Abisheganaden’s accounts refer to the Japanese Occupation and the fact that the Syonan orchestra was very well maintained and many of these musicians playing in the Syonan Orchestra would have become feeder stock for big band or dance band or even respectable music ensembles in hotels. Slava Tairoff, Ferry Krempel, Dan Hopkins, some Filipinos, Lee Boon Liew and even a few Chinese musicians.... Pianists adept in jazz, besides Sam Gan, Jose Daroya, Albert’s uncle Lionel Buenaventura, pianist Dodo Malinger a white Russian who played both classical and jazz very well. The band in the 1950s in Singapore consisted either of “chamber ensembles” quartets, trios or the vestiges of a much older dance band which had probably more use as a dance band. Repertoire consisted of what would be known in jazz practice today as Standards, Broadway, Tin-pan Alley, Cole Porter, George Gershwin and included popular music of the swing era, music of the 1930s and 1940s made popular like All the Things you are, Blue Moon, He’s got the Sun. The cabarets were hotspots especially after WWII. There were very good big bands like big bands…like Cecil Wilson…Gerry Soliano’s big band, H.H. Tan and Peggy Tan, Sid Gomez and Fred Libio, just to name a few. Alfredo (Fred) Libio and his all-star Filipino Swing Band was a hit in late 1930s and 1940 at the New World Cabaret. Fred Libio, it seems, went on to become the music director of Shaw Brothers films.  

Classification of Musicians
Among the musicians themselves, there emerged a perception of two groups of musicians; those who played for the 5-star hotels, the European Western hotels; and the other group that played for the cabarets which had names like New World, Great World and Happy World, and Gay World. These were amusement parks built from the 1920s based on a model, which seemed to have great success in Shanghai earlier.

The telling difference between the two groups of musicians was down to having certifiable performance skills and demonstrable musicianship skills, being able to read musical notation. With such qualifications, one could become a member of the Musicians Union but it was possible to straddle both fields. Being a member of the Musicians’ Union earned a musician the badge of respect not unlike a lawyer or doctor. There was entertainment at different levels. At the first level one had the musicians employed at Raffles Hotel, Seaview Hotel level. Horace Wee recalls Gerry Soliano was in that league. Sam added in those days they had the big bands...and they all catered to different social classes...ballroom dancing was big...so the higher class citizens of Singapore, the whites...would go to the Raffles to the big band sound, while the locals would go to the cabarets...Happy World, New World, Great World, West Point....

Here again, one does need to consider the sphere of consumption. The extent to which dance bands were available for consumption was largely the extent to which disposable income would have made visits to these exclusive Hotels possible, and here again whether or not these “dance halls” or ballrooms were open to the public at large. Simplicius recalls his father playing in an orchestra and in Singapore that would indicate a level of proficiency and therefore passage to exclusive spaces. For one not likely to have had that pathway, the alternative route would have been by default, records, films and affordable venues to dance to. The New World Cabaret was at least one such place. In the 1930s, it had acquired a formidable reputation over others in terms of drawing crowds to dance bands, one of whom was Fred Libio who was from the Philippines. The concept of the three “worlds”, New World, Great World and Happy (Gay) World, originated from Shanghai, rather akin to the modern day theme parks, or perhaps the occasional fun fairs and carnivals that are set up on a semi-permanent basis. Its greatest feature was that it gathered eastern and western forms of entertainment in one place. In the “worlds”, one would find ‘getais’, cinemas, dance halls, entertainment parks, ball courts, restaurants, shops, stage performances, cabarets, skating rinks, and retail shops. They had many gambling stalls and a Ronggeng too. It was also accessible to most people because it was centralized. Most of the nightlife in Singapore then was to be found in New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night. New World’s dance hall drew many young couples before the advent of the cinemas and had a dance floor that once packed 500 couples. Later, the dance hall was shut down to make way for an amusement park. Now the only things that remain are the dates and its yellowing frontage. The cabaret girls, also called taxi girls, were mostly Chinese with a sprinkling of Eurasians, Indians and Filipinos, but no Malays at all. Though they were available for dances at just eight cents a dance, they were quite educated. Most of them spoke good English and a few had even completed their Senior Cambridge exam (equivalent to the current ‘O’ levels). People from all walks of life visited the cabaret; there was the Chinese towkay, the British soldiers, navy personnel, managing directors of firms and even the former Sultan Ibrahim of Johore would visit occasionally, along with a large entourage. The cabaret girls lived within the vicinity of New World. The cabaret commenced at 7 o’clock and went on to 12.
There were tea dances that commenced at 4 in the later afternoon. The band comprised of Goanese and the leader was a Mr. De Silver, also a Goanese.30

Simplicius Cheong recalls his father’s dance band…the Rhythm Revellers in the 50s…occasionally played for the Cricket Club and social clubs…but weekend bands…we played arrangements by Glen Miller…big band stuff…he had two saxophones, two trumpets, I used to thump the piano, sometimes solo…In my teens, I learnt piano… my father had a dance band…although I couldn’t play, I heard so many things…lots of aural/oral experience…he was playing cha-cha, house…we rehearsed in Tank Road…and every Friday night…people stopped working…they’d bring their instrument…my father would bring out an arrangement by Glen Miller and so on. My father was playing dance music…Latin American cha-cha, rhumba and samba…but he wasn’t playing hard bebop. 31

Sam Gan and Horace Wee offer their own lived experiences, particularly how the same repertoire catered to different groups: Gerry Soliano might be playing a big band version of One o’clock jump. You go to the Cabaret and they have the foxtrot…the sign would go up for foxtrot and they will be playing the One o’clock Jump. The only difference will be the quality and the standard of the musicians. Working in the 1950s, if you can’t read, you can’t be a member of the union…reading qualifies you as a union member. A member of the union was looked upon with respect that was status because a musician was regarded as a professional person…the level of a doctor…if you can’t read music and you could just play, you are at a different level. The better jobs were for those who could read, it paid better and there was this big difference where you played. Then again, some of them could just pick up a piece and read and play a piece…but when it comes to solo or improvising, they had no idea how to go about to do this…in the 1950s that was the situation but strangely the popularly requested repertoire in the early 1950s was very common…no matter which part of the scale (social and type of gig) you’re in…you’d play the same type of music…32

Tony Beamish’s observations (around 1954) seem to bear out some poignancy in the popularity of the Dance bands. Unfortunately, it emerges at the expense of something much older: The greatest competitor of this old Malay folk music is in fact the Western dance band (emphasis mine). One has only to listen to the radio to note that this type of musical entertainment is now by far the most popular among all races and not only with the younger generation. The samba rules the air-waves as far as most listeners are concerned. Modern dance tunes are not only universal favourites in their imported form, but they now cloak much of the local Malay, Chinese and Indian music as well as in dance-band arrangements. In the villages, old music, some of whose inspiration can be traced back to India, remains popular in spite of canned substitutes, but in the towns it has already given way to the “modern joget” type of band, child of Western jazz. These can be heard disporting themselves in most of the urban amusement parks, which are known in Malaya as “worlds” (Great World/New World/Gay World…). More will be told of this recent arrival on the musical scene in the chapter dealing with the dance and stage entertainment. Modern Malay “kronchong” orchestras, playing dreamy music similar to Hawaiian music, recorded commercially in Singapore, and are a big draw with all communities. They specialise in sentimental songs that are firm favourites both in Malaya and over the water in Indonesia. It
is anyone’s guess whether the kronchong orchestra is more popular than its rival attraction, the Western style dance band.33

A similar point is made by Joseph Peters in his observation of a current practice in Malay tradition. Joget (modern Malay dance) and Ronggeng (traditional dance) were popular dance forms in 1950s. Various dance spots or nightclubs, the most famous which was Bunga Tanjong, at the New World Amusement Park, were the venues for their proliferation. The nightlife in Singapore revolved around amusement parks and these parks helped form hubs for other forms like bangsawan and Chinese opera before World War II (New World opened in 1923, Great World in 1931 and Happy World in 1936). Their significance cannot be discounted largely because people flocked to these clubs every night to dance joget, ronggeng as well as contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, tango to name a few.34

Media influences
The introduction of bebop and hard bop seems to have coloured the jazz scene of the 1950s. If practitioners Sam Gan, Horace Wee and Simplicius Cheong arrived at working on its practice, where were the influences? Sam recalls he got into music...largely through records...I used to listen to the Voice of America...and it had a good jazz programme...and you tune into VOA on short wave...12 am.....and you hear Duke Ellington’s Take the A Train...and the voice of Willis Conover will come over and say “this is jazz from America”. I was so keen to hear about who was going to be featured...I was introduced to Bill Evans through this programme...every week in the series and they would feature him playing something...it was so hard to accept him...now I can play like this guy and that guy and shit here he comes along...35

Horace Wee saw the impact of this new fad. Bill Evans got people following here from the early stages...and how he eventually got his act together...and he embodies the totality of his development...and you could actually hear people develop along with him...and actually when Evens played in the early days...you could hear what it was leading up to...Horace offered a clue to the way in which jazz as a more serious and intense artform was learnt. He (Ernesto) lived music...after we finished our gig...we would go and have our coffee and supper and sit a lot of times at the Esplanade...along the waterfront...Clifford Pier...where all the stalls were and just sit there till the morning carrying his three inch reel recorder...and listen to something over and over again...I suppose you listen till it plays in your mind...you live in that atmosphere...but what happens is when its time to play, he plays and he was actually a bass player.36

Simplicius Cheong was active as a jazz musician from about 1958 to January 1965 in Singapore. Pianist Ernesto Darroya left an indelible impression on him. Ernesto used to buy LPs (331/3—by middle 1950s, 78s were a thing of the past and 45 RPM and hi-fi had now become a current fad) of George Shearing...he used to say, “Sim lets try and transcribe this”...we listened to Shearing, Oscar Peterson and Dizzy Gillespie and we used to listen until the grooves wore out...an LP in those days cost $4-5...relatively expensive...
to cost of living...a movie ticket would cost about $2 to 3...we had to save to buy an LP...but my father was very generous with me...the main point was that I didn’t play music for a living...we played gigs during weekends, at the Masonic Club, Rotary Club whatever...even the Teachers’ College...I was already interested in jazz...but I saw how the real artists like (Ernesto) doing it...later on when I was 17, I had a chance to go to night clubs, the Golden Venus about 1958-1960...I was already playing jazz and Ernesto knew that...occasionally he would ask me to take over for half-an-hour...so I played...I jammed with those guys...then at midnight. Occasionally he would say, “there’s a guy from America...trumpet player...saxophone player...he would ring up all his friends...Louis Soliano, his cousin Rufino[Soliano], Olympio [Galaura] on trumpet...we would all jam till 2 in the morning...the boss didn’t mind...the boss loved jazz...kept the business going till late... We had no way to learn jazz...so we bought records..."

**Performing Venues/Repertoire**

Ernesto became for these practitioners, an attractive force that centred around The Golden Venus which was a very cozy night club operated by the Orchard Hotel, with the Ernesto Daroya Trio resident there from the late fifties to 1966 till his tragic death. Across other local jazz musicians who came to jam with Ernesto were Billy Martinez (bass), Louis Soliano (drums) Tony Castillo (trumpet), Winston Filemer (bass), Renaldo Lachica (alto saxophone) Ahmad Jaffar (guitar, tenor sax and flute) Horace Wee (bass clarinet). The crowd at the weekends was sizeable at the Golden Venus which had a capacity of around 100 seats. The weekends were always packed out, if I recall. Golden Venus was operated by a medium size hotel (Orchard Hotel) and I cannot recall exactly how much a musician was paid per gig then at the Golden Venus.

Simplicius remembers meeting many officers and soldiers from the British Army stationed at Changi, and also members of the various foreign delegations, American, French, German, etc. Some even brought their instruments to jam. About a third of the audience were locals, mainly teachers, some academics, public servants etc. One could say the middle class Singaporean had the time and money to pursue jazz either by purchasing jazz records or attending live performances.

The jazz scene was mainly patronized by members of the foreign delegations, and expatriates. There were few jazz concerts mainly small bands playing at the various big hotels. I cannot remember the Victoria Memorial Hall ever staging jazz concerts between 1958 and 1964! I have no idea how big the jazz community was in Singapore but it was an enthusiastic following who patronised the various clubs. The repertoire consisted mainly of standards by Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Charlie Parker, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers. Bill Evans, Errol Garner and Oscar Peterson were the reigning keyboard giants if I recall. Some local jazz musicians like Ernesto Daroya and myself tried to play our own jazz pieces, but I am afraid they have not survived the test of time! Audiences then and today still prefer the old standards to contemporary works by jazz musicians. As someone active as a jazz musician, I may be deluded into thinking that the perception and reception of jazz by the local jazz community was a sizeable one.

Horace Wee remembered There was a band that played in the American Club on weekends where Mike Tseng’s cousin Jimmy played bass...the group was called the Metronomes...
session at Golden Venus started at 3 in the afternoon finished at 6pm then they would go to the Princess Garni at Orchard Road[Crown Prince Hotel today], drive down there and finish the Sunday afternoon jam there even if it meant one hour only...after that some of us had to work Sunday night...weekend...if we finish early...go to the American Club...watch Mike Tseng play there They had a good saxophone player there from the USIS Library...then go to Clifford Pier...and listen to Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, or Cannonball Adderley....then sometimes we would go Penang Way (near Siglap)...to listen to singer Barbara...the sister of the pop group guitarist Dickie Tan (think that’s his surname)...anyway Ernesto liked to hear her singing...and sometimes there would be two tables there. After hours we would drive down to JB and check out the scene there. We used to pick fights with the customs there because they wouldn’t let me bring my saxophone (without paying duty).\(^{41}\)

**Participants from Diverse communities**

In those days the Filipinos and those of Filipino heritage were kingpins because they could read music and basically the Filipino trait was the ability to copy exactly, the notes, the feel and whatever else. The first generation of Filipinos....they were supposed to be the studied ones...many of them had classical training...they were multi-instrumentalists. in the Singapore context, I would say that pianists here in those days that could play jazz, were me, Jose Darroya, Albert’s uncle Lionel Ventura, in that period...we had in those days very good soil...Dodo Malinger...a white Russian....and he played very very well....that guy was well-versed in classical and jazz...Paul Abisheganaden’s accounts refer to the Japanese Occupation and the fact that the orchestra was very well maintained...Simplicius says his dad said the only way the family stayed alive was his involvement with music...just after the Occupation...how many of these musicians playing in the Syonan Orchestra would have become feeder stock...Slava Tairoff, trumpet player and violin, Ferry Krempel, Dan Hopkins. But when I joined the band...with the Filipino musicians...[there were] Malay musicians...we had Johari Salleh’s father playing first trumpet...Johari was fresh from school playing third trumpet... but the best exponent of jazz music, to my mind, at the time in Singapore was Ernesto Daroya...he had this uncanny ability to listen while washing his car...he would listen to a track and by night he could play the damn thing...\(^{42}\)

There were two kinds of participation, formal and informal. In the formal, the gigs properly and professionally speaking, only the groups contracted would participate. However, when that was over, the informal jam session would commence and when that happened, anyone who had the confidence and desire to participate did. Horace Wee noted with the Golden Venus, there was a British band, that were part of the military band....but their pastime was jazz...and a lot of them came up to the jam sessions.....but when they came to these gigs, you wouldn’t see these guys there, it was the local bands...but the British guys wouldn’t be playing these gigs...military band...of the two Americans who visited...one of them was Buddy Rich...Mike Manieri ...the vibraphone player...but it was so scarce in those days...foreign players......Ronnie Scott...I played with Tony Scott...the clarinet player...and he was a riot...he reminded me so much of Tony Castilo...completely unpredictable. But it is jazz, the spirit, the spontaneity, able to work with...catch up with people...Satchmo in Singapore in December 1964 and Michael Tseng who was actually a decent piano player, still is and lives in Sydney. He returned to fulfil his Colombo Plan obligations; he was an engineer.\(^{43}\)
Charles Lazaroo was remembered as a conductor, arranger and educator, ECA person… but he was a jazz pianist nonetheless. Another person called Benjie Kleinman used to be playing at the Princess Garnie along Orchard Road where the Crown Prince Hotel is today. There used to be a fixture there… Sid Gomez… these are what you call the better pianists with Lawrence Francisco… a multi-instrumentalist… played clarinet… as well… as someone growing up in the 40s and 50s… he would have to be multi, especially wind instrument… he said I play tenor sax… but you should be able to blow the clarinet and that’s basic and later on they learnt how to play flute… horn players took up the flute… they all learnt to play the clarinet… Ah Poon (Val Ortega) took up the flute in the 60s… John (Lee) and all these other horn players took up the flute. They had all learnt to play the clarinet first.  

The Waning of Jazz

Sam and Horace describe their experience of events that altered their continued relationship with jazz as well as the general reception of jazz from then on:

For Sam Gan, in the 1960s I started to write for the orchestra (RTS)... I went more into the other scene.... although my first love was still jazz and I liked playing in a trio.... I didn’t like guitar players because we couldn’t agree on chords... we used to fight about it... I got involved in more commercial things.... I went into night clubs... there was more money in it... everybody in Singapore did that... I won’t say I lost contact with that but not necessarily what one could make a living out of... Jazz was dead by the 70s. The mid-60s was an exciting era because jazz did exist... jazz died when the pop revolution of the 1960s hit the live band spots... you know the Carnaby Street thing became the biggest thing.... Beatles and Carnaby Street... it wasn’t flower power... it was actually the miniskirt and pop revolution... Marian Faithfull, Lulu, Petula Clark... when Ernesto died this was where this whole pop culture was beginning to develop. At the peak, even in the 1964 period at the advent of the Beatles, that was where all the heavy jam sessions would go on at the Golden Venus..... at the tail-end came the Tea-Dance pop bands which started to take over... in fact the jam sessions got cancelled because the pop sessions got more popular... jazz had taken a backseat... in terms of the commercial world, the public and the media... The only avenue in those days was up to the late 1970s when we had the Sunday tea dance jam sessions... 1960s into 1975... But they started clamping down because they said it was the drug problem.... You’d have the tea time jam sessions on Sunday afternoons at the Apollo hotel... That was the tail end of all the jam sessions... 

In reality, the thriving dance band scene which served its community with dances were supplanted first by a change in the late 1950s... with Bill Haley and the Comets..... and Elvis Presley... change, and the big culture shock to the musicians of the day especially for those of us who became established as respectable musicians playing Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and established numbers. When the Beatles, Cliff Richard and the Shadows, came to Singapore, all of a sudden you had a bass guitar.... It was a very loud... amplified sound... not a smooth, well-rounded and refined sound... very raw... if you describe it now, it did sound very raw.... when it first came on... it was the players.... the people who played it were from a different school.... they weren’t qualified musicians.... they couldn’t read... they just played... Half the time they couldn’t even play the instrument... sometimes its good that way because that’s how a new artform or practice evolves.... when someone goes in blindly
innocent...you don’t now what’s impossible...so that’s why in those days it was loud...discordant...mainly because they didn’t tune their instruments properly...it became a big shock to the professional musicians of the previous twenty/thirty years....and of course it was greeted with great resentment...you remember when Sam talked about how in the heydays of the big band scene, there were always the quality musicians who could read music...and those who could not...this actually became the other way around....but then the professional musicians looked at these pop-up stars...and say they only play three chords....hardly in tune (because they could hardly tune properly) and they couldn’t even read a damn note...so the professional musicians were rather dismissive of them...there was a lot of tension between both parties...the rock n’ roll musicians looked at the professionals with disdain...old men...and the professionals looked at these people and said something like a bunch of amateurs...and they weren’t even amateurs....

Music and the Law

Carnaby Street fashion in the form of Petula Clark, Lulu the Beatles, gave way towards the late 1960s to the sounds of Santana, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix, Woodstock, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath. From a musical point of view, one saw the movement of a very light and rhythmically vibrant sound emanating from three guitars, a drummer and voices articulating love and sentimentiality to lyrics expressing anger, bitterness, angst, to calls to political action and later the intensification of amplified sound which some observers in the UK referred to as industrial noise while its adverse influence was not far from security concerns. According to Joseph Pereira, the closure of the tea dances were enforced by a government decree in January 1970 (Channel News Asia puts it at December 1969). Brawling at tea-dance fights, a killing at the Mandarin Hotel boiler room as well as deaths caused by fights over choice of songs like Carl Douglas’ Kung Fu Fighting in nightclubs in Singapore around 1970s basically gave pop and rock sufficiently bad press to warrant law enforcement in musical establishments. In the nature of these incidents, there emerged the perception that “music was inflaming these passions.”

The extent to which music was implicated in this anxiety was evident in an excerpt of a speech at the opening of the Japanese Gardens by the then Defence Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee:

Let us not consider the subject of music as a trifling matter, of no import in the state of affairs. The ancients knew better. Both Plato and Confucius correctly recognised which music as an instrument of state policy could play in producing the desirable type of citizen. Neglect in Singapore on this subject has given rise to serious problems. I refer to the widespread popularity of the barbarous form of music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification. Voice accompaniment takes the form of inane tasteless wailing. It is barbarous music of this kind that is mainly responsible for attracting the mindless young of Singapore to the cult of permissiveness of the western world. It is hardly a coincidence that the problem of drug-addiction has become serious where performers and audience foregather. I trust the Ministry of Home Affairs will take stern action against this menace.

What is most unfortunate here is when the Ministry of Home Affairs was called upon to take stern action by the Defence Minister, it was not made clear whether the menace was the music or the drugs. What was clear from the message was the correlation between music
and type of citizen. In any case, both drugs and barbarous music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification became targets in an effort to deal with the menace. For many trained musicians who had worked in respectable circumstances the emergence of Rock n’Roll, Carnaby Street, Pop (including psychedelic pop) and Rock/Heavy Metal had considerable impact on altering their perspectives, if not their livelihood. For the sake of a livelihood, Jazz musicians in Singapore were compelled, from the Bill Haley days onwards, to cater to changing demands of a clientele which also had different expectations from the musicians. Dave Buenaventura who played with the late Lawrence Francisco’s band admitted to playing more dance music than jazz at gigs alone because one would find it “hard to make a living” out of playing jazz. Rock and roll musicians had to adapt to playing opportunities at private parties, music festivals and concerts. During the 1970s, private sponsorships allowed for a number of rock-revival shows at the National Theatre with acts by Sweet Charity, Humble Origin, Unwanted, Fragile and Heritage; eventually not sustainable enough both in terms of finance and musicians. This environment was not helped by the interconnection of the music, musicians and drugs. Ho (1999) refers to the period as the Great Concern about Drugs. Clubs housing local bands began to close, TV stations refused to feature male performers with long hair, a prohibition of rock concerts and rock songs restricted from airplay and even the restriction or prohibition of rock music and musicians eventually reached the National Theatre. Therefore, the 1970s and 1980s saw local bands in English language having a hard time establishing themselves.

If that was not bad enough, consider the position inherited by professional musicians whose livelihoods were not tainted with the same brush. According to Horace Wee, during the early 70’s there was the ban on long hair, the current western music, rock etc...associated with drugs...a "yellow culture" as it was termed and that Western influences were decadent. This policy was implemented quite heavy handedly. As a result it became difficult to engage bands. A lot of club owners turned to the now growing Disco movement...less overheads, hassles and they did not pay for any copyright fees then. So the first nail in the coffin for LIVE music. During the "yellow culture" days, musicians with long hair were not allowed to sit with the customers of the club and generally regarded by even waiters as second class citizens. eg., musicians were sneered at and called "band boy" [a form of insult]. Since also the late 60's a lot musicians failed to have any CPF contributions because of the way establishments engaged them to cut costs. eg. a 3-month lumpsum contract with an extendable 3 which was a far cry from the musician that was a highly regarded professional in the 50's. The regulation employing foreign musicians that has also remained intact from the original one in the 60's is that they have to leave the country after a maximum of one year performing in Singapore. After Disco came Karaoke, which the government first disallowed as it violated the regulation that customers were not allowed on stage or perform. They changed their minds later and this unleashed a whole lot of bathroom/amateur singers into public establishments as well as the use of backing music tracks. So there went another source of live music. Also the "live" music began to shift to Hotel Lounges as a result of this situation. There was still some live music going on. Matthew and the Mandarins were still playing at the Shangrilla bar. I was playing in Richard Ortega's Band for live cabaret shows at the Shangri La Supper Club around 197 and the Lost Horizon Club in the basement of Shangrilla was still using live bands like Western Union and if I'm correct the Xperiments, Flybaits (or New Faces). We would go and play the supper club shows sometimes also at the Lost Horizon. Some happened to be more in the pop vein, eg. Elvis type shows etc.
Another reason for the waning of jazz was the presence of a new form of competition. Horace Wee explains that during the early 1960's (1961-1964 probably), the then President of the Musicians Union Mr. Slava Tairoff was very active in trying to preserve the rights of the local professional musician. One of the things he negotiated with the government authorities was the implementing of the one for one regulation when it came to allowing foreign musicians/bands to perform in Singapore. For every foreigner the club has to engage a local musician or at least a local band. Sometimes the foreign band may have been a ten-piece ensemble so to be flexible the club engages a local five-piece ensemble. This enabled some form of protection and the reason for allowing foreign musicians was to elevate the local standards; the overseas band should also be of a higher standard than the locals. This was negotiated with the help of a certain Mr. Devan Nair who was then president of the AUPE and a labour organisation leader as well as Mr. Roy Daniels from the Ministry of Labour.  

Perhaps another more significant point was raised by the late Lawrence Francisco: The jazz scene was very small and limited. Not many people liked jazz. Most did not understand jazz largely because of the improvisation. Jazz and jam sessions took place during after-hours and on Sunday—quite a number of locals were interested in jazz but jazz was not big compared to mainstream. The repertoire was wide, there was no official jazz club, musicians played what they liked, audiences were mixed, clever and wealthy. It [playing jazz] was not lucrative but quite well paid compared to various other professions.  

It is what a professional could do in a jazz ensemble that enabled Lawrence Francisco to be able to support his family financially. He played at the American Embassy regularly where the patrons were mainly Americans. This also enabled him to have a jam session, after hours, with Buddy Rich’s sextet. Met Lionel Hampton and Louis Armstrong from a distance but it was too packed because of the big crowd. Francisco remembered playing with Mike Manieri. There were no places to learn jazz, rock and pop. Lawrence picked it up through analysing, listening and experimenting…resources available were scores and radio. Instruments were expensive and hard to come by. Goodwood Group was the main group to get all the foreign artists in. Gigs were through word-of-mouth or head-hunt. Had to negotiate contracts, auditions and only the good one were taken in.  

On balance however, the overseas bands saw good groups coming in as pop groups, not only players but also performers….first one being the Maori High Fives…and we had from the Philippines, Brown Boys, D’Starlights. I put them as being responsible for this revolution. This was an eye-opener in the entertainment scene. Here was something more than good musicians sitting on the stand playing very well…they were also entertaining and they were playing today’s music and requests. They couldn’t read music but that wasn’t the point…the customer gets music and he gets more…he’s paid for entertainment.  

This is not a new phenomenon. Before the regulation and negotiations of the 1960s, an earlier generation of Filipino musicians, Romy Kartindig Bands, who were more in the traditional Filipino bands of the jazz genre, played pop and they did this very well…Romy Posadas bands…Romy’s playing reminds me of Bill Evans but he played more forcefully. With his wife Rita, they came as a whole band to Singapore…played at the old Hotel
Singapura where the Forum Galleria now is. In the band were Ernie Mendoza on tenor sax/flute, Fernando Cortez on double bass and played all the jazz concerts with me....so when I played with my group, I used Fernando. Being a guitar player and saxophone player, I used to play without a pianist in the group. My drummer was Terry Tay, who also tragically died in a car accident just before the Merdeka Bridge, not long after Ernesto.  

But musically one could not deny the supplanting of bebop and hardbop by what Sam and Horace call avant garde artists. As Horace recalled, I still kept in touch with my beloved Coltrane. Sam felt different vibrations: the funny thing with me was with Coltrane...when I listened I thought it was great but I couldn’t really understand...what’s behind that...besides that it was great and I could never play like that...I could hear but I couldn’t understand and when you don’t understand, how can you play...when you get to jazz of that kind of advanced stage...you cannot copy...except if you want to solo exactly as you heard...It became an expressive tool by that time, George Shearing you can copy...but when you get to that stage it was true self-expression...copying [copying note for note] was out of the question...one needed to be educated to know the vocabulary....

Alternative Pathways
Musicians like Sam Gan and Horace Wee sought alternative avenues with the changes. Their paths crossed at Rediffusion Radio as part of a session band in 1963, worked in different lines but then met again, doing recordings for Radio and TV: in the 1970s we got back together again...I was writing for Radio and TV, writing shows and sometimes Sam would too, and sometimes, there would be too much work in one programme so we’d be sharing our chores. So here we go again, music but in a different time and we’re doing different things. We’re writing music. Sometimes, he would play my stuff, then I would play his stuff. Some of the other musicians would get a commercial (jingle)...and we’d all go to the recording studio, play and stick our hands out for some money after that....

Sam recalls doing quite a lot of R. Ramlee’s recording while Yusnor Ef recalls his recourse to more specialised skill given his own shortcomings: I didn’t learn any musical instrument only percussion...a little bit piano...not pianist material...I’m involved in song writing...I only composed a few songs...but even in these compositions that few songs I cannot read notes, so I la-la-la into the cassette and gave it to somebody to write notes and tell them to notate my song...my songs were written by Sam Gan last time...those days we were together in recording and I said this is my song and he played and arranged the songs...but mostly I wrote lyrics.

That is not to suggest that Jazz simply became an activity reminisced by those who enjoyed its proliferation and privileges. The National Theatre Trust records that it brought in Duke Ellington & his Orchestra for a one time performance at the National Theatre on 2 February 1972; The Charlie Byrd Trio at the Singapore Conference Hall on 29 and 30 July 1975; the Gil Evans Orchestra on the 20 and 21 June 1976 at the Singapore Conference Hall (this was in association with the American Embassy); A Jazz guitar Concert by Barney Kessell in association, again, with the American Embassy, at the DBS auditorium, and even included two local performers, Rufino Soliano (drummer) and Winston Filmer (bass guitar); Jazz of Japan by Nobuo & His Sharps and Flats, jointly presented with the Japan Foundation and the Embassy of Japan at Victoria Theatre 21 and 22 January 1977, to name a few.
Perhaps one of the most revealing aspects of the support of popular culture became evident in the Annual Report of 1977 under Improvements to the Theatre, more specifically under Sound Reinforcement System:

As the sound system of the theatre was more than 10 years old a committee was set up to study and plan for the improvement of the acoustic system of the theatre. This resulted in the award of tender for the new sound reinforcement system costing $235,000. The main features of improvement to the sound system are as follows:

a. A 16 channel (expandable to 20 channels) mixing console with individual equalisation replacing the 8 channel mixer to improve the input facilities;

b. Installation of higher frequency horns and base speakers in low frequency enclosures to ensure even sound pressure level at all times throughout the auditorium;

c. Installation of 2 sets of high-powered high frequency loudspeakers for “rock and pop concerts”;

d. A wireless microphone system with 6 transmitters and 4 receivers to give drift-free reception. This would clear reception problems encountered by opera and drama performances in which free movement of artistes is of prime importance.

e. Good quality transcription turntable cassette tape decks and open reel tape decks to improve tape and record reproductions.

The sound reinforcement system when commissioned is expected to upgrade the acoustic effects of the theatre. It will make the theatre suitable for varied classes of performances. 62

One of the beneficiaries of this new system included the James Last Orchestra on 3 December 1980 and Sadao Watanabe Jazz Sextet – in association with the Japan Foundation and the Embassy of Japan, National Theatre on the 24 February 1981. 63

If Jazz was being brought in drips and drabs, while struggling to make a prominent face, the introduction of a Singapore International Jazz Festival Fringe comes as a surprise. Records of the Jazz festival begin in 1982. Not much is available at this point in time although a programme flyer for the 2nd Singapore International Jazz Festival (16-25 September 1983 at the Singapore Conference Hall – concerts at 7.30pm) informs us that it was organised by the Ministry of Culture and the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, sponsored by the Singapore Cultural Foundation and co-sponsored by Hotel Royal while the sound system and instruments were provided by Yamaha Music Asia Pte. Ltd. In the First concert, the SBC Orchestra and Guest Artistes provided the local component while the international component was filled by Joe Lee Wilson (USA), Jazz all Stars (Korea), Errol Buddle Band (Australia) and Takeshi Inomata and His Force (Japan). By 1983, the SBC Orchestra combined with a Junior Orchestra and a Richard Ortega Quintet, Tony Castillo & the Castillians, Louis Tan, Iskandar Ismail and Friends, Stardust with Sydney Tan and Friends, Singapore 17, Singapore Jazz Artistes provided the local component which saw an international field comprising Australia, Belgium, Japan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Phillipines, Sweden and USA. The 1984 Festival saw the arrival of France, New Zealand as international additions to some familiar names like the SBC Orchestra and Singapore All-Stars. In 1985, Chile, Hong Kong and Hungary were new international representatives here while among the local contingent included Sadli Ali and his Friends, SBC Jazz Combo and Jeramzee and Friends. 1985 is also the first time a Jazz Fringe Festival is introduced as part of the Jazz Festival. The SBC Junior Orchestra, NUS Stage Band and National Theatre Stage
Band formed part of the fringe by performing at Peranakan Place, NUS, Century Park Sheraton and the Singapore Conference Hall. 1986 witnessed groups from the Soviet Union, Greece and the UK. Local fringe performances were Century Park Sheraton Hotel, the Botanic Gardens, NUS, Singapore Conference Hall, and some schools. The National Theatre Annual Report of the 4th such festival fringe proudly proclaims that:

A few local groups performed at the Peranakan Place as part of the fringe events leading up to the 1985 Jazz Festival. One of them was none other than our own full complement 17-piece NTSB stage band. Its emphasis was on ensemble playing. The musicians acquitted themselves well, producing lush, creamy sounds. Except for a couple of numbers, such as a highly energised reading of the “Fame” theme song, the pace was by and large jaunty but relaxed, blending well with the Saturday shopping crowd ambience.

According to Horace Wee and Sam Gan:

[During] the 1980s...Tony Castillo was the president of the [Musicians] union and if I'm correct, he organised the first jazz festival/concert...1985/6. It was after the visit, about 1986 that he (Tony) got some money from the Ministry to sponsor the artists. The first two jazz concerts were at St. Joseph's field...Bras Basah. It was the in-between period when they did not know what to do with that place. At the jazz festival, Jeremy Monteiro’s group (Jeramzee) was there...Eldee Young’s trio...and there was also a Swedish jazz fusion group (Mynta) that came...and there was Mah Joon Hong (Two names are possible here – Sadli Ali and Friends or SBC Jazz Combo)...

Beyond 1986, no records are available on the Singapore International Jazz Festival.

There were other developments which local musicians doing gigs, commercially in popular culture, jazz or other styles, have not recovered from since a watershed decision:

In 1985, Singapore’s first recession, hotels appealed to the government to help as they could not afford to hire both foreign and local musicians. Somehow the whole ruling (from the negotiations between Roy Daniels, Mr. Devan Nair and Slava Tairoff of the Musicians Union) got dropped and it opened the floodgates...anybody who could be categorised as a musician even if they were not...was allowed to come in. That spelt the death of the local music scene. They brought in a whole lot of cheap Filipino bands who were not musicians...but entertainers. Basically that was money flowing out of the country because they would be sending foreign bucks earned, back to their home country. This floodgate of poor grade or even non-musicians coming in undermined a whole job market of Singaporean musicians. No decent job could be had by a local musician...unless he/she wanted to come down to that level of a very low pay almost equal to these foreign performers. And that is the current position of the local musician to this day. This sent the whole industry into a downward spiral.

The late 1970s was Jeremy’s introduction to the jazz world as a working professional at the Club 392. I was looking for a job as a musician...at the time Roland Sandosham was on drums...Yusoff on guitar, Louis Mendoza on bass...Michael Isaac (Mr. Isaac’s son) on piano...because he didn’t want to play all night...every night...so I went, I auditioned...and he gave the job as band leader...here I was at 16, leader of musicians who were in the 30s and 40s...Singers were Rahim Hamid and Rahimah Rahim...and it was wonderful...Rahimah was doing all the female jazz classics...she was singing more jazz than pop numbers in that
jazz club...Rahim did the whole Nat King Cole song book...I had a chance to play all that great music...Tony Castillo at that time...came out of confinement...I had a trumpet which I wasn’t using and he bought that off me and he started playing a couple of nights a week...after my NS in 1981, Richard Ortega invited me to join the Ortegos...that was another wonderful opportunity because I got to play with Matt Munro and New Seekers, Platters, Inkspots...I played outside gigs because I was one of the few reading pop pianists...I had a chance to play with the original Four Aces...Love is a Many Splendoured thing...but after we played, they started dying one by one all in a period of 6 years...playing with the Ortegos, they changed shows every two weeks and we had to pull out different charts. I remember one chart that made me wet my pants was the Irving Berlin musical. It was a review of his music and for the first time I had to read...Broadway style charts...all written out left and right hand...this was great because I could see all the shape of the harmonic structure and managed my way...by the second week I was playing what was written...at the time Polygram studios opened...so I went to do some work at Polygram...it was pretty much playing jazz at night and pop by day...1983 I played at Bistro Toulouse Lutrec, which was at Tanglin Shopping Centre...I had a chance to play with Joe E. Wilson...he was in exile in Brighton...actually from New York...he was notorious in the late 1970s and early 1980s for having dug out Duke Ellington’s seldom performed songs...and spirituals and gospel tunes and performed them...he was on Downbeat magazine...readers polled him as the best male vocalist of his time...for some strange reason, he ran away to the UK...to play at the Bistro Toulouse Lutrec which Dr. Goh Poh Seng owned at the time...Cassandra Wilson who had a recent Grammy Nominated album...it was very hard for Cassandra Wilson to work with me in 1983/4....at that time I still didn’t swing...it was only in 1986 when Eldee Young first appeared on the scene here playing at the Somerset Bar...I was first exposed to Eldee Young, Red Holt...playing jam sessions with them was when the first seeds of Swing were planted in me...Eldee Young and Red Holt were very patient swinging with this non-swinging bugger...Bistro Toulouse-Lutrec... I played at the Ship restaurant in 1985, then the Saxophone bar opened, I played there in 1986...I had just recorded my first album Back to Basics...Claude Knobs Montreux Festival director came to the Saxophone and I passed him this cassette...wrote about how much he enjoyed my playing and he also discovered that two musicians he lost track with and enjoyed listening to were here...Eldee Young and Red Holt...I was invited with them to perform at the main stage at the Festival...I could only swing 50-60% at the time of the Montreux jazz festival...so when I listen to the recording now...People love the album, and I can pick out all the parts where I didn’t swing...and all that...never mind it was considered by the Festival directors as one of the classic concerts of the first 25 years of the Festival and it was on the video disc—the best of the Montreux Jazz Festival, sandwiched between George Benson and Spyro Gyra...then doing the Montreux thing...and me getting an opportunity like that even when I was not 100% ready...but you cannot say no to an opportunity like that...it may never happen again...so I rose to the occasion by using it as the band...the presentation went well. On that night we played in the same programme with Chick Corea...then I listened to Keith, I got blown away...so I tried to play like Keith and wanted to sound so like Keith in the 1990s that when I played in Hong Kong, the reviewer said “you should catch Jeremy Monteiro...he is a poor man’s Keith Jarrett”...the sick thing was I took it as a compliment...Jazz is still played in smoke-filled rooms in Swing...and dodgy...its good to play there to get a sense of the smoke-filled atmosphere and the dodgy-ness of the environment the early jazz practitioners had to contend with...jazz is amazing...you work from playing in a hole-in-a-wall to a 7000-a-night
concert hall in Shanghai…and all points in between…jazz musicians do all that…an established rock or pop musician wouldn’t do it…very rarely…

Support systems
One of the reasons that the practice of jazz began to gain currency was the levels of support which led right back to governmental organisations, alongside other initiatives. Jeremy began to immerse himself in a community not many would have thought likely or conducive; a jazz programme for schools and tertiary institutions:

When I went into schools, I did 80 concert cum seminars…across primary, secondary, and junior colleges…polytechnics and one in NTU…I tell these people that I’m not coming here to teach you what music you should listen to…this is to increase your musical palette and one day when you come home from work…put on Duke Ellington one day and Elton John or Debussy the next.

When Simplicius Cheong worked in the jazz scene, he described the audience as one-third local comprising middle to high-ranking civil servants, while the rest were visibly expatriate, some from the British forces stationed here, Americans, among others. Jeremy’s experiences described a similar situation in 1976 when he embarked on a musical career:

The audience at Club 392 consisted of oil riggers who either loved country and western or jazz and blues…Maori soldiers…fair share of local people…interesting blend…mostly mid 30s to about 50s…middle income group…When I got into the act at Club 392 in 1976, dance band music had somehow given way to jazz as a listening experience…the dance band culture may have been on through the 60s, late 60s and maybe even later until rock and pop and later disco came along…in 1976 when I began, you listened to jazz while having you drinks or when Gil Evans came to the Conference Hall, there was music for a listening audience…in the earlier days when people used to come out and dance, I used to get pissed off…now its great.

The other important factor was the composition of the audience:
Until 1995 my audience was 80% expatriate and 20% local…and not only that…but the composition of the Singapore audience…50% below 25 and 50% older people. Around 1995/6 the local to expatriate ratio was almost equal and enjoying jazz…two thirds of my audience at Harry’s today are below 30…when I play swing I see University students…they appreciate straight ahead jazz…acoustic jazz and mainstream jazz as much as the latin and funky things we do…and that is encouraging…its become more local…I think what also helps…sometimes you don’t think of the exponential growth potential of little things…and if you think, in all of these 80 schools, I never had audiences of less than 500 per concert…and if you take 5-7% of that listening audience some years ago, maybe that’s the number of
people who may be my audience at jazz gigs and concerts today…and in the audiences of the Thomson band.\textsuperscript{72}

Since the 1990s, the Thomson Jazz Band has grown to emerge as one of the largest and most recent support systems for Jazz and big band. It is managed by Eddy Chan (nephew of the late Lawrence Francisco) and owner of Jazz at Southbridge. The Thomson Jazz Band is resident at the Thomson Community Club and continues to hold regular sessions, with workshops by local and international proponents who encourage members to exceed themselves and appear in local and international concerts.

Jeremy has gone on to become an icon for the musical practice of Jazz in Singapore with the award of the Cultural Medallion in 2002. The current batch of jazz musicians in Singapore can claim to having been trained in US jazz institutions and some fortunate ones have been supported through NAC Scholarships. The Music Department of NIE, NTU conducts Studies in Pop and Jazz for teacher training programmes as well as an elective for NTU undergraduates. LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts are currently advertising programmes in Jazz Studies at Diploma and Degree level. The National Arts Council continues to provide assistance for those doing tertiary studies in jazz performance overseas and the Thomson Jazz Band, housed and supported by Thomson CC (under the auspices of the Peoples Association), has grown from amateur activity to include overseas performances.

A jazz musician today may be said to have regained some measure of respect in his/her gigs as is its practice. Respect and credibility notwithstanding, the remuneration for such dedication and skill is somewhat tenuous and many of them still supplement their earnings with other sidelines in pop, rock or other genres.
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NEW BRUNSWICK RECORDS
All the latest in Dance, Vocal and Instrumental
Ask your distributor for list
Sole Agents: McAlister & Co. Ltd.

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21 Syonan Times, 8 August 1942, Comfort Party Provides Rare Entertainment.

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58 Ibid.
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63 National Theatre Trust Annual Report 1980/1, p. 13 and p.16.
64 Unpublished material on selected concerts, National Arts Council, undated but provides logistics and financial details up to 1991.
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68 Interview with Jeremy Monteiro, 31 July 2003.
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Musical practice of Kerongchong

Keronchong is believed to have originated in 16th century Portuguese music of the Portuguese colonies in the Moluccas and Batavia while in Malaysia (and Malaya) kerongchong is mainly associated with practice in Malacca. Malaysian kerongchong is thought to be derived from Javanese kerongchong. Chopyak informs us it is not so much a musical form as it is a style of performance. Therefore he points out that an asli langgam song becomes a kerongchong langgam song when performed in a kerongchong style on kerongchong instruments. This is evident in Ernst Heins’ entry on kerongchong in Groves where typical instrumentation of the ensemble would comprise two kroncong (small guitars), among other instruments. Craig Lockard goes on to describe how kerongcong orchestras and recordings attracted both Malay and Chinese communities with a sensuous Portuguese-Indonesian musical blend originating in Java while dondang sayang either produced or consumed in some popularity in Melaka and western Johor seemed to bear resemblance to kroncong. In contradistinction however, Dondang Sayang, according to Philip L. Thomas, combined the verbal art of complex poetry or pantun as it was known locally, with orchestral accompaniment. The pantuns were highly stylised repartee and required considerable effort to excel in. Lockard also referred to Popular Malay ensembles known as orkes melayu which he argues as being heavily influenced by Middle Eastern and Indian musical styles were seen to be popular on the West coast while ghazal was seen to combine Indian, Persian and indigenous influences and became predominant in the state of Johor. While it is not difficult to presume secretions further down south to Singapore, performances of these specific forms beg the question, were they all accompanied by a kerongchong ensemble?

Tony Danker’s recollections on his pathway as a musician begins in what he calls a kerongchong band:

I played with a Kerongchong Band in 1938...19 January...I was doing Junior Cambridge then....after that it was known as Standard 8...I remember that...I used to play every week at the Happy World Cabaret.....they used to call it the Sarong and Kebaya night...two bands...on one side they had Fred Libio and his Swing Band playing English music...on the other side was David Lincoln and his kerongchong band and we used to alternate...they would play three or four numbers then stop then we would play three or four kerongchong and then stop...I started with David Lincoln and his
Orchestra...they used to record for the Columbia recording company...local but the brand was Columbia and all the Malay singers who sang were in the David Lincoln Keronchong orchestra...I was a member of that band and what I was doing was playing first guitar...by first guitar, there is a thing in Malay which was called tokal...but that would be what a lead guitarist in a Malay keronchong band does...you would have a violinist doing the melody...and this guy on first guitar is doing all the improvisations to back the melody...and that is very difficult to do...

The David Lincoln Orchestra is not another evanescent name in a practice that seems to have missed documentation. Tan Sooi Beng’s work on the 78 RPM industry pre Japanese Occupation draws attention to a list of New Malay Records in the Straits Echo of 1937 of Columbia Singapore Artistes:

GE 10008  Jamilah Rumba
           Bukan Batu
           Che Jamilah & Lincoln’s Orchestra

GE 10009  Sri Tambak
           Burong Puteh
           Obed & Lincoln’s Orchestra

GE 10010  Pekan Baru
           Yatim Piatu
           Che Yah & Lincoln’s Orchestra

GE 10011  Kliruan Dunia
           Chinta Salah Mata
           Miss Julia & Lincoln’s Orchestra

In fact the recording industry was among the first to capitalise on recording music making. Tony Danker recalls his difficulties in recording music:

Even if you’re recording in the studio, there is only one microphone...those days recording was not like today...you record there and straightaway you put your tape...you get your music being played back...no such thing!...you record on 78s...remember in the recording studio there was a French engineer...he had something that looked waxed to me...I don’t know...anyway it was that thick and I know that I could see him put it there and the light would come on...we were in the next studio and he would be in his own room...as recording engineer...and the light come on red that means you start...and then you were not to exceed three minutes and twenty seconds for every record...woe betide you if you did because those ‘waxes’ were very expensive and the engineer would give you hell...if you break a
string there while you’re playing, it’s recorded there...he’ll get mad...because it is expensive...after the thing is done...you don’t get a chance to listen to what you just did...you have to wait six months because those wax things have to be sent to India for processing and they come back...the 78 plates/recordings...after six months...only then can you hear what you played six months ago!...this recording studio was in Killeney Road [in the 1930s, Gramophone Co. of Singapore, 147 Killeney Road produced its own catalogue—the company also created a recording studio at 96 Cairnhill Road where recording engineers such as Mr. F.A. Floyd recorded singers and musicians—(Straits Echo 24 May 1934)]...more like a bungalow house to me...subsequent recordings we went up to McDonald House, years later...I went through all that...and these Malay songs or keronchong bands, for every song they wanted an introduction...guitar introduction and you alone...the light is on and anything goes wrong...it’s hell of a thing to record...the joke is you don’t hear what you played until 6 months later...you go anywhere else and perform...people are lucky today...there and then you hear what you played...and you can re-record at not extra cost at all, digital and multi-recording...those days these things were unheard of...the technology was such that was the only way...and this guy loses his cool if we ruined one of this waxed things...I remembered that but that was a good foundation for me...[^8]

Much of Danker’s recollections are corroborated by Tan:

*Recording was done on hard wax. Performers had to sing into the recording horn. They had to move away from the horn when they were singing high notes and move closer when they were singing low notes. Singers were only given two-to-three minutes to sing each song. This limitation restricted improvisation; if mistakes were made the wax had to be thrown away.*[^9]

**Instrumental configuration**

According to Ernst Heins in his entry on keroncong in Groves, typical instrumentation of the ensemble would comprise transverse flute, violin, mandolin, one or two guitars, two keroncong (small guitars), a plucked cello imitating a drum and an optional plucked bass.^10^ Tony Danker recalled the instrumentation in practice as he used to play every week at the Happy World Cabaret: *They used to call it the Sarong and Kebaya night...there was a violinist, lead guitar, strumming guitar, two ukeleles, and a cello and double bass...if you are lucky enough you could play the flute...beautiful...maximum I would say 8. Singers were on their own...but they were good singers singing in the*
keronchong...they used to sing the lagus and aslis, as you call them...in those days they used to call it nasib...lagu nasib... I don’t know why they were called lagu nasib ...they were very sad songs...mostly about tragedy...songs of fate...I’m not sure...but in those days they used to call it lagu nasib...now that’s changed to asli...and that was very simple...one bass and one violinist and they had the kompong (percussion drum)...you had to know how to hit it...because it you’d hit it the wrong way...otherwise you’d just complicate things...certain beats you’d move to the beat...mostly they were based on love...the lyrics were written so that everybody wanted to talk about or sing about or listen to...once in a while you’d get a song about lovesickness...the loss of a mum then was a big issue...that upped the sale of records...out of sympathy..." Support for the practice:
At the Happy World Cabaret they used to have two bands...on one side they had Fred Libio and his band playing English music...on the other side was David Lincoln and his keronchong band and we used to alternate...they would play three or four numbers then stop then we would play three or four keronchong and then stop...people used to enjoy that Sarong and Kebaya night... the highest record sales were actually not purchased so much by the Malays but by the Peranakans...those keronchong orchestras [had] Malays acting in it...but we had Chinese singers, you know...Lily Toh...she used to sing keronchong...she only recorded four songs...but it sold very well in those days...because she was Peranakan...the Peranakan’s loved keronchong and asli and lagu nasib...they were a big community then...We used to have keronchong competitions...most of them attending were Chinese...in the Happy world and all that...our singers and the band won quite a few...and when I joined another group the Chap Singa group...they also won. They used to have keronchong competitions and competition night, the whole of Geylang road will be crowded with people walking...mostly from the Geylang Serai...they would walk to the Happy World...and to see people walk in by the droves for the competition. It was a great journey...it was a huge job to fight for the microphone and the Happy World stadium was so large...while this was going on they would invite well-known singers from Indonesia...have all these side shows and sing together to attract more crowds...S. Abdullah was a great keronchong singer...When we were playing keronchong music he was already a famous keronchong singer in Indonesia...I know he came through Singapore only once...there was another famous singer from Indonesia called Kartini...sang very good keronchong...her husband played trumpet...Locally, there was an
Abdul Rahman...Miss Julia...Miss Rose who was from the Philippines but sang Malay songs... a lady called Faddilah from Penang... very great to be there...it was simple...but we looked forward to these things...

By the late 1940s and 1950s a number of these traditions found themselves transformed either by appropriation of Western musical or instrumental influences. Yet as Lockard points out, all these popular and traditional forms, arrived at by synthesis of the foreign and indigenous, are considered today very much a part of Malay cultural tradition. Writing in 1954, Tony Beamish informs us of the presence of Music in culture in the sixth chapter suitably titled *Music and Letters*:

Many people are unaware of the great wealth of Malay folk music in the country, because they do not often get a chance to hear it. Nevertheless it ranks as an important part of Malaya’s artistic heritage. As it is not written down, there is always a risk of it dying out, but this is unlikely for several reasons.

- The music gains strength from its readiness to absorb new ideas.
- The Malay rulers give it strong support.
- Energetic steps are being taken by Radio Malaya to preserve it on records and to arouse wider interest in it by broadcasting.
- But the main reason why the music is still played and sung in the kampongs today is because the villagers revel in it, a sure guarantee of survival in the face of the strongest competition.

Modern Malay “kronchong” orchestras, playing dreamy music similar to Hawaiian, record commercially in Singapore, and are a big draw with all communities. They specialise in sentimental songs that are firm favourites both in Malaya and over the water in Indonesia. It is anyone’s guess whether the kronchong orchestra is more popular than its rival attraction, the Western style dance band.

The late Captain Abdullah Ahmad remembers as a 16-year old being part of a “keronchong orchestra Hawaiian band” together with Hamzah Dolmat and Zain Blackout. He recalls I was involved in bangsawan music and had an opportunity to study many things about the elements of music with my own creative abilities. The period in question was the heyday of the Bunga Tanjong cabaret, New World, Great World and The Pagoda and these performing venues were crucial years in his development as a growing and youthful musician. He recalls the demands made on good repertoire and
good performance standards with the opportunity to perform in different locations which were significant for his musical development. However, these opportunities did not last long and Captain Abdullah felt hampered by the need for further development. Which is why he took the opportunity in 1946, just after the Japanese Occupation, to travel as a member of the Donyada Latin Quartet Susikuri Review, a Japanese programme, to visit various countries in Asia like Hong Kong, Manila, Taiwan and Bangkok for two months.\textsuperscript{15}

The puzzling reference to a “keronchong orchestra Hawaiian band” seems to assume a merger of two performance genres. However, Tony Beamish informs us of their proximity in his description and discussion, well worth the repeat:

\textit{Many people are unaware of the great wealth of Malay folk music in the country, because they do not often get a chance to hear it...Modern Malay “kronchong” orchestras, playing dreamy music similar to Hawaiian, record commercially in Singapore, and are a big draw with all communities. They specialise in sentimental songs that are firm favourites both in Malaya and over the water in Indonesia. It is anyone’s guess whether the kronchong orchestra is more popular than its rival attraction, the Western style dance band.}\textsuperscript{16}(emphasis mine)

The performing venues are corroborated by Joseph Peters in his observation of popular dance forms in 1950s where various dance spots or nightclubs (the most famous of which was Bunga Tanjong at the New World Amusement Park), were the venues for their proliferation.

In her academic exercise, Popular Music and Contemporary Malay Society (1994), Siti Shaireen Selamat’s preliminary study of Malay pop music in Singapore with two themes in mind:
1. Music as a means of cultural and ethnic identification
2. Music as a source of social commentary and ideology\textsuperscript{17}

It would seem that popular culture among the Malay community was dominated by traditional and folk-arts. There was often a strong regional flavour to them with some modernisation and syncretism via variations on traditional themes. Several musical styles dominated this period;
1. Keronchong
2. Ghazal
3. Boria,
4. Asli, and
5. Joget.

Each musical form had a distinctive style of performance with a specific rhythmic characteristic and an ornamental style of singing. It was possible to associate the musical style with a geographical place…dikir barat (rhythmic chanting of verses) was favoured by those from Kelantan; boria (group choral singing with dance routines) dominated in Penang and ghazal in Johor. Until the proliferation of Music of Popular culture in the Malay community, popularity in music was arrived at via practice of the more traditional forms, or to use Howard Becker’s term solidified conventions. Joseph E.E. Peters offers us details of some of these popular traditional practices. The question of what is traditional and what is popular does become enmeshed in such a way as to problematise traditional and popular as mutually exclusive terms.

The Musical practice of Keroncong is probably in a very fragile present, given that it is popularised by the Peranakan community, more than it is by the Malay community. For the Peranakan community, it seems, like Bangsawan to hold for them a unique identity and signifier for their cultural identity. Perhaps it is reason enough for them to articulate it as musical practice of its own community.
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11 Interview with Tony Danker. 4 June 2004. Spellings are based on memory and may not correspond with the names as they might appear in other documentation and records.

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Musical practice of Malay Film

It is very difficult to imagine this genre without the virtual dominance of one figure for whom Penang must rest as birthplace and identity Malaysian but one whose influence was very strongly felt in Singapore and Indonesia. It is of considerable import to understand the significance of P. Ramlee’s success through Singapore. Lockard points out that Singapore remained the centre of Malay popular culture and intellectual life well into the 1960s. Although he set for Singapore on August 9, 1948 to Singapore, he was quite fortunate to have arrived at an infrastructure that had already been developed by Malay Film Productions, who as James Harding points out succeeded a company which could be traced to 1937. This activity according to Harding and Sarji, was run by Shaw Brothers built out of inspired improvisation in the face of a lack of technical resources. Human resource we are informed arrived from a number of destinations. B.S. Rajhans, who spotted P. Ramlee, alongside other Indian directors, was imported from India in the face of scarcity of local technical support. Actors and actresses were recruited from the cabarets of Singapore and from the Malay and Indonesia troupes who performed in sandiwara and bangsawan.

P. Ramlee’s entry into the market was propitious timing, considering a number of previously disappointing experiments. The Shaw Brothers had attempted to woo an audience with existing Chinese films with little impact. Tony Danker’s accounts offer a clue to this…I played for two Malay films…Bermadu…then I played guitar music with the David Lincoln Orchestra…another film was Topeng Saitan, the star of this movie was Momo…he used to come out in the early days as an older person…While the film was going on….while they were shooting, we had to play…usually we had to play while the main star was singing the song…this was open air stuff in Geylang Serai….we did this many times…pre-war…P. Ramlee came much later….I remember Topeng Saitan was being filmed at Jalan Ampas…Balesi…then for Bermadu, we did some of the scenes at a Malay village at Geylang Serai…then in Siglap…big place….there is where had big clouds...

Tan Sooi Beng’s work on the 78 RPM industry pre Japanese Occupation draws attention to the recorded repertoire of the 1930s which included music from a few Malay films. The first Malay film was Laila Majnun, which was based on a bangsawan legend and was released in 1934. The director was an Indian, B.S. Rajhans. As in bangsawan, ‘enchanting Egyptian and Arabian Dances’ and ‘Lilting Song Hits in Classical Malay’ were featured (Straits Echo, 20 April 1934). Other films made prior to World War II dealt with contemporary stories and some even with social themes. These included Mutiara, Bermadu, Toping Syaitan, Hanchor Hati, and Terang Bulan di Malaysia (Sunday Gazette, 4 August 1940, Times of Malaya 27 October 1940, Filem Melayu, 1 July 1941). Most of the films were produced by the Chinese entrepreneurs Run Run and Runme Shaw (Shaw Brothers), directed by Hau Yaw and assisted by Miss Wan Hai Ling.
(Chinese Brothers from Shanghai). The featured actors were largely drawn from bangsawan... (Filem Melayu, 1 August 1941).
Additionally, in order to make profits, recording companies did not risk recording unknown performers. Only the best were recorded and re-recorded. The recording artists were either famous bangsawan stars such as Miss Norlia, Miss Julia, Miss Tijah and Mr. K. Dean or they were winners of competitions organised by the recording companies... the most highly-skilled musicians formed the orchestras of the recording companies. The HMV and Columbia orchestras were led by A. Rahman, Ahmad Jaafar and Osman Ahmad. D. Lincoln’s Orchestra also played for the both HMV and Columbia. Zubir Said and Yusuf B. led the Pathe Orchestra.  

It is highly unlikely that Chinese themes attempted by the Shaw Brothers were to find immediate resonance with a culture that had strong Indian influences as well as a well-established bangsawan and keronchong infrastructure supported by the Straits Chinese. Tony again provides some clues. For most of these songs (Lagu nasib, later lagu asli) the highest sales were actually made not by the Malays but by the Peranakans... those keronchong orchstras with Malays acting in it... but we had Chinese singers, you know... Lily Toh... she used to sing keronchong and all that... she only recorded four songs... but it sold very well in those days... because she was Peranakan... the Peranakans loved keronchong, asli and lagu nasib. 

Yusnor Ef, also points to an activity with some of its roots in Indonesia at what he calls Istana Kampung Glam which he suggests predates the Shaw Brothers forays... that is the time the composers came from Indonesia... that was the time they composed but those songs were mostly Indian influence... last time it was only about bangsawan... bangsawan was stage play... the stories were about fairy tales and fantasy... when they came into the film industry... things changed... film started in 1933, Shaw Brothers around 1945/1946... before Shaw Brothers they had a Film Nusantara company... all the directors and actors were from Indonesia...

One of directors, B.S Rajhans’ directed Laila Majnun in 1933, with a cast from a local opera group, likely to have been drawn from Malay and Indonesia troupes performing bangsawan and sandiwara. The fate of the Istana Kampung Glam activity may have been direct competition with live performance or not being a profitable venture or perhaps both but remains speculative pending further research. The more important point, essentially, was that P. Ramlee may not have been the primer mover in music of Malay popular film in Singapore but rather the very catalyst for the emergence of what Harding and Sarji refer to as the golden age of Malay cinema. Yusnor Ef makes the telling point, P. Ramlee came in 1948 in Malay film when it started to become very popular... that was the time when the Malays came to know about the film... many songs were to come out of it... and besides that, there were singers doing recording. What is remarkable here is the way in which a number of communities in Singapore were
intertwined in such a public venture... *the technical side of the Malay film industry was Indian, the financing was Chinese and the actors and artists were Malay...*  

In a 1954 publication, *Arts of Malaya*, Tony Beamish observed *Hindustani music was popular far beyond the confines of the Indian...communities...interesting experiments in Western orchestration can now be heard in both. At the same time, traditional skill is being maintained and the more esoteric forms of communal music continue to be played in Malaya. Of these, Carnatic songs... have an enthusiastic following in the country, and are supported not only by local arts societies but by the occasional visits of distinguished performers from...India and other parts of South-East Asia.*  

A chapter on film production in Southeast Asia by Tamaki Matsuoka Kanda has opening paragraph articulates sites of cultural exchange between India and Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s; not so much through diplomatic ties but through film: *One of the centres was Singapore. Chinese bosses, Malay stars and staff from all over Asia—Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Japanese also—made films together. As S. Ramanathan said, “It was a really cosmopolitan atmosphere.”*  

John Lent’s chapter, corroborates Tamaki’s accounts with the broader context of the film industry in Malaysia and Singapore, hence drawing on a historical unity of the Kuala Lumpur and Singapore leading to the latter’s independence in 1965 and slightly beyond.  

John Lent, however, goes much further: *Usually, the Indian directors just translated Indian scripts into Malay, the result being that the films had all the Indian nuances, cultural idiosyncracies and mannerisms, and very little that was truly Malay.*  

A view of Malay film as a translation of Indian film in all but language is curious when juxtaposed with Tony Beamish’s estimation of the greater popularity of Hindustani music. Why is there an affinity expressed between Malay film and Hindustani film but not Tamil film? Phani Majumdar, Chisty, Baldev Singh Rajhans, S. Ramanathan, Lakshmana Krishnan and B.N Rao, counted among the pioneering directors of Malay film, reveal such a range of diversity of Indian-ness that it would be difficult to predict a predominantly Hindustani translation. Support for Hindustani film, and by extension Hindustani film songs, by the Malay community can only invite further research at this point.  

What characterised P. Ramlee was the completeness of artistry he embodied. He was taught violin and guitar and learnt his lessons well; was talent-scouted by Rajhans because of his voice; acquitted himself very well in front of the movie camera; and was admired for his acting and later directing skills. Malay Film Productions (MFP) employed Ramlee as a musician, playback singer and actor for 60 Straits Settlement dollars a week. His duties included writing some songs to conform to the film director’s requirements, singing them and leading the Orkestra Kembang Murni. According to Harding and Sarji, the early Malay films were modelled on Indian films, which had dancing and singing. L. Krishnan, the director who gave Ramlee the stardom he is
known for today, was originally from Madras and employed by MFP in 1949 because of his expertise. One of his observations was the mammoth task facing a director of a fledgling industry. It was a very raw industry at that time.....the director was basically the anchor of everything...a one-man job...my immediate reference was Indian films. Often we borrowed story lines from Indian films and transplanted them into a Malay setting. There was another source: I used to venture into the bangsawan frequently in those days but I never really favoured the typical bangsawan actor...he would always overact. And that would not go down well on film. Therefore, the music...was one of the most important singing ingredients. In Chinta (1948), for instance, Ramlee was the playback singer for Roomai Noor, a bangsawan trained artist, to songs composed by Zubir Said, in addition to a modest part as an actor. In Bakti (1950), a storyline adapted from Les Miserables, Ramlee was portrayed as a hero, with Roomai Noor as villain, one song Satay, composed by Osman Ahmad, was observed by Harding and Sarji to have carried an echo in it of music written by G.F.Handel.

At the support level, Ramlee served his employers well. Shaw Brothers ran Jalan Ampas Studios on a tight schedule. No film was supposed to take longer than three months to make. By some quirk of calculation, Ramlee and by extension Shaw Brothers were able to capitalise on extremely good situations.

The practice itself was such that the success of the song depended on the composer, singer and lyricist and of course presumably the instrumental ensemble. To a large extent, the song was the outcome of the dictates of the film and film director. At one extreme, composer, singer and lyricist could be three separate persons, while at the other, all three were found in one person and P. Ramlee was credited with a number of them beginning with Budi di Bawa Mati (Berhati-hati) from the film Derita in 1951. Ramlee was not short of collaboration with composers. Songs from his first film Chinta (1948) were written by Zubir Said. His association with some composers varied in length of collaboration. With Osman Ahmad that collaboration over songs was quite extended. Ahmad Jaafar composed two songs for Ramlee, Ibu from the film of the same name in 1953 and Tak Puas Mata Memandang from Budi Mulia of 1953. Yusnor Ef was the lyric writer for Senjakala from Madu Tiga (1964) and Lanang tunang tak jadi from Dajal Suchi (1974) with the song composed by Kassim Masdur. Yusnor had a much bigger role in writing the lyrics for Joget Istana, Tari Panglima and Bermandi-manda from the film Tunggal (1961).

The Musical Practice of Malay Film

The watershed period we are told of appear in the 1940s to the 1960s with the proliferation of Malay popular film, giving rise to directors, composers, singers, lyricists and editors. These Malay songs, which acknowledging primary Hindustan origins, also seem to draw on a variety of dance music influences such as cha-cha, samba, rumba, tango, bossanova, mambo to name a few. The lyrical content of the songs were not of a
serious nature; love, advice, nostalgia, moral issues and advice. An important consideration then was the singer who held the key to the song and its popularity or reception. Ef notes the practice on records which did not acknowledge names of composers or lyricists which makes attribution difficult if not impossible unless there was personal knowledge.

By all accounts, the popularity of these songs and their consumption would require explanation. It is very likely that such recording material was expensive as with the attendant equipment like the gramophone. One of two possibilities for its proliferation are the presence of one of these in a kampung which was a shared resource in that locale. It is very likely one family possessed the resource and when new releases were purchased, neighbours would be invited to partake of the latest songs. The relative informality present in the social structure and practice of a kampung is likely to have supported such a practice. A second possibility arises from the use of amplification at much larger settings, like social functions, weddings and other public occasions within the sphere of the Malay community. Either this came in the form of gramophone via a public system or mediated presence, namely a band of musicians recreating the songs with whatever available instrumentation afforded in that instance. Yusnor was himself such an example. I joined another group Pancaragam Aneka...accordion, double bass, got violin...like a small combo...I became popular as a singer...at the time, I was in Jalan Ampas watching the filming...I got to listen to the songs...I knew a few songs from the film...so when my band went out to play for weddings, we had the edge...we sang the latest songs...like songs by the group Kenek Kenek Udang (Gergasi ca. 1969)...all these songs I used to sing at functions so I became very important singer...there were other singers but I was important...sometimes when I arrived late people kalang-kabut...so when I arrived...my colleagues would say 'hey why are you late...people are waiting to hear the songs...I stayed quite long with this group."

At the time the groups were known as Musical Parties or Pancaragam. In my time they had the Sri Pemuda Harmonium Parti...so Parti Pancharam Anika...Kenchana Wati...Pancharam (the term) they also used...Pancharam Kampung Glam was led by Kartina Dahari’s father...at that time many Hindustani groups competed with the Malay groups...Chandineraat party...Naujahan Party...at that time Hindi films were very hot...those featuring Divanan, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Vijantimala, Veena Kumari...really popular at the time...they played for weddings, any shows...nothing too big in scope or scale...especially the Malay weddings."

The relationship between music and text is already a complex issue without it being gridlocked in a film. Ramlee was reported to have said that every song depended on the composer’s feelings. Since the very emotion itself was incapable of producing the desired result, the composing of the song, inspiration had its own will. Ramlee however, did not work in an environment that could support song-writing at an irregular pace. In
any case, the director of the film was very likely the person who decided the kind of song to be composed. Harding and Sarji observed that it was common for the songs in a Malay film to have a Hindi beat. Nevertheless, when writing a song purely to entertain and without any link to a film, P.Ramlee preferred to revive the traditional Malay spirit.\textsuperscript{25}

Another concern of P.Ramlee was to emphasise the importance of a collective empathy between composer and lyricist. Yusnor discusses this in some detail, \textit{...old generation like Zubir Said, Ahmad Jaafar, P. Ramlee, Ahmad Nawab, Kassim Masdur...these people could write music by notation...so always they wrote the music first...melody first...I could not read these notes...so they would play it on the piano or guitar and the melody of the song and record on a cassette...I would memorise the melody...try to get the feeling of the song and mood of the song, sad or happy or some kind of comedy...that will lead me to thinking about how to put up the words of the song...sometimes I would ask the composer, when he/she composed the song...what they were thinking...love problems...then they would tell me its something like this...so I based it on what they tell me...I created the words...and to create the words to suit the music is not easy...last time people making the song...from here (head) and here (heart)...that means idea and feeling...come out there's something...then you write it in notation...and you call the professional musicians with the score...you play the music...how you key in with the music...how you arrange the music...I wrote the lyrics for a song composed by Kassim Masdur...\textit{Gelisah (Restless)}...sung by Ahmad Jais...the lyrics come out of my own personal experience...I fell in love with the girl who is today my wife...she was 17 I was 27...we chased each other...sometimes I chased and she was very hard to get...I felt very restless...I went to Jalan Ampang studios...Kassim Masdur is a music composer who wrote for film...so he played a song on the guitar...I asked him what song this is...he said the melody is a sad one...he was also having problems...I suggested writing the lyrics because I too had problems...so I wrote the lyrics...and the song became a hit...sung by Ahmad Jais...that it the song about the girl that eventually became my wife...who is still my wife for 37 years...whenever I am interviewed I say this... and I am recorded on radio for having said this...many of my lyrics are based on my experience...some are based on composers’ or even singers’ experiences...I have one song a Kassim Masdur song...I got to write the lyrics...I didn’t know how to write the lyrics...Sani Sahuri...this song sounds quite sad...do you have any ideas? She said Cik Gu, this song...I want to tell my story...during my birthday, my loving grandfather passed away...spoil my birthday but (it was a) blessing people say...So I penned the title \textit{Tahun sedih bagi ku}...so when she sang the song people thought she had been cheated by the boyfriend...actually not the case...a Kassim Masdur song sung by Saloma and Ahmad Daud...called \textit{Nilai Cinta}...how did we get this idea? We had a show in Malacca, Kassim, myself and some artists from Singapore...after the show we met a few girls...we were very popular and young, girls came after us...we brought the girls to the Malacca seaside...we sat with the moon
overlooking the scenery...while we talked...Kassim Masdur came up with the idea for
the song....Antara bulan bintang beribu...manakala sama bulan yang satu...antara
ribu bintang yang tebu di langit..di kau bintang hati ku...the song based on this
girl....when we chatted together...through experience, the song must come to me
first....

Lyricists who collaborated on P.Ramlee’s songs were Jamil Sulong, H.M.Rohaizad and
S.Sudarmadji. Ramlee composed a variety of songs with a Hindi bear for the 1950s
films made by directors of Indian descent. Once he was director, songs he produced had
a keroncong rhythm, as in Alunan Biola from the film Antara du Darjat. The film
Semerah Padi is an appropriate site for many songs which became very popular among
the Malay community, for example, Sekapur Sireh Seulas Pinang, Makan Sireh di
Semerah Padi, and Lenggang Kangkong Baru, because they were accompanied by
dances which by comparison with his previous work, seemed gentle and more
graceful.

When P.Ramlee films made by Indian directors contained dance sequences, many were
choreographed by Edith Costello. This was to change as well. When P. Ramlee was
working on the film Penarik Becha, he asked Habsah, mother of actress Hashimah Yon,
who was an expert on dance and had toured Malaya with a theatre troupe since her
youth. She recalled the Inang which was a Minangkabau dance that had a swaying
movement. This was adapted to an “Inang baru” dance, performed by six couples, in
traditional Malay costume, the choreography empathised Malay culture in movement.
Suffice to say we are informed the Inang Baru dance took centre stage at every party,
variety show or social gathering. Ramlee composed many songs in traditional Malay
music such as inang, zapin, masri, asli, joget and boria.

Inang Bahru
Gambus jodoh (zapin)
Nak dara Rindu (traditional Malay)
Joget Pahang
Alunan Biola (keroncong)

He was also adept in appropriating a variety of external influences
Tidurku di Rumput Yang Basah (waltz)
Ya Habibi Ali Baba (Middle Eastern influences)
Hoi-Hoi Ya-Hoi Lagu Penyamun (Chinese influences)
Nasi Goreng (samba)
Merak Kayangan (beguine)
Mengapa Riang Ria (andante)
Juwita (bolero)
Bila Larut Malam (rumba)
Putus Sudah Kaseh Sayang (slow beguine)
Ramlee was popular as a lyricist for tongue-in-cheek songs like **Nasi Goreng, Maafkan Kami** and **Pok-Pok Bujang Lapok, Do Re Mi**. In the movie Laksemana Doremi [Admiral Doremi] which P.Ramlee directed in 1968, there was a scene showing the three main characters riding a magic carpet and singing a Japanese song, rendered heartily in Malay and Japanese, which many informants call “Miyatokai no Sora”. It is possible Ramlee picked up the song while attending a Japanese school as a 14-year-old in Penang during the Japanese Occupation. In the movie **On to Singapore** opened with a military unit advancing on bicycles towards Kuala Selangor “singing lustily all the way ‘Hashirei Hinomaru Ginrin Butai’ (advance Hinomaru Cyclists Corps)”, and concluded with the British surrender. Cinemas not able to obtain Japanese films screened **second and third run, Malai, Chinese and Indian films**. Popular songs like **Di Pingiran, Entah di Mana** and **Assalamulaikum**. Ramlee gained credibility for his marching songs, which in the early Islamic period played a big role in arousing the spirit....Patriotic songs like **Pahlawanku, Perwira** and **Sekapuh Sireh**, all sung by Saloma. It is all the more likely that some lessons learnt during the Japanese Occupation may have helped Ramlee in working out such winsome strategies in his patriotic songs. The same seems to apply to **Joget Malaysia, Joget Pahang** and **Melaka**. Songs of advice like **Kenek-Kenek Udang, Rukun Islam** and **Tolong Kami**. Love ballads include **Merak Kayangan** and **Tidur-lah Permaisuri, Dendang Perantau** can be heard on radio and television during the Id celebrations. Weddings usually had **Renjis di Pilis, Merpati dua Sejoli** and **Selamat Pengantin Baru**.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, young Malays were more attracted to the Beatles, Venture, Cliff and the Shadows, the Rolling Stones and other pop idols. Ramlee formed a band called **Pancha Sitara** hoping to counteract the influence of the **Platters** and revitalise Malay music. **Pancha Sitara** was well received as were the songs **Bila Larut Malam** and **Mawar Ku** to name a few. If there was a time Ramlee was out of joint, this was probably it. A movement that appeared in the 1960s that had already been simmering with **Bill Haley and the Comets** and **Cliff Richard and the Shadows**, hit fever pitch in Singapore, especially with the **Cliff Richard and the Shadows** who gave a performance at the Happy World Stadium in 1961. Subsequently, most ensembles were to convert to the three guitars and one drummer configuration. In fact, by the time M. Osman’s Suzanna appeared and emblazoned EP sales and radio airplay in 1963, Pop Yeh Yeh had emerged and continued into the late 1960s. Ramlee was quoted as saying this kind of music placed importance only on the loudness of the music rather than the quality of the song itself...Poor quality pop songs and music will give rise to a future generation that is wild. Young people who sing as they please, play music as they
Please, dress themselves as they please will end up exposed to negative elements which will inevitably result in all ill discipline.  

That, however, did not prevent Ramlee recording several songs based on kugiran led by Jefri Din, A. Ramli, L. Ramlee, S. Mariam, Jaafar O among others. His own contributions were Bunyi Gitar from Tiga Abdul (1964) and Ai Ai Twist from Masam-Masam Manis of 1965.

On balance, Ramlee’s concerns were the vocal quality of a song. Ramlee was not alone in this concern. Professional musicians in the world of jazz and popular culture, Sam Gan and Horace Wee believed that the big culture shock to the musicians of the day...especially for those of us who became established...I think before the Beatles, Cliff Richard and the Shadows, the Ventures came to Singapore...and all of a sudden you have bass guitar...what’s that? It was very loud...amplified sound...not as smooth, well-rounded and refined a sound...very raw...Horace Wee echoed similar sentiments If you describe it now, it did sound very raw...when it was first came on...it was in its infancy.....the players who played it weren’t qualified musicians...they couldn’t read...Half the time they couldn’t even play the instrument...sometimes its good that way because that’s how a new artform or practice evolves...when someone goes in blindly innocent...you don’t now what’s impossible...so that’s why in those days it was loud...discordant...mainly because they didn’t tune their instruments properly...it became a big shock to the professional musicians of that last twenty/thirty years...and of course it was greeted with great resentment...you remember when Sam talked about how in the heydays of the big band scene, there were always the quality musicians who could read music...and those who could not...this actually became the other way around...but then the professional musicians looked at these pop-up stars...and said they only played three chords...hardly in tune because they could hardly tune properly and they couldn’t even read notes...there was a lot of tension between both parties...the rock n’ roll musicians looked at the professionals with disdain...old men...and the professionals looked at these people and said something like a bunch of amateurs...and they weren’t even amateurs.

Many more questions come to light surrounding this practice. Apart from oral accounts by those close to the Malay Film Industry and their star- performers, much of this practice reveals the need for photographs, contracts to produce music for film, correspondence, 78-rpm records, live recordings, recording in-situ, scripts, to name a few, to help corroborate this practice, its composers, performers and its audience.
REFERENCES

1 Harding, James and Sarji, Ahmad, P.Ramlee The Bright Star, Pelanduk Publications, Malaysia, 2002, with specific reference to chapter 2.

2 Ibid., p.19.

3 Ibid., p.19

4 Bermadu was a black and white pre-war film, among others like Laila Majnun, Ibu Tiri, Tiga Kasih, and Terang Bulan Di Malaya, the last of which had a song which eventually emerged as the National Anthem of Malaysia. Laila Majnun was directed by B.S. Rajhans and that was financed by the Motilal Chemical corporation from India. It is not certain if the others were similarly financed since MFP Productions by Shaw brothers according to one source was a post-war entity, although the Shaw Brothers were very successful in the pre-war period with film screening and cinema houses. By 1953, Shaw had two movie-houses, Rex theatre and Queens in Geylang Road, while Keris had the Odeon Katong.

5 There are two Momos cited in different sources. One is Momo Latif, the singer and references to him are found in Harding and Sarji, op.cit. However, the film in question, Bermadu is found in Mohd. Kamsah Sirat: Malay Film Industry in Singapore—its Beginning in the proceedings of the EWC-AMIC ASEAN FILM RESEARCH WORKSHOP, held in Singapore 6-8 September 1989. The second presence of a Momo Karim, besides Sharid Medan, Momo Karim, Habsah and Tija just to mention a few, acting in those films had prior experience in Bangsawan or Malay traditional opera. It is likely that Momo Karim is the actor in question.

6 Interview with Tony Danker, 4 June 2004.


8 Interview with Tony Danker, 4 June 2004. Although I am unable to determine if the audience at MFP films were predominantly Straits Chinese, the evidence here suggests that the Shaw Brothers film industry was not supported by a Chinese majority in Singapore.

9 It seems that Laila Majnun was adapted from Sanskrit sources which was a tale about two ill-starred lovers.

10 The dates are a problematic because Mohd. Kamsah Sirat credits Tsu Min for starting up Nusantara Film after Shaw brothers MFP. See Malay Film Industry in Singapore—its Beginning

11 Oral Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 December 2003.

12 Harding and Sarji, op.cit. p.19.

13 Oral Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 December 2003.

14 Oral Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 December 2003.


16 Tamaki Marsuoka Kanda, Indian Film Directors in Malaya, pp.43-50, p.43, in Vasudev, Aruna (ed.) Frames of Mind; Reflections on Indian Cinema, UBS Publishers, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1995. Tamaki cites four reasons (p.50) for the presence of Indian directors in Singapore:

1. A much earlier developed Indian film industry;
2. Much cheaper to employ than Hollywood directors;
3. English as a language well-employed by the Indian directors; and
4. Familiarity with the Malay Peninsula because of the large number of Indian immigrants.


19 Harding and Sarji, op.cit. p.27.

20 Ibid., p.21.

21 Ibid, p.28

22 Ibid., p.41

23 Oral interview with Yusnor Ef, 29 December 2003.

24 Ibid.

25 Harding and Sarji, op.cit., p.213.

26 Oral Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 and 26 December 2003.

27 Harding and Sarji, op.cit., p. 214.


29 Syonan Shinbun, 13 January 2603, 7 April 2603, 1 September 2603, 10 September 2603, 24 September 2603, in Kratoska, Paul H., The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, a Social and Economic history, Allen& Unwin., p.142.

30 Harding and Sarji, op.cit., p.219.

31 Burhanudin bin Buang, Pop Yeh Yeh music in Singapore, 1963-1971 Academic Exercise, National University of Singapore, 2000 with particular reference to Chapter two.

32 Harding and Sarji, op.cit., 215-216

33 Ibid., p.217.

34 Interview with Sam Gan and Horace Wee, 9 January 2004.
Musical Practice of Malay ‘traditional’ forms

Malay Community

Much has been written about the little that is known about pre 19th century Singapore, among the recent works being the Singapore History Museum's *Early Singapore 1300s - 1819: Evidence in Maps, text and Artefacts*. However, references to music can be found in the classical Malay text *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) that traces the origins and descent of Malay royalty. Although the *Sejarah Melayu* is a work belonging to more traditional literary genre than history, it nevertheless provides some clue to what type of music could have been performed and heard in prior to the arrival of the British. Here, mention is made of the queen of Bintan, Iskandar Shah who is said to have been the first to use or instituted the *nobat*, which refers to both a drum as well as a royal orchestra that performs during a ruler's coronation, *Bagindalah yang pertama nobat, maka diturut oleh segala raja-aja yang di bawah angin ini*. The significance of the *nobat* lies in that it is believed that the ruler will not be accepted unless the *nobat* is played. More interestingly however, according to the *Sejarah Melayu*, Iskandar Shah was the mother of Sang Nila Utama, the founder of Singapore. Excavations by historian and archaeologist John Miksic however has not revealed any musical instruments although Miksic does mention the limitation of his work owing to extraneous factors. Miksic also points out objects that have yet to be identified. Nevertheless, he does however suggest that Fort Canning was once the site of religious activity, craftsmen's workshops and a palace. *FTC can be interpreted as a craftsmen's quarters within a palace and temple precinct, as artisans were common residents in traditional Southeast Asian royal compounds.* Given both Miksic's findings as well as the claim that Sang Nila Utama was the son of the Queen of Bintan who instituted the *nobat*, one could assume then that some sort of a royal orchestra would have existed at some point in time prior to the 19th century. Moreover, if there was a temple precinct, which served in the context of worship, other forms of musical practice would also have been likely. But aside from music in the court and as well as music for worship, there was also public music. In the tenth section of *Sejarah Melayu* that tells of the legend of Singapore being attacked by swordfish and its subsequent fall to the Javanese, there is reference to a song that was created by the public. According to the legend, a young boy saved the island from the swordfish attack through fortifying its coast with banana tree trunks. During this time, as recounted by the *Sejarah Melayu*, the king's sleeve was torn by a swordfish during one of the attacks. This incident gave rise to a song:

Pada suata riwayat,
daripada deras lompat todak itu,
datang ke atas gajah,
kena baju Paduka Seri Maharaja,
carik lenganny;

1

2

3

4
maka dibuatkan orang nyanyi:

Carik baja raja,
Di lompati todak;
Bukan disahaja
Sebab akal budak

By 1827, however, there was musical activity of some sort as evident in an account of the celebration of King George IV's birthday in the April 26th issue of the Singapore Chronicle held by the Resident of Singapore, at that time, Robert Fullerton: On the 23rd the Hon: the Resident gave an entertainment in celebration of the anniversary of His Majesty’s birth, unequalled perhaps in the annals of Singapore festivity. As night approached, the Government Hill was lighted up with innumerable lamps....from a distance the appearance of one mass of flames which must have been visible for many miles to sea-ward......On the grassy brow of the hill were spread mats in a square of considerable extent, surrounded by seats which received the visitors as they arrived whilst the area was occupied by a groupe of Javanese musicians and dancers. The music of these performances was, to our ear at least, not unpleasing, but the dancing of the Javanese, if this could be considered a fair specimen of it, has little to recommend it....the sex of these professors formed matter of considerable speculation but whichever it may have been formed they formed a curious and characteristic groupe which occupied the attention of the company.....when one considers the way in which censorship prevailed over published newspaper texts, the coda to this article is most revealing not only by its late inclusion but by its nonchalance....we have made a large omission in leaving out His Highness the Sultan who, and also the second son of the late Temangong, were present at dinner and during the evening. The former appeared in high good humour and pleased with everything going on around him.5

Not much prevails in the English versions of the newspapers. However, the presence of a number of dances well established in Singapore cannot be denied when the Theatres Ordinance of 1895 extended the boundaries and definitions of theatre which includes any theatre room booth or other place open to the public or any class of the public in theatre which there is carried on any stage-play circus conjuring, dancing, wayang, mayong, mundu, joget, ronggeng or other operatic or theatrical performance of any sort whatever.6 (emphasis mine)

The purpose of this ordinance was to ensure that a permit would have to be obtained in order to validate its performance. Details are scarce but slightly further down the list of guidelines are: The Chief Police Officer may withdraw any license if in his opinion the theatre licensed is a public nuisance or is an annoyance to the persons living near or having their place of work or business near or if any riot unlawful gaming or misbehaviour has taken place therein or if any performance therein is of an indecent
immoral or improper nature or if the theatre has been kept open beyond the hours stated in the license or in contravention of any Municipal By-laws. The Chief Police Officer shall if required furnish the licensee with the grounds of such withdrawal in writing. Notice of such withdrawal shall be served on the licensee if he can be found and shall also be affixed to the theatre.7

Music was evidently in practice, either from Java or in Singapore of Javanese origin or both. Craig Lockard’s descriptions arrive a little later in the twentieth century although the assumption is Malaya which would have included Singapore:

Before World War II, popular culture among Malays was dominated by traditional and folk arts—often with regional or local flavour—or by more modernised or syncretic variations on traditional themes. Traditional Malay music long pre-dates the arrival of Western culture and chiefly involves gamelan-type instruments such as gongs, drums, flutes and those with affinities to Islamic cultures. In the words of a Malaysian culture scholar, music played an important role in upholding the social structure of the time.......the world-view of the traditional society, music and political ideology coincided. Musical instruments formed part of the royal regalia......[and] are believed to have supernatural powers.8

In her academic exercise, Popular Music and Contemporary Malay Society (1994), Siti Shaireen Selamat conducted a preliminary study of Malay pop music in Singapore with two themes in mind:
1. Music as a means of cultural and ethnic identification
2. Music as a source of social commentary and ideology

It would seem that popular culture among the Malay community was dominated by traditional and folk-arts. There was often a strong regional flavour to them with some modernised and syncretic variations on traditional themes. Several musical styles dominated this period;
1. Keronchong
2. Ghazal
3. Boria,
4. Asli, and
5. Joget.

Each musical form had a distinctive style of performance with a specific rhythmic characteristic and an ornamental style of singing. It was possible to associate the musical style with a geographical place…dikir barat (rhythmic chanting of verses) was favoured by those from Kelantan; boria (group choral singing with dance routines) dominated in Penang and ghazal in Johor. Until the proliferation of Music of Popular culture in the Malay community, popularity in music was arrived at via practice of the
more traditional forms, or to use Howard Becker’s term solidified conventions. Joseph E.E. Peters\textsuperscript{9} offers us details of some of these popular traditional practices.

**Pantun**
This is a Malay literary poetic form closely identified in **dondang sayang** (an event for love songs). **Pantun** is also commonly used as a structural support for musical forms such as **bangsawan** (opera), **asli** (native songs) and **dikir barat** (chorus and movement). The skill in performing these poems is to recite in a way to suggest a form of singing while at the same time conjure up the ability to engage in quick, witty and subtle dialogue, usually in relation to questions and issues of the daily existence of the common folk. **Pantun** can be written in **dua baris** (couplet) or **empat baris** (quatrain). The main **pantun** line/s depending on the 2 or 4-line structure is the thematic focus. However, the **pembayang maksud** (shadow line) is the subtle point to be savoured. The **pantun** is regarded the high art of the Malay community. The Malay radio station in Singapore ran a very successful **pantun** programme in the 1980’s called **Senda Mesra** (Cordial Banter) popular not only in Singapore and West Malaysia but also in Malay communities in Southern Thailand, Brunei, Riau Islands (East Indonesia) and even Perth. This programme presented **pantun** in dialects of Minangkabau, Bugis and Javanese. **Pantuns** are known to be the purveyor and conveyor of Malay Customs (**adat**) and manners (**adab**). Older Malay **pantuns** are noted to be great collections of traditional Malay views of life and the world around them, serving as a vehicle for conservation. **Pantuns** are generally created in styles portraying **sindir** (indirect references) and **kias** (analogies). In the days when the Malay communities lived in a **kampung** setting (village), the art of **pantun** laced conversation at important social celebrations, ritual relating to major life-cycle events like marriage, birth, initiation, agreements, contracts and entertainment. Since the transformation of Singapore, practice of the **pantun** had been reduced to a few specialised groups. Its run into oblivion has been stemmed by intervention by politicians, academics and artists.

**Kuda Kepang**
This dance form originated from East Java and was popular at wedding in Singapore. Commonly as the ‘horse dance’—the dance is said to be about warrior horsemen and victory celebrations; stiff cardboard cutouts of gaily coloured horses are attached to the dancers, giving the feel that they are victoriously riding on horses. A reduced version of the Javanese gamelan is the usual musical accompaniment. In the original dance, the stories were exclusively from the Indian epics, the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**. **Kuda kepang** came to Singapore through the migration patterns of East Javanese as well as the movement of this dance form and the gamelan through the Malay courts. The kuda kepang form in Johor was unique in that the gamelan was used to accompany the dance and this form influenced the early Singapore version. It lost most of its popularity after World War II, through the shift in preferences in the younger generation to contemporary popular musical styles and its association with trance and therefore,
evil spirits and/or drunkenness, arising largely out of misrepresentations of the dance. In 1971, Raden Suparti Raden Emam formed a troupe, Kesenian tarian Kuda Kepang Putra Putri Unggal Wenang, with the idea of disassociating the dance with trance and re-popularise it. Nazri Bin Othman points out in his study, the Kuda Kepang practice survives especially among the Singapore Javanese despite the presence of opposition from others in the Muslim community in Singapore. These practitioners hold strongly to their principle that the Kuda Kepang is an ancient cultural practice that must be protected as a heritage.

Asli
The term asli is a collective reference to Malay heritage. James Chopyak informs us the word asli literally means ‘original’ and is derived from the word ‘asal’ which means origin. While the denotative meanings count for problems in connotative meanings, Asli has been used by practitioners to refer to old, traditional or semi-traditional music or style or performance. It can also be used to refer to a particular musical genre. This genre has regional variations but generally acknowledges developments out of the dondang saying (love lullaby) genre. The term asli is often used to describe a style of singing. In summary, Chopyak informs us of the variety of meanings attached to Asli:

1. A particular rhythmic pattern
2. A particular tempo
3. A particular song genre
4. A particular instrumental grouping
5. A particular style of singing
6. An old or traditional Malay music

Nevertheless, where songs are concerned, they reflect a distinctive Malay musical heritage (Yusnor Ef, 1994). An asli song is highly melismatic and uses pantun for its lyrics which could be about anything ranging from love stories to nature, patriotism and nationalism. Chopyak argues that the text in asli is fixed and written in advance but in practice, performed in a highly improvised style. It is performed in slow duple or quadruple meter and accompanied by a flute, violin, hand-drum, gong, guitar and piano-accordion. The genre of asli songs performed today consists of mainly songs written for entertainment like stage works or film and use major-minor diatonicism. However, the melodic lines are still coloured by melismatic features from a previous tradition which allow for the label asli. Flexibility of style allows for the use of instruments outside the tradition.

Craig Lockard observes the overall presence of asli which had more than one meaning: essentially a modernised or popularised folk music including folk songs, pop songs in a folk style, instrumental pieces, and dances in various styles, with the joget as the best known; asli also refers to a style of song with a distinctive rhythmic characteristics, as well as to an ornamental style of singing. Some types of asli were closely identified
with bangsawan and often incorporated popular Western dance beats. Traditional music persists side by side with modern music but has taken on some modern influences. For example, the violin has been adopted for the ronggeng, joget, and dondang sayang.\textsuperscript{15} A Straits Times caption advertising a show at the Alhambra in the tells us of the Re-appearance of Irving Aaronson and his Commanders in a Selection of Numbers followed by a musical number of special interest to Music lovers Duci De Kerek Jarto whose rendering of violin selections delighted audiences on his last appearance here...\textsuperscript{16}

Tony Danker who played in the David Lincoln Keronchong Orchestra between 1938 and the outbreak of WWII offers his own perspective on \textit{asli}.....\textit{They were good singers, like Miss Julia singing in the keronchong...they used to sing the lagus and aslis, as you call them...in those days they used to call it nasib...lagu nasib... I’m not sure...but in those days they used to call it lagu nasib....now that’s changed to asli....and that was very simple...one bass and one violinist and they had the kompong (percussion drum)...you had to know how to hit it....because it you’d hit it the wrong way...otherwise you’d just complicate things...certain beats you’d move to the beat...themes, lyrics...mostly they were based on love...the lyrics were written so that everybody wanted to talk about or sing about or listen to....once in a while you’d get a song about lovesickness....death of mum...the loss of a mother then was a big issue...that upped the sale of records...out of sympathy. That drove the very strong message of family ties.... but most of these songs the highest sales were actually made not by the Malays but by the Peranakans....those keronchong orchestras with Malays acting in it...but we had Chinese singers, you know...Lily Toh....she used to sing keronchong...she only recorded four songs but it sold very well in those days because she was Peranakan...keronchong, asli and lagu nasib [were] taken up more by the Peranakans.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Dondang Sayang}

It is one of the forms centrally reliant on the \textit{pantun} structure. According to Peters\textsuperscript{18}, Two possible origins exist; one source claims origins in Rhio Lingga in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century and attributed to a love song written for Princess Wan Bernai of Binan island. Another origin is in the courts of the Malacca Sultanate during the 14\textsuperscript{th} & 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries where the \textit{pantun} was the medium of entertainment during the festivities among the royal families and nobles. This practice witnessed the introduction of musical instruments like the \textit{rebab} (violin), \textit{rebana} (hand-drum) and \textit{tenawak} (gong). Its popularity allowed for it to be spread to major traditional festivals of the people and later for general social occasions. When the Portuguese arrived in 1511, it was one form that not only found favour but grew in popularity. The proliferation meant the infiltration of the Western violin, accordian and guitar in these songs as well as the leaning towards major-minor diatonicism. The \textit{rebab} was one of the traditional instruments began to disappear from this genre. The Peranakan community in Malacca played a significant role in developing
another version of dondang sayang. There were two sectors in this community; the Baba-Nonyas (mixture of Chinese and Malay cultures) and the Chettiars (mixture of Tamil and Malay cultures). It was the Baba-Nonya culture that developed significantly as a community and spread to other parts of Malaya and to Singapore.

Tony Beamish, writing in 1954, informs us of the haunting “dondang sayang” a musical setting of the spontaneous Malay “pantun”. This is sung almost exclusively in the Malacca district, though some effort is now being made to keep the art alive in other places, such as Penang and Singapore. Both the Malays and many Straits-born Chinese excel at sustained improvisation, both of words and music, and a song session may well last half the night, continuing until the singers often from rival villages, drop with exhaustion. This form of inter-village competition, salted with robust but friendly ridicule, seems in Malaya to take the place of country darts matches in England. Many people are unaware of the great wealth of Malay folk music in the country, because they do not often get a chance to hear it. Nevertheless it ranks as an important part of Malaya’s artistic heritage. As it is not written down, there is always a risk of it dying out, but this is unlikely for several reasons.

• The music gains strength from its readiness to absorb new ideas.
• The Malay rulers give it strong support.
• Energetic steps are being taken by Radio Malaya to preserve it on records and to arouse wider interest in it by broadcasting.
• But the main reason why the music is still played and sung in the kampongs today is because the villagers revel in it, a sure guarantee of survival in the face of the strongest competition.

The greatest competitor of this old Malay folk music is in fact the Western dance band.19

Currently, both the Malay and Baba forms of dondang sayang are in practice. The main difference between the Malay and Baba versions of dondang sayang lies in the use of language in the pantun. The Baba language is a pidgin version of Malay slanted with much from Chinese dialects, particularly Hokkien. The melodic lines are less melismatic than the asli version. Additionally, the Malay version of dondang sayang is accompanied by violin, gong and hand-drum. The pantun dialog is usually the highlight of the dondang sayang event. A number of such dialogues happen and each is usually sung by two persons (most often male and female), engaging in “trading wits” and comments on any issue. The pantun sessions are interspersed with dancing episodes where joget and ronggeng are featured most. Improvisation plays a crucial role here in the creation of text in the highly stylized and structured template of the pantun.

The late Pak Malim Asman, who directed the Orkes Aslirama, launched a Dondang Sayang club and they were featured regularly on television between 1982 and 1985. Pak Malim even tried performances at the beach on a Saturday night to create a wider base of appreciation. Today a handful of troupes are left—Dendang Semudra and Dendang
Asli to mention two. Dendang Semudra has even taken the effort to learn Mandarin to appeal to the Mandarin speaking population and perhaps regain the Chinese Peranakan community from there. The Baba version of dondang sayang is exclusively performed by the Peranakans through the Gunung Sayang Association which was formed in 1910. It actively promotes all manner of Peranakan arts through public performances/displays and radio and television.

Hadrah and Kompang
This genre is said to have arrived from the Middle East via India as early as 13th century through trading activities. We are informed of its possible origins where the work hadrah is derived from hadir, which is taken to mean “to present” something in lieu of a performance or a demonstration or a ceremony. It is suggested that merchants from the Middle-east used this hadrah (hand-drum) to attract customers to their wares, hence the connotation after time through the form of the performance. The kompang, it is suggested, has onomatopoeic derivations, from the impressions of the sound made when beating this hand-drum. Essentially, the hand-drum used in the hadrah and kompang belong to the rebana family of drums, the largest of which, the rebana bedah, is used at mosques. Hadrah and kompang music spread through the Malay region of Southeast Asia with the advent of Islam and took on different shades of development at different destinations. It came to Singapore in the early part of this century (Ahmad Azmi suggests 1920s from the Riau Islands) and was prominent in the years after the Japanese Occupation. According to Peters, music associated with the hadrah and kompang seems to have survived in choral forms which are closely linked to rhythms accompanied by rebana (hand-drums). Two types exist—the rebana hadrah (with small clinkers attached to them) and rebana kompang (large hand-drums without clinkers). The songs used in both forms are taken from the Dewan Hadrah, which is the traditional repertoire, and the Barzanzi scriptures, where the religious repertoire in Arabic come from. The songs are performed in the style of chant and sung over interlocking rhythms classified as the lead, basic and rhythm beats and the form the music takes is shared by the Hadrah and Kompang. There are separate types of interlocking rhythms for the two categories of music. The kompang interlocking rhythms are usually faster and more extrovert. The major use of hadrah and kompang is at Malay weddings where the chanting of Arabic verses announces the arrival of the groom at the bride’s house. It also features prominently during the bersanding (sitting in state) when the bride will be taken from her room to the pelamin (dias) for her relatives and friends to view her, and sometimes tease her as well. It is also common to hear this type of music at formal occasions like openings of conferences, inauguration of buildings, and other auspicious events. The kompang inter-locking rhythms are also basically three, but they have more variety and are usually faster and more extrovert than those of the “Hadrah”. In Singapore, the Kompang is performed in three major styles:

1. Kompang Melayu
2. Kompang Jawa – including:
   a. Kemplingan,
   b. Kenterongan,
   c. Pacitanan,
   d. Terbangan,
   e. Jidur,
3. Kompang Araban which includes
   a. Zapin and
   b. Marwas

Diker Barat
This is another Malay choral form which has the pantun art very much as its central feature. Body movement, call-and-response between groups of singers to the accompaniment of musicians, chanting and body sounds are the other essential features of this music. There are strict rules for the creation and performance of song forms, as well as rules for the structure of the group. Diker Barat was introduced to Singapore from Kelantan in the 1940s. There is today a Singapore Diker Barat Federation which is very active in the promotion and development of this art form. Renewed interest in Diker Barat began in 1984 when a competition was held among junior colleges. Development through the 1980s happened at the school level with the former Singapore Broadcasting Corporation programme, Sennandung Rakyat (folk songs) telecasting them. Schools were keen to promote diker barat mainly because it helped with the teaching and learning of the Malay language. Not surprisingly, song creations had themes that reflected school and youth concerns like harmonious living, unity, courtesy, hard work and achievement. A diker barat ensemble has four key elements: the tok juara (leader); tukang karut (song initiator), the awok-awok (chorus) and the musicians. The tok juara establishes the theme and keeps the group together. The tukang karut is the key performer as this role requires a quick-witted person who has command of the art of pantun and who can initiate response or pose challenges to a competing diker barat team. The awok-awok provide colour and entertainment through their body movements and body sounds like clapping of hands and vocal interjections, and reinforce phrases from the tok juara or the tukang karut through repetition. Instruments used are the rebana ibu (large hand-drum), rebana anak (small hand-drum), tetawak (gong), canang/bonang (xylophone) and the rhomba (maracas). There has also been a trend to add the seruling (flute), serunai (oboe) and modern maracas. Songs are classified according to Lagu Juara (Tok Juara’s song form), Lagu Karut (Tukang Karut’s song form) and Wau bulan (concluding song form). Lagu karut has four sub-forms: karut pattanit, karut Kelantan, karut Yankee and karut matang, all of which have different ways of constructing the pantun. During a performance there are two diker barat groups sitting opposite each other. The rebana ibu gives the cue to begin the tepuk 10, a sequence of hand-clapping by the awok-awok. One groups performs a juara song and
one or two karut songs before the other takes over. They engage in a dialog, teasing each other in a friendly spirit through some humorous lyrics. This activity calls for much improvisation and the cue to end comes when the wau bulam is sung by one of the tukang karut after which the tepuk\textsuperscript{10} will be performed to round off the performance.

**Ghazal**

Ghazal is a relatively new genre of traditional music, originating in Johore in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century from Arab, Portuguese and Indian sources. According to Abdullah bin Mohamed, quoted in Chopyak, the term ghazal is Arabic but passed into Persian, Turkish, Urdu and Malay and has acquired different meanings in these languages...in Arabic literature the ghazal is a poetic genre (Jahiliah). It was a form of love poem, often also called ‘the erotic-elgiac genre’...ghazal in Persian and Urdu has developed into a vehicle for serious poetry...in Malay, the ghazal is not a poetic or musical form: it is rather a name applied to a musical session, a sort of salon musical party, consisting of traditional Malay folksongs controlled and disciplined by a small number of musical instruments—mostly of foreign origin—with harmonium as the leader.\textsuperscript{23}

The term ghazal seems to refer to:

1. A specific accompanying rhythm pattern
2. An instrumental group
3. The process of performing this music

There are variations in the orchestration used but a basic ghazal group includes a violin, guitar, gambus (oud), tambourine, maracas, two tabla, and one harmonium. On occasion, Chopyak informs us that the Malay rebana and gendang are used to supplement or replace the second tabla. The violin plays the basic melody with the guitar and gambus providing the countermelodies. The harmonium usually plays countermelodies as well as occasional thirds (major/minor). Ghazal tempo is usually twice that of asli. Mohd. Anis Mohd. Nor (1983) suggests that ghazal was used to accompany dance in Johore as early as 1956.\textsuperscript{24}

**Zapin**

Zapin began as an Arab Dance in the Middle East, absorbing Indian influences enroute to Malaya which included Singapore. Zapin in the present refers to:

a. A Dance
b. An instrumental ensemble
c. A particular rhythmic pattern
d. An implied melodic-rhythmic integration

While asli groups sometimes play a zapin, the most commonly used instrumentation for the form is a violin for the melody, a gambus, one or two large gendang, one or two
small gendang, a harmonium, maracas, rebana, kompang and/or tambourine and an optional flute for countermelodies but for the most part, it is the gambus which usually stands out prominently from the rest of the ensemble. The rhythm of the melody of the zapin is closely integrated with the rhythm of the accompanying percussion instruments.

Larry Francis, in his study of the Zapin tradition in Malaysia offers his observations. Although practices in Malaysia and Singapore are similar they are still site-specific practices and therefore dependent on the socio-political and cultural contexts which cannot be converted into a one-to-one correspondence. However, there are some fundamental aspects of the practice which Francis observes: Zapin Melayu is sung in Malay...the rhythm is very clearly established and seems to correspond to a choreography more elegant and stately although it may have more rhythmic variety...verses are repeated, the melodic line is much simpler. There are both male and female participants in the dance of Zapin Melayu...in Zapin Melayu, one must offer salaam.....sometimes its Indian style, sometimes its bowing. ....you have to salaam...same sequence...its like service to the Sultan. Malays stand or squat.... But they look at the audience....its eye-contact with the audience...contact with the audience because it’s a staged performance. The conjecture is that Zapin is a court dance....its obligatory for the salaam to be offered to the Sultan. In my work I have discussed this in relation to Mak Yong....in all the court dances.

In relation to song-texts, Larry Francis observed that that Zapin employs the use of pantun in the Malay style. There is an opening segment known as the taksim, which may be regarded as improvisatory in its articulation. The taksim is used to signify a solo performance played either by the violin or gambus but normally the gambus is the main instrument. As there is opening (buka) there is also a closing segment (wainab/tutup). According to Farid Alatas, there is a place in Turkey called Taksim....it divides Europe from Asia at Istanbul...so taksim is the thing is that divides one part of a song from another...which is generally instrumental. Francis points out a Malay term wainab used in Zapin Melayu. Farid explains that in Zapin Arab, it was called wainak:

When we went to Jakarta, including Ahmad Fadar...it was wainak which means where are you...rhetorical...asking God where He is...a call to God now that I have completed my devotion to you, show me your presence...concentrate on devotion to God like in Ya badi il-Jamal...the wasaal...means union with God....so after that you have not found God....so you ask, where are you? Its very Sufi.

Whether or not the practice of Zapin appropriates Zapin Arab practices, among other more detailed aspects, is likely to engender further discussion and scholarship through field research.
**Masri**

Masri can be used to refer to
1. A dance
2. An implied melodic mode
3. Two basic rhythmic accompaniment patterns

Fundamentally, masri is music associated with a dance of the same name. The basic asli ensemble, sometimes with the addition of a large rebana or a gendang, is used to perform masri. There is no fixed tempo for masri.

**Inang**

The term refers to
1. A dance
2. Three different accompanying rhythmic patterns
3. A style of performance

The word itself, inang (wet nurse) is found in the name for a dance (mak inang) and of a song (Mak Inang) that is written and most often performed in the style of masri. Inang is the most difficult genre to characterize because it does not refer to any specific musical elements, as much as it implies a style of performance. There is no specific inang rhythmic pattern. There is generally less percussive emphasis in the inang than there is in zapin performances. Some musicians point to a strong Hindustani influence on inang, especially when a vocal part is included. On some occasions fast-paced masri patterns have been referred to as inang. However, Harding and Sarji point out that when P. Ramlee was working on the film *Penarik Becha*, he asked Habsah, mother of actress Hashimah Yon, who was an expert on dance and had toured Malaya with a theatre...
troupe since her youth. She recalled the Inang which was a Minangkabau dance that had a swaying movement. This was adapted to an “Inang baru” dance, performed by six couples, in traditional Malay costume, the choreography empathised Malay culture in movement. Suffice to say we are informed the Inang Baru dance took centre stage at every party, variety show or social gathering.

**Joget/ Ronggeng**

Joget has two literal meanings, dance and dancing girl. In its earliest usage Chopyak informs us that the term probably referred to female court dancers and dancers in the state of Pahang in West Malaysia. It would go some way to explain why P. Ramlee, in composing many songs in traditional Malay musical and dance genres, selected of all joget-joget, a **Joget Pahang**. The joget form was greatly influenced by the Portuguese, particularly during the Portuguese occupation of Malacca. Until the early 20th century, it was also known as a ronggeng. With the creation of the joget modern, joget as a term eventually replaced ronggeng as the name for the genre. Perhaps one of the main reasons for the popularity of the joget is that it is a social dance forming which male and female move flirtatiously around original form, used European (modern) instruments in an outdoor dancehall-like setting. Since it was not considered proper for unmarried Malay women to take part in such affairs, men could buy tickets to dance with professional female dancers, who were called ‘joget’.

Chopyak informs us of an early observation on joget from the Journal of the Indian Archipelago:

*The Malays are exceedingly fond of music and many have acquired a tolerable knowledge of the violin and play their national tunes and many European airs correctly, the drum appears to be the only native instrument, and for hours will a party of Malys amuse themselves by reciting verses accompanied by its monotonous tones. On the violin they will execute by ear all their own tunes and English jigs and Portuguese fandangos and will dance to the tunes with as much spirit as an Englishman at a fair; reels and jigs they manage well and will go through the Figures of the quadrille tolerably; it must be stated that the stolid country Malay seldom indulges in such amusements, those that reside near the town and the Jawibukans are fond of imitating their European neighbours.*

Traditionally, joget was accompanied by an ensemble essentially the same as the asli group: a violin for the melody, a large knobbled gong serving the colotomic function, a flute (optional) for countermelodies, and at least two rebana or two gendang for rhythmic accompaniment. The main characteristic of joget music is a fast-paced rhythm which emphasises duple and triple beat divisions in alternation and simultaneously. This characteristic rhythm is closely related to many European 6/8 dance forms, such as the tarantella and fandango.
Western influences were already evident in resident state or constabulary bands often staffed by Filipino or Goan musicians. It would not be difficult to assess the proliferation via oral influence of musical instruments from the European tradition. Given Singapore’s receptiveness to changes in the absence of what Howard Becker calls solidified conventions, practices were likely to emerge as syncretic culture. Western style dance bands gathered momentum becoming popular with dance halls and cabarets while eclectic bands played Chinese or Malay Music using Western instruments. Surjan Singh informs us that the first police band in Singapore was formed in 1925. It was called the Straits Settlement Police Band. Its function, we are told, was to add to the atmosphere and provide entertainment at police functions. We are also informed that following an audition held in India, successful candidates—all of them with musical background—were brought to Singapore to form a 32-instrument band. Alec Dixon recalls this development in a little more detail. It was about this time that the Regimental Bandmaster of the Royal Sussex Regiment, M. F. Minns, was appointed in the rank of Chief Inspector to form the band of the Straits Settlement Police...One of Minns’ musical achievements is worthy of record, for it occasioned some excitement among local Asiatics. From time to time he attended performances of the Malay Opera at the New World pleasure ground at Jalan Besar where he greatly attracted by some of the traditional Malay love songs. One evening he told me that he hoped to include some of these songs in the Band’s repertoire, but explained that there were certain technical difficulties of a musical nature to be over come. However, he persisted in his self-appointed task, and some weeks later produced what he described as a ‘Malay Medley’ during a band concert given at Tanjong Katong. A large crowd of Malays and Straits-Chinese turned out to hear the music, and its delight was expressed in a great ovation for Minns and his band when the ‘Medley’ concluded with the familiar and haunting rhythm of Bandong. I doubt whether Europeans living in Singapore in the twenties were aware of the considerable musical talent to be found among the local Malays. The Kandang Kerbau police division had a very fine string orchestra, all of its players being Malay constables or NCOs. Their band of about twenty players was in great demand for local ronggengs and Malay weddings. Many a European orchestra of great name and reputation might have envied its élan, its harmony and the perfection of its tempo.

The cabarets of New, Happy and Great World seemed to have strong influences from the Cabarets from Shanghai, given that they were modelled after them. The New World became such a well-known entity that the management announced that In response to numerous requests we have erected a building situated in the busiest parts of the ground, where firms who desire to display their samples for advertising purposes can now do so to the best advantage and at an economical rental. The primary object of this innovation is to develop it into a commercial museum which has proved a success in Java. Samples will be well cared for by the management. Charges for space and all further information may be had on application.
Joget (modern Malay dance) and Ronggeng (traditional dance) were popular dance forms in 1950s. Various dance spots or nightclubs (the most famous of which was Bunga Tanjong at the New World Amusement Park), were the venues for their proliferation. The nightlife in Singapore revolved around amusement parks and these parks helped form hubs for other forms like bangsawan and Chinese opera before World War II (New World opened in 1923, Great World in 1931 and Happy World in 1936). Their significance cannot be discounted largely because people flocked to these clubs every night to dance joget, ronggeng as well as contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, tango to name a few. Popular band formation was enough to perform music for all of these types of dances, thus making it an economic possibility while at the same time lending variety and the ‘local’ flavour in entertainment.

By the late 1940s and 1950s a number of these traditions found themselves transformed either by appropriation of Western musical or instrumental influences. Yet as Lockard points out, all these popular and traditional forms, arrived at by synthesis of the foreign and indigenous, are considered today very much a part of Malay cultural tradition. Tony Beamish informs us of the presence of Music in culture in the sixth chapter suitably titled Music and Letters:

*The most typical rhythm of the peninsula is that of the ronggeng dance, played in the old days on the flute and drum.*

In a column on the British Malaya journal, with reference to old and new dances, we are informed of the observation that Malayan youths are crazy over... the Joget modern... actually modern versions... The Joget is the modern style of dancing the old-fashioned Malay "ronggeng", with Latin-American rhythm and the samba, the conga and the rumba steps to give it the thrilling life so lacking in the sedate "ronggeng". The modernising of the "ronggeng" was first effected in the Federal capital, Kuala Lumpur... Nearly everybody was then going crazy over the samba, and as the rhythm was found to go well with Malay songs, it was introduced into the "ronggeng". Gradually, the violin, drum and gong of the "ronggeng" orchestra were augmented. The maracas and the trumpet were brought into play, then the microphone, then the percussion instruments of the rumba band...

A similar point is made by Joseph Peters in his observation of a current practice in Malay tradition: Joget (modern Malay dance) and Ronggeng (traditional dance) became popular dance forms in 1950s. Various dance spots or nightclubs (the most famous of which was Bunga Tanjong at the New World Amusement Park), were the venues for their proliferation. The nightlife in Singapore revolved around amusement parks and these parks helped form hubs for other forms like bangsawan and Chinese opera before World War II (New World opened in 1923, Great World in 1931 and Happy World in 1936). Their significance cannot be discounted largely because people
flocked to these clubs every night to dance **joget, ronggeng** as well as contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, tango to name a few.\textsuperscript{40} One only needs to return to Straits Settlements Government Gazette of October 1895, 1407 No. 612, where theatrical performances included…**wayang, mayong, mundu, joget, ronggeng**…and more importantly required *a license from the Chief Police Officer of the Settlement in which such theatre is situated and shall pay the prescribed fee thereon*.\textsuperscript{41} It is highly unlikely that the *joget* and *ronggeng*, known to law-makers of the Straits settlement in 1895 and joget and ronggeng in the 1950s that Joseph Peters describes could be the same. And yet their identities between 1895 and 1950s had rendered a change from traditional to popular. Many of these traditional musics have become the purview of the Peoples Association Malay Orchestra or Orkes Melayu as it is known in other settings. Formed in 1991, Orkes Melayu is seen to fulfil a ‘social and cultural’ responsibility in sustaining and experimenting with Malay traditional musics via performances, workshops and lecture demonstrations. Further scholarship is most usefully pursued here in examining the nature, role and identity of Malay traditional musics, as museum curator or as contemporary commentator, confronting the Malay community in a contemporary globalised setting.

Much of these practices begin with the notion that they were extremely popular in a very distant past. Worthy of discussion is the notion of these practices as attractors for social cohesion or participation as communities. Another problem raised hinges on the notion of popularity of support and its correlation with popularity of traditional practice. Both seem to work on differing views of cultural praxis either as museum culture or evolving, adapting culture. Chopyak makes the point in his article which looks at these musical practices as popular forms in Malaysia yet these are promoted as musics of Malay traditional culture in Singapore. Future scholarship should be able to revisit these issues, among many other issues.
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26 Interview with Mohd. Bagushair, with Larry Francis and Farid Alatas 25 April 2004.

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30 Chopyak, op.cit., pp.121-122.

31 Harding and Sarji., p.219.

32 Ibid., p.219.

33 Chopyak, op.cit., 124.

34 Vaughan, J.D, Notes on the Malays of Pinang and Province Wellesley, Journal of the Indian Archipelago and eastern Asia, 1857, p.135, in Chopyak, op.cit., p.138. Here is a suggestion of the influence given that quadrilles were long in practice in Singapore by that time and we are not often given information on whether these Malays, particularly those in urban areas, might be part of a band at the Governor’s expenses.

35 Singh, Surjan (compiler and editor), They died for all free men. Supported by the National Heritage Board, Published by the Sikh Missionary Society Malaya, p.16.

36 Alec Dixon, Entertainment Only.

37 Straits Times, Tuesday July 22 1930, p.9


39 New Dances for Old In Malaya, British Malaya Journal 1950.


41 STRAITS SETTLEMENTS GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, OCT. 25, 1895, .1407 No. 612:-
2. *In this Ordinance "theatre" includes any theatre room booth or other place open to the public or any class of the public in theatre which there is carried on any stage-play circus conjuring dancing, wayang, mayong, mundu, joget, ronggeng or other operatic or theatrical performance of any sort whatever.*
3. *After the coming into operation of this Ordinance it shall not be lawful for any person to open a theatre within Municipal limits or carry on a theatrical performance therein unless he shall first obtain a license from the Chief Police Officer of the Settlement in which such theatre is situated and shall pay the prescribed fee thereon.*
Music for State

To understand something of the National Day celebration in Singapore, I should like to relate certain events pertaining to them. The first is the news (Channel News Asia) on Sunday morning July 7 2002, when it was announced by the Ministry of Defence that tickets (free of charge) would be made available when the collection centres were announced at 6am. Tickets would be distributed subsequently. According to news reporters, there was already a long queue before the distribution of the tickets were to take place; it seems that people were able to predict the venues. By 7.20am Sunday morning, the tickets were all distributed out and an even longer crowd was annoyed that they had to wait an hour and a half to discover they were not going to get any tickets. An official for the Singapore Armed Forces insisted that there had been no ‘leaking’ of information. By Wednesday morning, there were notices posted over the internet advertising ‘free’ National Day Parade tickets for at least S$500 each. Evidently, a National Day ticket was worth quite a lot of trouble. Why would 60-70 thousand people want to be witness to the year’s celebrations?

The National Day Parade NDP

These excerpts reveal something of the NDP as an event. From what we gather, there are Singaporeans who want to be there, to soak up the sights and sounds, the spectacle, their participation as the spectacle and the atmosphere which must be for them memorable. There is music. First of all there is ceremonial music, played by the Military Band with the contingents and the march pasts. ‘Music from the Military Band, a long remembered source of music-making in Singapore since 1829 (from the records of the Colonial Governor’s annual expenditure account), fulfils the necessary duties. The National Anthem is sung and the pledge taken. Majullah Singapura was originally in the 1950s after the island went through a period of political and industrial turmoil. Singapore became a city on September 22 1951 and the Municipal council became a City Council. The Rendel Constitutional Commission of 1955, which recommended partial internal self-government, provided for the Peoples Action Party (PAP) emerging as the leading party and Ong Eng Guan was elected Mayor while Ong Pang Boon elected Deputy Mayor. The City Council, despite its municipal functions and anti-colonial sentiments, wanted an official song. The former superintendent of the Victoria Theatre Yap Han Hong recalled, “I had orders to look or a theme song to be used by the City Council…..the song had to be vigorous, in other words, with a sense of martial tempo to it.” Yap remembered coming across Zubir Said who composed songs for Cathay Keris films. Zubir Said was then approached by a City Council member Syed Ali Redha Alsagoff to compose a ‘patriotic’ song for the Council. The song was to be titled Majulah Singapore based on the same words displayed in Victoria theatre after the renovations of 1958. Zubir recalled his task It is not a film song: It is not a romantic song. It is a special kind of song I realised...first I had to consider the contents of the lyrics. It should be in simple language, easy enough to sing and easy enough to understand by all races in Singapore. Secondly, I should know the policy of the government, the social life in Singapore and wish of the people and how to progress to prosperity. The song had to be composed in Malay so a Malay language teacher Muhd. Ariff Ahmad was consulted. The first run had no lyrics and the tune was played out on a piano and recorded on tape which was sent to the committee specially formed for this purpose. Ong Pang Boon liked it and advised Zubir to improve on it. Once the song was approved, Paul
Abisheganaden, conductor of the Singapore Chamber Ensemble was coopted into the process with the intention of getting his choir to sing Majullah Singapura during the grand finale of the concert commemorating the opening of the newly renovated Victoria Theatre on September 6 1958. Paul recollects the moment, the response was most satisfying. The people who had come were surprised that a song was specially written, especially in the national language [Malay] which was becoming important at that time.

The City Council was dissolved in 1959 as Singapore attained self-government in 1959. When looking for symbols and a song, Zubir Said’s City council anthem was recalled. Dr. Toh Chin Chye, then Deputy Prime Minister and PAP Chairman explained his interest in the anthem as a political instrument to unite different races of Singapore, we are a multi-racial society and in the 1950s there were not many people who spoke English. English was not the lingua franca in Singapore….the Malay version of the National Anthem would appeal to all races. It would strike no discordant note. It can be easily understood and at the same time easily remembered.

A number of musicians and orchestras were involved in the changes to the National anthem. Paul Abisheganaden, Dick Abel, a Filipino conductor working for the Radio Singapore Orchestra, Aishah Ghows, the Military Forces Band, The Radio Singapore Orchestra and not least, the Berlin Chamber Orchestra, who gave a performance at the Victoria Memorial Hall. Dr. Toh, who was present at the concert, requested the conductor to re-composed Majullah Singapura. Not a musician himself, Dr. Toh had to rely on the musicians The piece was finally adopted, shorter than the City Council version, and the best version was put up by the Berlin Chamber Orchestra. The National Anthem along with the state Flag, State Crest were unanimously accepted by the representatives of the Legislative Assembly and formally presented to the nation during the launching of ‘Loyalty Week of 3 December 1959, after the installation of The first Malaysian-born Yang Dipertuan Negara of Singapore, Yusof bin Ishak.

Evidently, there are Singaporeans who want to be there, to soak up the sights and sounds, the spectacle and the atmosphere which must be for them memorable. The first National Day Parade in 1966 is described by Vernon Cornelius with a 23 thousand strong parade at the Padang. This first National Day parade was staged at the Padang, the site of a colonial past, both as a locus of power and civic pride, which served as a cricket ground as well as a ceremonial ground. Kong and Yeoh describe the symbolism of the green completely absent in the wake of the boots of the several thousand parade participants arranged in serried ranks and wielding military and musical instruments, flags and other paraphernalia. This green cricket ground that once symbolised white colonial rule was the site of the witnessing of the emergence of a nation from its colonial past. The ceremony it seems took place in the morning with crowds gathering as early as 7am. At 9am, formal ceremonies began with a Presidential salute, parade review and a 21-gun salute in the presence of the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, cabinet ministers and members of Parliament and a number of other dignitaries. This was followed by a march past. Participants included informed contingents from the Singapore Armed Forces, Ministers, MPs, Parliamentary secretaries and officials. This was followed by uniformed contingents from schools of all language streams, displaying the colour and rhythm of the four cultures of Singapore…the members and flag-bearing cadres of the peoples Action party all dressed in white, followed by the as smart and large contingent from member of the National trades Union Congress. A mass display of 60 lions and dragons performing simultaneously brought a rousing end to the parade at 10.30
am. The marching contingents continued their procession through the Chinatown and Tanjong Pagar area greeted by cheers from the packed crowds on 5-foot ways and roadsides and from those perched on balconies and bridges. The entire parade was also televised live for the benefit of thousands more at home. First day cover stamps were issued depicting Singapore’s policy of progress through industrialisation. The entire city was bedecked and draped with the finest festive fittings. At night, multicoloured lights festooned streets, buildings, temples, churches, mosques, parks and along the waterfronts of the Singapore River and the sea. The President and the First Lady hosted a cocktail party for about 1000 guests and they were able to partake of a privileged view of the fireworks display at Fort Canning. For 90 minutes the night sky dazzled with explosive streaks and starbursts of colour, light and smoke to the delight of cheering crowds watching the display in the city. Later that night at the National Theatre, the audience was treated to a marvellous mix of multi-racial and multi-cultural performances featuring the Metro Philharmonic Society, Sriwana Malay Dance group, Singapore Ballet Academy, Nan Hwa Girls School, Performing Arts Studio, Suara Singapura Singers, Singapore Amateur Players, Mareoti & his Band, Bhaskar’s Academy of Dance and Maureen Lim Dancers. Community Centres, too, held their own celebration dinners and cultural shows around the island.5

The Practice of National Day Celebrations in Singapore on every 9th August6
Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh analyse four strands of the annual National Day Celebrations in Singapore:
1. Constitution of ceremonial space
2. The contribution to display and theatricality;
3. The composition of parade participants; and,
4. The selection of parade motifs.

From the outset Kong and Yeoh emphasise that their starting point is that nations and national identities are socially constructed. National Day parades are analysed as secular or civic rituals which are stage managed annually. An account of one spectator in the Straits Times 10 August 1994 offers a little more:
Chou Shixian 11……His spirits soared as he screamed, sang and then screamed some more. He needed no prompting as spontaneity was in the air. Shixian was not alone. There were 60 000 others like him at the stadium that night, some older, some younger. All of them determined to have a party. They cheered as they waved their small red and white plastic flags at a man who stood in for President Ong Teng Cheong. Standing still, they sang the national anthem and took the pledge. Finally they the Happy Birthday song to Singapore when a giant two-tiered pink cake was wheeled into the stadium. I was amazed at what I saw because all of this happened at a parade review. Then yesterday, I saw a repeat performance by 60 000 other spectators. What a spectacle it was, seeing, hearing and feeling Singaporeans cheering for Singapore. I had seen the parade three times before and yet I felt the goosebumps. The Singapore spirit had hit me. Yesterday, this cynic became a convert.

After this, one feels like one would fight and die for Singapore
(Parade spectator, quoted in Straits Times 10 August 1986)
These observations illustrate the effect National Day parades have on ordinary Singaporeans in terms of convincing the sense of belonging and identity and the feeling of pride. In 1966, the first National Day parade was stages at the Padang, the site of a colonial past, both as a locus of power and civic pride, which served as a cricket ground as well as a ceremonial ground. Kong and Yeoh describe the symbolism of the green completely absent in the wake of the boots of the several thousand parade participants arranged in serried ranks and wielding military and musical instruments, flags and other paraphernalia. This green cricket ground that once symbolised white colonial rule was the site of the witnessing of the emergence of a nation from its colonial past. The symbolism of such a moment is all too obvious and telling. These National Day celebrations, which have continued to this very day, are considerably reliant on combining architectural spectacularity of the past and the animated spectacularity of the present. By the 1990s this spectacular construction has for the majority of the people less meaning as a site of the colonial past. The parades do not occupy static central space but allow for the movement through space by diffusing the participants of the spectacle. If the parade were held at the Padang, the marching contingents would continue through Chinatown cheered by the people waving from windows, clambering over bridges and balconies, crowding along roadsides and 5-foot ways, who on any other occasion would have been indifferent to police and soldiers (Straits Times 10 August 1966). In the subsequent years and into the 1970s, marching columns traversed the satellite towns and housing estates like Alexandra and Queenstown (Straits Times, 10 August 1968, 1969 respectively). Between 1975 and 1984, before the advent of live telecasts, the National Day parades were held throughout 13 selected centres at the heart of residential areas, allowing for residents from all parts of Singapore to witness a scaled-down version of the unified whole while at the same time celebrate the pomp and pageantry, combining local resources with national prestige in the production of spectacle. From 1976 onwards, the National Stadium (completed in 1973 to coincide with the hosting of the then South East Asian Peninsula Games SEAP for short), with its capacity of 60,000 (the Padang could only accommodate 20,000) became home to these National Day celebrations. Tickets were issued free of charge to ‘people from all walks of life’. From 1985 onwards the National Day parades would alternate between the Padang and the National Stadium.

National Day Meaning and Messages
As a mass event such as this requires a high degree of orchestration, The National Day parade embodies the hierarchical structure of Singapore society: Ordinary citizens either in the galleries or on the parade-ground wait upon and/or are reviewed by the ruling elite. All matters of protocol and procedure are oriented around the office of the President. There have been occasions in the early years of independence signifying the integration of ruler and ruled. An example of this was in 1968 when there was a severe downpour and all at the Padang, from the acting vice-president to the civilians and students stood in the hour-long rain (Straits Time 1968). This ethos of nation-building, according to Kong and Yeoh, allowed no room for flinching (outwardly)...each is expected to...a show of defiance...individual sacrifice and togetherness ‘whatever the odds’ (Straits Times, August 10, 1975). As Kong and Yeoh point out, the National Day parade has from its inception combined both strategies (ritual ceremony and carnivalesque in Smith 1995; 143) in its attempt to remind people of their common experience as citizens and as a statement of collective identity and Singapore’s nationhood.
Kong and Yeoh note that from the mid-1980s there was a concerted move toward opening up more space for the people's participation. In a dramatic change of format, the 1985 to 1989 Parades became Peoples Parades. The spectators became active participants in song and movement (Souvenir Magazine 1990:20).

As the national Day celebrations took on a more distinct air of informality, the ceremonial portion (pledge, inspection of guard–of–honour, 21-gun salute and march–past was condensed while the celebration segment–aerial displays, mass parades on the parade ground and spectator participation was augmented. An hour before the start of the parade, the ritual of audience-loosening exercises to set the atmosphere for the parade (August 10, 1986) included rock and pop groups and local pop stars providing entertainment and locally composed tunes while the military strains, the standard fare were taken out. In the last ten years, the spectators have become the parade; waving flags, participating in crowd colour and pattern displays, singing specially crafted National Day songs lustily and unabashed nationalistic flag-waving. In the words of one young spectator-participant, we all had a part to play. We were not here just to watch the Prime Minister or the contingents. (August 19, 1986).

According to Kong, four messages emerge consistently, even unfailingly, through the years;

1. Multiracialism, Multiculturalism, Multilingualism and Multireligiousity; no discrimination, avoidance of racial chauvinism, racial and cultural sentiments and identities should exist only alongside a larger identity based on secular, non-cultural national values. These themes have been explicitly and implicitly articulated over the years:
   - Joy of Harmony 1976
   - Living harmoniously in a multicultural blend 1985
   - Unity in Rhythm 1986
   - Many races, one nation/Many cultures One people 1988

2. Youthfulness. The metaphor is equally applicable to the youth, the youthful workforce and youthful nation. The exuberance, vibrancy and energy of youth are celebrated in song and dance. The participation of the school going population is nearly always a given in these items.

3. Teamwork. Values like social discipline, efficiency and technological rationalism were actively promoted as necessary values for a nation to progress. The NDP is the propitious occasion to render the ideological exercise. The entire parade theme in the 1970 NDP was work together for security and prosperity. This was evident in the 1973 Unity and progress mass displays and floats highlighting the importance of unity. When Singapore went into a recession in 1985/6, the exhortation was Together Singapore and Count on me Singapore as well as the Pursuit of Excellence.

4. The importance of education and training so that economic development can be achieved and maintained; the emphases here being technological rather than humanities
based. Moreover education and training are not seen as ends in themselves rather as keys to a more promising future.

There have also been other themes alongside these main ones. The first of these has been people. The Souvenir Programme in 1991 offered the message *We are proud to be Singaporeans. The celebration expressed all that we feel about ourselves, our country and the world in which we live. My Singapore, the place that I call home.* A reiteration appears in 1992 *We are Singapore* and in 1993 when the official theme of the celebrations was *My Singapore My Home.* A spokesman from the newly formed Ministry of the Arts and Information (MITA) suggested that the theme was *an expression of the pride Singaporeans feel for their homeland.*

Kong and Yeoh read the parade and its attendant messages, implicit or otherwise, as strategies to elicit citizens’ sense of attachment and belonging to Singapore given the perceived threat of global forces….westernisation. *It reveals the concern that Singaporeans must be rooted in their Asian heritage while importing the more progressive elements of western developments all the time maintaining their ties, loyalty and 'mystical bond' (Penrose 1993: 29) with place (Singapore).*

The exhortation to exult in pride for the nation is put alongside another dependent factor; to strive for excellence for Singapore. Given that Singapore has achieved in the 1980s what most Third World nations would aspire to, reinterprets the earlier ideology of survival and a rugged society as excelling. It is an interesting message that seems to coincide with a teething problem in the wake of a massive acceleration of the HDB programme. Many complaints were raised about shoddy workmanship in both the finished work of the flats and those responsible for the internal renovations. The 1986 ND message valorises skill, precision and alertness, qualities for a nation of excellence moves on in the 1987 version ‘towards a brighter tomorrow’ and in 1988 the message underlined is ‘*We, the people of Singapore, regardless of race, language or religion, together celebrate our National Day with singing of national songs and spectacular display....Singapore, a nation of excellence for all*’.

That is not to suggest that support of these parades of national consciousness has been unanimous throughout the nation. In 1966, opposition parties condemned the parade as phone independence and a waste of public money (August 10 1966). In 1970, anti-government banners were found (August 10, 1970). In more recent years, the different reception Singaporeans have had of the National Day Parades has not been openly confrontational. The readings elicited from respondents in Kong and Yeoh’s survey fell into three categories:

1. Feelings of resentment among those who participated in the parades;
   These consisted of national servicemen: *I was on duty, I had to do crowd control. I was outside the stadium. I was reluctant and I resented it. Students of schools participating in the parade: I was sent by my school. We didn’t like it. None of us liked it. We were there because my principal wanted us to be there.. those expressed the view that rehearsals were frustrating and tough because you’ve got to be disciplined and wait and wait and go through the sequences again and again. This came despite the acknowledgment that the hard work did
result on the day in a feeling of patriotism and fervour but it was short-lived. *I was grateful to break the routine of having my Sunday burnt...Life was back to normal after that. We went back to our routines and I was glad.*

2. Feelings of unhappiness about the nature and extent of the parade;
The resentment felt extended to those who were put off by exorbitant sums of money spent in putting together these parades; the perceived routine and lack of creativity every year; the blatant nature of the ideological messages (Its so deliberate you feel really skeptical):
*It makes us think that everything is good, that we are having a good life in Singapore...everybody has a job...but it doesn't draw our attention to the more realistic aspects of life...I think it makes us apathetic because we think everything is fine. We are diverting our attention from some of the real problems that do exist. Everything is made to look very positive.*

3. Those who enjoyed and appreciated the parades for reasons different than those intended by the state.
There were vendors for whom the parades represented opportunities for quick monetary gains. Prices of cold soft drinks, portable fans, caps, to name a few, depend on demand; they were usually overpriced.
Students did this for extra points for their extra curricular activity by participating. Some students thought their principals wanted to get their schools to gain from the limelight by participating.

That does leave out those for whom the parade was a thoroughly enjoyable experience; *my little cousins enjoy the song and dance; its one way of keeping my children entertained.* Those who enjoyed it compared the parade to a football match, a party, an opening of a shopping centre. Students thought it was a good day to ‘hang out’ with friends for legitimate reasons; *it wasn’t a chore because I could be out there with my friends at weekly rehearsals and scream my lungs out. It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience; I found it quite fun because there were other schools there and you can get to know people from other schools.*

As the subsequent years of independence, the National Day Parades have tended to display less military flavour and displaying a huge array of military armaments and placed greater emphasis on the role of citizens in the nation. Current defence ideology has been adopted and adapted from the Swedish model of Total Defence, the kind that involves all citizens, united as a nation. Evidence of this does abound:
*There was a great spectacle. The feeling was one of a great festival; it was very carnivalish. There was a sense of euphoria, heightened emotions, patriotism and everything. It was wonderful.*

**The Practice of National Day songs**
Lily Kong’s account explores the state encouraging and commissioning of National Day Songs or *Sing Singapore* songs promoted by the Psychological Defence Division of the Ministry of Communications and Information in 1988. The various texts of the programme, including the Sing Singapore book contains the lyrics and scores of 49 songs, the accompanying tapes and video clips aired on national television, are examined. These songs are an indelible part of Singaporeans. Lily Kong articulates the ways in which such messages
cannot but reach the average house/flat dweller in Singapore. They are taught, practised and sung in schools during music lessons and sometimes during school assembly sessions; this is a Ministry of Education directive. Moreover, they are broadcast over television in between scheduled programmes a few months before the event and even singing sessions are organised in community centres. These means, in Kong’s view, are to assist the objective, which is to convince Singaporeans of the idea that it has come a long way from 1965 and Singaporeans must continue to play their part in maintaining this dramatic development. The ultimate concern, Kong postulates, is to develop in Singaporeans a love for their country, a sense of patriotism and a willingness to support the ruling elite who have led the country. Dr. Yeo Ning Hong, then from the Ministry of Communications and Information, wrote in his message for Sing Singapore 1988 songbook: Singing the songs will bring Singaporeans together, to share our feelings one with another. It will bring back shared memories of good times and hard times, of times which remind us of who we are, where we came from, what we did, and where we are going. It will bring together Singaporeans of different races and backgrounds, to share and to express the spirit of the community, the feeling of togetherness, the feeling of oneness. This, in essence, is what the Sing Singapore programme is about.

The lyrics are written in all four official languages and through national songs Singaporeans are encouraged to express feelings of love and pride for and of belonging to their country. This ensures inclusiveness and although the main songs may be sung for the greater part in English or Mandarin, each of the songs are explored in such a way as to be sung in all four languages with the same melodic configuration. Songs are in the planning stage once the main themes have been formed and the conceptual framework understood. The composer, lyricist and arranger must then ensure empathy for sentiments of love, belonging and pride must be translated into more active manifestations and through singing these National Day songs, Singaporeans are exhorted to attain excellence for Singapore. This idea of excellence encompasses various concepts such as unity, commitment to Singapore, productivity, hard work and teamwork. These concepts are reinforced elsewhere by ministerial speeches in settings, which may or may not even bear resemblance or relevance to the event. Additionally, the newspapers prominently display facts or findings like “Singapore top investment site for Western businessmen (Straits Times 9 April 1991). According to Kong, these messages are encoded in the lyrics of many national songs...the ideological message purveyed is that excellence is possible only when Singaporeans remain united..."
better educated, wealthier and more sophisticated population...Music has therefore been developed to form part of a multipronged strategy for support for the nation including dance, religion and other non-cultural forms.20

No national event it seems exists without some opposition. Just as Kong pointed out negative criticism in the newspapers of 1966 and ant-government demonstrations in the 1970s, she identifies a more subtle mode of protest in the 1990s. The irony is of course that such means have been made possible through those considered to have greater educational achievement. Kong quotes Anderson and Gale (1992, 7) who point out that powerful institutions (including nations) can ...work to ensure that what are partial, culturally-bound interpretations of reality are accepted as natural and correct by the public at large, while Gramsci 1973 has pointed out hegemony is never total and the dominant group’s preferred reading of texts can be often met with contested meanings. Such an example is Not the Singapore songs book. This book was first published in 1993 and reflects how a form of subtle cultural resistance, transported by popular music, can be used as social commentary on government policies and the ugly Singaporean.

One example of alternative set of lyrics to the same tune is Ong Cheng Tat’s Count Mummies of Singapore sung to the tune of the original Count on me Singapore. While the original exhorts Singaporeans to give “their best and more” (Sing Singapore 1988 p.95) Ong’s version exhorts Singaporeans, women in particular, to reproduce (Not the Singapore song book, 1993, p.35). While this collection does not resort to borrowing every available tune from the Sing Singapore collection but the lyrics do point to a variety of topics. Ee Kay Gie’s the SDU March (Social Development Unit) is sung to the tune of Colonel Bogey exhorting women to get married as a form a national service—child bearing—reflecting the view of the Prime Minister that it is nature not nurture that produces the intelligent, hard-working offspring in the mould of ‘excellent’ Singapore. Colin Goh’s Babies keep forming in my bed (sung to the tune of Raindrops keep falling on my head) make social commentary on child-bearing, all dependent on the wealth and tax rebates. Desmond Sim turns What I did for love to What I bid for Love commenting on the Certificate of Entitlement for cars (or CoE for short). Another mainstream topic is educational streaming—hence Sam Wan’s What we always do is stream to the tune of All I have to is Dream.

This is not new in music of popular culture; Weird Al Yankovic was only one such example of setting alternative lyrics to Michael Jackson’s songs. As Kong points out, it is not just government policies that form the basis of such commentary—it is also about opposition discourse to groups identified as yuppie or nouveau riche (sometimes they are one and the same) and the greedy, spoilt, ungracious citizen also known as the ugly Singaporean who indulges in an ostentatious lifestyle.21 There is also further comment about the spirit of kiasu—translated as the fear of losing out, hence Goh Eek Kheng’s Oh my kiasu sung to Clementine. This is not the only version. Another version of kiasu in the early 1990s, is a rap modeled on a hit by the group Naughty by Nature. More recently, the sudden craze by Macdonald’s offering of a variety of Hello Kitty dolls with every Macdonald’s breakfast meal has had queues hundreds of metres long at outlets across the island not only highlight a current craze for infantile passions but also the spirit of not wanting to lose out on these newly-found passions and the concomitant raised tempers which have resulted in police
intervention not to mention arrests. Not too long later, a number of radio stations were airing a **Hello Kitty** done to the tune of Lionel Richie’s **Hello**.

In a society where confrontation of issues have always been carefully screened to minimise potential civil strife via themes of racial prejudice or problems, these alternative lyrics dressed in familiar tunes adopt satire as a means of making polite commentary. However, as G. Heng (Straits Times, May 28, 1992) points out, the end effect is not so much questioning or confronting social issues or governmental policies but rather an enculturation process and a spirit of acceptance. Music is employed here as entertainment but more as a vehicle in the expression of “live and let live”.

Through the Sing Singapore and National Day Songs, Lily Kong points out… **the state is constructing its version of the nation, one in which citizenry is bound by ‘core Asian values’, chief of which must be the notion of society above self**…from the days of independence, the state has attempted to employ music to develop a sense of national identity and patriotic verve. From the organisation of national song-writing competitions (to encourage the production of distinctly Singaporean songs) to hosting Asia-Pacific song competitions (in which the representative participation of Singaporeans will hopefully whip up a sense of nationalistic support from fellow Singaporeans) music has been part of the state’s arsenal in the symbolic construction of nation.

She goes on to state that the **Sing Singapore programme is hence not singular in the history of state exploitation of music. However, this programme is singular in its degree of organisation and commitment as well as in the extent of its reach and influence. In the past, allegiance to the state and ruling elite, which could be achieved in the past via delivery of economic goods, have now become more difficult to gain in recent years with a better educated, wealthier and more sophisticated population. The state therefore has had to step up its efforts in the hegemonic construction of nation. Music has therefore been developed to form part of a multi-pronged strategy including dance, religion and other non-cultural forms.**

Despite the claims that the political culture of Singapore does not encourage open conflict and confrontation, Singaporeans, it seems, have had other ways and means of expressing their opposition to preferred meanings. Kong mentions the Feedback Unit, letters to the Editor, among other approved channels. **Not the Singapore Song Book** is one manifestation of a sophisticated voice of opposition for Singaporeans, who while not nourished on a staple of open conflict, are less condoning of policies and policy decisions taken for which they seem to have no control or choice over – including aspects of unacceptable behaviour by fellow Singaporeans. At least with a song, the dissenting voice is likely to be more successful in being heard and message delivered in full.
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5 Ibid., pp.2-3.


7 Straits Times 10 August 1990, quoted in Kong and Yeoh, op.cit., p.221

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12 Kong and Yeoh, op.cit., p.233.

13 Ibid., p.233.

14 http://www.mita.gov.sg/songs.htm

15 Kong, Lily, Music and cultural politics: ideology and resistance in Singapore, Singapore ed. Gerry Rodan, p.365

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17 Ibid., p.365.

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Pop Yeh Yeh
The 1960s brought with it unprecedented enthusiasm and interest in entertainment in the realm of popular culture, specifically the Malay community. All of the histrionics experienced with Elvis Presley’s ‘shocking’ behaviour of hip-gyrating antics, hordes of screaming fans elsewhere around the Euro-American popular culture traditions began to have their appearance in Singapore; in the form of antics of fans, the craze to form bands, the countless records produced and the abundant opportunities to perform live music. Pop Yeh Yeh according to Craig Lockard,¹ this terminology was derived from the Beatles song, She Loves You (Yeah Yeah Yeah). This was not confined to Singapore nor Southeast Asia. David Looseley notes the emergence of yeye in France around the same time.² Loseley’s accounts are interesting because contrary to what most accounts claim, the term yeye could not have derived from the Beatles' single 'She Loves You', since it was already in use before the song was released in August 1963. It is more likely to have originated in the common refrain 'woah, woah, yeah, yeah' used by a variety of pre-Beatles singers from the Everly Brothers to Helen Shapiro.³ Here again, as in yeye in France, it would be instructive to know when Suzanna emerged. Burhanuddin’s accounts place it at 1963,⁴ while Yusnor Ef has M. Osman’s popularity with Suzanna around 1965.⁵ The former date validates Looseley’s logic while the latter at 1965 is likely to be a Beatles influence; a problem here surfaces when a musical practice seems to have acquired a name after its presence is felt.

Configuration
The practice in the Malay community was based on the amplified sound of a grouping known as the kugiran, made up of three guitarists, lead, rhythm and bass) and a drummer. Some bands made use of an electric organ but the three guitars and drum were the acceptable norm. The music was of a lively tempo and encouraged stylised dancing. Influences came from the Shadows, Rolling Stones but especially the Beatles. Despite the Western influences, they were adapted by the Malay community who managed to infuse asli vocal and singing styles giving Pop Yeh Yeh a unique sound. The lyrics dealt with themes of love, an expression of love for the opposite sex (M.Osman’s Suzanna, A. Ramli’s Oh Fatimah and Fatimah M.Amin Teruna (My Guy) or failed relationships (a diamond Ring) and A. Halim’s A story and a Lesson. Other songs came under social commentary, spirituality and religion but of a minority in an otherwise escapist nature.
According to practitioners, Suzanna in 1963 was the song that initiated the Yeh Yeh phenomenon. After the Shadows performed at the Happy World Stadium in 1961, most ensembles were of the three guitars and one drummer configuration\(^6\) (The Rolling Stones we are told, played at the old Singapore Badminton Hall in 1965). According to Joseph Pereira,\(^7\) most of the ensembles prior to the Shadows concert were duos and trios. According to Burhanudin bin Buang, the word *kugiran* itself was a compression of Kumpulan Gitar Rancak—a group of fast guitars. The Malay kugiran (bands) like the Rhythm Boys are said to have preceded their non-Malay contemporaries like the Quests, Straydogs, and Checkmates. The *Rhythm Boys* initially played Beatles and Rolling Stones covers but Suzanna marked the change towards what was to be identified as the Pop Yeh Yeh idiom. Ali Taib, bassist of the popular band the *Rhythm Boys* offered this in an oral interview:

*Although we played mainly Malay songs, there were still shows where we played a totally English repertoire. That way, we were able to get more shows. Other than that we functioned as backing bands for singers like S. Mariam and also some other singers from Malaysia and Indonesia.*\(^8\)

*Kugirans* did instrumental backing for singers and it was common to play with more than one singer. Between 1964 and 1971, Singapore was the centre of the Pop Yeh Yeh phenomenon and made household names of the likes of **M. Osman and the Clans, Impian Batik, The Mood, The Zarak, The Young Lovers, The Hooks, A. Ramli and the Rhythm Boys, Jefrydin and the Siglap Five, Kassim Selamat and the Swallows, Ahmad Jais, J. Kamisah and Fatimah M. Amin**. Singapore was also known as the centre of the **Pop Yeh Yeh** industry because it housed the recording facilities and technological infrastructure; most of the recording companies that produced Pop Yeh Yeh were based here.\(^9\) Singapore was also identified as the centre for Malay popular entertainment. Two film producing companies based in Singapore were the Malay Film Productions, owned by the Shaw Brothers and Cathay Keris, which was owned by Loke Wan Tho.\(^10\) Cathay Keris had as their musician and film composer Zubir Said who was to have written the national anthem Majullah Singapura. According to one practitioner at the time, although the traumatic process of Singapore’s expulsion from Malaysia, the *Pop Yeh Yeh scene was not affected...Singapore bands still performed regularly in Malaysia and vice versa...The media in Singapore gave equal exposure for both Malaysian and Singaporean artistes.*\(^11\)
From Burhanudin’s account, most of Singapore’s Pop Yeh Yeh musicians lived in settings called kampongs in the east side of Singapore in areas like Geylang, Siglap, Jalan Eunos and Kaki Bukit. Geylang Serai was the meeting point for Pop Yeh Yeh bands. *Geylang Serai was the place to see singers and musicians hanging out. It was a nice atmosphere. Many members of Pop Yeh Yeh bands also lived nearby so the place was a rather convenient place to go.* The kampung was more: *There was more sense of unity and togetherness in the kampung. Although there were different bands, they would invite each other to perform if they had relatives who were holding weddings. There were no jealousies or enmities [*sic*]. Nobody would make noise (complain) if we were rehearsing too loudly.*

Pop Yeh Yeh recordings came in the form of EP (Extended Playing) records, usually containing 4 songs. Ali Taib explained how they were documented in an EP: *The Bands played and the recording engineer recorded their performance. After that the record company people brought it to the plant to make more copies of the recording. It is like in the factory, there’s allocation of work. True, before Pop Yeh Yeh the process may have been the same. But during that era, it was more intense due to the huge demand. In those days, we didn’t have multi-track recording. Pop Yeh Yeh music is very up-tempo and fast, so we were prone to make mistakes, If we made a mistake, we had to start all over again. An artiste or band might not consider it unusual to record 4-5 EPs in a year.*

Lucrative sales were more meaningful to the record companies than the bands. Yusnor Ef in an interview explained: *In those days, there was a lack of transparency with regards to royalties. There was no proper accounting on how much the bands or artistes earned. The record sales were good. The support was tremendous unlike today. But the bands also did not bother so much about this issue. They were happy getting booked for shows. That’s where the money was.*

Ali Taib went on to explain: *Honestly, I wasn’t thinking about getting popular or rich at that time. I think we were more concerned with seeing how far our talents could bring us. To play in a band with friends and relatives who had similar interests was something more valuable than rewards. Of course now, we do feel that we should be more mindful about things such as royalties and copyright. We could have been rich now.*
Levels of Commitment

Not all Pop Yeh Yeh musicians were career-musicians. One student band was known as the Caliphs and even a Chinese (language) teacher called Evey Lyn made a Pop Yeh Yeh album. A radio programme called Penyanyi Pujaan Minggu Ini PPMI (This Week’s most Popular Singer) played an important role in popularizing Pop Yeh Yeh (Yusnor Ef’s article in Berita Harian 8 July 2000—Pop Yeh Yeh Menguasai Muzik Melayu). There was a Pesta Pop (Pop Party) which featured Pop Yeh Yeh artistes and bands. Performing venues included the now demolished National Theatre and the Fraser & Neave Hall at River Valley Road. Given the absence of public entertainment licenses (the Public entertainment license was introduced in 1969)\(^\text{17}\), bands could easily play at parties, tea dances and weddings. Bands could charge between $100-$200 per performance and the Rhythms Boys even played at a PAP Anniversary dinner in 1966 as well as a road opening ceremony at Jalan Eunos. Another avenue for Pop Yeh Yeh was film. Music has been an important part of the Malay film in Singapore and Malaysia. The legendary P. Ramlee, in a film Tiga Abdul (the Three Abduls), in 1964, included a Pop Yeh Yeh tune called Bunyi Guita (Sound of a Guitar). Omar Rojik’s Agogo 67 was another film to feature Pop Yeh Yeh so to the late 1960s and early 1970s Mat Sentul films and later P.Ramlee films at Kuala Lumpur’s Merdeka Studios. From what was gleaned from personal accounts, singers A. Ramli and Jefrydin were mobbed by their fans who wanted, more than autographs, their jackets, shirts, among other memorabilia Ariff Taib, drummer for The Rhythm Boys remembers: *It was crazy but we enjoyed every moment of it. The crazy antics of the fans made us even more fired-up to perform.*\(^\text{18}\)

Consumption

Consumers of the Pop Yeh Yeh phenomenon were largely Malay youth, adults and children. The music arrived via radio, weddings, and of course, the records. Given the open setting of the kampong, anyone who was not from the Malay community would have at least had some form of contact with the practice. Pop Yeh Yeh stood at the threshold of fashion. The men often imitated the Beatles coat and tie look while young women were clad in bright-coloured blouses, tight pants and mini skirts. Lambretta and Vespa scooters were also part of the ensemble, such that Pop Yeh Yeh bands played at promotional concerts, with the objective to sell scooters.
The practice somehow diminished in significance—Craig Lockard suggested the late 1960s and early 1970s. Practitioners sensed that the change from guitar-based rock n roll to ensembles employing the saxophone and trumpet. There was a decline in performance opportunities and record companies looked to promote music to suit changing musical styles. In the wake of the fading Pop Yeh Yeh came the music of Jimi Hendrix, Santana, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin to name a few.

Revival
Pop Yeh Yeh is still fondly remembered. 1985 saw a Pop Yeh Yeh revival in Kuala Lumpur and even in the mid-1990s. A number of artistes like M. Osman, Salim I, Jefrydin and J Kamisah re-recorded their hits. The heavy metal group XPDC even reinterpreted Pop Yeh Yeh hits Agogo Metal, Rock Yeh Yeh and Metal Yeh Yeh. Burhanudin offers his views accounting for Pop Yeh Yeh’s decline. These include:

♦ Change in musical economics and fashion; the Carnaby Street fashion which brought along the black tie & jacket and coloured blouse…was to give way to flared trouser bottoms, flamboyant and well exposed chest and hair-lines for males and the advent of the Woodstock wardrobe fashion…the flamboyance was also apparent in the musical styles, greater amplification and distortion….

♦ Influences from the Western world of pop which glorified drug-consumption, flower power and permissiveness which amounted to stricter regulation of music being marketed in Singapore, radio-airplay, public performances….S. Rajaratnam, the then Minister of Culture exhorted the people to ‘be a society of moralistic, disciplined and hardworking people.’

♦ A decline in the importance of Singapore as a center of Malay popular culture. Malay was the national language prior to 1965 but since the establishing of an independent Singapore with concomitant policies of multi-culturalism, multi-lingualism, have resulted in the promotion of four official languages in Singapore; Chinese, Tamil, Malay and English.

♦ Changes in work ethics

♦ A fight against ‘yellow culture’- the label which had been applied by the Chinese conversant community during the 1950s against “Western music” – which according to them promoted permissive behaviour and unhealthy attitudes.
A greater awareness of Islam, the Malay community and socio-economic conditions in the Singapore, particularly with the formalisation of MUIS and other related Muslim organisations that worked to regain a sense of Muslim value systems with the community which included Arab, Indian-Muslim and Indonesian with Malay. Burhanudin refers to songs like *Irama Desa Seberang* which laments the loss of the kampong and the green fields to the concrete jungle coming up—the advent of HDB and high-rise flat dwelling. Singapore’s industrialization programme began in 1961-in a bid to create more opportunities. This process of resettlement of kampong-style housing to high-rise flats coincided with the daunting task of the Housing and Development Board to provide affordable housing for all Singaporeans. Statistically, 9% of Singaporeans lived in HDB flats in 1960; a far cry from about 85% today.

Burhanudin cites sociologist Peter Chen who saw Singapore in the 1960s going through the simultaneous processes of modernization and industrialization. This is a different set of circumstances where industrialisation began first and modernization later. Given this twin-track change meant aspects of modernization such as urban resettlement technological developments and mass communications. Bedlington explained the reception of this process of being resettled out of the kampong into a HDB flat:

*Many Malays feel sadly out of place in the anonymous concrete corridors of the housing estates. Their new flats are too small to accommodate the ritual and ceremony integral to their culture...they cannot rear chickens and ducks as in their [kampong] houses and the smell of pork being cooked next door in a Chinese flat is an affront to their nostrils.*

It would be true to expect the same for other communities.

The entry of women in the workforce changed the perception of women being confined to affairs of the household. Statistics show that females in the Singapore workforce numbered 12,534 in 1970 while in 1958 it was 3,910. Given the emancipation of women and the proliferation of female singers and dancers in the ensemble, often groups like Young *Lovers Dancers*, *Les Malinja* and *Saadiah* dancers accompanied the singers or bands on stage, doing the twist or the a-go-go dances.
Yusnor Ef explained: *In terms of quantity, there was more female participation in Malay Music in the 1960s compared to during the 1950s. It is because on a larger societal level, women were getting more and more involved in the sphere of public life like working in the factory.*

However, Burhanudin admits, the main reason for the decline of Pop Yeh Yeh was the arrival of rock and the post-Woodstock culture, one that was to grip Singapore in ways that had been very different from other musical practices.

Discussion
Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, young Malays were more attracted to the Beatles, Venture, Cliff and the Shadows, the Rolling Stones and other pop idols. A movement that appeared in the 1960s that had already been simmering with Bill Haley and the Comets and Cliff Richard and the Shadows, hit fever pitch in Singapore, especially with the Cliff Richard and the Shadows who gave a performance at the Happy World Stadium in 1961. Subsequently, most ensembles were to convert to the three guitars and one drummer configuration.23

It would be foolish to assume Pop Yeh Yeh’s coruscating appearance in the 1960s without sufficient infrastructure. Its appearance seems very much to have been fuelled by an already thriving Malay film industry which had absorbed and incorporated many elements of Western popular culture – one of the most outstanding was the music. For instance, Looseley points to an earlier presence of vocal sounds associated with the Beatles in the music of the Everly Brothers and Helen Shapiro and Elvis Presley. There also needs to be consideration of a support system. Singapore was very much a British colonial city; the proliferation of musics of Western popular culture would have been difficult to deny. The fact that many of these practitioners enjoyed prominence in the public sphere via live performances also affirmed them sensuously. Given the fledgling industry of gramophones and records and the television, live performances afforded anyone spectator of Pop Yeh Yeh, opportunities that might have been denied them from a technological or financial perspective. A practice such as Pop Yeh Yeh validated musicianship from an aural and oral perspective without recourse to certification or schooling. The infusion of technology was another crucial element. Given a substantial interest in the ‘tools of the trade’, amplification
of sounds, usually reserved for the cinemas and public address systems were now part of each band’s arsenal of musical resources.

On balance, though, not all views of Pop Yeh Yeh were enthusiastic. For instance, Malay film superstar, P. Ramlee, was one of the first to voice his reservations. When M. Osman’s Suzanna appeared and emblazoned EP sales and radio airplay in 1963, Ramlee was quoted as saying *this kind of music placed importance only on the loudness of the music rather than the quality of the song itself…Poor quality pop songs and music will give rise to a future generation that is wild. Young people who sing as they please, play music as they please, dress themselves as they please will end up exposed to negative elements which will inevitably result in all ill discipline.*

Ramlee was to form a band called *Pancha Sitara* hoping to counteract the influence of the *Platters* and revitalise Malay music by adapting Western influences to suit what he believed to be local needs and expectations. *Pancha Sitara* was well received as were the songs *Bila Larut Malam* and *Mawar Ku* to name a few.

Ramlee was not alone in his reservations. Horace Wee and Sam Gan, practitioners with certified musical qualifications as well as a considerable wealth of playing experience in performing music for dance band and jazz ensembles, recalled their first experiences of amplified sound at the Happy World Stadium: *The big culture shock to the musicians of the day...who became established...was when the Beatles, the Shadows came...Cliff Richard and the Shadows, came to Singapore...and all of a sudden you have a bass guitar...a very loud amplified sound...not a smooth, well-rounded and refined sound...very raw...If you describe it now, it did sound very raw...when it first came on...it was in its infancy...the recording technician had not gotten in yet...in fact it wasn’t even [mediated by] a recording technician...it was the players...the people who played it were from a different school...they weren’t qualified musicians...they couldn’t read...they just played...Half the time they couldn’t even play the instrument...sometimes its good that way because that’s how a new artform or practice evolves...when someone goes in blindly innocent...you don’t now what’s impossible...so that’s why in those days it was loud...discordant...mainly because [in our view] they didn’t tune their instruments properly...it became a big shock to the professional musicians [like us] of the previous twenty/thirty years....and of course it was greeted
with great resentment...in the heydays of the big band scene, there were always [a gap between] the quality musicians who could read music and those who could not...this actually became the other way around...professional musicians looked at these pop-up stars...and said they only play three chords...hardly in tune (because they could hardly tune properly) and they couldn’t even read a damn note...they [the professional musicians] were rather dismissive of them...and there was a lot of tension between both parties...the rock n’ roll musicians looked at the professionals with disdain...old men...and the professionals looked at these people and said ...like a bunch of amateurs... [or] something really damning... 25

Many practitioners of Pop Yeh Yeh were also musicians working in the English-speaking equivalent of Western popular culture, as much as their Mandarin-conversant and Tamil-conversant counterparts. Somehow the music-making served at one level to enable practitioners to the point where musical ability as a biological predisposition in every human being would have become difficult to refute, if the level of support was considered. At another level, the levels of support also entailed cross-community exchanges, economic opportunities for those who recorded this practice, which gave rise to the possibilities of national and international careers in music for those who excelled in quality of songs and performance standards.

There is an ease with which Pop Yeh Yeh melded into technology, Vespas and Lambrettas and fashion, which has yet to be explored. If Cliff and the Shadows were sufficient encouragement, why was Pop Yeh Yeh a necessary phase since the practice of the English-version of rock n’ roll was equally enthusiastic in its emulation in Singapore? Not yet discussed is the implication of the dissenting voices from the Malay community with regard to this infiltration. P. Ramlee may have been the most significant voice but his concerns were likely to have shared sentiments from less audible voices. This is an area, among many related issues of religion, culture, sites of contestation, technology, economics and politics, which bodes much potential in further scholarship.
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3 Ibid., p.


6 Burhanudin bin Buang, op.cit., Chapter two.


8 Burhanudin bin Buang, op.cit. Chapter two.

9 Interview with Yusnor Ef, 30 Nov. 2000 who claimed Olympic Records, Eagle records were as big as Phillips and EMI. Quoted in Burhanudin bin Buang, op.cit., Chapter two.

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11 An oral interview with Zam Zam, 6 Dec. 2000, quoted in Burhanudin bin Buang, op.cit., chapter two footnote16.


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17 Burhanudin bin Buang, op.cit., chapter two, footnote 27.


19 Ibid., footnote 41.


22 Lee Kuan Yew, From Third World to First : the Singapore Story: 1965-2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore Times Editions 2000, p.120.

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Shiyue

Shiyue’s presence in music of popular folk culture has been somewhat understated and this exploration can only serve as a preliminary view to its understanding. Its historical position, unfortunately, is that of a slightly poorer relation next to the Taiwan college songs – Mingge – which had commercial and more concerted air-space, reaching out to aspiring pre-Xinyao practitioners before Xinyao was identified in 1982. Strangely the strongest defence via its accounting for it exists alongside Xinyao; one view of Shiyue holds it as a predecessor to Xinyao.

Chronology
A source known as the Xinyao Diary\(^1\) marks the year 1978 as the beginning of shiyue or poetic music. Students of the Nanyang University Poetic Society decided to write music to their own poems and performed them. There is a sense of history in that poets even from the Tang Dynasty were known to perform their prose or poetry by approximating their delivery to what we would identify as music. Unfortunately, this area of enquiry has not been pursued in much greater depth and eventually we are told that from 1982, Shiyue evolved into xinyao and xinyao developed from here.

As a practice, Shiyue somehow lagged behind Xinyao largely because there was a way in which Xinyao arrived at a propitious moment in a narrative that we identify with musical practice in Singapore. Shiyue is defined literally as poem songs in a parallel way, as does Art Song in Euro-American practices. One of many questions that remain unanswered is the practice of shiyue. Just as Shiyue’s rise to prominence in 1978 marks its solidification, there are some questions as to its practice which must have preceded its bracketing.

The Story of Shiyue reportedly begins with a poem:

\begin{verbatim}
You are a fallen star
Freed from the heavenly realms
I am a boatman
Carrying with me beautiful stories
A harbour that’s no longer
Waves that are brittle
Declaring the soft cries of thunder
We tell
Of little stories
Quite forgetting the shores and lands we have reached
\end{verbatim}
Pan Zhenglei created this story in a lecture theatre at the Nanyang University (or Nantah) Arts/Humanities Faculty. He passed this story on to Zhang Fan who wrote the music for Story. Through, this simple account we are informed of the beginning of shiyue. When they were not having classes, these ambitious members of the Nantah Poetry Society often strum away on their guitars while translating their thoughts into poems before embellishing them with music.

On the fourth of August 1978, they put together ten such works of “shiyue” (“poetic music”) and presented them at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry Exhibition Hall. Within a matter of few months, on 1 December 1978, the Nanyang University Poetry Society once again held a shiyue performance. Some of the seventeen songs showcased, Waving the Hands, Outside the House, By the Lake, to name a few, became very popular on campus. Even after graduation, Zhang Fan and his friends continued to be enthusiastic about music. At that time, the Singapore Association for Activities of the Elderly was raising funds for the Elderly Clubhouse” Building Fund. These young people then showed that their enthusiasm was for more than just their art alone by holding the February Green Grass Shiyue Concert in the name of the Singapore Youth Association. On 24 August 1980, the Aljunied Literary and Translation Society was established, and later became heavily involved in the promulgation of shiyue. 1981 marked the year when Minyao and Shiyue practitioners met. A year later, between 17 and 18 April 1981, the Aljunied Literary and Translation Society brought together the Johor Bahru Bai Zhuan Choir, pioneers of Taiwanese contemporary folk songs Yang Tsu Chun and Wu Tsu-Tsu. Altogether, 23 songs were performed in this concert called Wind in April. In the same year, National Junior College also organized the first ever performance of original compositions in July.

On 1 February 1982, members of shiyue organized an exhibition named “An Exhibition of History”. The focus of the exhibition was on the history of Singapore-Malaysian literature. After this exhibition, they were “exhausted”. In addition, having just stepped into the working world, they decided to become less “active” and focus all their energies on the literary periodical “Stratosphere” and another literary publication (“Stratospheric Literary Books”).

In June 1981, Billy Koh and Ng Guan Seng became friends after knowing each other in the Chinese Orchestra of River Valley High School. As they shared a common passion for music, they often strummed and sang together when they were not having classes. When they entered Singapore Polytechnic, Koh Nam Seng joined them. The trio called themselves “The Straw” for the sake of entering “Talentime” organized by then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC). The group was officially formed on 6 September in a fast food restaurant.
Although shiyue had quietened down, 1982 was in fact the peak period of folk songs in Taiwan. Thus, the students on the campuses would be singing American folk songs of the sixties and the seventies if they were not strumming and singing Taiwanese folk songs. At the same time, one question seemed to plague each of the young people here: “Where are our songs? Are we going to just sing the songs of others forever?” Thus, many youngsters, especially junior college students, started forming groups with like-minded friends around them. Initially, their songs were called (“Sing folk songs”). This was later interpreted as (“Singaporean folk songs”) or (Original songs composed by Singaporean youths”). Since then, (“xinyao”) had been flourishing on the prolific music scene.

Liang Wern Fook’s own accounts are worth the quote:

In the past for our generation, our parents forbade us to listen to them, particularly to the educated group—that differentiates between artistic and entertainment songs. In the older generation, children were encouraged to listen to Nantah (shiyue). Before (shiyue) in the 70s, Most of the songs we listened to in the 70’s I would describe as one-way traffic—either from Taiwan or Hongkong—music from Taiwanese films—love songs...also theme songs from Hongkong TV serials...basically Taiwan Lui Chia Chang—important prolific write in Hongkong it was Hu Chia Hui—considered the godfather of “theme songs”. We got very few opportunities to listen to then unlike our parents generation where they listened to quite a lot of songs from China in the 50s and 60s...Mandarin and Cantonese—Sam Hui...before Shiyue, there hadn’t been much of students or undergrads writing their own songs, especially among the Chinese community in Singapore. Nantah’s songs were basically songs written for poetry. To me, although I myself write a lot of poems, it will, on the one hand it is very artistic, it has very good literary values. On the other hand, it will cause a certain restriction. When you need to compose music for the audience, there are a lot of considerations and you probably need to adjust your music...In the conflict between musical content and lyrical content, it is the phrasing of the words. Usually when it comes to poetry writing, you tend to use more profound words and have it more condensed...in many ways Xinyao is different from shiyue. I belong to the generation that listened to shiyue. In 1981 and 1982, the Shiyue group of people, our seniors, organised an annual concert at the DBS Auditorium. I remember this very clearly. Before this, we listened to Taiwanese singers but this is the first time we got to listen to our own locals and they are not singers and they are not shiyue professional singers, whether trained or doing this for money...they were just like us...students..a few years older than us....and they were still pursuing their studies...we felt their music was very refreshing and different—the style of Shiyue. At the time we were studying in JC's (Hwa Chong, NJC and Jurong JC) and Polytechnics. As the audience that played an important role in our lives. Their efforts had a strong influence and impact on us. In reality, we had been writing songs on our own around this period.³

There are at least two known practitioners, Pan Cheng Lui and Zhang Fan. Of the two, I spoke with Zhang Fan:
Taiwan, at the time was undergoing a change which reflected a more personal expression.... For those in Taiwan, there was a sense of awakening. Prior to that, music of this domain from Taiwan was based more or less on Japanese tunes; they had 50 years of Japanese influence. The youth and university undergraduates in Taiwan turned to writing their own material and songs; that's why they called it Xiao Yuen Ge Shui (College Songs). There were three guys who became the pioneers of the Taiwan local song revolution...during that period in time they expressed themselves through songs; a parallel with Bob Dylan in the USA in the 1960s.4

We were writing these songs, shiyue, around 1975 music based on poems...around the same time as the Taiwan Movement so we were not influenced by them. This is because they attended our concerts (Wern Fook attended our concert)—attending to music based on poems. There were a few concerts that we organised...the first concert was August 5 1978. This concert coincided with a poem exhibition at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce Exhibition hall. This poem exhibition featured Chinese calligraphy with poems—a sort of multidisciplinary exhibition—painting related to poems. So we also presented the songs that reflected the poems. This is the first concert which we had which was quite a success. These are the songs that we sang...the few songs that I wrote...I was the only composer. But then the second concert that we organised, there was only music....no exhibitions this time. This second concert 1st September 1978 was held at Nanyang University Arts Faculty main lecture hall. The third concert was the concert that Liang Wern Fook, Billy Koh, all the young people attended on February 9 & 10, 1980, at the DBS auditorium. This was a fund-raiser for a Spring concert. Here we described the songs that we sang. On April 17 and 18, 1981, we organised another concert at DBS auditorum, this time inviting pioneer singers from Taiwan.5

A very obvious but little delved into aspect of change in Taiwan is made a little clearer in Benjamin Ng Wai-Ming’s study of Japanese popular music in Singapore. He informs us that, the 1970s saw the golden period of Taiwanese popular songs among Chinese communities in Asia. Most of these Taiwanese songs were Mandarin covers of Japanese enka (urban nostalgic and emotive songs) or kayokyoku (early Japanese pop). They were very popular among the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Chinese Singaporeans became familiar with Japanese tunes, although few realised that their favourite Mandarin songs [were] borrowed from Japanese tunes.6

Gaps in the knowledge are quite easily filled in here. Shiyue seemed to share with Taiwan campus songs, an aversion to already popular Taiwanese songs. As Zhang Fan elaborated earlier, the Taiwan campus songs represented a time Taiwan was undergoing a change which reflected a more personal expression, the same time we were singing our songs...there was a sense of awakening. Prior to that, music of this domain from Taiwan was based more or less on Japanese tunes; they had 50 years of Japanese influence. The youth, university undergraduates in Taiwan turned to writing their own material and songs; that’s why they called it College Songs.7
In the face of an ideological rejection, it is now possible to understand the reaction against sounds of music of Chinese popular culture (Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien dialects), and an emulation of Taiwan campus songs, whose style was described as more refined and fit in well with Shiyue practitioners in the Singapore context. This of course was to impact Xinyao practitioners a little later.

Why and how did Shiyue slip into Xinyao? Why was it not possible for Shiyue to continue? Zhang Fan explains. *I think in 1980, there was a combined degree at NUS. Only one batch before NUS came along and Nantah became obsolete and NTI came about. So the NUS was legally, officially Nantah and Sintah...of course there are sentimental issues. Nantah was regarded as the only Chinese university in Southeast Asia.*

With regard to shiyue’s waning and xinyao’s emergence, Zhang Fan offered this explanation. Shiyue was more academically oriented—it was more an undergraduate experience and undertaking whereas Xinyao was more something that happened in the secondary schools and JCs. For shiyue, when we stopped, there was no more shiyue...it was unable to become popular because there’s no cassette...we needed a platform for its dissemination and that platform was slowly shifting in a different direction...also the focus of Shiyue. The poems were actually written by local poets...the lyrics are deeper in meaning...I was actually thinking of it similar to Schubert lieder...I am classically trained...I sing German lieder so that’s the way I thought of shiyue music...I took up formal lessons towards the LRSM from Samuel Ting Chu San...after Dunman High (school) days...after university graduation so I can say I have a classical background...also I was only responsible for the music.

What about broadcast possibilities? *It is mentioned that in this first concert there is this cassette...sent abroad to Taiwan and it was broadcast (over radio?)...if you remember there is a very famous Chinese lady writer called San Mao (already passed away). She brought it with her and she had it broadcast and she received hundreds of letters of feedback about music from our first/second concert in the early 80s. San Mao came to Singapore in about 1981/82...I could say that we were naïve about not making this commercially viable. We just thought it was good that people liked our music and it seemed fine...it was not our intention that we should take a commercial approach like getting it published. But as for the last concert in the later 70s...we didn’t make the cassette.*

Was any attempt made to revive it or create opportunities for it? *These songs, one called Chuan Tng...and right now this particular song we have together with Du Nan Fah (chief editor of Shin Min)...its in the Singapore Press Holdings...they organised a competition...Golden Lion award...Chuan Tng...passing down the lantern...we performed in front of Ong Teng Cheong...then the Minister of Culture in 1984...After listening to the songs, in the opening ceremony...I played the guitar and sang...it’s a chain effect...strange because in the audience was students from JB...Quan Rong Secondary school (Foon Yu is in Hakka) it’s the largest Chinese
independent school (clan association)...in fact it is the largest Chinese school in JB...so this group of students managed to transcribe it...on one occasion I visited my friend (1987) in JB...and they sang this song...every Festival...this song in a sense reflects ways of upholding Chinese values and traditions...this would be the true spirit of shiyue....this coming concert we are performing it...but I don’t like this arrangement...I still like to listen to Chuan Tng out there...(In Malaysia)...with thousands of people singing...Chinese festival in Malaysia are quite major events there...each year they are organised by different states...at one time I was in Malacca...they kept singing the song for two-three hours...  

Were there attempts made to revive or relive Shiyue?  
Together with a friend of mine, we went to Japan to learn about Chinese culture...we realised that the Japanese retained their culture so well and they were so refined...why shouldn’t we as well? We were all working with some resources financially speaking...after a seven year absence, Pan Cheng Lui, Du Nan Fah, Chou Wee Chueh...July 8-9 1988, organised another concert...we wanted to set some directions...maybe invite more young people to join us...get a new group of people to write music based on poems. But you realise that in 1988, Xinyao is already active. Shiyue is different from xinyao...shiyue does not have much commercial involvement.  

Until further research explores this musical practice in greater depth, shiyue seems destined to remain an enigmatic practice with apparent links to Xinyao.
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Musical practices of Indian classical music

Kernial Singh Sandhu informs us that *Indians have been present in Singapore from the very first day of the foundation as a British trading post by Raffles in January 1819.*\(^1\) By 1821, there were 132 Indians excluding the others in the garrison and camp-followers which would have totalled 4727 in Singapore. Between 1819 and 1980, we see the Indian population to comprise anywhere between 2.8% and 11.8% of the entire population.\(^2\) The first batch of Indian convicts reportedly arrived from Sumatra in April 1825. Apart from the facts that 10% were released every year and some settled down locally, Sandhu Singh’s point is *the history of the convicts was the history of the Public Works Department.* We are also informed that the mutterings against the “concentrated scourings of the Indian jails” eventually led to the closing down of Singapore as a penal station in May 1873.\(^3\) Although all the major ethno-linguistic groups from India were present, the Tamil community comprised 75% of the Indian population in Singapore. Of the Northern Indians, the Punjabis made up about 51% of the North Indian population in Singapore in 1980.\(^4\)

Chulia and Market Street in the 1830s was the most occupied space by the earliest Indians (South Indian Chettiar and Tamil Muslim) and it seemed to fit in their professions as traders, financiers, money-changers, petty shopkeepers, boatmen and others. Another group, comprising Sindhi, Gujarati and Punjabi dealing mainly in the cloth and textile business while the third group of Gujarati and Muslim textile and jewellery traders could be found in Arab Street region. A fourth grouping of Indians consisted of Tamil shopkeepers around the Farrer Road and Serangoon Road area, which was to become the centre of the city during the 19th century. The last prominent concentration of Indians exists around the dock and railway, where many of the workers have been Tamil, Telugu and Malayalis. Sandhu points out that the concentration of Indian communities in Singapore reflect *the efforts of the British administrators to plan urban development and fit the indigenous and foreign populations into convenient moulds* besides other factors such as *the siting of government labour lines close to the labourers’ place of work and the traditional Indian tendency to congregate in homogeneous communities.*\(^5\)

1833 was a watershed year when slavery was abolished throughout the British empire. There was a need for cheap and subservient labour to
develop Singapore and other British possessions. The Straits Settlements were for a while turned into convict stations, and the convicts were used in the construction of roads in Singapore and maintaining the cleanliness of the streets. They were also credited for the physical effort in erecting St. Andrew’s Cathedral and the Government House. Sri Mariamman Temple was built by Indian Convicts in 1828. Indian labourers have also been credited with monuments like the Johore Causeway, The Sembawang Dockyards, and the former Kallang Airport. A. Mani also informs us that both missionary and government schools were staffed almost wholly by Indians and the police constabulary was practically dominated by Sikhs and Indians.

The boom of 1900-1920 which caused a sudden increase in the demand for rubber and tin in Malaya and for import and export in Singapore generated the need to replace gambier, sugar-cane and pepper with rubber. Geographically, this meant the extension to areas around the Bukit Timah and Seletar in the north and Pasir Panjang and Jurong in the west. Mani points out the logical growth of settlements along main transport routes. Dhobie lines along Orchard Road have resulted in its memory via its name, Dhoby Ghaut. Post 1920s, the British, in anticipation of further Japanese military expansions, developed the northern part of the island as a naval base, building a military base in Sembawang and an airbase in Changi. By 1962, the number of Indians living in Chong Pang, Jalan Kayu, Nee Soon and Yew Tee villages near the military establishments far outnumbered the Malay population there. Given the changes post 1968, Ang Mo Kio, Toa Payoh, Queenstown, Macpherson and Woodlands new towns became new focal points in the 1960s and 1970s. Further out-migration also resulted in Indians making home in Yishun, Hougang, Tampines and Jurong.

Tradition seems to be adhered to despite the urban nature of Singapore. Outside of the experimental and art traditions, music-making is very prominent at social, ritual and religious festivals within the Indian communities. The nada swaram and tavil are two such musical instruments performed at the appropriate point of a marriage ceremony when a bridegroom ties the tali (the equivalent of a wedding ring) onto the neck of his bride while the priests chant mantras or verses from the holy book. The Spring festivals of Holi (North Indian) and Pongal (South Indian) are occasions for music. During Holi, a bonfire is lit and participants splash each other with coloured water and phag (songs) are sung about great feats accomplished by heroes in the Ramayana and Mahabhrata. During Pongal,
newly-cooked rice is brought to the temple where pujas (prayers) are chanted. The Sindhi community celebrates Cheti Chand (the birthday of Jhoole Lal—an incarnation of the god Vishnu) with panjra (devotional songs) as the food is cooked for the celebration.

The South Indian classical tradition known as the Carnatic tradition emerges as influence for musical practice in Singapore. Classical traditions and music by implication appear in the early films of the 20th century in the form of folk and Hindu mythology. The classical tradition seems to have been prevalent, by implication, in temple grounds and in rituals throughout the year. This then suggests the practice of the South Indian classical tradition in Singapore as early as the 19th century. The classical tradition seems to have been prevalent, by implication, in early 19th century Singapore. By 1821, there were 132 Indians; excluding those in the garrison and camp-followers which would have totalled 4727 in Singapore. The Sri Mariamman Temple was reportedly built by Indian convicts in 1828. Into the 20th century, around the years 1925 and 1926, oral interviewees relate the presence of Indian dances, dramas and folk performing arts which were popular in Selegie and were performed free for the public. The actors and directors came all the way from India. The length of their performances was dependent upon their popularity reflected by the size of the crowd, thus the bigger the crowd, the longer they performed. Dances such as ‘Silambu’, ‘Karan’, and ‘Kalai Nigalchi’, a combination of themed dramatic art and gestures, were the favourites. Silambu is the name of the age old Indian (Tamil) art of self-defence whereby a staff (long, wooden pole) is used to defend or attack your opponents. Stories such as the Ramayana and the Tamil epics were also acted. The Ramayana tells the history of Sri Ramachandra, the son of King Dasaratha and his wife Sita and his brothers. This work tells much about the Hindus of that time, their customs, their way of life, their arts and their technology. The Ramayana (or Life of Rama) is generally regarded as the first poetical work of purely human origin and legend has it that its author, Valmiki, was originally an ignorant highway robber whose life and character were transformed through meditation after he was instructed by the great sage Narada. From this incident, he received his name ‘Valmiki’ which means ‘born of an ant hill’. When the Chariot was carried from the temple during Thaipusam, the Silambu dance would follow sometimes with the horse and tiger dance, which is a popular folk art among Tamil Indians. Visitors from as far as Johor Bahru and Kuantan would travel to Selegie just to watch these performances. However, at one
point, the government banned these performances on the streets as they were too rowdy.\\footnote{15}

We are informed that drama troupes came by a ship known as the **Rajullah** in the 1930s and docked at **Naval Base**. Historical and epic dramas were staged at Alexandra Hall while Kathakali drama was staged at Sembawang. Posters on horse coaches, big notices, newspaper advertisements on drama titles were also ways of organising publicity for dramas while Tanjong Pagar, Potong Pasir and Serangoon Road were the main sites for such publicity.\\footnote{16} Accounts indicated strength of audience support for shows and there is arguably the first reference to *band music* for dramatic purposes. Practitioners recall being part of a musical ensemble referred to as **Music and Dramatic Society**.\\footnote{17} What they identified as Band music was played by members of a music party,\\footnote{18} a musical ensemble within a dramatic troupe which was to become an independent group. Gregory Booth’s study of the Madras Corporation Band identifies the wind band ensemble in a 1911 recording as the Tanjore Band which had become by the early 20th century something of a status symbol. Wind bands had become a new processional requirement as the public of central Tamil Nadu gradually learned to combine music ensembles and their concomitant layers of cultural meaning. This extended to public and private, religious and secular processions.\\footnote{19}

Names of musical band parties\\footnote{20} in the 1950s and 1960s were identified together with notable musicians, MP Gurusamy and Pundit Ramalingam who were identified in oral accounts as those synonymous with the South Indian classical tradition as well as a semi-classical tradition. One explanation offered for the term *semi-classical* referred to the degree of conformity to the raga or mode of the song/music. In the South Indian classical context, some modes had very specific contexts, times and occasions. Music or songs which deviated from this convention could be found in semi-classical or light classical settings. Songs of South Indian film were such examples and this was a known practice in south Indian film.\\footnote{21}

Christina Edmund recalls how her father, Edmund Appau, a Hindu Tamil by birth and later convert to Catholicism upon marriage, remembered visiting temples with his father to watch Indian classical music in his growing years. The New World Park was also the site where various Indian dramatic productions were performed. The Singapore Indian Artistes Association, for
instance, had Tamil plays put up from the late 1940s till the 1960s. In 1948, together with the late Mr V Sinniah, a tabla player, Edmund Appau founded arguably the first Indian musical group in Singapore known as the **New Indian Amateur Orchestra**; known essentially as an Indian classical ensemble, more specifically of the Carnatic tradition.

Reference to **band music** is found in its supporting role in drama, particularly Indian classical derivation. S.Sivam recalls how in the post WWII period... even ladies washing clothes or washing rice would stop to listen to **Thiagaraja Bhagavathar** singing... and songs by **T.R. Mahalingam**, who were from the Carnatic tradition and semi-classical as well. Repertoire reportedly consisted of cinema songs...early MGR films, films about gods and goddesses with songs by **Thiagaraja, A Kittapa and K. Ramasamy**. Mythological movies were great favourites running to packed houses with films such as **Thiruvilaiyaadal, Saraswathi Sabadam, Kanthan Karunai, and Aathi Parashakthi** to name a few. It had classical Indian music and it educated many of us on our religious background. At that time they used play the gramophone with the label **His Master’s Voice**...people from the elite class learned classical music and **Bharatha Natyam** from **Bhaskar's Dance Academy and Singapore Indian Fine Arts**; especially the Ceylonese Tamils and the Brahmin Tamils. The Tamils who were from the middle class went to small time teachers who taught dance for film music. Hindu Temples played a big part in promoting music and dance then and even now. There were performances of Carnatic vocal and instrumental music on the first half of the evening and all dances on the second half. It is interesting to note the dancers performed popular dance numbers from the films, either as solo or duet or groups.

Narratives in Indian mythology formed a common bond between music of South Indian classical (and semi-classical) tradition and even early films from India screened in Singapore. According to a local consumer and observer of Tamil cinema, Balakrishnan Veerapan: **Mythological movies were great favourites here...ran to packed houses. They had [Indian] classical music and it educated many of us on our religious background. We practically saw all the “Hindu Mythological figures” on screen.**

The proliferation of Tamil language and culture seems to have had somewhat of a boost in the post Japanese Occupation period of the 1950s. In terms of a greater awareness of both forces of attraction and repulsion in the
Indian community in Singapore, at least two factions are noted. The first is the division of Tamil and Hindi in the separation of North and South Indian groups. Within the South Indian community, there were two groups, according to A. Mani, Tamil-using Indians and Tamil-losing Indians. The Tamil-using community was led by G. Sarangapani who went on to create a Malayan Tamil identity, with the Thamizhar Thirunal (Tamils Festival), which had ramifications even further afield in Thailand and Indonesia. This movement largely affected the Tamil-using middle and working class Indians. The Tamil language was used as a unifying factor even when the individuals were separated by caste and religion. When the Goh Report, published in 1978, emphasised the need to pass in a second language, the Ministry of Education’s response for the Indian community was to increase the number of schools offering Tamil as a second language.

Mr. Sarangapani’s efforts had immediate ramifications culturally and musically. In the year 1953, the very first Tamil Festival was performed at the Happy World Stadium at Jalan Besar, catering to the many Indians around that area. The Tamil Festival is actually the ‘Pongal Festival’ or the Harvest Festival in English. It was a celebration not only for the Tamilians, but also for all Indians who spoke the Tamil language. Dr. Seetha Lakshmi notes that after 1952 (with the establishment of the Tamils Representative Council), Mr Sarangapani initiated the Thamizhar Thirunal which was celebrated as the Harvest Festival (pongal) in India. This was very popular and about 350 participants took part in a talentime organised by Mr Sarangapani.

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This movement largely affected the Tamil-using middle and working class Indians. The Tamil language was used as a unifying factor even when the individuals were separated by caste and religion. In the face of fragmentation of language, religion or caste prevalent in the Indian
population in Singapore in the 1960s and beyond, the Tamil language
teacher emerged as the new catalyst to community orientation. This can be
traced to a movement called the Dravidian movement which in Malaya and
Singapore was essentially a working class movement against Brahminic
domination of Indian society beyond India.\textsuperscript{37} It is said that the Goh report
published in 1978, which emphasised the need to pass in a second language
created considerable concern among parents, the Ministry of Education’s
response for the Indian community was to increase the number of schools
offering Tamil as a second language.\textsuperscript{38}

The ancient penitential rites, thaipusam and pookkulittal (vow to walk on
fire) are sustained by certain types of music. Thaipusam has been observed
in Singapore for well-over 180 years. Hindu devotees do penance by
carrying kavadis (metal structures with spikes embedded in the devotee’s
flesh) over an extended distance. During this journey of penance, the
accompanying party does an improvised call-and-response melody that is
primarily rhythmic, facilitating a trance-like dance. The Singapore Chronicle
in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century bears witness to some of these activities with particular
concern expressed of the practice of what approximates in time as the fire-
walking ceremony\textsuperscript{39} while an incident during Thaipusam in 1896 becomes
the subject of concern with police intervention and enforcement at a
religious festival.\textsuperscript{40}

Fire-walking, like thaipusam, is penance and stems from vows made to the
rain goddess—Mariamman. Music-making here is contained within the
temple and its role is to create a state of mind for the ritual. Maha
Shivrathri—in celebration of the birth of the Lord Shiva, japa (constant
chanting) is initiated two days before for meditation. On the evening of the
day, a long puja (prayer) is made four times through the night symbolising
the four ages of human civilisation. At intervals between, bhajan (holy
songs) are sung with musical accompaniment to keep the devotees awake.
Sometimes jugalbandhi (mixed North and South music) performances or
villupattu, storytelling with music and sketches take place.

Indian classical music is practised in Singapore largely because of the efforts
of private schools, organisations like temples and dedicated individuals.
Interviews with promoters and practitioners in Singapore engender the perception of a strong dependence on musical, educational and professional resources in India, with the exception, perhaps, of groups involved in experimental projects. Communication with cultural resources in the various cities and centres in India translate into a constant stream of Indian artists and teachers to Singapore to enhance learning and appreciation of Indian classical music. Much of the classical and folk traditions have been dealt with in Joseph E.E. Peters’ Singapore Chapter on Evolving Music traditions of ASEAN as well as a number of Internet Websites in relation to the Societies mentioned above.41 There are some well-known sources for the teaching and learning of Indian classical music in Singapore:

1. Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society
2. Academy of Fine Arts
3. Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society
4. Kala mandir (temple of Fine Art)
5. Apsaras Arts
6. The Kolam-Ayer Indian Youth Ensemble

Although there is a distinction between North and South Art Traditions, collectively they form the bulk of the vocal, instrumental performance programmes for those interested in the practice of North and South Indian musical traditions. According to Joseph Peters, the Raga-Tala formula (modal/rhythmic configuration) provides some basis of unity among musicians although there are differences in execution and approaches. South (Carnatic) and North (Hindustani) are the main divisions found in Singapore although the Carnatic tradition predominates given that demographically there seem to be more of Tamil origin than other Indian communities. With the North and South Indian traditions firmly placed, the sitar and tabla have become popular among Singaporean Indians. Attempts to mix Northern and Southern styles have become regular features in jugalbandhi performances at social gatherings. Recently, there have also been trends towards creating more original forms or aspects of Indian music attributed to Singapore.

**Dance-Drama**

The increase in dance-drama productions, some elaborately and the development of an Indian Orchestra are part of that trend. In its traditional context, Indian Classical music would have been performed as part of religious, social or cultural events. There is little to deny in South Indian
classical musics a symbiotic relationship between dance and music evident in the highly structured forms like **bharatanatyam, katakali, odissi, katak**, to name a few. Learning and performing these forms are the staple means of a livelihood for private Indian music schools here. There are also attempts to fuse the skills and efforts of dancers, choreographers, musicians, composers, set designers, mural painters, lighting designers and scriptwriters since the early 1990s. Instrumentation for musical accompaniment tends to be orchestral and in a way influenced by theatre musicals. However, strict Indian classical musical rules are usually observed in the creation of dance-drama music. It is not unusual to find pre-recorded music played as accompaniment to dance-dramas. This is to do with the problem of rehearsing episodes with choreography of a detailed nature. Indian musicians rely heavily on improvisation when performing musical works. Dance-drama, therefore, with live accompaniment places different demands on dancers and choreographers and is an option not considered viable. Major dance-dramas have surged in Singapore. In 1993, the oldest Indian epic, Ramayana, was staged by Kala Mandir with an elaborate setting lasting about four hours and using a montage of musical and dance ideas from Bali, Thailand and Sarawak. Kala Mandir have had a track record in this respect, producing dance expressions of works like Swan Lake (1988), The legend of Mahsuri (1989) The legend of Lady White Snake (1990) and Jonathan Livingstone Seagull (1991). In 1994, Kala Mandir stages Midsummer Night’s Dream and Dharmaasoka, the story of King Ashoka’s religious conversion. Others have also trodden the same path. The Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society (Siddharta—the life of Buddha, Thyaga Chinam—based on the love tale by Kannadasan, Aum Muruga III—based on the life of Lord Muruga and on whose behalf Thaipusam is celebrated) and Apsara Arts Society (Ganesha—the story of the Hindu elephant-god) have been working along the same ideas. Dance drama has now reached a point where music is written by local Indian musicians.

**Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir**

The idea to establish an ensemble of Indian instruments materialised in 1985 when the Singapore Indian Orchestra was established under the Peoples Association—an umbrella organisation that coordinates socio-cultural activities at the national community level. A choir was added in 1990 and together the Indian orchestra and choir have given more than 100 performances and a number of people writing music for them.
Instrumental Configuration consists of Veena, Sitar, Western violin (but played Indian style), Flute, Clarinet, Percussion consisting of Mrdangam, Tabla, Ghatam, Ganjira, and other small percussion instruments. Occasionally, other musical instruments from the Western, Chinese, or Malay traditions are added.

The Indian orchestra plays two types of music; Indian classical and what is called ‘experimental’ music. In playing Indian classical music, the performance adheres to raga-tala formats but sonorities are distinguishable because of the instrumentation. When experiments are made, the trend is towards syncretism, multi-layered melodic lines, ideas from popular music and mixing instruments from Chinese and Malay traditions. At the recently concluded Singapore Arts Festival 2002, the Indian Orchestra and choir combined with the Peoples association Youth Chinese Orchestra, The Orkestra Melayu Singpura, Singapore Wind Symphony, The Vocal Consort and Singapore National Youth Orchestra to perform Mozart’s Symphony no.40 in G minor, Vivaldi’s Double Violin Concerto and some jazz numbers.

Discussion
Historically, the Indian community has had its fair share of problems associated with its religious beliefs even up to as recent as twenty-five years ago. The following are a sample of the difficulties encountered although at different times, it had somehow not been possible for the community itself to articulate, defend, or clarify the significance of their practices. The question of musical practice may have been far more difficult to define, vis-à-vis John Blacking’s use of the term ‘music’ but in 19th century Singapore musical practice was described as hideous noise while up to 1980, when definitions of musical instruments reached a new threshold, police enforcement has authorized a new definition of musical instruments and therefore musical practice in religious rituals.

A letter to the Editor of the Singapore Chronicle dated October 25th 1833 has this to offer…Mr. Editor yesterday the Kling inhabitants of Singapore applied to the Magistrates for permission to go in procession through the Streets of the Town at night with lighted torches and fireworks, as they have been in the habit of doing in former years…This practice was presented by the Grand Jury…as highly dangerous and recommended to be put a stop to it; nevertheless the Magistrates…thought proper to sanction its continuance
by a direct permission. The procession took place accordingly, and although no accidents from fire occurred on this occasion not on any former one, yet it is absurd to argue that because no accidents have happened, therefore none ever can and will happen. Any one who had witnessed the procession of last night would have been led to form an opposite opinion...if this ridiculous indulgence continues to be granted we shall hear some day, of half the Town being burnt, when doubtless our supient Magistracy will exclaim: Who would have thought it? ....

The presence of Hindu temples would have generated the need for music for worship and devotion. Our only key to the past is indirect evidence surrounding practice which we believe to be and assume as integral parts of ritual aspects of Hindu worship. If this is a procession in late portion of the year, the only one that corresponds to the traditions might be the Fire-Walking Procession. It is strange that there is no mention made of music although there are some very clear definitions of what is described as music or not as the case may be. It is also entirely possible that whatever went on in the procession must not have counted for anything worth attending to except the potential fire hazard.

A clue to the extent to which the Government of the Straits Settlement was concerned is evident in the legislation given below with specific reference to Music:

2. Police may give licenses for the use of Music in public roads, streets &c, on the occasion of native festivals and ceremonies (Section 32) 1872
3. Music in Street, &c., without license—penalty (Section 19 no.2)—Beating drums, tom-toms &c., without permission—penalty—(Section 21 no.8) 1872
4. Police Rules for music at Native Festivals and ceremonies Orders in Council 4 August 1875 Govt. gazette, p.496.
5. No Licenses granted for playing Musical Instruments in Streets and public thoroughfares within a radius of 3 miles from Central Police
Station...Government Notice 26 May 1881
The foregoing Amended—Licenses only granted under special instructions from Governor Government Notice 26 May 1881, Government gazette p.465
See also Assemblies and Processions—Fireworks—Mahomedans. Acts and Ordinances in force in the colony of the Straits Settlements 2nd edition, to the end of 1892.

MUSIC
Licenses may be given for in public roads, streets & c. See POLICE 7 (b) Penalty for breach of license. See SUMMARY PROCEEDINGS 1(a) Penalty for beating drums, tom-toms, &c, in streets; not to apply to military music.

XII of 1872 SUMMARY CRIMINAL JURISDICTION
Whoever, without the permission in writing of the Chief Police Officer beats a drum or tom-tom or blows a horn or trumpet or beats or sounds any brass or other metal instrument or utensil.
EXEMPTION: This Clause shall not be held to apply to Military Music

Another more direct impact of a parallel fear is evident at a later time as reported in the Singapore Free Press:
31 January 1896
The Tai-pusam or harvest thanksgiving festival was celebrated at the Chitty Temple Tank Road last evening with all the usual noise and ceremony. The silver car, drawn by the sacred bullock made the customary procession and in the evening the Temple brightly lighted and garishly decorated was thronged by a dense crowd of natives and others large numbers of Europeans responding to the general invitation issued by the temple authorities. The proceedings were less musical than on the previous day because the instruments of the Maharajah of Travancore’s band have been taken charge of by the Police, as they exceeded in number those mentioned in the permit. Mr. Groom applied this morning for a mandamus directing the delivery of the confiscated instruments.43

A little more detail is offered on 3 February 1896
CONFISCATED DRUMS
The band of the Maharajah of Travancore was engaged to play at the Hindoo Taipusam Festival. They took part in the procession on January 29th but were arrested by the Police and locked up in a cell for two hours till bail
was forthcoming. A kettle-drum, a big drum, a cornet, a bagpipe and a euphonium were confiscated by the police and the band lost its engagements for the following nights. On Friday, Mr. Groom applied for a mandamus directing the magistrate to give up the instruments on security being given. Mr. Justice Leach said the mandamus should have been asked for against the police, but would not give leave to amend the motion but said no doubt the Attorney General who was present, would advise the Police. The case comes on in the Police Court on Tuesday but the proceedings seem to have been unnecessarily harsh, as the chetties had a license for the music in the procession and the complaint only seems to be that of using too many instruments.  

THE NOISE NUISANCE 18 February 1896 Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR

SIR—I have been much annoyed during the last six months by “Night Noises” in a Hindoo temple near my house. There are all night services held on an average three nights every week, and these occasions shouting, yelling, beating of gongs and tom-toms and the dismal sound of the conch shell go to make up hideous night hours of torture to luckless Europeans who have to live in the neighbourhood. I have not a word to say against day services and would endure the noise say up to eleven o’clock at night; but these services do not begin until ten o’clock and are kept up till two, three, four, and sometimes even five o’clock in the morning. Then there is the constant noise of Klings arriving and departing from the temple and they shout and squabble on the public road in front of our courtyard. Now, Sir, it is monstrous that British residents in a British Colony should be compelled to endure such noises, merely because Kling coolies see fit to keep up their noisy rites during the livelong night. The nocturnal noises of all sorts have increased enormously in our neighbourhood during the last twelve months and if they are not put a stop to, Singapore will attain an unenviable notoriety as a place of torture for European householders. Thanking you for your public spirited action in ventilating the noise question, in your valuable paper, I am, Sir

A MUCH TIRED SUFFERER

What seems now to be needed is a statement by the Chief Police Officer as to the precise procedure to be adopted by the public for the abatement of noise nuisance. We shall be glad to publish it. [Ed.S.F.P]
In the present post-independence context, Thaipusam seems to have lived up to its controversial reputation in Singapore. Vineeta Sinha offers her views on some of the difficulties surrounding the event:

In recent years...Thaipusam has become embroiled in several controversies...the debate over the need for **musical accompaniment** during a Thaipusam procession and the abuse that supposedly comes with allowing music on the roads, started in the mid 1970s. There were complaints, both formal and informal, from members of the public to the effect that Thaipusam, labelled a religious occasion, was losing its character as such because a large number of youth at the festival were behaving like 'rowdies' and giving the festival a carnival mood instead of treating the day with the dignity and solemnity it deserved. The presence of youths dressed in garish and outlandish outfits carrying and playing musical instruments of all shapes and sizes and often the use of substitutes (such as metal pails, dustbins, plastic drums, and pails, cylinders and cooking pots and using plastic combs and chopsticks as drumsticks) to 'make music' were cited as contributing to this undignified carnival-like atmosphere on the day. The actual ban and seizure of musical instruments was effected in 1979, when the Hindu Endowment Board (HEB formed in 1969, in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs) issued a list of conditions to be followed by participants of Thaipusam. Amongst others, there was a general prohibition on dancing by those accompanying the **kavadi** and a ban on musical instruments alien to the festival such as Western drums and bongos. Traditional Indian music is today allowed only within the temple grounds and under the supervision of policemen on duty. As far as the authorities are concerned there seems to be some ambiguity about why this ban has been implemented. Reasons include noise pollution, disturbance to traffic and the public on the roads, the possibility of abuse of musical instruments by youth whose behaviour may turn the festival into a 'comic opera'. According to HEB, the decision to ban music on the roads was taken by the Police authorities; according to a Straits Times article dated 21 January 1981, a police spokesman was reported to have said that the ban on musical instruments during religious foot procession was a ‘government policy matter’ but declined to elaborate...a majority of participants and observers objected to the band and expressed their disapproval at the police action. Many viewed this as ‘racial discrimination’ pointing out that music is allowed in the festivals and rituals of other communities. Others see this as ‘government control’ in matters of religion. In 1981, the HEB appealed to the police to reconsider the ruling against all musical instruments on grounds that it is ‘traditional to have classical music accompany the **kavadi**
bearers on their annual penance.” Their appeal was rejected. The issue remains largely unresolved but every year during the festival, the same topic is raised by the authorities, the Hindu Advisory Board (HAB was formed in 1915) and the Police and generates considerable discussion. The only difference is that both the HAB and HEB argue in favour of banning the musical instruments that the sanctity of the festival be the main consideration.\(^{46}\) (emphases mine)

Music for worship and/or devotion is either acknowledged implicitly as in the Kling procession concern of 1833, or as in the Taipusam festival of 1892, 1896 and even 1980, which was regarded as a threat to civic order and management in the history of Hindu religious practices in Singapore.

Not all of instances of music in these settings are negative. While both musical configurations of South Indian classical modes of performance as well as western popular culture seem diametrically opposed, there is a site where both seem to co-exist; the Hindu temple and the time in question is the nine-day preparation to the fire-walking ceremony. Mohammed Ali Nilavu makes the observation that:

\textit{On each day of Navarattiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band).}\(^{47}\)

Oral accounts corroborate this observation and added the temple priests had not objected to the presentation of devotional material with a western-style accompaniment. While Indian classical tradition and practice continues to be promoted as essential for its role in supporting and enhancing cohesive worship and devotion in sacred sites and occasions, music and dances are now available to interested participants from the non-Indian communities in Singapore. It is not clear whether there is a matching correspondence with music for worship and Indian classical music and that is an area which has potential for development and further research.

Additionally, the sociological element of devotional songs played by a Western-style band is a significant element in consideration of Lefebvre’s triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational space.\(^{48}\) That there are groups normally associate with popular culture or film culture performing alongside Indian classical modes of performances
creates contradictory space of the sacred and devotional material with both validated and secular musical instruments – one which the temple priests themselves seem encourage by booking such groups.

However, in consideration of the music for worship and devotion, Indian classical tradition and practice continues to be promoted as essential for its role in supporting and enhancing cohesive worship and devotion in sacred sites and occasions while adding on the dimension that its music and dances are now available to interested participants from the non-Indian communities in Singapore. Much more about the intersection of classical traditions and practices with contemporary lifestyles are as much about conformity as about contradiction since Western band configurations are associated with the Indian community as a medium for expression of film music in Singapore. Moreover, the presence of an ensemble like the Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir in experimental settings presents both convergences and collisions with tradition and modernity by attempting Indian classical practice with very different instrumentation while attempting to increase the repertoire of the ensemble with repertoire outside of its practice and instrumental ability. It is hoped that future and further scholarship can identify and provide further clues about these practices.
REFERENCES


2 Ibid., p.775, Table 30.1.

3 Ibid., p.775.

4 Ibid., p.777.

5 Ibid., p.778.


8 Fung 1975, p.,17, cited in A. Mani. op.cit., p.793-794, particularly the statistics Table 31.2.

9 Ibid., p.794.

10 Singapore Chronicle, October 31, 1833, Vol.3, no.44, Letter to the Editor. The letter expresses particular concerns of fire and safety with an event which approximates the ritual of the fire-walking ceremony. Later, the Singapore Free Press, 31 January 1896, reports the confiscating of musical instruments used in the Thaipusam ritual at a temple at Tank Road by the police.

11 Kernial Singh Sandhu, op.cit, pp.774-775.

12 Taken from  Oral Interview A00896/7 Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu; OI A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam. I am indebted to Clement Liew for his invaluable assistance in providing me with this brief summary based on his research.

13 Ibid.


15 Oral Interview A00896/7 Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu; Oral Interview A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam.

16 From the Synopsis of an Oral Interview with Purushothaman Thambyah, Oral History Board. Accession No. 1342. The oral interview is in Tamil.

17 Interview with SIMP, March 2004. George a guitarist recalls, I joined in 1962, Usha Music Party...which was actually known as Usha Music and Dramatic Society. SIMP members recall how their predecessors were considered part of music and dramatic society configuration.


19 Ibid., p.67-68.

20 Ibid. According to oral interviewees, musical band parties were synonymous with music parties.
21 Personal correspondence with Radha Vijayan from the Peoples Association Lifeskills Branch, January 2005.

22 Microfilm The Singapore Indian Artistes Association—NA2345.

23 Most of the interviewees were of similar opinion that SIMP was a pioneer group but none knew of the New Indian Amateur Orchestra. The repertoire of New Indian Orchestra and the first SIMP was predominantly Carnatic, according to contemporaneous sources.

24 From the Synopsis of an Oral Interview with Purushothaman Thambyah, Oral History Board. Accession No. 1342. The oral interview is in Tamil. The term band here will require much further clarification but in the context of this synopsis, band is used to identify musical groups. The synopsis also includes names of musical band parties in 1950s and 1960s and includes names of famous musicians, MP Gurusamy, Pundit Ramalingam.

25 Interview with S.Sivam, 10 March 2004. Semi-classical is not clarified.


27 A. Mani’s chapter, Indians in Singapore Society, pp.788-809, p.796, in Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, edited by K.S.Sandhu and A. Mani (eds), ISEAS, Times Academic Press, 1993. Mani notes a gulf in the South Indian community caused partly out of caste and community differences as well as notions of economic class. Additionally, the Sri Lankan (Ceylon) Tamils and Malayalees saw themselves well-oriented towards the use of the English language and colonial culture. In both senses, the subscription to Indian classical traditions as well as fine arts of the western tradition would have sufficed for elitism.

28 Ibid., p.796, points out that with the establishment of the Tamils Representative Council of 1952, the Tamil language was promoted in literature, mass media, particularly newspapers, and cultural issues. The Tamil language had for its support base Tamil-using and working class Indians.

29 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

30 Ibid.

31 A. Mani op.cit., p.796. Mani cites examples of Tamils, particularly Sri Lankan Tamils who belonged to the administrative and clerical sectors of the colonial economy who were content to patronize Anglicized forms of colonial culture, English-medium schools for their children, their women learning fine arts…like Englishmen with Indian colorations.

32 Ibid., p. 796. The Malayalees went their own way and formed organisations for themselves. The pullout of the British forces from Singapore also resulted in an outflow of Malayalees. In the face of fragmentation of language, religion or caste prevalent in the Indian population in Singapore in the 1960s and beyond, the Tamil language teacher emerged as the new catalyst to community orientation. This can be traced to a movement called the Dravidian movement which in Malaya and Singapore was essentially a working class movement against Brahminic domination of Indian society beyond India.

33 Ibid., p.807. This is not longer the situation where Hindi has become, increasingly so in the last decade, the Indian language many parents subscribe to at the expense of Tamil and it has become a concern for the Tamil Teachers Association of Singapore.

34 Oral Interview with S. Varathan A001000/8. These festivities still occur today in the form of a Deepavali Festival Village that lasts 21 days and is similar to a street carnival. This provides a showcase for the best of Indian culture featuring pushcarts displaying and selling a variety of costumes, jewellery and...
accessories, food, paintings, handicrafts, spices and carpets. The carts will line Campbell Lane, from Serangoon Road to Clive Street and the roads will be closed to traffic throughout the 21 days. (STB) There will also be performances by local talents and foreign artistes presenting a rare mixture of South and North Indian cultures over a period of three weeks (except Sundays) until the eve of Deepavali. To add to the colour, the Silver Chariot of Sri Mariamman Temple will make its visit to the Festival Village enroute its traditional journey for the Fire Walking Ceremony on 1 November. (STB)

35 E-correspondence with Dr. Seetha Lakshmi, Saturday, August 24, 2002, 10:50 am.

36 A. Mani, op. cit., p. 796. The Malayalees went their own way and formed organisations for themselves. The pullout of the British forces from Singapore also resulted in an outflow of Malayalees.

37 Ibid., p.795.

38 Ibid., p.807.

39 Letter to the Editor, Singapore Chronicle October 31, 1833, Vol.3, no.44. Unfortunately, this was referred to as a Kling festival. In most social exchange, this is a derogatory reference to members of the Indian community.


42 Letter to the Editor, Singapore Chronicle October 31, 1833, Vol.3, no.44.


44 Confiscated Drums, Singapore Free Press, 3 February 1896

45 The Noise Nuisance, Correspondence, Letter to the Editor, Singapore Free Press, 18 February 1896.


47 Parenthesis and emphasis in original. Navarattiri involves a nine-day preparation for the fire-walking ceremony.

Musical practices of South Indian film in Singapore

Introduction

References to music of Indian popular film in Singapore are located in two entries. The first of them is in a 1954 publication, *Arts of Malaya*, where Tony Beamish observed *Hindustani music...[was]...popular far beyond the confines of the Indian...communities...interesting experiments in Western orchestration can now be heard in both. At the same time, traditional skill is being maintained and the more esoteric forms of communal music continue to be played in Malaya. Of these, Carnatic songs... have an enthusiastic following in the country, and are supported not only by local arts societies but by the occasional visits of distinguished performers from...India and other parts of South-East Asia.*

Given that Malaya in 1954 included Singapore, the practice of music of Indian popular film in Singapore is notable not so much by its presence but by its brevity of description. Moreover, Beamish’s articulation of the popularity of Hindustani music is curious. Was it Hindustani classical, folk or film music? How did Carnatic songs have an enthusiastic following when Hindustani music was popular beyond the Indian community? What are the interesting experiments in Western orchestration that Beamish observed in Hindustani music? How did this popularity come about if an Indian community comprised no more than 12% of the entire immigrant and indigenous population in Singapore, not to mention a South Indian majority within this small proportion?

*A later entry by Lee Tong Soon on Music in Singapore in the Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians makes the following observations:*

The majority of Indians in Singapore speak Tamil, while other large groups include the Malayalis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Bengalis, and Gujaratis. Temple music from the Carnatic tradition, featuring the nagasaram (oboe) and tavil (double-headed barrel drum) is performed to announce daily prayer times and during festivals such as Thaipusam and Thimithi. Other genres include bhajanas (Sanskrit bhajans), film music and Hindustani and Carnatic classical music.

Film music (we are not informed of its particularity, i.e., North or South Indian) is juxtaposed between Sanskrit bhajans and Hindustani and Carnatic classical music. There is little, either in description or scholarship, to inform a reader of the diversity or uniqueness that characterises the presence and practice of music of Indian popular film in Singapore. Apart from Joseph Peters’ noteworthy contribution on classical and folk culture of the Indian community with the ASEAN context, the Groves’ entry contains no single bibliographical reference in English, Tamil or Hindi for anyone wishing to research music making in the Indian community.
A third entry located in a chapter on film production in Southeast Asia by Tamaki Matsuoka Kanda has opening paragraph articulates sites of cultural exchange between India and Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s; not so much through diplomatic ties but through film:

*One of the centres was Singapore. Chinese bosses, Malay stars and staff from all over Asia—Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Japanese also—made films together. As S. Ramanathan said, “It was a really cosmopolitan atmosphere.”*

The fourth account, John Lent’s chapter, corroborates Tamaki’s accounts with the broader context of the film industry in Malaysia and Singapore, hence drawing on a historical unity of the Kuala Lumpur and Singapore leading to the latter’s independence in 1965 and slightly beyond.

**Brief Chronology**

South Indian classical tradition (Carnatic) and Tamil film emerge as influences for musical practice of South Indian film in Singapore. Classical traditions and music by implication appear in the early films of the 20th century in the form of folk and Hindu mythology. The classical tradition seems to have been prevalent, by implication, in temple grounds and in rituals throughout the year. This then suggests the practice of the South Indian classical tradition in Singapore as early as the 19th century. Oral accounts suggest two areas of considerable influence; Indian classical tradition and popular film. The classical tradition seems to have been prevalent, by implication, in early 19th century Singapore. By 1821, there were 132 Indians; excluding those in the garrison and camp-followers which would have totalled 4727 in Singapore. The Sri Mariamman Temple was reportedly built by Indian convicts in 1828. The Singapore Chronicle bears witness to some of these activities with particular concern expressed of the practice of what approximates in time as the fire-walking ceremony while an incident during Thaipusam in 1896 becomes the subject of concern with police intervention and enforcement at a religious festival.

Into the 20th century, around the years 1925 and 1926, oral interviewees relate the presence of Indian dances, dramas and folk performing arts which were popular in Selegie and were performed free for the public. The actors and directors came all the way from India. The length of their performances was dependent upon their popularity reflected by the size of the crowd, thus the bigger the crowd, the longer they performed. Dances such as ‘Silambu’, ‘Karan’, and ‘Kalai Nigalchi’, a combination of themed dramatic art and gestures, were the favourites. Silambu is the name of the age old Indian (Tamil) art of self-defence whereby a staff (long, wooden pole) is used in defence or attacking opponents. Stories such as the Ramayana and the Tamil epics were also acted. The Ramayana tells the history of Sri Rama-chandra, the son of King Dasaratha and his wife Sita and his brothers. This work tells much about the Hindus of that time, their customs, their way of life, their arts and their technology. The Ramayana
(or Life of Rama) is generally regarded as the first poetical work of purely human origin and legend has it that its author, Valmiki, was originally an ignorant highway robber whose life and character were transformed through meditation after he was instructed by the great sage Narada. From this incident, he received his name ‘Valmiki’ which means ‘born of an ant hill’. When the Chariot was carried from the temple during Thaipusam, the Silambu dance would follow sometimes with the horse and tiger dance, a popular folk art among Tamil Indians. Visitors from as far as Johor Bahru and Kuantan would travel to Selegie just to watch these performances. However, at one point, the government banned these performances on the streets as they were too rowdy.

We are informed that drama troupes came by a ship known as the Rajullah in the 1930s and docked at Naval Base. Historical and epic dramas were staged at Alexandra Hall while Kathakali drama was staged at Sembawang. Posters on horse coaches, big notices, newspaper advertisements on drama titles were also ways of organising publicity for dramas while Tanjong Pagar, Potong Pasir and Serangoon Road were the main sites for such publicity. Accounts indicated strength of audience support for shows and there is arguably the first reference to band music for dramatic purposes. Practitioners recall being part of a musical ensemble referred to as Music and Dramatic Society. What they identified as Band music was played by members of a music party, a musical ensemble within a dramatic troupe which was to become an independent group. Gregory Booth’s study of the Madras Corporation Band identifies the wind band ensemble in a 1911 recording as the Tanjore Band which had become by the early 20th century something of a status symbol. Wind bands had become a new processional requirement as the public of central Tamil Nadu gradually learned to combine music ensembles and their concomitant layers of cultural meaning. This extended to public and private, religious and secular processions where nagasvaram-tavil musicians in their dhotis were seen to appear side by side with wind band musicians in their military-style uniforms. In HMV recordings of 1911 of Balakrishnan’s Tanjore Band for instance, the instrumentation comprised: 2 Bb clarinets; probably an Eb clarinet; either two cornets or one cornet and an alto horn; a valve trombone and/or euphonium; a bagpipe used as a drone; a large thin pair of Indian talam or a small pair of European (Turkish in this case) cymbals; and a drum (not a tavil). They played varnams and kritis, listed by the Gramophone Company brochure by title, ragam and sometimes by appellation – Tamil tune, Telegu tune (Ithuva Tillaisthalam..Kafi-krithi, Jampey; Kirvani…Tamil Tune…English tune here seems by Booth’s estimation as strains from at least two British marches. The Gramophone Company certainly had a clearly-established marketing category in their catalogue (Bands) for those runs by Balakrishnan and Govindaswami Dasu. The Tanjore Band became by and large a private processional ensemble for hire which in itself represented an important milestone in a process of ongoing musical and cultural change in southern India. However, by 1933, HMV recordings on their Black Label series had each performance recorded by title and ragam; with the exception of one listed as “Rama-Bhakthi: - presumably a devotional
song such as kirtanam but the rest were kritis. Most of the compositions are by Sri Tyagaraja, although two are by Patnam Subramania Iyer, who also appears as a composer in the 1911 HMV releases. The quality of musicianship in the 1933 recordings is somehow stronger with brighter and quicker tempi. The change for us here is the group is identified as Balakrishnan and Party – Tanjore Band.\textsuperscript{18}

Names of musical band parties\textsuperscript{19} in the 1950s and 1960s were identified together with notable musicians, MP Gurusamy and Pundit Ramalingam who were identified in oral accounts as those synonymous with the South Indian classical tradition as well as a semi-classical tradition. One explanation offered for the term semi-classical referred to the degree of conformity to the raga or mode of the song/music. In the South Indian classical context, some modes had very specific contexts, times and occasions. Music or songs which deviated from this convention could be found in semi-classical or light classical settings. Songs of South Indian film were such examples and this was a known practice in south Indian film.\textsuperscript{20}

Christina Edmund recalls how her father, Edmund Appau, a Hindu Tamil by birth and later convert to Catholicism upon marriage, remembered visiting temples with his father to watch Indian classical music in his growing years. The New World Park was also the site where various Indian dramatic productions were performed. The Singapore Indian Artistes Association, for instance, had Tamil plays put up from the late 1940s till the 1960s.\textsuperscript{21} In 1948, together with the late Mr V Sinniah, a tabla player, Edmund Appau founded arguably the first Indian musical group in Singapore known as the New Indian Amateur Orchestra;\textsuperscript{22} known essentially as an Indian classical ensemble, more specifically of the Carnatic tradition.

Reference to band music\textsuperscript{23} is found in its supporting role in drama, particularly Indian classical derivation. S.Sivam recalls how in the post WWII period… even ladies washing clothes or washing rice would stop to listen to Thiagaraja Bhagavathar singing… and songs by T.R. Mahalingam, who were from the Carnatic tradition and semi-classical as well.\textsuperscript{24} Repertoire reportedly consisted of cinema songs…early MGR films, films about gods and goddesses with songs by Thiagaraja, A Kittapa and K. Ramasamy…\textsuperscript{25} Mythological movies were great favourites running to packed houses with films such as Thiruvilaiyaadal, Saraswathi Sabadam, Kanthan Karunai, and Aathi Parashakthi to name a few. It had classical Indian music and it educated many of us on our religious background. At that time they used play the gramophone with the label His Master’s Voice…people from the elite class learned classical music and Bharatha Natyam from Bhaskar’s Dance Academy and Singapore Indian Fine Arts; especially the Ceylonese Tamils and the Brahmin Tamils.\textsuperscript{26} The Tamils who were from the middle class went to small time teachers who taught dance for film music.\textsuperscript{27} Hindu Temples played a big part in promoting music and dance then and even now. There were performances of Carnatic vocal and instrumental music on the first half of the
evening and all dances on the second half. It is interesting to note the dancers
performed popular dance numbers from the films, either as solo or duet or groups.  

Narratives in Indian mythology formed a common bond between music of South Indian classical (and semi-classical) tradition and early films from India screened in Singapore. According to a local consumer and observer of Tamil cinema, Balakrishnan Veerapan (2003), "Mythological movies were great favourites here...ran to packed houses. They had [Indian] classical music and it educated many of us on our religious background. We practically saw all the “Hindu Mythological figures” on screen." 

The proliferation of Tamil language and culture seems to have had somewhat of a boost in the post Japanese Occupation period of the 1950s. In terms of a greater awareness of both forces of attraction and repulsion in the Indian community in Singapore, at least two factions are noted. The first is the division of Tamil and Hindi in the separation of North and South Indian groups. Within the South Indian community, there were two groups, according to A. Mani, Tamil-using Indians and Tamil-losing Indians. The Tamil-using community was led by G. Sarangapani who went on to create a Malayan Tamil identity, with the Thamizhar Thirunal (Tamils Festival), which had ramifications even further afield in Thailand and Indonesia. This movement largely affected the Tamil-using middle and working class Indians. The Tamil language was used as a unifying factor even when the individuals were separated by caste and religion. When the Goh Report, published in 1978, emphasised the need to pass in a second language, the Ministry of Education’s response for the Indian community was to increase the number of schools offering Tamil as a second language. 

Mr. Sarangapani’s efforts had immediate ramifications culturally and musically. In the year 1953, the very first Tamil Festival was performed at the Happy World Stadium at Jalan Besar, catering to the many Indians around that area. The Tamil Festival is actually the ‘Pongal Festival’ or the Harvest Festival in English. It was a celebration not only for the Tamilians, but also for all Indians who spoke the Tamil language. Dr. Seetha Lakshmi notes that after 1952 (with the establishment of the Tamils Representative Council), Mr Sarangapani initiated the Thamizhar Thirunal which was celebrated as the Harvest Festival (pongal) in India. This was very popular and about 350 participants took part in a talentime organised by Mr Sarangapani. SIMP members attribute the proliferation of Tamil Music Parties to Mr. Sarangapani: 
...that’s where we had this inter-band competition...bands sprouted everywhere...they wanted to win...every year there would be a big fight between SIMP and Chitra...then came Roshni Jeevans and Febra...at Rangoon Road...during this period of the festival...music bands would be most active... we didn’t have housing estates... but any corner you went there was a roadshow organised by Radio Singapore...we used to go to Fort Canning—the old drama centre—for the band competitions during Bertie’s time (Bertie Fernando was their former band leader)...SIMP every year would win...those
days there was total commitment...they were more interested in music...during those days, people had titles....if you mentioned a clarinettist—Joseph; saxophone—Karunan; tabla—Shanmugam from SIMP... \(^{35}\)

The presence of these band competitions drew in non-Tamil musical groups and continued with radio and television broadcast. Amar Singh, leader and singer of Hindi band Roshni Jeevans recalls:

...there was an invitation to all the bands to participate in a competition...only bands....this was in 1965...the producers and directors were from RTS, Philippines, Malaysia...we had to do three songs...instrumental....Hindi Song Hava...then we had a Tamil song...with Krishna on Hawaiian guitar.....he played Satyam...one more was our own composition...I can’t remember now...there were altogether 12 bands...we were second...first was Singapore Indians...we got our prize, then we got a contract...every month on some shows on TV or Radio...we became busy and very popular ...we lasted for 7 years...1965-1972...I was given a chance to sing on TV and Radio until 1980...at the same time, when there were requests for a good Hindi Band for weddings and functions they would recommend our band...although Roshni Jeevans is a Hindi band we did Tamil (music and songs) for radio and TV. \(^{36}\)

What emerges from these accounts is the way in which songs of South Indian film are re-created or adapted by using different lyrics or different tunes or a combination. The nature of these exchanges and settings lends the impression of a change in South Indian film from its initial Indian classical settings. The juxtaposition of rhythm and tempo with apparently enthusiastic response from the youth does suggest much livelier music and song, and perhaps dance.

Even clearer indication of change appears in an observation by Balakrishnan Veerapan (2003) of a different kind of music of South Indian film that permeated the Indian community in pre-television Singapore through the organisation and presentation of these events:

Film music was very popular since the screening of movies in Singapore I believe. In the 60s, at the wedding dinners and other functions, film music was a must. They had bands playing the music and locals singing film songs. I saw guitars, saxophone, clarinet, accordion, jazz drums, along with the tabla and dholak...they were very entertaining. \(^{37}\)

This last excerpt not only describes the musical instruments on display but probably the spectacle to be anticipated and enjoyed. Print culture helped to fan the flames of a growing interest in this ‘entertaining’ style of Indian cinemas in Singapore: Movie News, published locally featuring Tamil and Hindi movies; and, Pesum Padam, which was imported from India and had gossip, latest releases, interviews with actors and actresses, and even lyrics of popular songs.
Although names, events, dates and times are not provided, we are offered clues through two photographs of musicians with their instruments. The first features a generation of SIMP musicians and their instruments which included a fife/piccolo, shakers, double bass, tambourine, accordion, bulbul-tara (Nagoya harp), clarinet, bongos and guitar.

PICTURE

Fig 1. SIMP; by kind permission of Edmund Appau family, undated.

A second picture from this period appears to be a student ensemble with the curious title “Singapore Indians Students Orchestra” (some letters are missing) across the bass drum of the drum kit alongside bongos, congas, saxophone and clarinet (played by one person), accordion, guitar, tabla and what looks like a dholak and small percussion.

PICTURE

Fig.2 Singapore Indian Students Orchestra; by kind permission of Mohd. Rafee, undated.

While both musical configurations of South Indian classical modes of performance as well as western popular culture seem diametrically opposed, there is a site where both seem to co-exist; the Hindu temple. Mohammed Ali Nilavu (1994:89), makes the observation that, “on each day of Navarattiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band)”. Oral accounts corroborate this observation and added the temple priests had not objected to the presentation of devotional material with a western-style accompaniment.

The introduction of television in Singapore became another significant moment when the various live shows supported by the Indian community in Singapore, were transferred onto an even larger public platform. Local performers of songs of South Indian film had a Singapore-wide audience through television. Balakrishnan Veerapan (2003) offers us more details:

There were variety shows which had classical, modern songs and dances. Local singers who were popular were the late V. Ramachandran, Betty Jones, Rajamani Francis, Rukmani and Dr Uma Rajan...the Singapore Indians Music Party was a leading band in the TV shows. There were also locally written songs. Songs were mainly penned by the late Kavingnar Ka Perumal and ESJ Chandran (now based in India). Music was composed by Late Pundit M Ramalingam...there were two prominent magazines which promoted films. 39
One more notable event took place through recorded media. Local practitioner Christina Edmund (June 2004) remembered being the first local singer to be featured in a record release of Tamil songs:

*In 1967, the first local Tamil record was made in Singapore. Four songs were composed and written by a lyricist from India, Mr Banuthasam. Two local singers, S. Thanaletchumi and myself recorded the songs at Kintex Studios. It was recorded by a Chinese company called TNA Records. The 4 local songs were very well received and were very popular in Singapore and Malaysia. They were always requested by the public over the radio.*

**PICTURE**

*Fig. 3. Cover of first local Tamil record; by kind permission of Christina Edmund.*

Oral accounts indicate many youth were encouraged to participate in these programmes because their parents believed it would help them in the development of their language and culture as well as leisure time wisely spent. Parental support enabled local practitioners like Mohd. Rafee (who currently works for film music director A. R. Rahman in India) and Ravi Shanker to be introduced to broadcast media at very early ages of ten and eight respectively.

We are informed that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, most of the music-making continued to be active in the public sphere through a well-established network of community activities and social events as well as radio and television broadcast. The playlist and frequently requested songs at functions, weddings and other community events now extended beyond music of Tamil and Hindustani film.

From about the 1990s, the opening of a number of night-clubs offered these musicians’ opportunities to recreate songs of South Indian film in these settings. Curiously we are also informed that the 1990s was a period which saw a decline in support for this practice as well as changes in the ways entertainment affected practice. Oral accounts indicate that in the present, very few live-band musicians continue a practice within the same spheres of activity and endeavour which propelled them into prominence about fifty years ago.
Locations of Practice
According to Kernial Singh Sandhu, the concentration of Indian communities in Singapore reflect the efforts of the British administrators to plan urban development and fit the indigenous and foreign populations into convenient moulds besides other factors such as the siting of government labour lines close to the labourers’ place of work and the traditional Indian tendency to congregate in homogeneous communities.41

Of the various concentrations of Indian communities, one group consisting mainly of Tamil shopkeepers was to be found around the Farrer Road and Serangoon Road area (the centre of the city during the 19th century and better known as Little India today) while another concentration could be found close to railways and docks; the logical growth of settlements along main transport routes. Post 1920s, the British, in anticipation of further Japanese military expansions, developed the northern part of the island as a naval base (hence the name of one location Naval Base), building a military base in Sembawang and an airbase in Changi. By 1962, the number of Indians living in Chong Pang, Jalan Kayu, Nee Soon and Yew Tee villages near the military establishments far outnumbered the Malay population there.42 Given the changes post 1968 with the British withdrawal and an exodus of Indians, new towns like Ang Mo Kio, Toa Payoh, Queenstown, Macpherson and Woodlands became new focal points for the South Indian community in the 1960s and 1970s. Further out-migration also resulted in Indians making home in Yishun, Hougang, Tampines and Jurong.43

Divisions in practice—Hindi and Tamil
Mohd. Bagushair, a singer with the Al-Wehdah Arab musical ensemble in Singapore, observed how during his time and even now it was prevalent among the Malay community to enjoy Hindustani songs because of their love for Hindustani movies which were usually screened at theatres like Garrick, Haz, Singapura and Queens, where they also screened Malay films produced by Shaw Brothers. Tamil films were shown at Alhambra, Capitol, Cathay, Diamond, Royal, Rex and State theatres, among others.44 Sivam’s contemporaries, members of the Singapore Indians Music Party (SIMP for short), also recall a Hindustani musical group, Chandiniraat, who played modern music using clarinet, saxophone, accordion (which was the main)...playing music mainly from Hindi films...so all the programmes along Geylang side went to them...Malays had an obsession for Hindi music...Chandiniraat was very good and it was very difficult for us (Tamil bands) to get into that area...45 Mohd. Bagushair, a singer from the Al-Wehdah ensemble from the Arab community in Singapore, recalls how his brother Omar, a violinist, was the leader of the Mujum orchestra playing Malay, English and Hindustani songs for weddings and functions while continuing his commitment to Samra al’ Fan from the Arab community in Singapore with very
different repertoire serving devotional functions. While following his brother, Omar, Mohd. Bagushair came across Hindi musical groups like **Shah Jehan** and **Chandiniraat**, the most popular Hindi band located at Geylang, playing Malay, English and Hindustani songs, led by Halim Marican, the **Mohammad Rafi** of Singapore.

SIMP members admitted to their difficulty in being able to play Hindi songs, let alone Tamil songs, in the predominantly-Malay populated Geylang area. Mohd. Rafee, no stranger to both practices, offers his views:

*The division came about because there were Tamil bands that were very good at doing Tamil songs but whenever they played Hindi music, it didn’t have that feel or flavour...also, Hindi bands would never play Tamil songs...Hindi music caught on very well with the Malay community and Indians who married Malays in Singapore.*

Why was there this penchant for music of Hindustani film in the first instance considering a South Indian (Tamil) majority in Singapore? Mohd. Rafee, currently working with film director **A.R.Rahman** in Chennai, India, recalls how in his father’s days and even in his time, the Malays were crazy about Hindi music and songs and we had a very strong following...you have to remember Malay film [in Singapore] was spearheaded by Indian film directors and producers...that’s why they carried on the tradition...

Yusnor Ef, a lyric writer who worked alongside the prolific P. Ramlee, points out in the Malay film industry, *composers came from Indonesia but those songs were mostly of Indian influence...and the technical side of the Malay film industry was Indian.*

John Lent goes much further: *Usually, the Indian directors just translated Indian scripts into Malay, the result being that the films had all the Indian nuances, cultural idiosyncracies and mannerisms, and very little that was truly Malay.*

Rafee’s father was the leader of a group called Jeevans in the 1960s (later Roshni Jeevans) and they played a lot of popular comical Hindi songs. *My father didn’t mind the mix of both Hindi and Tamil songs...that was an exception and we had a very strong following...as musicians we saw it (the ability to play mixed repertoire) as an opportunity.*

Ravi Shanker, Rafee’s contemporary who took over leadership of Maru Malarchi from his father S. Sivam, points out *about 20% of our performances have Hindi songs... when you have Indian Muslim weddings, they prefer more Hindi songs to Tamil songs...when they book the band they will ask whether we can play Hindi songs....*

In the sphere of broadcast media post-1965, however, it was probably the reverse and Rafee recalled his difficulties: *There were many Tamil bands like Febra and Maru Malarchi Tamil band...my father knew a lot of Hindi songs but he did not play a lot of Tamil songs. As we were growing up he wanted us to play music and one channel for playing music was to play for radio. At the time, radio was only highlighting Tamil...not*
much Hindi... I started by learning Hindi songs...slowly, because of TV and radio, we started playing Tamil music...South Indian styles...we wouldn’t have done it otherwise...\textsuperscript{54}

Amar Singh shares similar sentiments:
...although Roshni Jeevans is a Hindi band we did Tamil (music and songs) for radio and TV...normally RTS producers will select their own singers...maybe 10 songs, 1 Hindi and the others Tamil...only we didn’t have a main Tamil singer...so John Mammen and Christina Edmund (Edmund Appau’s daughter and her husband) and many other singers used to come over to practice...that is how we play Tamil songs...if my band was performing, I would definitely get one Hindi song even though we played mainly Tamil songs.\textsuperscript{55}

A view of Malay film as a translation of Indian film in all but language is curious. Why is there an affinity expressed between Malay film and Hindustani film but not Tamil film? Phani Majumdar, Chisty, Baldev Singh Rajhans, S. Ramanathan, Lakshmana Krishnan and B.N Rao, counted among the pioneering directors of Malay film, reveal such a range of diversity of Indian-ness that it would be difficult to predict a predominantly Hindustani translation. Support for Hindustani film, and by extension Hindustani film songs, by the Malay community can only invite further research at this point.

Transitions in Musical Style—classical to popular culture
Accounts of an emergent musical style of Tamil film are made by Balasekaran Veerapan’s accounts via its emergence in more public settings:

\textit{During the 1960s, film music was a “must-play” during wedding dinners and other functions. Local bands played these musical numbers and sang songs from popular Indian film. I saw guitars, saxophone, clarinet, accordion, jazz drums, along with Indian instruments like the tabla and dholak. They were very entertaining.}\textsuperscript{56}

What emerges from a description of practice is the presence of film music which reveal stylistic elements of pop and rock culture and those employed in Hollywood, dance music of both jazz and Latin culture. Again we are not given more information as to the nature of the film music, Hindustani or Tamil. In his historical overview of Indian film culture up to 1975 in India, Peter Manuel provides some background information here on the North Indian film practice:

\textit{Most film songs combine Western and indigenous elements. Imported instruments like congas, synthesizers, horns, and especially violins are used alongside tabla and dholak drums and melodic instruments like sitar and sarod. Instrumental accompaniments typically contain nontraditional features like chordal harmonies and sectional ensemble passages in contrasting orchestral timbres. Such elaborate arrangements reflect a precomposed and notated (i.e., written) approach to music composition and}
performance which is quite distinct from most forms of Indian folk music. While many melodies are quite Western-sounding in their tonal organization, most are distinctly Indian, using characteristic modes and melodies akin to those of folk or light-classical music. Cuban and disco rhythms are not uncommon, but far more typical is a quadruple meter essentially equivalent to the kaherva tal ubiquitous in North Indian folk and light music. However, the most conspicuously indigenous feature, as with most non-Western popular musics, is the vocal style, which exhibits characteristically South Asian ornamentation and timbre.\textsuperscript{57}

Mohd Rafee points out that anything that came out of India in the 50s and 60s was just replicated here...whatever happens there, happens here,...given the delay in transmission.\textsuperscript{58} There is consensus among practitioners in Singapore that much of the elements in popular culture, musical and extra-musical, found in Tamil film in the post-classical phase (and one might add post-war period) pointed to the influence of music from Hindustani film. However, if the initial configuration of Tamil musical ensembles was of South Indian classical or even light- or semi-classical orientation, how did Tamil popular film emerge?

S. Sivam, former leader of \textbf{Venus Music Party} and later \textbf{Maru Malarchi}, believes that influences of popular culture were primarily Northern Indian. Sivam experienced the transition from Indian Classical to what he considered a ‘modern’ musical style from about 1957-1960:

\textit{...not 100\% modern but just a few new ones...some of the songs moved from Hindi to Tamil became hot—the boogie-woogie style as found in the song \textit{Meena Meena Deeka}}.\textsuperscript{59} Sivam also attributed the source of change in Singapore to its subscription by the local Malay community...you see this modern music was started by Malays in Singapore in the Geylang area...bands playing Hindustani music at weddings...these music groups comprised Malays, Indian Muslims or their wives were Malay or some were Urdu speaking Muslims... these groups wrote in the lyrics in Romanised Hindustani words...there were so many of these groups like \textbf{Suara Bahru, Melati Putih}.\textsuperscript{60}

With respect to this ease of transition, musicians from SIMP remembered their early introduction to popular culture:

\textit{...there was also a change from tabla to bongos to African drums and to jazz drum...first inhaled by Hindustani musicians...when the bongos were in... this style was totally inhaled by the South Indian musicians... ... ...then the rhythms like cha-cha, mambo and samba which started in Northern Indian films caught on... slowly but gradually we moved into Tamil cinema songs ...}\textsuperscript{61}

There is no difficulty in understanding this influence; of subscription at the immediate level to music of Hindustani film by the Malay community. At another level, however,
the Malay film industry which enjoyed immense popularity, was driven primarily by technical directors from the Northern Indian film domain. Yusnor Ef, a lyric writer for Malay film music, pointed out that those songs were mostly of Indian influence. He recalled being in Pancaragam Aneka after being in the Harmonica Party and remembers groups like Sri Pemuda Harmonium Parti, Pancharagam Kampung Glam. The repertoire in question was undoubtedly songs from Malay film but Yusnor also recalled how much in fashion songs from Hindi film were as well as the competition with groups like Chandiniraat and Naujahan Music Parties. The question here is one of directness of impact, largely because of the speed of reception and response to popular culture through Hindi film among Tamil musical ensembles. Mohd Rafee points out that anything that came out of India in the 50s and 60s was just replicated here...its like a speaker...whatever happens there, happens here....given the delay in transmission.

Oral accounts that emerge suggest not quite a simple translation. The crucial question focuses not so much on the speed of response which is obvious but the speed in emulation, which may not have been such a simple task. If Sivam is correct in his assumption, then while the immediacy of reception was a given, the ease with which Tamil music parties gained from influences of popular culture found in Hindi film had two sources, the Hindi music parties and musical influences from India on the Malay film industry which provided further resource. It is possible that the Malay music scene which came into full prominence around the 1950s may have been instrumental in facilitating the ease the transition into popular culture among the Tamil music parties but this needs to be explored in further scholarship.

**Group Configuration and dynamics**

The very first Indian musical group New Indian Amateur Orchestra was formed like a classical orchestra. The instruments included tabla, bulbul tara (Nagoya Harp), two violins, clarinet, harmonium, guitar and some percussion (Fig 1). A second picture of SIMP included a fife/piccolo, shakers, double bass, tambourine, accordion, bul bul tara, clarinet, bongos and guitar (Fig 2). A third picture appears to have bongos, congas, saxophone and clarinet (played by one person), accordion, guitar, and drum kit, tabla and what looks like a dholak and small percussion (Fig. 3). As the accordion player Ramu from New Indian Amateur Orchestra left the band to go overseas, Edmund Appau took up a short course at Foorman’s Studio to learn to play the accordion. With a new batch of trained musicians, he formed the Singapore Indians Music Party popularly known as SIMP, a classical music party. Oral accounts yield three phases of transition from New Indians to SIMP. S. Sivam seems to have remembered some of the processes of change:

Milan were beginning to develop a greater interest in Malay music...not only P Ramlee music...the government had given them some importance...Malay became the main
language so they wanted to play Malay music... so they broke... E. Lal stayed with the Malay band... Karunan, Ramdas and another guy went on to form Singapore Indians Music party... second generation... modern... not the classical version of the Singapore Indians... mrdangam Ramachandran, Menson Davies... Raju (Gemini)... Accordion Suppiah was helping Chitra Music Party... at the same time playing for Singapore Indians Music Party.  

The second generation of SIMP musicians had adapted to include music of Indian popular film, more Tamil than Hindi, although the infusion of popular elements had begun to emerge. By the emergence of the third and current phase of SIMP, musicians had learnt to incorporate popular tunes from Malay and Chinese traditions into their repertoire as well as popular elements from Hindustani film. Some of the instruments in a 15-person ensemble were the accordion, guitar, bongos, saxophone, clarinet, mandolin/ukulele (Fig 4).

S. Sivam offers careful details of the instrumentation of musical ensembles Gemini and Milan Music Parties: 

*Gemini was a new group.... Some of the people from the classical SIMP... they went to join Mr. Raju and formed Gemini music party... Raju on harmonium, a clarinet player Soyemalai, Haidrus and Purushotaman on violin and Shanmugam on lead guitar, Maniam played bongo, Sekaran was a singer and tabla player, Joseph played percussion.... all of them went to join Gemini... one of the harmonium players in the Singapore Indians music party was Suppiah — called Accordion Suppiah, he is a Malaysian but Singapore citizen.... there was another E. Lal bongos, Karunan flute, Ramdas played guitar—very good rhythm guitar... these musicians got together with some Malay musicians in Geylang and formed Milan Music party... Milan were beginning to develop a greater interest in Malay music... not only P Ramlee music... the government had given them some importance... Malay became the main language so they wanted to play Malay music... they broke up.*

Raymond from SIMP III recalls how his first group Genoa Music Party was formed: 

*Those days there were very few bands in Singapore.... around Sembawang area, there was no band at all... when someone wants an Indian band to play for a wedding... its either Chitra, Gemini or Singapore Indian Music party... Sembawang side... they were all bachelors... someone had the idea of forming a band instead of loafing around... earn the money... put in a subscription on a weekly basis... bought instruments. We had a good patron... when we bought instruments, he was our guarantor.*

While Edmund Appau and a few others retained some measure of group stability, SIMP continued to remain in flux comprising members from other groups and an uneven mix of short and long-term relationships within the musical ensemble. With a further split in SIMP, Edmund Appau joined Clarinetist Joseph to form the Edmund Joseph party and
when Joseph parted company, it became Edmund Music party. Raymond who joined SIMP in his late teens, was first an accordion player with Genoa Music Party (formed in 1957) imbibing music of South Indian classical tradition...George, formerly of Usha Music Party recalls, in March 1963, the comedian and dramatist, Mr. Nathan from Radio Singapore, brought the boys from Usha Music Party to join Singapore Indians Music Party and the rest is history...I played the guitar with Singapore Indians and we played for radio and television.  

S. Sivam had a different sort of beginning:  
…I bought a guitar in 1953...didn’t know where to learn....when I saw the English (language) films I saw young boys play the guitar and the chords...cowboy pictures like Roy Rodgers and singers like Gene Autry at Capitol theatre...they used to play (described the sounds he made as jing jang)...I thought this was the way to play...didn’t know there were chords...my father’s friend John Muthu was my first teacher...I used to sling it (guitar) over like a cowboy, riding my bicycle over to John Muthu’s place for my lessons...I took the trouble to learn more by myself and improve...when people watched me, they liked the way I played...anywhere I went, somebody would ask me to play with them. In those days party referred to a group of people...not because they were playing in parties...I formed my band Venus Music Party...Venus, Goddess of Love.

Sivam’s abilities not only made him equally mobile across Hindi and Tamil parameters but extended into Malay and music of western popular culture:
I was not only the leader of the band, I was also coach, teacher and stand-by player if needed...not only my band but other bands as well...if any band needed a guitarist, they would call me...I used to go and play for Muslim bands...like Shahjehan...when some of the bands in Geylang needed a guitarist they’d call me...you see for Muslims, when their fathers or somebody closely related passed away, they had to mourn and were not supposed to play for 40 days for any programmes so I used to play if I was free...then I played with a group at the British Military Hospital (Alexandra Hospital today). Philip Arikan (Lead guitar) who was my second teacher, myself (doublebass), Tommy—he married Philip Ariken’s sister (drums) and Hugo (Filipino used to play rhythm guitar)...we used to play together...we didn’t have a name....anyway the NCOs only wanted some group to play English songs...we played three days a week...beginning 1962...we would start at 8pm and finish at 3am...drink and dance evenings...Thursdays was ladies evening...Wednesday and Saturday for guys...

Given the richness of this endeavour, there were inevitably negative aspects of this configuration:  
Our group Genoa Music party started practices and programmes and all that....and then the band leader of another Music Party used to hang around the window and watch us playing...and he went to form his own group...I will never forget one incident...we were supposed to play at a wedding programme...before we got to the
house, this earlier mentioned group was already there playing music...they played for half an hour...whatever songs we practised, they were already playing... \( ^72 \)

At one level, there was no code of conduct written or agreed upon in practice to prevent rival groups from picking up repertoire from other groups. On the other hand, this ability to pick up tunes by observing other groups practice was no small indication of the deftness of oral and aural abilities of these musicians. The rivalry was expressed in different ways. Christina Edmund recalls:

...anybody was free to play what they wanted to play.....so there was nothing to stop copying of songs and a lot of group rivalry and jealousy. Our band was always the target. In the temple each group was supposed to play once.....but they (temple authorities) kept calling us more than once...so certain musicians were not happy. \( ^73 \)

Some members joined a band to play an instrument of their choice, failing which they would wait for an opportunity to leave for another band to fulfil that choice. Inter Band rivalry as well as short-life spans of musical groups formed part of the soundscape. One SIMP member, Joseph, recalls, *I entered into the Music world via Usha Music Party in 1962 ... a couple of boys left it to form Shanti Music Party...there were two Chinese boys, the bandleader was Eurasian...then we formed the Van Cliff Rhythm Boys...you remember **Cliff Richard and the Shadows**? We copied it and called ourselves Van Cliff...there were competitions for band to take part...we took part as an English band....and we came in first...we broke up after that... \( ^74 \)

Many musicians interviewed who experienced frequent changes in band personnel offer their views:

*As a family band we were tight....we stayed together as a family band and stayed that way.... But SIMP and other bands, they changed personnel ...when they wanted to leave the band they just disappeared ...short or long term disruptions but the most beautiful thing was when they wanted to return they would use another person...a mediator...maybe when they left and probably found out that things were not quite the same with the new band they wanted to come back... \( ^75 \)

SIMP musicians recall:

*People joined the music party for hobby, pastime...slowly went for monetary gains....there were young boys who complained that they came for practice but didn’t get a chance to play in front of television...then, for instance, I wanted to join a band to play bongos...no chance...if I wanted, they would either buy a guitar for me or I would buy one....So I was forced to play guitar...in those days there used to be regulations...like if you are going for this band, you cannot play in another band... sort of inter-band rules... \( ^76 \)

In his own group, Sivam set about the process of teaching and learning:
I used to teach them...I taught them mandolin...I had a keyboard player...sometimes I used the keyboard I had to show him...those days no organ...no electronics...only accordion...pianica and accordion...I had to go and stand near the microphone and play...I played the mandolin and guitar...we started in 1957 playing regularly until 1968 then most of my boys switched to English music...then the other boys started leaving for other bands...some were poached by other bands...in 1969, I changed my band name to Maru Malarchi (Reincarnation)...since we had 12 people, we started Maru Malarchi Orchestra: saxophone, keyboard (Tiger by Farfisa), violin, 2 guitars, congas and bongos, drum kit, with minor percussion instruments, and singers, one male and one female...those days it was very hard to get female singers...not all of them like to sing...and their parents difficult to negotiate...we played all modern Tamil songs; for Navarathiri we played devotional and semi classical songs...

Repertoire
In the beginning, the repertoire of these music parties consisted largely of songs from Tamil film. Here again, the initial repertoire was Indian Classical. S. Sivam remembers M.S.Viswanathan and Illayaraja as those who wrote a lot of melodies...and very beautiful. Raymond from SIMP recalls, we used to go for classical rehearsals at Katong side...all professional ladies...they have the xylophone with the water...violinist, flutist, tabla and I would do the chord work with the accordion...and that is where you learn typical South Indian classical music with the Malayaragam, Kalayaragam (ragam—modes). With the eventual influence from Hindi popular film, the song **Aiyai Samy** (samba rhythm)...this was in the 1960s...Chandra Babu sang a song **Ah Gemini Papa** (Mexican Shuffle)...Then Doris Day’s **Que Sera Sera** was used in **Sinna ponna la pothu**...I never thought a waltz rhythm could be played on the tabla...first time I heard it I was amazed.

What caused them to move to music of Indian popular film? According to SIMP members, the movies showed a change in the trend and they followed suit...so like the latest fashion, we played the latest music. SIMP had already reached a third generation where their repertoire had extended beyond Indian Classical, through the latest songs in Tamil popular film to playing Malay, Chinese and English tunes...when did that change take place...when the TV producers gave National Day programmes to SIMP, they wanted four different languages to be made into one song...the multinational stuff came from road shows...we would go and perform a Chinese tune, a Malay song...I remembered we played in Queenstown...the request came to play a Chinese song...we played the famous Spring song...immediately after that we got a hongbaw... If you are given this kind of situation, what would you do? I said we better improve, Chinese, Malay, anything. If we played at an Indian wedding and even if there were at the most three Malays, we’d play one Malay song. We believed the word would get around. Even if we saw one Chinese person at a function we would play a Chinese song. For instance
at Joseph’s son’s wedding, we played a Chinese song because his daughter-in-law is Chinese.\textsuperscript{81}

Music of Hindustani film had started to gain prominence and in Hindustani music there were influences from another culture. S. Sivam found himself playing more than just Hindi and Tamil music:

\textit{By this time we were playing popular material...my band liked to play all the latest numbers....when I saw a picture...I was able to play all the songs from that picture...I liked to play the guitar....bought a guitar in 1953...didn’t know where to learn....when I saw the English (language) films I saw young boys play the guitar and the chords...cowboy pictures like Roy Rodgers and singers like Gene Autry.}\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{La Cumparsita, La Paloma, Come September, Besame Mucho, The Young Ones} as well as selected Beatles numbers joined the list of frequently requested and therefore played songs at functions, weddings and other celebratory events. Ravi Shanker, who played in the junior Maru Malarchi ensemble, recalls how in the 1970s:

\textit{...we used to play English songs....like Bee Gees numbers...You should be dancing, Tragedy and even Hotel California and Careless Whisper.}\textsuperscript{83} Ravi’s contemporary, Mohd. Rafee, who works for film music director A.R. Rahman, went a little further in his musical preferences:

\textit{...when I was growing up I liked English music...until Jazz came about...jazz is different area ...early rock groups I liked listening to rock...Uriah Heep, Deep Purple...but I didn’t play rock... I couldn’t become a rocker because I never felt like that image...but we went a little further....we were listening to Kool and the Gang, Commodores...next to rock came the Motown groups...the funky stuff...the brass instruments and everything...to me Man, this was it!....and they were cool...different...they had a new image...that you never saw before...we clung on to that...we started playing our songs like that...we’ve been doing that all the time...doing Hindi and Tamil songs with a lot of brass arrangements....but nobody understood...we were doing all the funky stuff...no one else, no other bands (in Singapore) were doing it...}\textsuperscript{84}

One generally assumes that the repertoire of these Indian Music parties served secular interests. However, during the \textit{Navarattiri} (Nine Nights Festival) preparation to the annual Fire-walking Festival \textit{Timiti}, every Tamil band had an opportunity to play at various Hindu Temples around the island. Music for devotional reflection by band members who played there revealed that it consisted of music from popular film but which had a correspondence with the sort of devotional spirit required of them...\textit{on each day/night of Navarattiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band)}.\textsuperscript{85} Oral interviews suggest no conflict of interest or devotional ideals. The family of Edmund Appau as well as Ravi Shanker of \textit{Maru Malarchi} indicated little difficulty as the priests simply booked their services. It is curious that
temple priests did not prescribe repertoire or type of instrumentation. Interviewees claimed that when the Western-style instruments came to be set up, it generated a greater deal of interest among the temple worshippers. One explanation offered was that having listened to the very severe classical tradition via sitar and tabla, music via western-style instrumentation provided the necessary relief.86

Appearances in the public sphere

For Gregory Booth, the suggestion of the new Corporation of Madras City should have its own wind band, the city commissioners were following a precedent established by the regions’s last independent Indian ruler and maintained quite naturally by the British for whom the garrison band of Fort. St. George served a similar function. In a historical sense, the proposal that the Nanthamuni Band, playing a repertoire of primarily Indian music, played on European instruments, and dressed in European uniforms, should be transformed into the Madras Corporation Band condensed these Indian and British symbols of state and civic prestige into a single entity. By choosing the Nanthamuni Band whose repertoire was dominated by kritis, thevarams, kirtans, etc., rather than an Indian army ensemble, (likely more march-oriented), the city commissioners made it clear that they were selecting a musical identity that was suitably Indian to represent their newly independent city. The offer was made in 1946 and the Nanthamuni brothers refused, possibly because they were making too much money as a private concern and the Madras city commission offer seemed not a good enough offer. Moreover, if they had, the Nanthamuni family would have had to relinquish control of their business to the city….Repertoire is still predominantly Tyagaraja’s compositions from the Karnatik classical repertoire. A few British melodies, marches and waltzes have survived at least 40 post-colonial years in oral tradition. State patronage here empowers and enables the Madras Corporation Band to select their repertoire largely according to their own taste and tradition, with little concern for popular trends in Indian music. Unlike most South Asian bandsmen, who perceive themselves at the mercy of the modern popular taste for film music, patronage has allowed MCB to ignore the barrage of popular music generated by the Indian film industries.87 Tamil film songs make up the majority of the film-related part of the repertoire, although at any given time, Hindi film songs may be heard at an evening’s programme. In the hands of the MCB, film songs sound like lighthearted kritis. This is possible with MCB’s depth of musical resource – their classical training, as well as their traditional performance styles, stationary performance contexts, and function as an entertainment, rather than a processional and dance music ensemble.88

Many of the Band practitioners participated in the band contest organised by Mr. Sarangapani in his Tamil Festival from 1953 onwards and groups that won or were highly placed could look forward to many engagements for the band. It was also
considered a status to belong to a well known band and SIMP was the most popular band in the Indian community. Later more bands like Gemini, Shah Jehan, Venus and Newton Bharath music parties started forming and competitions started at ponggal (harvest festival) held at certain areas like Rangoon Road. There were band competitions and in the words of the Edmund Appau family, we were so proud to see our father, the first president of SIMP, go up to the stage to collect the champion trophy. Mr. Amar Singh, a singer from the group, Roshni Jeevans, a Hindi band, recalls a competition for live bands organised and held at the RTS auditorium in 1965. 12 groups participated for the top three spots—the producers and directors from RTS, Philippines, Malaysia...were the judges...we had to do three songs...an instrumental from a Hindi Song Hava...then we had a Tamil song....with Krishna on Hawaiian guitar.....he played Satyam...one more was our own composition...I can’t remember... Engagements were usually arranged when a group garnered sufficient reputation, one of which would have been winning a band competition. Being placed among the top three in this RTS competition gave Roshni Jeevans a large number of engagements including playing at Khalsa Association during the mid-1960s. At present, most of the bands play at pubs and night clubs. Vasantham played at the Taj until 1994, while Maru Malarchi played at NTUC-Shenton Way for 2½ years from 1997 and were replaced by a splinter group from Maru-Malarchi called Bayrevi.

Radio and television became significant platforms for these musicians’ re-creative expression. As early as the 1950s, the radio had become for these practitioners a very important source and resource for practitioners because of the potential body of subscribers. Repertoire for other occasions was largely determined by paying attention to the request programmes on the radio and drawing up a list of pieces to be played at functions. Very little risks were taken as expectations seem to have determined the sort of repertoire to be performed. S. Sivam noted that initially, very few programmes involving music were acceptable on radio and they were largely music from the Indian classical tradition. However, repertoire changes incorporating music of popular western and Indian film meant a greater variety of songs were made available. Christina Edmund recalls:

...actually we had the main radio in Singapore and Rediffusion...we listened more to the Malaysian radio...it seemed that on Singapore radio, there was more talking, so when there was more talking, channels were switched to Malaysian radio......particularly the request station to be able to hear more music...a song would be a great song hearing the number of times it was requested...sometimes twice a day, even three times a day.....morning, afternoon, and even night...actually it was mainly our parents....for us, once we had TV we listened less to the radio...

During those early days, well known musicians had a say in the selection of singers for radio/TV singers. Training was provided for the singer if he or she had problem with the songs during music practice sessions. According to my father, sound recordings for
radio programmes were done at Cathay Building and there was only the main radio and Rediffusion. Recordings for radio programmes then moved to Radio Singapore at Caldecott Hill. Recordings for programmes took hours; they would start at 7pm and end at about 11pm. When the recordings were on weekdays, the musicians had to rush from their place of work to my father’s place where they would collect all the instruments and proceed to Radio Singapore.  

According to SIMP members:
Radio in Singapore was first located at Cathay building before WWII and after some time as well when it move to Caldecott Hill. There was a Tamil programme called Kalapaddam (meaning mixture)...the producer used to ask any one to do a solo...no one had been able to play TR Mahalingham’s song—Nee say Tamil nee saythe Sarthalay...but it was done by our tabla Shanmugam’s father Mrdangam Methay.

Amar Singh had a slightly different problem:
...although Roshni Jeevans is a Hindi band we did Tamil (music and songs) for radio and TV...normally RTS producers will select their own singers...maybe 10 songs, 1 Hindi and the others Tamil....then they will call all the singers for discussion with the band on the songs.... And the name of the song and singer....then they will contact me and tell me when the rehearsals and practices will be.....they will come for rehearsals and the producers tell you when the recording will be held.....so we have to be ready.. and we go over to RTS to record....only we didn’t have a main Tamil singer...so John Mammen and Christina Edmund (Edmund Appau’s daughter and her husband) used to come over to practice.

S. Sivam was offered a place to perform on variety shows on television ...1962 I played on RTS and radio variety shows as well... His son, Ravi, born in 1963 recalls his first experience of his father: I was about 5 years old in 1968...my father was playing on TV...I was very excited...I waved to him thinking he can see me and wave back...he was quite famous so he appeared about twice a month...the programme happened on Saturday nights...around 8pm at night...our dad was a star...performing...he even used to sing on TV... Ravi himself was nine when he performed on television: I started playing in 1972....I was playing triple conga with the seniors....the congas were higher than me so they adjusted the congas lower....1972 was my first performance on TV. His contemporary Mohd Rafee also began as a child of ten on television some two years earlier than Ravi.

There were little opportunities for musicians to cut albums. However, Christina Edmund had the distinction of being the first local singer to be featured in two record releases of Tamil songs:
I was introduced to singing by two musicians, Mr Bertie Fernando, a saxophonist and Deva Sagayam, a mandolin player in SIM and in 1967, the first local Tamil record was made in Singapore. 4 songs were composed and written by a lyricist from India, Mr Banuthasam. My father was not involved in this record. 2 local singers, S. Thanaletshumi and myself recorded the songs at Kintex Studios. It was recorded by a Chinese company called TNA Records. The 4 local songs were very well received and were very popular in Singapore and Malaysia. They were always requested by the public over the radio...when I did my second record, it was backed by the Esquires (another local western pop group)...there was also a pianist by the name of Ramdas who played English music at nightclubs.101

Not all of it was entirely successful as Mohd Rafee recalls:
I went into the Indian music scene on a fully professional basis...playing Indian music but with the sounds of Kool and the Gang and the younger crowd loved what we did at live performances. I did an album in Tamil with Reggie Verghese (from the Quests) as my producer. When we did our first song he said Indian music doesn’t sound like this...I told him its going to sound like this...he took the sound around to small drink shops, pubs, his friends and they said “this doesn’t sound like Indian song”...cannot sell...Reggie got afraid...I was forced to do Indian film songs.102

Eventually, what made these groups of musicians special and endeared them to the community was their live performances. They played for many functions such as weddings, birthday parties, engagements, dramas and even entertained prisoners at Changi prison and functions at the Istana, talentime presentations at Victoria Theatre where popular singers such as L.Vijayendran, Eswaran and Sarada Shanker took part. They played for stage shows in Singapore and Malaysia, weddings and Navaratirri programmes in the temples. As Edmund had converted to Roman Catholicism, on Christmas eve night, they would play music on board a lorry with Christmas decorations, visiting churches with significant Tamil parishioners, especially those who attended the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes at Ophir Road. People got excited when they heard the sound of the bongo, tambourine, announcing the arrival of the “Christmas lorry”.103

Issues of Authenticity in Music for film
Learning songs from Tamil and Hindi popular film took on another dimension. While it was a common practice for musical groups to re-create songs from films and their own songs using film tunes, many recall the difficulty with instrumentation. Mohd Rafee describes some of this in detail:
….even up to 1980s, up to 1982, 1983, we were still copying and playing, trying to get to hold of how these guys were doing it...you see, we are not in the film industry, we didn’t have predecessors, there was no one before us showing us what to do....we couldn’t get an opportunity to watch orchestras play...how did they create this piece,
how did they play...because we were in Singapore....all we got from the film was one hero, one heroine...singing, running around and singing...we didn’t see bands....so whatever bands we saw were the ones which we saw playing here on their own...so they mixed and matched...take a Latin tune...copy it in Hindi, play it with bongos, congas, drums, maraccas, cowbells, cabasas, castanets...we have these instruments, we can play with them but how to play these instruments is another thing....there is a way to play the drums and you start playing it differently, over the years it takes a form...that happened in a lot of Hindi songs.\textsuperscript{104}

Simplistically, in the absence of any informed view of the practice other than oral and aural transmission, whatever could work in the most practical way was the eventual solution. Increasingly, there was a move to adapt tunes from Indian film and have the lyrics altered to a new context by Tamil poets in Singapore, despite the resistance to the authenticity and altered meanings. However, it wasn’t as simple as that:

\textit{A lot of old Indian films are inspired by Latin elements...sounds very Latin...but the way they depicted Latin playing...we learnt it that way... my brother played Hindi music exactly the way the Hindi guys did it on tape or on record...but when he started learning Latin, playing in the circuit with mainstream artists in pop and jazz circuits...cowbells were played different, congas were tuned/played differently...he thought this was the way to play it...what happened was it had a form of its own and was copied here by people who called themselves Hindi musicians... but that’s the way they played it.}\textsuperscript{105}

Even the older musicians from the third phase of SIMP admit to the paradox when they were active in the late 1950s through the 1960s:

\textit{...the bongos used to be tuned to the pitch so it never sounded like a real Latin bongo...actually they used the instruments like the clarinet, saxophone, violin with the Indian classical touch...when we listen to the songs being played, we would take note of the instruments used...that’s how we picked things up...if they used a bongo...we would need to use a bongo....there had always been an accordion.}\textsuperscript{106}

Oral accounts suggest the effect A.R.Rahman had on music in Tamil film was that melody and song were relegated to the music which had always been in the background:

\textit{A.R. Rahman...I don’t know how he can become so famous...but I don’t appreciate his music...noisy...so people following his style like Yuan Sankeraja and Karthikraja...sons of Illayaraja}\textsuperscript{107} (a music director in Tamil popular film, not unlike M.S. Viswanathan). There is however, acknowledgement that the sound associated with A.R. Rahman has gained currency among Tamil youth. Sivam laments the fact that with this new fad, melody and song, a characteristic of earlier Tamil film is of lesser concern than the soundscape that was in the background of such films.

\textbf{Points of Intersection with other musical endeavour}
To suggest this practice as an insular activity available and consumed by only the Tamil-speaking/Tamil conversant community might seem blindingly obvious. This is probably true if the musicians had been working in the Indian Classical performance mode. The transition to music of popular culture also would have signaled a commensurate change. Oral accounts from the practitioners suggest some rather interesting aspects of these musicians. Beginning with S. Sivam and continuing till today, practitioners found themselves playing in events outside of their Tamil-conversant domain and playing Tamil repertoire alongside non-Indian performers. Mohd. Rafee’s father encouraged him to learn Tamil repertoire to gain access to broadcast opportunities.

But a number of these musicians were also involved in musical endeavour and performance modes which had nothing to do with music of Indian popular film. S. Sivam’s prowess with the guitar enabled him to use those skills beyond his role in Venus Music Party:

...you see after John Muthu (my first guitar teacher) left, my second teacher was Philip Arikan, a Eurasian from the Blue Hawaiian Band. The leader was a Mr. Andrew and they used to practice in Zion Road. Philip Ariken (lead guitar), myself (bass), Tommy (a drummer who married Philip’s sister) and Hugo (Filipino used to play rhythm guitar) and myself on bass used to play at the British Military Hospital (Alexandra Hospital today) NCO Club...our group didn’t have a name...anyway the NCOs only wanted some group to play English music and songs. We used to play three days a week in 1962. We would start at 8pm and finish at 3am....these nurses all liked to dance....Thursdays was ladies evening....Wednesday and Saturday for guys... ¹⁰⁸

The interaction was not uni-directional. George, a guitarist who joined SIMP, recalls:

I only came into the scene with Usha Music party in 1962...then a couple of boys went off to form Shanti Music Party. We then formed the Van Cliff Rhythm Boys; two Chinese boys and the band leader who was Eurasian...you remember Cliff Richard and the Shadows? We copied it and called ourselves Van Cliff...there were competitions and we took part as an English band. We came in first and we broke up after that.¹⁰⁹

Edmund Appau’s children and band members were equally conversant in music of western popular culture. His eldest daughter Christina recalls:

By this time, my brothers were old enough to join the percussion side, Jesson, playing the bongo, and Hermann, playing the maracus. Jesson Edmund started playing the drums. He also started an English group called Blues Inc. and became the lead singer and drummer for that group. Hermann went on to play the trumpet and Lawrence (another brother) joined the English scene as a drummer. They all started playing English music in night clubs, but at the same time, they used to play Indian music too.¹¹⁰

Christina Edmund recalls one of the members of SIMP:
Joe Chandran who later became popular with the X’periments (a local western pop group) was a member of SIMP. When I did my second record, it was backed by the Esquires (another local western pop group)…there was also a pianist by the name of Ramdas who played English music at nightclubs.\footnote{111}

**Support systems of everyday life**
The New Indians Amateur Orchestra had their rehearsals at Edmund Appau’s residence at 34 Short Street. Edmund Appau’s residence became the rehearsal studio even as the family moved to Race Course Road, Rangoon Road with one exception when they rehearsed at a clubhouse at Norris Road, even across the personnel transitions from SIMP to Edmund Joseph Music Party, Edmund Music Party and later Edmund Appau Orchestra.\footnote{112} The New Indians Amateur Orchestra had their rehearsals at Edmund Appau’s residence at 34 Short Street. Edmund Appau’s residence became the rehearsal studio even as the family moved to Race Course Road, Rangoon Road with one exception when they rehearsed at a clubhouse at Norris Road, even across the personnel transitions from SIMP to Edmund Joseph Music Party, Edmund Music Party and later Edmund Appau Orchestra.\footnote{112} The Singapore Indians Music Party III practised at Owen Road, Kamala Club near Middleton hospital, Moulmein Road, Jervois Road and used to rent a house for $70 a month. Some of these groups had sponsors, even advisors, some were sustained via subscriptions from group members.

Another space that encouraged and sustained these musicians’ activities was the community centre. It is a practice that continues to this day. These community centres or clubs are part of a larger grouping known as the People’s Association and are home to considerably diverse cultural and arts activities. According to Koh Tai Ann, to achieve more direct contact with the people, a statutory body, the People’s Association, was created on July 1 1960. It took over the existing twenty-eight Community Centres (CCs) hitherto run by the Social Welfare Department…it was noted that the twenty eight CCs before June 1 1959 had “no unified policy or central leadership”. There was therefore a need for the People’s Association “to assist the government in organising and promoting...healthy, cultural, recreational and other organised activities for quality”, with the “task of socially integrating our multiracial society”\footnote{113}.

In reciprocation, these groups provide music for a variety of functions organised by the various community centres, from celebrations of the main cultural festivals, Deepavali or Pongal (harvest festival) to larger more cohesive events like National Day or functions involving national campaigns. S. Sivam’s Venus Music Party rehearsed at Queenstown CC and provided music for whatever community club functions Queenstown CC asked of them. SIMP III is currently resident at Bukit Batok Community Club.\footnote{114} Maru Malarchi rehearse at Marsiling CC, Oothayha githam at West Coast CC alongside AV-Connections who are more minus-one oriented. A much younger group calling themselves Jeevans, (but not connected to a live-band of the 1960s with the same name) were known to practise at Braddell CC.\footnote{115}

According to current SIMP members, when it comes to economics…*its big band, small money*…\footnote{116} That phrase has historical resonance for the Edmund Appau family:
Money was not a big thing those days, they (musicians) were not paid much. It was more for the love of music. SIMP entertained the Indian community with light Indian music at a time when most Indian music entertainment was in the form of classical music. Also SIMP played mostly songs from films, popular films starring Sivaji or MGR, semi classical music, English, Malay and later, even popular Chinese songs at public functions.\textsuperscript{117}

Oral accounts indicate music-making in this endeavour did not emerge as a full-time professional commitment. Virtually all interviewees had full-time jobs, although some may have lost their jobs or changed jobs because of their passion for this form of music-making. However, being part of such a musical ensemble was no ordinary membership: During those times, it was considered a status to belong to a well known band and SIMP was the most popular band in the Indian community. My father (with the first SIMP), played for many functions such as weddings, birthday parties, engagements, dramas and even entertained prisoners at Changi prison and Istana functions. My father played at Naval Base functions, weddings...there were very few Tamil bands...it went around the community that if you got SIMP, you got the best......... people came from all over to book this band. If they couldn’t get SIMP they would be very disappointed but sometimes my father had to turn them down...\textsuperscript{118}

This affirmation went beyond the Indian community:
A show was organised and coordinated by Mr. T. T. Dorai, coinciding with the formation of the National Sports Promotion Board. All the actors and actresses from Tamil film, M.G. Ramachandran, Nagesh, Jayalaleetha, playback singers Soundarajan, P. Susheela and Chandra Babu were all flown to Singapore...I remember it was in June 1972...we were all stationed at Hotel Imperial Oberoi (now demolished). On this occasion, RTS selected Singapore Indians Music Party for the whole show...we were the main band ...no payment...but we had a final dinner at the Shangri-La...and after the performance each got a ride home on a Mercedes home provided by Mr. Jumabhoy...that is one unforgettable experience... we also got to play at the National Day programmes.\textsuperscript{119}

S. Sivam recalls:
We used to play for weddings, birthdays, parties, functions, events, stage shows...other special occasions...when we practised at Queenstown CC we didn’t have to pay any rent but any event which we played for at the CC had to be free...even until now they are still with that arrangement... normally, we do Deepavali shows...so Tamil and Hindustani songs....if its National Day function, we’ll play Tamil and Hindustani songs...and there will be a group for Malay classical dance...I started with Queenstown in the 1960s with the Goodwill community dinner...this happened after the Prophet Mohammed riots...we were, I think, the first band to agree to play at this dinner.\textsuperscript{120}
Teaching and Learning

Very few of these performers knew how to read musical staff notation. Modes of learning were primarily oral and aural, listening to cassettes, records and at time televised performances. Enterprising band leaders then took the trouble to teach the others the melody by using the accordion or guitar to those who needed to know how to fill in the bass parts or the chords. Because the mode of learning was primarily oral and aural, anyone with good enough musical acuity had little difficulty fitting in. Often performers had very little prior formal training and in this domain, seniors played a crucial role. Joseph of SIMP studied classical Indian training....but I could read only Tamil notes...tabla notation...scalic notation...I learnt from Mr. Pandit Ramalingam... Some of the pioneer members of SIMP had classical training, read Tamil and tabla notation. Raymond from Genoa Music Party recalls: Mr. T.P. Balakrishnan, Mr. Ramachandran and Mr. Bhaskar...they bought an accordion for me and formed a band in old Nee Soon, in 1958....near the post office, police station...1200 Upper Thomson Road...that is where we started practising....I need not pay any subscription as I was still schooling...they even sent me to Foorman Studios and paid for my lessons...then we started developing and moved into wedding programmes....and our patron was a doctor who had clinic in Nee Soon.122

Christina Edmund notes that her father also went to Foorman Studios to learn to play the accordion properly and used that knowledge to form the first Singapore Indians Music Party. In other aspects she did not notice any prior training except his keen interest in Indian classical music practices in the temples he visited with his father in Penang, where Edmund was born. But she did remember that:

Music was picked up using the gramophone. The records were played over and over again to perfect each player’s part. From a very early age, music was instilled into the minds of us as children who listened to the music during practice sessions. In those days, each player played an instrument...a maracas player, a tambourine player (today a tabla player will handle all the smaller percussion instruments). Although he had no formal training in music, he was very particular about tuning the instruments. Even a slight fault in tuning would make him stop the musician responsible.123

S. Sivam describes his processes of learning and teaching in a bit more detail:

As soon as the film comes to Singapore, we’ll probably buy the records and by hearing, because I don’t read notes or anything, I can get the songs...I normally pick up everything first with the mandolin or guitar...then I’ll reassign the parts teaching them from the mandolin or guitar...sometimes I used the keyboard to show...those days no organ...no electronics....only accordion...pianica and accordion...I had to go and stand near the microphone and play....myself I played the mandolin and guitar...in the music—lets say the song—they have three positions for violins...first violin, second and third violin...this sort of thing we don’t have and definitely can’t play...anyway once we arrange this for my band, we get the main idea of the music...it is clean not faulty...so
when people hear it, it sounds like the song...in those days, when people come for a party, wedding or function or something like that, unless they are professional musicians, then only they will know this is a different arrangement or something like that....these people when they sing, normally they will want to hear what the singer singing...mainly can hear, the band is playing along OK...we were playing music from the latest film before other bands...wherever we went to play, people from other bands would come and listen...my bands (Venus, Maru Malarchi) and Shahjehan were the first to have electrical guitars....electric mandolin, electric accordion.124

Mohd. Rafee remembers his lessons: I started by learning mainly Hindi songs...he would teach me from the harmonium and I’d pick it up on the guitar... he would tell me where to place my fingers and in which positions... I had to listen and he would teach me how to play all the picks...Before the guitar, I learnt the mandolin which my father had the mandolin and gave to me...to play it, I had to watch Nana Mouskouri on TV...I learnt to play the mandolin during the show...and my father used to make me watch the show and learn how to play the mandolin...125 His contemporary Ravi Shanker also recalls how his father, S.Sivam, had practice sessions at his residence and he grew up watching the rehearsals. His account of entry into his father’s band is rather unusual: They were having a practice session at our house... ....before they practised they used to listen to the record...one of the percussion players was playing the wrong beat for a Hindi song...the bongo player wasn’t listening to the song or the beat...I could tell he was playing the wrong beat...I play by listening...so I went to play the bongo...my dad said since you can play bongos, why don’t you play in the band...I was 8 years old then.126 Since his father was not a percussion player, Ravi was trained by his seniors in Maru Malarchi. Ravi recalled his father was more a guitarist and although he could not read notes, he could read and write guitar chords.

Gerry Farrell informs us of the impact the gramophone had on Indian musicians as articulated by Fred Gaisberg in 1942: Songs for festivals and weddings were already in our catalogue and new artists were learning their repertoire from gramophone records.127

Farrell points out that: As a way of disseminating musical material the gramophone was unprecedented, and it was inevitable that artists would copy songs from records. Indeed recording was a perfect tool for such endeavours. A record could be played repeatedly and mimicked without recourse to a teacher or notation.128 In imbibing of such a practice through the gramophone as medium, local musicians operated at two layers of meaning. First it was assumed that the source was authentic and respectable enough to engage in a copy. Farrell is quick to point out that the gramophone caused sufficient anxiety for the more celebrated performers of Indian music refused to be recorded because they found recording to be contrary to the spirit of their art. The result was that features of Indian
musical form were poured through the sieve of recording technology and time limitations until only the essentials remain [ed].

Secondly, while local musicians would have liked to present their performances in as authentic as possible setting, this was not practical as there were instruments they were unable to obtain for reasons more financial than practical. When the financial aspects were surmounted, the practicality of instrumentation status quo of the ensemble meant a more exiguous form that would suffice.

The Present, Challenges and Prospects

Yet the phrase by SIMP, big band small money, bears a harsher reality. Unlike their English pop counterparts, most of them have full-time jobs and such gigs are part-time endeavour. As a result of this present state of affairs, there are very few live-bands performing music of Indian popular film in Singapore. According to oral accounts: 
...only 4 major bands active, SIMP, Maru Malarchi, Bai Rayvee, Febra, Oothayha githam ...all other bands are using sequenced music, minus one....Jeevans are now using minus-ones...another one called AV-connections...Mostly popular requests....

As a result of a fully committed and passionate activity being run a part-time endeavour, sustainability remains a growing and fragile concern. Technology, particularly its use, has been a factor affecting their sustainability. When asked to compare variety shows of the past with the present Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi, who also plays in a percussion group called Rhythm Masala articulated the problem:
...what is happening now is mostly minus-one type of shows...no more live bands on TV...recently when we did a performance with Rhythm Masala...there was quite a bit of interest because there were live bands and plenty of percussion instruments...the feedback was that with minus-one, there was no impact...that is what the live bands can give the real impact.

The arrival of sequenced music or minus-one technology is just one aspect of technology that seems to have challenged the very existence of live bands. Ravi observed minus-one entry around 1995...audiences still wanted live band but for some pubs the minus one dropped the cost by ½ ...

This has not only affected their ability to be visual and aural in broadcast spheres of music-making but also affected their means of doing gigs at nightclubs and entertainment spots. Minus-ones have created a need for only a singer. In practice, different pubs and clubs have differing needs and in some cases, dissatisfaction with minus-one formats have ensured survival of the bands. On the other hand, the presence of a minus-one offers any cost-saving means to be implemented and management of clubs and pubs have not been averse to that option. When such entertainment spots are affected by slowing business or an economic slowdown, live-bands become casualties. A newer and equally problematic issue is that of the presence of Malaysian bands. This ease of influx of foreign bands into the entertainment scene in Singapore affected local English pop groups as early as the
1970s, worsening in the 1980s. According to interviewees in the Tamil pop scene, a gap in the proficiency levels in the past ensured their survival but changes in the standards of performance, the use of minus-ones and performance fees are some of the challenges local Tamil bands face. The current exchange rate of S$1 to M2.29 Ringgit is a crucial factor. As Ravi points out: we went to a wedding last week...they had two bands from JB...they are much cheaper than we are...they are paid 1000+ Ringgit which becomes S$400-500...for local groups, we charge S$900/950...133

Politics in the entertainment spots were also cited with live-bands discovering to their disadvantage the adhoc burden placed on them during their gigs:

...SIMP III last played at a pub called Happy Days every Monday almost for a year in 2002. We were drawing good crowds for a Monday....then they started complaining they weren’t selling more beer...they blamed the band...but we play the music...we are not responsible for the selling of beer...134

Maru Malarchi played at NTUC Shenton Way in 1997 every first Monday of the month...then it became first and third of the month...we were there for 2½ years....now a new band has taken over......they wanted a change of band...another band was favoured...rumour linked committee members and friends who were in the favoured band...before us another group was playing there for about 8 months...but all the while we were playing, our contract was extended....to be frank, we were the longest band for 2½ years...we were succeeded by Bairayvee ( actually a split group from Maru Malarchi Juniors)...anyway its not our rice-bowl...we have already shown our stuff to the audience...let them judge...just finished one gig in February...now its very hard...in 1997/8 we could do 30 performances....but this year so far only 2......a lot of people undercutting and another thing...a lot of minus-one CDs...135

Inclusion and exclusion in relation to Indianness and male-ness were some of the issues that emerged. Christina Edmund recalls the way she and the group were treated at an audition at RTS:

...its funny you mention male-dominated.....because when we went for an RTS audition...they failed us as a group...then there was a Ramiah who said that our band doesn’t know how to handle the instruments.....my father wrote to Radio Singapore to seek clarification and got a reply saying that no one in the band was capable of handling the instruments except my father (himself).....In any case he (my father) told us to disregard it and just carry on...this took place in the 1970s...my father’s advice was to redouble effort instead of complaining....that actually put us off any more auditions or broadcast efforts...so in fact before Mohd. Rafee came on the scene, we, my brothers and I should have been on the scene first.......we were shut down...Rafee was quite lucky that Kalaichelvan came in during his time...for a while, certain people at RTS had a funny kind of attitude towards people from other religions...there was a very good singer by the name of Roshan......not given many chances even though my father tried to put him up for programmes...those days they had this rather negative attitude about
those who didn’t carry fully Indian names although we played Indian music...we got the impression it wasn’t enough for them.\textsuperscript{136}

Perhaps one problem that has and will continue to engender controversy is the reported lack of infrastructure and support at the most fundamental level. Mohd. Rafee explains why despite being a child performer at RTS and countless variety shows, he joined the ranks of the lesser privileged:

...at my age I went into the Indian music scene on a fully professional basis...we were playing Indian music but with the sounds of Kool and the Gang... I was born and bred in Singapore and exposed to all kinds of music...I felt that Indian music was depicted in such a way that made it difficult for others to digest...I wanted to make it more accessible...so we started improvising, playing songs entirely differently and the younger crowd liked it. Then I started to play at the Taj, the first Indian nightclub at Syed Alwi Road in 1991...when we took the Tamil songs and did brass jabs we couldn’t get players to play...basically it just didn’t happen for us until we met this guy called A.R.Rahman ...exactly what we were doing with Indian music 15 years ago in Singapore is happening in India today... Rahman himself knows...fortunately he’s at the right place and right time...India didn’t have the musicians...the only way was that I went to India...sang in the movies, started arranging for Rahman...I’ve been playing on the radio since I was ten...and even after my work with Rahman I was told my materials cannot be played locally because I’m local...that’s sad...if that’s the case, how are to show our brand?\textsuperscript{137}

That is similarly voiced by SIMP III musicians who know Rafee:

...today in Singapore, you can’t even make a living as an artist. For Indian music, Indians are better and cheaper than Singaporeans...that’s why some of our best musicians are all abroad...one of our former guitarists Benjamin who played the ukelele is living in Europe presently...the other thing is that there was very little encouragement for Tamil music in Singapore...for example Mohd. Rafee—he has gone and played for A.R Rahman in India but why were his songs not played or supported in broadcast? You have to encourage local artists...\textsuperscript{138}

Finally, slowly gaining ground is a much younger group of heavy metal musicians who totally reject their predecessors in the Indian popular film practice. A new phenomenon in the 1990s, Indian heavy metal groups sing in English as well but identify their sound as a uniquely Indian sound, albeit metal sound. The group Rudra, which has been given air-play space and voted among the top-40 bands in Singapore, explain:

…We have always been interested in metal although traditional music does appeal we have utilised it in Rudra. I reckon traditional music defines the Hindu essence in us.\textsuperscript{139}

For another metal group, Narasimha,
For an Indian in Singapore to start his own musical band or group is very rare... we are influenced largely by Indian movies and its soundtracks... in terms of musical entertainment, we depend on Indian movie-makers to give it to us. Indian metal bands grew up listening to Indian film songs and English heavy metal bands from Black Sabbath from the sixties to its peak in the 80s... this was how our group Narasimha was formed... I got to listen to Rudra, the first ever band in Singapore to officially release a full length album. The music in Rudra really fascinated me. Loud and the heavy distorted sound of the guitars mixed with the aggressive drum beats with the touch of the Indian melody did fascinated me. We started going down to gigs and got to know people down there. And from there, we got to know other Indians who are also in this scene. Everyone of us had different bands influences, but still united in heavy metal. Well, the birth of heavy metal among Indians down here could be caused by similar experiences like this. And, in Narasimha, the vision is one which is the Indian culture. We never went off the line of our culture and we incorporate the Indian philosophy in our music. We never sing about love, because it's already common among the Indian film songs. Even in the music we compose, the Indian Carnatic or Hindustani style is inherent. It is about time the Indian community starts breaking away from the more widely listened to movie songs and make stuff of their own. Originality is what sells and is appreciated.

At least one outcome of this exploration is the discovery of a practice obvious to its supporters, lesser in written discourse but virtually unknown in other circles. When articulated through oral and e-interviews with practitioners and supporters, knowledge of and about musical practices of south Indian film in Singapore creates an open site for awareness, documentation and discussion. The problems, issues and challenges in a search for answers provide seed for further and future scholarship.
REFERENCES


5 Tamaki Marsuoka Kanda, Indian Film Directors in Malaya, pp.43-50, p.43, in Vasudev, Aruna (ed.) Frames of Mind; Reflections on Indian Cinema, UBS Publishers, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1995. Tamaki cites four reasons (p.50) for the presence of Indian directors in Singapore:
A much earlier developed Indian film industry;
Much cheaper to employ than Hollywood directors;
English as a language well-employed by the Indian directors; and
Familiarity with the Malay Peninsula because of the large number of Indian immigrants.


7 Singapore Chronicle, October 31, 1833, Vol.3, no.44, Letter to the Editor. The letter expresses particular concerns of fire and safety with an event which approximates the ritual of the fire-walking ceremony. Later, the Singapore Free Press, 31 January 1896, reports the confiscating of musical instruments used in the Thaipusam ritual at a temple at Tank Road by the police.

8 Kernial Singh Sandhu, op.cit, pp.774-775.

9 Letter to the Editor, Singapore Chronicle October 31, 1833, Vol.3, no.44. Unfortunately, this was referred to as a Kling festival. In most social exchange, this is a derogatory reference to members of the Indian community.


11 Oral Interview A00896/7 Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu and Chandrakasan Dharmalingam A001300). I am indebted to Clement Liew for his invaluable assistance in providing me with this brief summary based on his research.

12 Oral Interview A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam and Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu A00896/7.

13 Oral Interview A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam and Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu A00896/7 and Omkara, The Hindu Centre, February 1983 (Omkara 1983)

14 Oral Interview A001300 Chandrakasan Dharmalingam and Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu A00896/7.

15 From the Synopsis of an Oral Interview with Purushothaman Thambyah, Oral History Board. Accession No. 1342. The oral interview is in Tamil.

16 Interview with SIMP, March 2004. George a guitarist recalls, I joined in 1962, Usha Music Party...which was actually known as Usha Music and Dramatic Society. SIMP members recall how their predecessors were considered part of music and dramatic society configuration.

18 Ibid., p.67-68.

19 Ibid. According to oral interviewees, musical band parties were synonymous with music parties.

20 Personal correspondence with Radha Vijayan from the Peoples Association Lifeskills Branch, January 2005.

21 The Singapore Indian Artistes Association — Microfilm number NA2345.

22 Most of the interviewees were of similar opinion that SIMP was a pioneer group but none seemed to be aware of the presence of the New Indian Amateur Orchestra. However, interviewees note that New Indian Orchestra and the first SIMP notwithstanding, repertoire at first was predominantly Indian Classical Music, specifically Carnatic.

23 From the Synopsis of an Oral Interview with Purushothaman Thambyah, Oral History Board. Accession No. 1342. The oral interview is in Tamil. The term band here will require much further clarification but in the context of this synopsis, band is used to identify musical groups. The synopsis also includes names of musical band parties in 1950s and 1960s and includes names of famous musicians, MP Gurusamy, Pundit Ramalingam.

24 Interview with S.Sivam, 10 March 2004. Semi-classical is not clarified.


26 A.Mani’s chapter, Indians in Singapore Society, pp.788-809, p.796, in Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, edited by K.S.Sandhu and A.Mani (eds), ISEAS, Times Academic Press, 1993. Mani notes a gulf in the South Indian community caused partly out of caste and community differences as well as notions of economic class. Additionally, the Sri Lankan (Ceylon) Tamils and Malayalees saw themselves well-oriented towards the use of the English language and colonial culture. In both senses, the subscription to Indian classical traditions as well as fine arts of the western tradition would have sufficed for elitism.

27 Ibid., p.796. Mani points out that with the establishment of the Tamils Representative Council of 1952, the Tamil language was promoted in literature, mass media, particularly newspapers, and cultural issues. The Tamil language had for its support base Tamil-using and working class Indians.

28 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

29 Ibid.

30 A.Mani op.cit., p.796. Mani cites examples of Tamils, particularly Sri Lankan Tamils who belonged to the administrative and clerical sectors of the colonial economy who were content to patronize Anglicized forms of colonial culture, English-medium schools for their children, their women learning fine arts…like Englishmen with Indian colorations.

31 Ibid., p. 796. The Malayalees went their own way and formed organisations for themselves. The pullout of the British forces from Singapore also resulted in an outflow of Malayalees. In the face of fragmentation of language, religion or caste prevalent in the Indian population in Singapore in the 1960s and beyond, the Tamil language teacher emerged as the new catalyst to community orientation. This can be traced to a movement called the Dravidian movement which in Malaya and Singapore was essentially a working class movement against Brahminic domination of Indian society beyond India.

32 Ibid., p.807. This is not longer the situation where Hindi has become, increasingly so in the last decade, the Indian language many parents subscribe to at the expense of Tamil and it has become a concern for the Tamil Teachers Association of Singapore.

33 Oral Interview with S. Varathan – A001000/8. These festivities still occur today in the form of a Deepavali Festival Village that lasts 21 days and is similar to a street carnival. This provides a showcase for the best of Indian culture featuring pushcarts displaying and selling a variety of costumes, jewellery and accessories, food, paintings, handicrafts, spices and carpets. The carts will line Campbell Lane, from Serangoon Road to Clive Street and the roads will be closed to traffic throughout the 21 days. (STB) There will also be performances by local talents and foreign artistes presenting a rare mixture of South and North Indian cultures over a period of three weeks (except Sundays) until the eve of Deepavali. To
add to the colour, the Silver Chariot of Sri Mariamman Temple will make its visit to the Festival Village enroute its traditional journey for the Fire Walking Ceremony on 1 November. (STB)

34 E-correspondence with Dr. Seetha Lakshmi, Saturday, August 24, 2002, 10:50 am.


37 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

38 Parenthesis and emphasis in original. Navarattiri involves a nine-day preparation for the fire-walking ceremony.

39 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

40 E-correspondence with the Edmund Appau family, particularly Christina Edmund, dated 1 June 2004.

41 Ibid., p.778.

42 Fung 1975, p.,17, cited in A. Mani. op.cit., p.793-794, particularly the statistics Table 31.2.

43 Ibid., p.794.

44 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

45 Interview with SIMP members March 2004.

46 Interview with Mohd. Bagushair, 25 April 2004, Kent Vale. Mohammad Rafi is one of the few playback singers in Hindustani film from the 1940s to the 1980s and is mentioned in Peter Manuel’s study of popular music and technology in North India.

47 Interview with Mohd. Rafee, February 2004. Mohd. Rafee’s father was an Urdu-speaking native of the Deccan Plateau while his mother was Tamil.


50 Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 December 2003.


53 Interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi Band. By the time he was active, however, Ravi Shanker’s repertoire was extended, by choice, to playing Bee Gees numbers like Tragedy, You should be Dancing and Careless Whisper...


55 Interview with Amar Singh, former leader of Roshni Jeevans, 22 June 2004. Compare this with

56 E-interview with Balakrishnan Veerapan, Monday, October 6, 2003, 4:13 PM.

In the 50s, 60s and 70s, films were the only pastime for the Tamils here. I remember, as a child, the theatres which screened Tamil movies; Capitol, Cathay, Alhambra, Royal, Diamond, State, Rex, etc. They screened all the Tamil movies along with English & Mandarin and Chinese dialect movies. I believe even the Malayalee community had no choice but to watch Tamil movies. Singapura and Galaxy Theatres in the Geylang area screened Hindi movies. In my view, film music
was very popular since the screening of movies in Singapore. They were watched by people from all walks of life and had a great influence on people here. We understood the music, knew about fashion and there were sarees sold here which were named after a particular film or actress. In the 60s, film music was a “must-play” during wedding dinners and other functions. Local bands played these musical numbers and sang songs from popular Indian film. I saw guitars, saxophone, clarinet, accordion, jazz drums, along with Indian instruments like the tabla and dholak. They were very entertaining. South Indian actors like MGR and Sivaji were big names during the 1960s and 1970s. Many locals here sang songs by playback singers P.Suseela and T.M.Sunderajan in stage shows, TV etc. There were two prominent magazines which promoted films; Movie News, a local magazine which catered to Tamil as well as Hindi movies and Pesum Padam which was imported from India. The latter had all the ingredients which the movie goers were crazy about; gossip, latest releases, interviews with actors and actresses and even lyrics of popular songs. With the advent of television, there were variety shows which had classical, modern songs and dances.

57 Peter Manuel, op. cit., p.50.
59 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.
60 Ibid.
61 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.
62 Interview with Yusnor Ef, 19 and 16 December 2003.
64 I am grateful to the Edmund Appau family, particularly Christina Edmund, for providing me with a write-up on her father in correspondence dated 1 June 2004.
65 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.
66 Ibid.
67 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Interview with S.Sivam, 10 March 2004.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Interview with Edmund Appau family June 2004.
74 Oral Interview with Joseph of SIMP.
75 Interview with Edmund Appau family, June 2004.
76 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.
77 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.
78 Ibid.
79 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Interview with S.Sivam, March 10 2004.

83 Interview with Ravi Shanker, May 2004.

84 Interview with Mohd Rafee, February 2004.

85 Mohammed Ali, Nilavu, Mother-Goddess worship: practice and Practitioners in Three Hindu temples, pp.47-103, p.89, in Walker, Anthony R. (eds.), New Places, Old Ways, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1994. The interesting observation is made, On each day of Navaraththiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band). Parenthesis and emphasis in original.

86 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

87 Booth, Gregory, op.cit., pp.81-82.

88 Ibid., p.82.

89 E-interview with Christina Edmund of Edmund Appau family.

90 Oral interview with Amar Singh, blk 22, Sin Ming Road, 21 June 2004, 2030 hours.

91 Ibid.

92 Oral Interview with Mohd. Rafee.

93 Oral interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi.

94 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

95 E-Interview with Edmund Appau family.

96 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.


98 Interview with Si.Sivam, 10 March 2004.

99 Interview with Ravi Shanker, 8 June 2004.

100 Ibid.


102 Interview with Mohd Rafee, February 2004. July 2004 marked a remarkable change in Rafee’s fortunes and there has been a more positive reception to his musical styles and songs.

103 Mohammed Ali, Nilavu, op.cit., p.89. An interesting observation is made, *On each day of Navaraththiri, the temples sponsor a cultural performance. This includes classical dance, music and devotional songs (the latter sometimes accompanied by a Western-style band).*
104 Interview with Mohd Rafee March 2004.
105 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Interview with George of SIMP, March 2004.
110 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.
111 Ibid.
112 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.
113 Koh Tai Ann, Culture and the Arts, pp. 710-748, p.719, in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds.) Management of success, the moulding of modern Singapore, ISEAS, Singapore, 1989. We are informed that the Peoples Association was “the community development arm of the Prime Minister’s Office (p.885) and later in Koh’s article (p.720), we discover that in 1985, the Ministry of Community Development was created incorporating the Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture and the People’s Association…by Koh’s accounts, “a logical development”.
114 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.
115 Oral interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi,
116 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.
117 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.
118 Correspondence with Edmund Appau family, 2004.
120 Interview with S. Sivam, March 2004.
121 Interview with Joseph of SIMP, March 2004.
123 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.
124 Interview with S. Sivam, 10 March 2004.
126 Interview with Ravi Shanker, 8 June 2004.


128 Ibid., p.74.
129 Ibid., p.74.
130 Interviews with SIMP and Ravi Shanker (Maru Malarchi) yielded these names.

131 Interview with Ravi Shanker of Maru Malarchi, 8 June 2004.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

134 Interview with Errol of SIMP, March 2004.

135 Interview with Ravi Shanker, 8 June 2004.

136 Interview with Edmund Appau family, July 2004.

137 Interview with Mohd Rafie, February 2004. July 2004 marked a remarkable change in Rafie’s fortunes and there has been a more positive reception to his musical styles and songs.

138 Interview with SIMP, March 2004.

139 E-interview with Rudra, October 2002.

140 E-interview with Narasimha, November 2002.

141 E-interview with Rudra, October 2002.
Musical Practice of the Band in Singapore

Lee Tong Soon’s entry on Singapore in *New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians* classifies "music" in Singapore into categories that are at once communal, cultural and genre-specific:

- Euro-American classical music, among the others like;
- Music of the three major ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay and Indian);
- Popular music in Mandarin and English
- Musicals by Singaporean composers and
- Locally composed, produced and performed rock music in the 1990s.

The sheer diversity of musical culture reflects what Lee refers to as “a largely Asian population in a post-colonial setting.” The presence of such diversity of musics on one small island has revealed that much which is practised remains ‘hidden’ or perhaps not as readily available to us as knowledge of or about musical practices in Singapore. For instance, references to Euro-American art music and/or Music of popular culture reveal what is most remarkable; the absence of music for the Band and/or its practice. Firstly, the absence of Music for the Band in Lee’s entry on Groves is not consonant with its proliferation in the present. Secondly, Singaporean composer Bernard Tan’s overview of the history of music in Singapore, from the 19th century to the present, reads as follows:

*Pre-independence musical activity in Singapore remained largely an amateur activity, save the relatively few professionals such as military bandsman or Chinese opera singers and musicians trying to eke out a living.*

References to the presence of the Band in Singapore seem caught between apparent absences to relatively little known activity among military bandsmen as professionals. The relative silence itself is deafening both in the contradictions and ambiguity.

**Brief Chronology**

The earliest records we possess are from the Register of St. Andrew’s Cathedral which reveals the units or detachments of Military Forces in Singapore matched by the corresponding year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Unit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>6/7/1838 58th Regt Bengal Native Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Bengal Artillery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826 - 1831</td>
<td>25th Regiment N.I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>3rd Batt. Madras Artillery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>35th Regt Madras Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829 – 1830</td>
<td>43-44 4th Regt. Madras Native Infantry MNI</td>
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<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>13th Regt Bombay Native Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>47-49 Madras Engineers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Regiment/Military Unit</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>7th Regt. Bengal Native Infantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>1832-1839</td>
<td>43-50 Madras Artillery</td>
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<td>1834</td>
<td>29th Regt. M.N.I</td>
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<td>1834</td>
<td>23rd Regt. M.N.I</td>
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<tr>
<td>1836-1840</td>
<td>49th Regt. British Infantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841-1842</td>
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<td>1839-1841</td>
<td>8th Regt. M.N.</td>
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<td>1840-1843</td>
<td>26th Regt. British Infantry</td>
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<td>1841</td>
<td>Madras Horse Artillery</td>
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<td>1841</td>
<td>Royal Irish</td>
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<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Bombay Artillery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>The 13th Regt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>The Bengal Volunteer Regt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844-1845</td>
<td>27th Regt. M.N.I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>2nd Native Veteran Bn. Madras Establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845-1848</td>
<td>2nd Madras European L.I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846-1849</td>
<td>48th Regt. M.N.I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846-1849</td>
<td>21st Regt. M.N.I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>51st Regt. M.N.I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Bengal Artillery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are sufficient newspaper accounts of bands from some of these regiments, albeit brief. A grand celebration was held at Government Hill (Fort Canning today) to mark the birthday of King George IV in 1827. We are informed that dinner was prefaced by performances by Javanese musicians and dancers and followed by the “fair arrivals from Madras” and the other ladies of the Settlement had an opportunity of indulging in the most delightful recreation quadrilling, which was kept up with commendable spirit to a very late hour when the party separated much delighted with the entertainment of the evening.\(^4\) (emphasis mine) The fair arrivals from Madras could have been either the Band of the 35th Madras Native Infantry or the Band of the 3rd Battalion Madras Artillery stationed in Singapore, at least according to the register of Bands at St. Andrew’s Cathedral.

We are also informed of the Band activities in anecdotal historical accounts of Singapore: *The Officers of the 29th Madras Native Infantry [ca.1831], who had just come, allowed their band to play once a week on the plain, which is now called the Esplanade. As long as the Native Regiments were stationed here, the band used to play latterly twice a week; the chains were taken down opposite Coleman Street and the carriages were driven in and stood in a circle around the bandstand.*\(^5\)
Evidence of the reception of Band performances in Singapore are documented in a letter of regret to the Editor of the Singapore Chronicle reads:

Sir,

I regret to hear that we shall shortly be deprived of one of the very few amusements which exist here and which has been so obligingly contributed towards the gratification of the Community. The lover of music and others who are not insensible to its charms, have frequently enjoyed the opportunity of hearing the Band of the 29th Regt. M.N.I. perform on the Course, which has been a source of pleasure to me and it may be presumed has produced similar feelings in others. It is the first time that music has been so laudably introduced on the Plains of Singapore [Esplanade] and the execution is highly creditable to the capacity of the performers. I feel anxious therefore, Mr. Editor, previous to the departure of the gallant officers of the 29th Regt stationed here, to express my mite of acknowledgement for their kindness (in which it may be reasonably hoped I am not singular) for having so constantly permitted its gratuitous performance for the pleasure of the Public.

I remain Sir,

Yours,

A VOICE IN SINGAPORE January 22, 1834

Further evidence of political support of a military band is found in a statement, 1829, of the presence and cost of the appointment of Governor and its appendages for the united Presidency (PENANG, SINGAPORE and MALACCA) of the Straits Settlement, is listed below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governor’s Salary per annum</td>
<td>63 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yacht <em>Nerelde</em> including wear and tear</td>
<td>28 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent of Council House &amp; c…</td>
<td>16 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Bungalow furnished</td>
<td>2 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350 Convicts employed at Government House..</td>
<td>15 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling expenses on circuit</td>
<td>15 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnished House at Malacca</td>
<td>3 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 convicts at 4 a month</td>
<td>2 840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnished House in Singapore</td>
<td>3 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 convicts at 4 a month</td>
<td>2 840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Entertainment</td>
<td>2 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band, including instruments {r}ations and dress</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 500</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Secretary</td>
<td>7 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Secretary</td>
<td>4 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His pay as Capt. including Batta, Gratuity and Lodging Money</td>
<td>6 090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aide de Camp</td>
<td>2 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His pay as Capt. including Batta, Gratuity and Lodging Money</td>
<td>6 090</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
House granted ditto, equal to… 1 200
Total per annum Sicca Rupees 196 410
Add Secretary to Government pay & services 20 000
Deputy ditto….. 7 200
Assistant ditto… 4 320
Sicca Rupees 227 030

Further documentary evidence indicated band performances at Masonic functions\(^8\) and incidental concerts\(^9\) in addition to ceremonial duties which we hear or read very little of as well as performances to commemorate the King’s birthday. Tucked away in the Singapore Free Press review of a performance of *Damp Beds and My Young Wife and Old Umbrella* on the 27 September 1846 was this small acknowledgement: *the excellent music of the 21st Regiment’s Band added not a little to the evening’s entertainment.*\(^{10}\) In his book *Indiscreet Memories*, Brown calls his memoirs an *eye-witness account*,\(^{11}\) lending validity to the argument that his essay ‘Music’ was certainly about what the community understood and held to be the practice of the art form. Of the many chapters, one of them, the final topic, was *Regimental Bands*\(^{12}\) referring to the significant role military bands played either in assisting with productions, in giving their own performances or providing music on public occasions.

It is instructive however, for us to note that Bandsmen acting in the name of the British Empire were actually personnel from the Indian Native Regiments, the most notable in Singapore being the Madras Native Infantry.

We are informed of a significant event in 1856. Gregory Booth relates the British annexation of the Maratha kingdom around the Madras area into the Presidency of Madras. This anxiety was more deeply felt in Singapore with a reorganisation of the Madras Army in India. A letter in the Singapore Free Press in 1865, informs us of the concerns:

*We very much feared that the orders relative to the reorganisation of the Madras Army would completely cut up the old regiments and we find by the Indian papers that the officers of one of the corps now stationed at *Fort St. George* have discharged their band. Such will be the fate of all the bands, we suppose and the consequence will be that we shall be deprived of many a pleasant evening at the Gardens and Esplanade, where the bands of the Madras regiments hitherto stationed here have been permitted by the Officers, to play for our amusement; under these circumstances would it not be advisable to have a Town Band. An attempt was made some years ago to form one but failed, but here is no reason that we should not succeed in maintaining a first rate band at a moderate expense now seeing that the European population has so wonderfully increased. The Band might be organised by the committee of the Agri-Horticultural Society. As the climate of Singapore is well suited to the Singapore constitution we think
the Committee might engage first rate musicians in England and get them out overland and provided them with barracks in the gardens. Or it would be quite possible to engage the services of one of the bands now no longer required by the regiments of the Madras Army. We would prefer European bandsmen.\textsuperscript{13}

Of the many attempts made to localise the band, two prominent examples emerge, the Band of the Singapore Musical Society (ca. 1874) and the Santa Cecilia Band (ca. 1896). However, no records at this stage corroborate any musical activity beyond the respective years. Local attempts notwithstanding, the Singapore Straits Times and Free Press publicised visiting bands. The \textbf{Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers}, the Band of \textbf{HMS Invincible} led by Captain Buckle and Officers, “\textbf{The Buffs}” \textbf{The Band of the Battalion} and the \textbf{Band of the 5th Fusiliers} counted among the most press-worthy bands not because they performed their obligatory military duties extremely well (of which we have no evidence), but because they were seen and heard to provide entertainment at homes of Municipal council members and performed at well-known outdoor venues like the Botanic Gardens and the Esplanade.

Bands of the King’s Regiment continued to play an important role in ways unique to the Singaporean context. A newspaper report in 1896 tells us exactly how important a change in the concert pitch is: \textit{From a home paper we learn that...it has been announced that this year the Philharmonic society in London will lower its pitch to the diapason normale or French pitch. Again, by the Queen’s regulations, all military bands are required to conform to the Philharmonic pitch...\textbf{Here in Singapore the matter is of great importance in the interest of local music. For it has been felt that if the changes were not to come soon into effect, it might be advisable to contemplate the idea of purchasing orchestral instruments at the French pitch so as to improve the conditions under which orchestral music has at present to be played...the necessary information as to the course to be taken as regards regimental bands will be available in a short time.}\textsuperscript{14}

An explanation for this rather curious excerpt is found in one particular occasion involving the preparation for a Popular Orchestral Concert on 8 April 1899, featuring the second and third movements of Mendelssohn's Second Piano Concerto in d Minor, besides selections from Wagner's \textit{Tannhauser} and two movements from a Haydn symphony. Orchestral forces for the concert, a comparatively large one, totalling 43, 27 amateurs and 16 members from the band of the King's Own Regiment, the regiment stationed in Singapore then, who supplemented the wind section of the orchestra for it was "\textit{naturally impossible to find in any musical community in the Far East more than a small number of Amateur players of wind instruments...".}\textsuperscript{15} We are informed that a special "Children's Concert Fund" was set up based on donations of $1 or more from adults who wished to attend to cover expenditure on gas, \textit{bandsmen's fees and transport}, printing and incidental expenses.\textsuperscript{16} (emphasis mine)
This is not isolated practice at the turn of 20th century Singapore. The Cathedral Monthly Paper of St. Andrews, March 1928, has this to report:

*The three performances of the Messiah on February 17, 20 and 21 were well patronised and were very well rendered...the conductor was Mr. E.A. Brown. The chorus of about 100 strong did excellently and the orchestra with the help of members of the Duke of Wellington’s Band are to be congratulated on their efforts.*

(emphasis mine)

Here we have evidence of the King’s Regiment stationed here (though hardly audible in print-news space) and we learn of their ‘additional’ role; supplementing of wind instrumentation in amateur orchestral concerts and rehearsals. More importantly, in the face of a lack of orchestral personnel, we find Band members supporting orchestral forces in Singapore.

The next most prominent Band to appear was the **Second Straits Settlement Police Band** reportedly formed in 1925. Its function was to *add to the atmosphere and provide entertainment at police functions. Following an audition held in India, successful candidates—all of them with musical background—were brought to Singapore to form a 32-instrument band.*

Oral accounts recall the formation of this Band with eleven woodwind players, twenty brass players, a side drum and bass drum player; the performers were mainly Punjabis. The band was directed by a F.E. Minns till 1935 and was succeeded by J.Hitch. For an ordinary Singaporean, the band of the Singapore Police Force in the 1920s was one of the sources of Western music available to the public at large: *the earliest influences - shall we say, for the ordinary people was the Police Band; for the people who went to church it was the Anglican and Catholic church influences; those who went to neither of these places went to the cinema where they could hear music. So maybe in this way a love for what we call "Western music" became ingrained in the people.*

(Alec Dixon, in his memoirs, recalls this development in a little more detail. *It was about this time that the Regimental Bandmaster of The Royal Sussex Regiment, M. F. Minns, was appointed in the rank of Chief Inspector to form the band of the Straits Settlement Police...He spoke the Malay language haltingly and his vocabulary was exiguous, yet he succeeded in transforming a gang of somewhat tatty Sikhs into a highly efficient military band in a remarkably short time. Thereafter the Band gave public concerts in the Botanic Gardens or in the Old Gaol site at Brash Basah Road, with occasional appearances at Tanjong Katong. One of Minns’ musical achievements is worthy of record, for it occasioned some excitement among local Asiatics. From time to time he attended performances of the Malay Opera at the New World pleasure ground at Jalan Besar where he was greatly attracted by some of the traditional Malay love songs. One evening he told me that he hoped to include some of these songs in the Band’s repertoire, but explained that there were certain technical difficulties of a musical*}
nature to be overcome. However, he persisted in his self-appointed task, and some weeks later produced what he described as a ‘Malay Medley’ during a band concert given at Tanjong Katong. A large crowd of Malays and Straits-Chinese turned out to hear the music, and its delight was expressed in a great ovation for Minns and his band when the ‘Medley’ concluded with the familiar and haunting rhythm of Bandoeng. Chief Inspector Minns will long be remembered by Singaporeans for his part in providing the orchestral accompaniment for the Gilbert and Sullivan Productions of the Singapore Amateur Operatic Society. In those days the musical score of the Sullivan operas was subject to certain copyright restrictions; and I recall Minns spent many of his leisure hours for some months in transcribing by hand all the band parts for one of these productions. Neither was Minns’ influence on local music confined to the theatre and the bandstand. One of the recognised privileges of our Sikh bandsmen was their right to earn a few dollars during their off-duty hours by providing the music for Chinese funeral processions. It seemed to me that the ghost of the incorrigible Gilbert must have chuckled delightedly in the shades when it heard our Sikhs titillating those celestial ears with selections from H.M.S. Pinafore, or urging the hired mourners to ‘Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes’. Dixon’s amusement was to last much longer. Into the 1970s, Chinese funeral bands have been heard to perform Beautiful Sunday and Happy Days are here again at funeral processions towards the burial ceremony, even the Bee Gee’s Staying Alive.

The Police Band was to retain its basic formation even during the Japanese Occupation. Re-named Syonan Police Band, it continued to perform at concerts. One such instance appears in the Syonan Times 17 June 1942:

*The Syonan Police Band will perform at the Waterloo Street bandstand today from 7pm-8pm.*

- Marsch “Hoch Heideecksberg” R. Herzer
- Spanish Suite “In Malaga” F. Curzon
- Intermezzo- two step, Anona, V. Grey
- Selection “The Chocolate Soldier” O Straus
- From the Garden of Karna Four Indian lyrics A.W.Pinden
- Valse “Immortellen Valse” Gung’l
- Dance “Hungarian Dance” J. Brahms
- Kimigayo

Other advertisements of Band performances reported in The Syonan Times, went on through to 1944. Syonan Times reported that on Thursday, 15 June 1944, *The Syonan Police Band will perform at Hong Lim Green from 7-8 pm on Sunday* offering repertoire such as Kogun No Sieka and Military Band I. Information was also provided in relation to scheduled venues for performances in June 1944, for instance one on the 11th June at Jalan Besar and another on the 14th June at the Botanical Gardens. Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, Syonan Police band was renamed the Singapore Police
Force Band and again Band of the Singapore Police Force in 1946 after a reorganisation and under a new director R.E. House. Oral accounts inform us that declining numbers, retiring bandsmen or simply bandsmen returning home to India, prompted a recruitment drive initiated in 1947 where many young Malay civilians were recruited to serve as buglers and drummers. R.E. House was succeeded by James E. Boyle who held directorship of the Police Band till a financial crisis prompted an article in the Radio TV Weekly in November 1958:

How sad it is that the straitened finances of the Singapore City Council have compelled the discontinuation of public concerts by the band of the Singapore Police Force. I wonder if the Police will make the obvious gesture to continue their musical services to the public without charge? The Police Band invariably command a large audience whenever they appear on the city’s bandstands and their evening concerts add to the enjoyment which everyone receives from a stroll along the Promenade or in a park in the cool of the evening. Another reason the Police should forego the City Council’s fee is that the band is one of the Force’s best ambassadors to the public. The smart turn-out and excellent music of Singapore’s musical constables can help breed public confidence in our devoted guardians. Strike up the band, then, and write the cost off against public relations. 22

In the meantime, Members of the Straits Settlement Police Band were not the only musicians free-lancing outside of their primary commitments. Clan Associations were strong organisations in early 20th century Singapore. With support from the Cantonese clan associations, there was the reported formation of the Yeung Chin Primary School Band before World War I. Mention of this band is made not only in its social and community functions but also in other fields of endeavour. Matthew Chua, a member of the Mayflower Minstrel Party from the Peranakan community, offers us some insights:

In the Mayflower group, there were about 40-50 members. Some [were] supporting members, some of them [were] musicians. Some of them like games like badminton and so they join in. That was how Mayflower Association was formed from badminton. Out of the 40-50 members, half of them were active musicians. Some of them are good for acting, drama. They were not musicians. Some of them give a lending hand. Not only the Singapore born Chinese Peranakans joined, even...good musicians from the Cantonese clan – Yeung Ching high school had a brass band, so they would join us. Even the band master would come along when his students were inside the band and we played dance music! We would get all our orchestrated sheets form London. If not, we have our local music suppliers. We would get the latest hits and before they sell, they would pass [to] us to try. So, we made use of the music for our dance and orchestra. 23

The Mayflower minstrel group were not professionals but took much joy and pleasure from making music. It is possible that the entire experience was enrichment rather than a full-time endeavour as well as the desire to be recognized as amateur musicians of very best quality of performance: We play for the sake of joy...that is what we have in
mind. Not like you call for the brass band you’ve got to pay...we [are] amateurs... we’re not professionals. So we never think of demanding money. We play [and] entertain, you fill our tummies, we are happy already...sometimes people in appreciation for the service [would] pay the transport...we charter a bus, ok $15, $25 whatever, they gave in red paper...with that money we paid the transport. We went to all the amusement parks, the radio station...the same thing...we wanted to get the experience...For us [to perform for the occasion] it was free but for professional one had to pay...like during the early days, marriage processions needed brass band. So they call for professional brass band to play for them all the way and they had to pay.\textsuperscript{24}

The Hokkien clan association started Ai Tong Primary School Band before the Japanese Occupation. Usually after their primary school education, alumni of the Band would join the Ai Hwa Old Boys Band. According to Ho Hwee Long, whose very name is synonymous with the Band Movement in Singapore, \textit{in the 1950s.....some of the Hokkien Clan Associations had a very big military band for funerals, weddings, mainly for social events to support the clans....} \textsuperscript{25}

The third most prominent wave of the Band came again in the form of political support but this time in the domain of Education. According to Chai Chong Yii, Senior Minister of State for Education:
\textit{The Band Project was launched in 1967 with the general objective of raising a band in every school. To start with, teachers had to be trained to play brass instruments and to conduct and develop school bands. This core of band instructors proceeded to form the Teachers’ Military band. By playing together and performing at various functions, they develop further their skills and so contribute to raising the quality of school bands. This Band Programme, now in its eleventh year, has resulted in every secondary school in the Republic having a Brass or Military Band. It is estimated that 10 000 secondary school pupils are involved in school bands and an even greater number in Primary schools are also actively pursuing band activities. The movement has indeed developed at an incredible rate and this dynamic growth has created an impact on the very way of life of our country and our people. School bands also have the effect of building up school spirit and adding pomp and splendour to school functions.}\textsuperscript{26}

Tan Leng Kwang, in previewing the background to the Band Programme in Singapore Schools in 1976, informs us of the origins:
\textit{Launched in January 1965, the Band Project was the brainchild of the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. He had decided that bands should be formed in all schools in Singapore. The Government in introducing this programme in the schools had recognised the fact that group discipline, esprit de corps, and a sense of national identity can be gained by students participating in bands as an extra-curricular activity and the positive influence on public morale when school bands are heard and seen at outdoor functions and music festivals.}\textsuperscript{27}
Tan explains that at the initial stage, the Music Department, Ministry of Education, charged with the responsibility of forming and training bands. It was largely through such machinery that they managed to secure training assistance from bandmasters of the British Military Bands who were then based in Singapore. Under a crash programme, 4 pilot secondary schools (2 English Language medium, 1 Chinese Language medium, and 1 Integrated School) made their debut on 1st May 1965.

From an instrumental configuration point of view, Bugle and Fife Bands were introduced in primary schools in mid-1965. Ten music teachers from the Department underwent a five-week part-time training in the technique of playing the bugle, fife and drums and then sent out to organise bands in 10 primary schools. A public performance of 4 Bugle and Fife bands, each playing on its own, during a week-long music and dance festival in 1966, firmly established the band movement in the primary schools. Special courses subsequently were held every six months to train teachers on the staff of junior schools which wanted to form bands. From 1966, the Ministry decided that every primary school should have its own Bugle and Fife band. 28

Tan also informs us that financial assistance from the Government in the form of grants was readily forthcoming, and this was to be the greatest single contributing factor to the success of the band programme. Government and Government-Aided schools interested in forming bands received substantial subsidies for the purchase of instruments, accessories and uniforms. The training of students was provided free by bandmasters and senior bandsmen from the British Military Bands, whose part-time services were paid from Government funds. 29

Within the first two years (1965-1966) 20 Brass Bands were founded and the successful performance of a marching mass band leading a 500-strong student contingent in the first Independence Day Parade in August 1966, triggered off a rush of schools wanting to form bands. Since then, the number of bands has increased more than five-fold. 30

It soon became clear that the British Bandmasters and experienced service bandsmen employed to instruct schools was at best a temporary arrangement. For such a project to be sustainable in the longer term, there had to be training for local instructors to serve the schools. Thus in 1966, a unique scheme, as a long-term measure to provide the nation’s own instructors, was implemented. Qualified teachers in schools as well as music teachers in the Department of the Ministry were selected to undergo a two-year In-Service Course to train as performers in the Teachers’ Military Band and as Instructors of school brass bands. In September 1967, 61 teachers completed their training and took over as Instructors.

At this time it was considered unusual for qualified teachers of academic subjects to have switched over to duties of full-time instructors, as well as performing members of
the Singapore Teachers’ Military Band.\textsuperscript{31} Given the arrival of a core of trained personnel and the anticipated expansion in participation by schools, the primary concern of the Music Department was then directed at the improvement in the quality of performance, the building up of a wider and more varied repertoire and the organisation of even more spectacular massed band displays. To realise this aim, an Annual Band Competition was held. At this Contest, three top bands were selected. Winners were awarded Maces of Honour. In 1973, separate prizes were awarded for Outdoor Display of formation marching and for concert performance. Each year, this Competition or \textbf{Central Judging} as it was popularly called, commands great interest and the rivalry gets keener as schools vie against each other for top honours. In 1975, the Judging took a different form. Bands competing were divided into Sections A and B. Section A was for senior and finalist bands of the preceding three years, and Section B for beginner and less accomplished bands. Separate honours are thus awarded annually. These changes in the format in the competition are part and parcel of the growth and development of the bands in Singapore.\textsuperscript{32}

A significant transition was already on the way. Towards 1973, a handful of instructors of the 180 primary schools with bands introduced brass instruments to their bands. The Fifes and bugles were slowly phased out and by 1976, 60 primary school bands were said to have some form of brass instrumentation with many more in the process of transforming their bands into brass bands. Better brass bands reportedly even introduced woodwind into their bands.\textsuperscript{33}

Writing about the Band movement almost ten years after the project commenced, Tan adds in a concluding paragraph,

\textit{The Band Movement has left a definite impact on the people of Singapore. This impact has registered in every activity and every level of the nation. The influence of the school bands is so great that they have come to be accepted as a national way of life. It is a fact, that no celebration in the school, community, district or the nation is deemed complete without at least a band in attendance. Visitors to the Republic cannot help but notice our school bands as they parade at ceremonies or perform at public parks throughout the island. With a band – Brass, semi-military or Military – in every one of the 103 Secondary Schools and Junior Colleges, and an even greater number in the Primary Schools, Singapore’s half a million students have come to accept band performance, band discipline, marching and footdrill as important aspects of this challenging extra-curricular activity.}\textsuperscript{34}

The Ministry of Education, in response to a direct call from the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, set up the formation of the Band Project in 1966 and had for its rationale, a committed artistic and cultural endeavour, awareness and education of a general public, and a tradition that could resonate a national identity. \textbf{The Band Project} was launched as part of the extracurricular activity programme in both Primary and Secondary
Schools beginning with four bands in aided secondary schools and nine bugle bands functioning mainly under the banners of the Boys’ Brigade and Boy Scouts. Bands at this stage were mainly bugle and fife and marching and military in nature.

The Ministry of Education went further to organise annual indoor concerts in addition to the annual outdoor marching band competitions. Additionally, in 1966, the Music Department of MOE was charged with the responsibility of forming and training school bands. The Music Bulletin of Yamaha informs us that in 1965, when the idea was first started, British servicemen (bandsmen) were employed to train brass band instructors.35 By 1971, Inche Mohd. Ghazali Ismail, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Education, was able to say, “....no school, primary or secondary would consider itself a complete entity if it did not possess a marching Band”, a revelation of how the Band movement had “....developed at a dynamic rate...” given that there were in that year, 88 Brass Bands in Secondary Schools and over 100 Bugle and Fife Bands in Primary Schools. Its support within the school system has been consistent and has been increasing at an incredible rate.36 1970s, a special committee was formed to ensure highest quality of marching in addition to band performance. The former ECA branch, Police Academy, and Singapore Armed Forces were involved in the training and Band leaders from the various schools were trained in footdrill, conducting and leadership before returning to their respective bands.

As a consequence of the highly competitive school system in Singapore, one of the largest and most prominent spheres of activity and discussion has always surrounded Band competitions in Singapore. According to Ho Hwee Long, one of the most prominent figures in the Band movement Singapore...from 1971 up to early 1980s, it was an annual event...indoor and outdoor...the same band must do outdoor display and indoor concert to show their versatility...in the early 1980s...parents complained that it was too time-consuming...then the indoor and outdoor alternated...outdoor competitions have dropped in terms of numbers...this year [2004] there were only 5...but in the early days, the National stadium was full...40 bands taking part...preliminary rounds and final rounds...37

Given the move from scratch and beginning with bugle and fife as well as initially brass band instrumentation, there was inevitably a transition in instrumental configuration. Ho Hwee Long elaborates...before the 1960s, there was no fixed instrumentation...but the basic instruments were there...flutes, clarinets, trumpets trombones, alto and tenor horns, sousaphones, but the constitution of the band was not fixed as it depended on function, financial support and the availability of the students...sometimes you may have more clarinets or more French horns...but after 1965, when the band movement had become more formalised...we began with the British influenced brass band configuration in the mid-60s...brass instruments and percussion...but some bands had an alto and tenor saxophone to help to play running notes...from 1965 to 1969, we
managed to think about converting from brass band to military band...only the woodwinds were only used in the military bands...because of this terminology, after a few years, even the non-military bands, like community bands, became known as military bands...almost all Singapore school bands and even the Peoples Association Band became known as military bands.....One of the main reasons for converting from brass to military bands in the schools was the repertoire for the brass band which was very difficult...actually meant for professional bands and brass bands with a longer and stronger tradition...we had no choice but to switch to the military band format which was based more on an American model so we imported a lot of materials from America... in 1969, when I was the band director of NJC, I worked from the standard configuration; 6 flutes 12 clarinets, 2 bass clarinets, two bassoons, two oboes, two alto sax, two tenor sax, 1 baritone sax, 8 trumpets or cornets, 6 French horns, 4 trombones, 3 euphoniums, 2 E-flat tubas, 2 B-flat tubas...with the brass band configuration, we played repertoire from the British Band tradition...once I converted to military band, our repertoire moved towards American band music...When I started with the NIE Band in 1973...the instrumental configuration was 3 trombones, 2 tubas, 4 horns, 2 euphonium, 4 trumpets, 4 cornets... from 1970s, we concentrated on American band music, 1980s European and Japanese music crept in.....the 1990s, Belgian, Dutch and Japanese music just flowed in...competing with the American repertoire today...  

By 2000, there were reportedly 44 primary schools, 132 secondary schools and 14 junior colleges with their own bands. Currently, about 12,000 students or approximately 27.5% of students taking part in CCA music activities are involved in the Band. 2001 Central Judging Competition – 117 secondary school bands and 14 junior college bands with 7,709 participants were involved at the Singapore Youth Festival Central Judging Competition in 2001. In the present context, The Ministry of Education today, which oversees the Band movement in the school system, makes financial provision of S$ 132 thousand for a Primary school band with minimum numbers of 53; S$ 203 thousand for the formation of a Secondary school band with a membership of 65 students; and S$ 207 thousand for Junior Colleges with memberships of not less than 65. This grant is based on what it would cost in terms of standard instrumental equipment for a wind band.  

Of all the Co-Curricular Activities conducted for schools, the Band movement takes the lion’s share of participants to date. Band Concerts account for the vast majority of the annual concerts in Singapore, attended by people from all walks of life. Band Concerts can at least lay claim to a wide-ranging audience appeal. Recital programmes in Band Concerts have also shifted focus from familiar and traditional favourites to a wide ranging and eclectic repertoire and even works by local composers. The movement in the schools reveals the supportive role school teachers, principals, students and their parents also play in sustaining the momentum and engendering growth of the band movement in schools and beyond.
Presently community bands are very active with their regular public concerts. Anecdotal evidence suggests much of the supporting audience base comprises friends, family and loved ones. More schools and tertiary institutions are also setting up alumni bands. The more entrepreneurial wind ensembles even set up their own wind ensembles to experiment with interesting and specialized repertoires, programmes and instruments. This development has helped to provide more avenues for school band members to continue with their interest in band-related activities once they have left the school system.

There has been an attempt made to represent interests of the band instructors. One such avenue was the formation of the Singapore Band Directors Association in 1995 with its stated objectives:

- To develop, promote, organise and co-ordinate the band programme in schools, junior colleges and centralised institutes
- To strive for balance in the band programme and to maintain a perspective for the total educational development of the learner.

The formation of the Association has been to develop and improve the band programme, curriculum, supervision and instruction. A concomitant task has been to encourage and find ways for band directors to upgrade and improve their skills through workshops, clinics, courses and of course, the unavoidable proof of the pudding – competitions.

Presently, there is no specific tertiary programme in Music that allows for studies in the Band movement besides the Music Specialisation undergraduate programme at the Nanyang Technological University, National Institute of Education. Additionally, the Music Department has recently begun a Specialist Diploma in Band Directing which allows band directors to engage in a rigorous and deeper reflection of their skill and craft in practice. It is here that band directors need to be enthused themselves in order to make their ‘sales’ pitch to the hundreds and thousands of participating students in their school Band. The same Music department is active in postgraduate supervision and there are on record two theses written on the Band Movement in Singapore. Additionally, faculty members are engaged in research in the band from Composition to Musicological studies.

Studies of the recent history of Band movement in Singapore have enabled their categorisation into:

- School bands (primary, secondary and junior colleges)
- Tertiary bands (polytechnics and universities),
- Amateur groups (all Community Club-based bands),
• Peoples Association Military Band – from the Canton and Hokkien Clan associations.
• Independent groups such as the Singapore Wind Symphony (Formerly NTSB), Philharmonic Winds, Paradigm Wind Ensemble, and others,
• Professional bands (SAF Central and Police Bands). Except for this last group, members who join these groups will come from various walks of life, from being a student in the school to a fully-fledged working professional.
• Singapore Youth Wind Orchestra-entry by auditions and expected performance in WASBE 2005 and beyond.

• Clan association Bands
  o Yeung Chin Primary School Band (Canton Clan);
  o Ai Tong Primary School Band (Hokkien);

• Service Bands
  • Police Band
  • SAF Central Band
  • PA Military Band
  • PA-Pipers Band
  • Overseas Service Bands

• Visiting Bands
  Ho Hwee Long recounts how in the 1950s, other than the Police Band, there was the British Service bands, Far East Air Force band...British Navy band they were here in Tengah Air Base...ANZUK appeared in the 1960s......New Zealand Brass band was very popular in those days.....but they could play Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture, in the 1960s and 1970s they went around schools in Singapore to perform. Overseas bands active in the 1960s and 1970s were:
  • The Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment band
  • Military Band of the First Gordon Highlanders – the only bagpipe & drum band
  • The ANZUK Symphonic Band which was a combined band of:
  • The Band of the Royal Highland Fusilisers of UK
  • First Battalion, Royal New Zealand Regiment
  • Australian Army Band
  • The Far East Air Force Band
  • Gordon Highlanders of UK
  • The United States Seventh Fleet Band
  • The Royal Marine Band (Far East) of the UK
  • The Royal Australian Air Force Band
• The Royal Artillery Band founded in 1962, formed with eight players and resident in Singapore during the 1960s.43

Discussion
The extent to which the Band was part of everyday lifestyle or discourse would be dependent either on a critical mass of participants or stamp of authority to warrant its emergence in a more specific frame. The next stage of individual memoirs, East India Company records and documents, programme details, persons involved in organising the evening performances, are just the tip of the iceberg that merit further scholarship. What is the significance of the Band in the history of Singapore? In his research on the Gambus Melayu in Johor, West Malaysia, Larry Hilarian suggests musical instruments have always journeyed along the grain of politics, conquest and economic exploits amongst the communities so linked to trade, mercantilism, adventure and their source of entertainment. The study of musical instruments brings us to the intersection of globalization and diaspora, not in the commercial sense but to the close affinity of intercultural Sagrandizement and adaptation.44

What is true of musical instruments is also true of musical practices and personnel involved in them. The question of event as emergence is always a problem. Foucault suggests an event is considered more as a reversal of a relationship of forces…the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it…the entry of a masked ‘other’45. Acknowledgement of the presence of the band in Singapore refers undoubtedly to the presence of a military Band, one which began as a political entity and communicated that presence. Here is where the inversion of relationships take place - the masked other is not a Royal regiment from Imperial Britain but a Native Infantry from colonised India - Madras.

In Phan Ming Yen’s brief overview of Singapore, the East India Company had a political and financial overview and interest of the fortunes of the island - meaning anything to do with Singapore came under the direct purview of a satellite British Empire in India. Logically, and logistically, the experience gained from colonising India would have been most helpful towards administering Singapore.

Secondly, and musically speaking, in an article by Gregory Booth, we are informed that a British observer in 19th century Madras, Scott who in 1813, in a letter to the Military Secretary of the Commander-in-chief of Fort St. George (Madras), urged the formation of military bands in the native regiments of the East India Company Army as a means (among other things) of improving the appreciation of European music amongst the Indian population, our musick [sic] not being in much repute among the Natives of India.46
This letter reveals how bands were being formed but also why native bands were most desired in these circumstances and how the presence of these ‘fair arrivals from Madras’ kept martial music and musical entertainment in Singapore a tradition. The fact that the Madras Native Infantry had kept up the pleasure of its audience, at least twice a week, was a way of assuring the community in Singapore that not only was music of the Empire played but that it was played by Asian Indian natives. That even Asian Indian Natives could be trained to play European music, however effectively or convincingly, would suggest coopting of an ‘Asian’ in the processes of validating the British Empire. That they were performed at the Plains, witnessed by what evidence suggests, as a virtually European dominated audience would arguably have completed the Imperial circuity.

Thirdly, and as I pointed out to the publishing of the Governor’s expense accounts for the Straits Settlement for the year, the Band, rations and instruments account for less than 1% of the total expenses. As part of the British Empire’s political and cultural arsenal, a band with instruments and rations cost comparatively little and easily amenable to repeat performances with approval from their commanding officer/s.

Amidst details of a presence of a European community where gendered lines are breached for the pleasure of listening to music played by a regimental Native Band, curiously not one mention is made of a local or immigrant or even Asian audience. One is led to speculate that at best Cameron wanted Whitehall to be fully cognisant of an accurate description of the situation in Singapore, hence the concentration on “white audiences” OR that such music, probably the only regular diet of Western music, was meant for western audiences, which was played, ironically, by the Madras Native Infantry.

Given the situation in 1813 in India and the subsequent strategy, it should not surprise us to find the proliferation of the Madras Native Infantry, among other native infantry units in Singapore with its function perhaps to engender more effective permeation of ‘European music’ and by consequence its appreciation among the immigrant and local population; act as ‘localised’ media for European music served as a message of possibly political and cultural aggrandisement while at the same time able to provide repertoire that was familiar and expressly symbolic to an expatriate British community in Singapore.

Between the loss of the Madras Regimental bands, Band of the Singapore Musical Society and the Santa Cecilia band, there is evidence in newspapers, of ensembles organising fund-raising concerts, evening performances at the Botanic Gardens, Tanglin Mess and Esplanade. This seemed somehow to be a frequent report in the Newspapers as if to compensate for the loss the ‘fair arrivals from Madras’. These bands were in reality visiting bands from the UK, USA and Ireland. Bands of the Royal Inniskilling
Fusiliers, HMS Invincible, “The Buffs” The Band of the Battalion – were some of the few visiting bands mentioned in giving performances.

What emerges in the writings, although not yet refuted in further scholarship was the membership of this audience for the Band – there is are isolated references to members of the Eurasian and Straits Chinese community as local supporters, participants or audiences. Remembering that many of these events were performances, begs further research which would prove helpful in ascertaining the nature of these performances, expectations and ritual proceedings of these regimental bands while they were stationed in Singapore. We are given very little idea of the reception of the band’s performances beyond the repertoire played as well as how successful the event was in terms of the overall setting rather than the quality of performance.

In the domain of Western classical music, for instance, Phan Ming Yen’s thesis informs us of ways in which distinctions were made through music. For the European community of Singapore in the 19th century, to practice, to perform and to listen to the music of its own culture was the act of shutting out local musics or a preferred definition in its time – ‘hideous noises’. 47

The Band seems to have had a mixed reception. The Band of “The Buffs” played several Waltzes at an evening function of the Hon’ble Seach Liang Seah, in support of a cause I am not sure they were aware of: This is we believe the first occasion on which European ladies have been invited to a dance in a Chinese house. We trust it will not be the last, as such meetings will do more than anything else to promote friendly feelings between the East and the West and to indoctrinate the former with higher ideas regarding the fairer half of creation. We hope eventually to see Chinese and Malayan ladies appearing at such gatherings and enjoying the same freedom in social intercourse as their Western sisters...We hope that our other wealthy Chinese merchants will follow the good example of Mr. Seah Liang Seah by giving entertainments of a similar kind.48

On another occasion, a remarkably articulate although irate neighbour related how his celestial neighbour (in contradistinction to coolie neighbour) was found to host musical activity although the accounts of what he heard are best quoted: It is true that the monotony of the Chinese music, which to the uncultivated mind resembles the noise usually met with a working smithy, was interspersed with music given by a band of musicians playing European instruments. The two orchestras evidently vied with each other as to which could make the most bunyi-bunyi. They followed each other in incessant rotation….49

The Singapore Chronicle, Free Press and Straits Times of the 19th and even early 20th centuries provide sufficient examples of the ways in which the musics of the immigrant
community here were at the extreme regarded as noises and the response to them was manifest in letters to the Editor or even subject to the Penal Code. For instance, in Section 268, it was declared that: – *A person is guilty of a public nuisance who does any act...which causes any common injury, danger or annoyance to the public or the people in general who dwell or occupy property in the vicinity...or annoyance to persons who may have occasion to use any public right. If the inhabitants of a district are persistently annoyed a petition of house-holders to the Chief Police Officer should set the law in motion. The authority of Yahayah Merican v. Khoo Hock Leong 1878. July 29, reported in Kyshe’s Reports, the Court will at the suit of a private neighbour restrain by perpetual injunction the performance of a wayang or Chinese theatre in a house adjoining his if it causes a nuisance.*

Further to the Penal Code, Section XII of 1872 Summary Criminal Jurisdiction informs us unambiguously that criminal charges befell whoever, without the permission in writing of the Chief Police Officer, beats a drum or tom-tom or blows a horn or trumpet or beats or sounds any brass or other metal instrument or utensil. 

**EXEMPTION: This Clause shall not be held to apply to Military Music**

Therefore, even when the band of the Maharajah of Travancore, engaged to play at the Hindu Thaipusam Festival in 1896, took part in the procession on January 29th, they were still arrested by the Police and locked up in a cell for two hours till bail was forthcoming and the band lost its engagements for the following nights. It had not mattered that a license was already obtained for the procession and that the offending instruments comprised a kettle-drum, a big drum, a cornet, a bagpipe and a euphonium. The complaint only seems to be that of using too many instruments.

On the other hand, the subtext from the Singapore Free Press is that the use of instruments like a kettle-drum, a big drum, a cornet, a bagpipe and a euphonium (even before they were confiscated) was in no way dissonant with expectations of a soundscape at a religious festival like Thaipusam; that the chetties of the Tank Road Hindu Temple applied for a permit knowing the instrumentation; and more significantly, that the band of musicians had come via the good offices of no less than the Maharaja of Travancore.

There is at work, a much deeper cultural reliance on resources from India, cultural and musical, which maintain the balance between tradition and a changing presence and practice. Gregory Booth informs us that in Southern India, the musical interaction between British and Indian culture was quite enthusiastic. South Indians incorporated and adapted European instruments and musical materials to suit their own needs: *Wind bands...are a ubiquitous and sometimes perplexing phenomenon, because their continued presence as musical symbols of status and prestige in public and private settings demonstrates an ongoing relationship with the region’s colonial past, but...*
simultaneously expresses the ability of South Asian cultures to refashion external cultural influences in ways that fit their own patterns of social organisation and suit regional cultural needs. As the political and social realities...have changed, so ...have cultural needs and behaviours.\textsuperscript{52}

Given the evanescent Band of the Musical Society in 1874 and Santa Cecilia Band of 1896, much of what the Indian Native regimental bands were able to achieve during 19\textsuperscript{th} century Singapore were intensified during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century up to 1958 through the Straits Settlement Police Band, Syonan Police Band and eventually the Police Band. Despite the similarity of presence (Punjabis from India at first and later included members of the Malay community) and delectation from its audiences, was that the Police Band was able to immerse itself by transcribing and arranging for Band, music from popular local practices. If nothing else, Alec Dixon’s recalling of the efforts of Straits Settlement Police Band Director F. Minns is evidence of leadership that was able to relate to the local Malay community (and Straits Chinese community as well) via musical genres well-known and loved and practised. Their repertoire at public performances at either the Bras Basah Jail or Katong Park or the Botanic Gardens was sufficiently cosmopolitan to attract a large enough local audience.

Max Weber reminds\textsuperscript{53} us that in the art of warfare, the greatest progress originated not in technical inventions but in transformations of the social organization of the warriors. Even during the Japanese Occupation, the Police Band re-named Syonan Police Band, with a ‘local’ leader in Mr. Ganda Singh, continued the sort of “evangelical” work of promoting appropriate European (Brahms and Gung’l) as well as Asian repertoire (like Japanese melodies and the Kimigayo) in familiar locations such as Waterloo Street, Hong Lim Green, Jalan Besar as well as Botanic Gardens. Although the political agenda of the Japanese colonisers was a pan-Asian consciousness, the use and usefulness of the Band in the Singaporean context was one British colonial strategy they rode on.

Much of the meteoric rise of the Band’s prominence in the social and cultural fabric of cosmopolitan Singapore in the present cannot deny its motivation described by its pioneers as the Band Project. In 1965, the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew strongly advocated the formation of brass bands in schools. The newly-formed independent government of Singapore, in introducing the programme, recognised that the movement had great potential to engender group discipline, esprit de corps and a sense of national identity and valued the positive influence on public morale when school bands performed at outdoor functions and music festivals. The Ministry of Education in introducing the Band Project in 1966, saw as deliverables, a committed artistic and cultural endeavour, awareness and education of a general public, and a tradition that fosters a sense of national identity. Whether it was Band Music or Music for the Band, with its concomitant socio-cultural and artistic tensions, this phenomenon engendered an awareness and consciousness of the Band as a medium of cohesion, of
communitarian spirit and value, a microcosm of a rugged society – resilient, prepared and unified by adversity, a bond of camaraderie and *esprit des corps*; with greater impact on the school-going community in Singapore.

The decided focus on the practice of the Band at the levels of the schools, it seems to me, provided for a galvanisation of social forces right from the very beginning; something not previously achieved in the Singaporean landscape since 1819. The competitions that were put in place in the school system, reinforced the deliverables; what was prominent in the competitions at the initial stage was the outdoor, marching and display element. Since it was begun at the school system, it had no doubt its impact on the parents and family of these school going students. It would be a matter of time when parental objections and the histrionics that accompanied these competitions would engender a transition to concert and symphonic band configurations where the band became a medium of expression of a different but nonetheless valid repertoire. I believe the principal ideas of accessibility and permeability that mark out the band resonated better under these circumstances. One of the consequences of this action was the formation of a number of wind ensembles outside the school system, from those of the tertiary institutions, like polytechnics, universities and teacher-training institutes, whose graduands were charged with the responsibility of Band training in the school system. Service Bands, like the Armed Forces, Air Force and Navy (the Police Band was already very established) were also part of the formation although they served a different function in the face of a newly independent Singapore. Community Bands as well as Bands from Corporations, like SIA or the Buddhist SOKA with its autonomous affiliations represented just a few of the proliferation of bands in the post 1965 era. None of these external groups quite matched the proliferation that was witnessed in the school going community.

The Band as new form of Empire
Gayatri Spivak informs us *certain practices of...arts in the broadest sense are said to inhabit the private sector. But institutions of...art, as well as the criticism of art, belong to the public...*  

Multiplicity of artistic endeavour has distinguished participants of the Band in Singapore throughout its presence visually and sonically. Even in the 19th century, musicians of the Band entertained not only at official functions but also at external functions, fund-raising concerts, amateur orchestral concertising, children’s concerts, and even at one stage a Town band. The performance of Handel’s Messiah organised by St. Andrew’s Cathedral was in no small way assisted by musical forces of a regimental band. Dance-band music was already available in Singapore from the late 1920s in major hotels as well as cabarets and sufficiently popular to be advertised in local newspapers. Diversity of collaboration and participation notwithstanding, musicians like the Punjabi bandsmen of the Straits Settlement Police Band were able to play for funerals and other such activities among the various communities in Singapore. Singapore was a centre for a film industry, financed by Ho Ah Loke, Loke Wan Tho
and the Shaw Brothers during the 1950s and 1960s. We are informed that the first Band of the Armed Forces comprised musicians whose prior musical experience was in cabarets, kerongchong or Hawaiian bands or in musical practices of popular culture.

Alec Dixon’s amusing account of selections from Gilbert and Sullivan’s H.M.S. Pinafore and ‘Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes’ – as repertoire heard at funerals take us beyond Booth’s assertion of adaptation. It is an indication of a symbiotic relationship between music and social settings no where clearer than in this context. In Karl Mannheim’s words, “Each idea acquires a new meaning when it is applied to a new life situation. When new strata take over systems of ideas from another strata, it can always be shown that the same words mean something different to the new sponsors, because these latter think in terms of different aspirations and existential configurations. This social change of function, then, is ... also a change of meaning.”55 Here it is not the words but the sounds that are the subject of this transformation. By performing what they performed, these musicians, the Band they were affiliated to, and by extension, the Band movement, in whatever state of being, all acquired a distinct nature and identity, transcending their cultural identity.

In a sense, from its reported presence in 19th century Singapore, via Indian Native Regimental or Royal Regimental or even visiting bands in the 19th century, the Straits Settlement Police Band (Punjabi in all but name), the Syonan Police Band, Band of the Singapore Police Force and later the Band Project, brainchild of the Ministry of Education, is that the Band was and is, to most intents and purposes, an institution which transformed its participants, albeit varying degrees of adaptation. Its chosen medium of expression, in this case, music, rendered it the authority of an artistic institution which historically found favour with political and military institutions. This is significant, given the variety of communities, variety of participatory strategies throughout the processes of colonisation in Singapore. Despite the changes in adapting to political, social and cultural realities, the Band in Singapore seems to have survived, if not thrived towards its prominence. I believe this is because the Band as a political and artistic institution was accorded, has been accorded and on balance deserved its spatial prominence, pervading and permeating much of the traditional and contemporary performing spaces, in terms of personnel, musical resources and musical instruments.

It would too hasty and simplistic, if not erroneous, to draw direct link between the early bands of the infantry and the band today. There is no clear line of influence although if one does trace the history of the presence of Bands in Singapore, there emerges a "concept" or "notion" of a band, how it functioned and functions in society in site-specific ways.
There is so much more that needs to be articulated with the acknowledgement of a presence. What was the repertoire, how was it sustained, how did teaching and learning take place? What was the repertoire representative of? An analysis of the repertoire, the arrangements and transcriptions of the pieces would begin to address a correlation between the nature of such arrangements and transcriptions and the depth of available resources, instrumental and musical resources as well as skill levels of musicians, bandmasters, and possibly creative work. This research continues to redress the scarcity of photographs, concert programmes, taped recordings of concerts, financial records, letters of correspondence, among the few. Presence begs, even more questions, require far more explanation and another barrage of questions but provides the motivation for future and further scholarship.

If nothing else was learnt today, the overwhelming evidence of the presence of the Band in Singapore is a small step towards redressing the lack of a presence in the Groves entry on musics in Singapore. However, what was the nature, role and identity of its presence – a political phenomenon mediated through music or was it an artistic phenomenon mediated through a political esprit des corps? The gaps left behind especially between the Madras Native Infantry, Straits Settlement Police Band with all its evolution till one suspects 1958 and the Band Project inform us of the necessity of robust patronage for sustainability of the Band. Given the relative success of such patronage – was the Band a colonial gift so powerful that the only strategy to sustain its practice would have been to render it a political commodity in contemporary history? Tensions, contentions notwithstanding, one can no longer deny its practice, and by implication, its presence.

Acknowledgement
This paper draws from material used in the Brown Bag Session at the WASBE International Conference given on 11 July 2005 in Singapore.
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Musical practices of Euro-American Art Music in Singapore

Introduction
Of the musical practices in Singapore, few have the privilege of such rich discourse as the Euro-American art music tradition. Yet very little seems to have become obvious as a starting point. For instance, the most recent article to be written about it appears in JoAnn Hwee Been Koh-Baker, whose starting point is a translation of Leong Yoon Ping’s brief survey of the composition as a career in Singapore:

Two well respected musicians could be considered forerunners in promoting classical music in Singapore. Huang Wan Chen, a well-known singer and vocal instructor, presented two Chinese art songs ‘Whai Ren’ and ‘Hu Bu Qui’ in 1946 that captured the hearts of many. Subsequently in 1957, Ting Zu San also presented more than thirty pieces of art songs and sacred pieces...considered pioneering pieces in the music culture of Singapore.¹

The brevity of a discussion with pre-independence Singapore does little justice to a long and chequered narrative of music-making activities, known first as ‘Western music’ till its more recent association in Koh-Baker’s article as ‘Music culture’. However, Koh-Baker’s article justification of the brevity of discourse considers composition as a career in Singapore, in contradistinction to Lee’s much broader sweep.

Summary Chronology
Our research through documentary evidence suggests that music from European cultures was practised in Singapore in the early 19th century. Charles Burton Buckley recounts how in 1825, how very large parties were given in the old times by Dr. d’Almeida, and after him by Mr. Jose and his wife, whose house was always the rendezvous of all social amusement...Dr. d’Almeida and his family were admirable musicians and his musical evening concerts were frequented by all who delighted in listening to the rendering of some of the best composers. The Cree Journals offer us another such account:

Went to a musical party at Dr Jose d'Almeida's, a Portuguese merchant who lives on the Campong Glam and has a large family of daughters - and sons too... They are all very musical and get up delightful concerts in their house, twice a week, to which some of us have a general invitation...they sing and play various instruments divinely...Old Jose introduced us...to the Madam...Some of her relations, Malay rajahs, were there and treated us to a hornpipe - one played on a fiddle and the large room open to veranda all round made it cool, so were able to enjoy the quadrilles and waltzes with - a little flirtation.² Dr Jose d'Almeida's house at Beach Road was a meeting centre of all the musical talents of the Colony. Large parties and dances were given, so that his house soon became the social centre of Singapore.³
Western music, we presume was also performed at more than just social events. On the occasion of April 23 1827 the birthday of King George IV was celebrated at Government Hill and we are informed that among other things, after dinner the fair arrivals from Madras and the other ladies of the Settlement had an opportunity of indulging in the most delightful recreation quadrilling, which was kept up with commendable spirit to a very late hour when the party separated much delighted with the entertainment of the evening.\(^4\) Dancing was to continue on the occasion of the King’s Birthday on the 28 April 1828 (and indeed must have subsequent years) and doubtless required the services of a Native Infantry Band, although no specific mention is made of the regiment.\(^5\)

A natural consequence of the presence of music-making repertoire of western art music was the advertisement in The Singapore Chronicle of the sale of a piano:

Also, the property of a Lady about to leave the Settlement, a Broadwood’s Square Pianoforte, especially made for India, of peculiar Sweet tone, and a handsome piece of Furniture. For particulars apply to the Editor.\(^6\)

The presence of pianos is again a mystery as these are very contemporary piano designs. Who would have ordered them and how many arrived in Singapore? Until further research addresses them, all we have is another advertisement:

Two excellent Fine Toned, Square Pianos, made by Tomkinson to order, expressly for India, they are in perfect condition. Apply to the Editor.\(^7\)

It is not often we hear of connections between unnatural death and music. On this occasion, however, we are informed a Coroner’s Inquest was held on the body of a Portuguese of the name of Adrien, who was found dead by the Police the night before. It appeared the deceased had been returning home from a house on the cantonment side of the river, where he had been to deliver a harp, his profession, we believe being that of a musician (emphasis mine). The Jury returned the verdict of “Died from suffocation from falling in the mud, whilst in a state of drunkenness, and from assistance being prevented being given him by his brother Danchie.” His brother Danchie, we understand, is in custody.\(^8\)

A barrage of questions arrive with the emergence of this one sentence. Who was the recipient of the harp and why? How did the harp fit into the scheme of music-making in Singapore at the time? Was there an ensemble? We were told that Dr. d’Almeida and Mr. Velge’s residences were the centres. Was there an ensemble or was a family newly arrived at Singapore for whom a harp was to be delivered? Was Adrien self-employed? If not, who did he work for? Was this harp purchased after being ordered or was this harp sold in Singapore? If the latter was plausible, how many harps were available for
consumption? Was there demand for it? Who was interested in purchasing them? Were harps instruments that were consumed in the home for family occasions in Singapore? Given his identity, that of Portuguese descent, was Adrien able to earn a living by servicing a Eurasian or European or even local community or all of them? Or was he simply a delivery person, whose task that fateful day was a harp? Unfortunately, lack of sufficient clues or information at this stage does not fare any better by his unfortunate demise.

F.S. Marryat who visited Singapore in 1843 and had this to offer of social activities and entertainment on the island:

*Singapore, like all new settlements, is composed of so mixed a community that there is but little hospitality and less gaiety. Everyone is waiting to ascertain what is to be his position in society and till then everybody is too busy making money. The consequence is that a ball is so rare that it becomes the subject of conversation for months.*

It should not surprise us that news of a visiting performer is significant enough to occupy the front page of this issue of the Chronicle in 1830:

*Signor Vicenti Tito Masoni, an Italian, lately arrived from the Courts of South America, Professor of Music, vocal and instrumental, begs to offer his services to the Public, to give lessons on the Violin, or Piano, in Singing and Composition of Music. His terms for instructing in any of the above accomplishments are 12 Spanish dollars per month each pupil to engage for 3 months certain – in which time he promises a speedy progress as his method of instruction is very simple and most comprehensive. In order to be enabled to reside here, he wishes before entering into engagement to (procure) the names of twelve persons as desirous of receiving lessons. The pupils will receive instruction at their own houses at such times as will be most convenient to themselves. Signor Masoni wishes further to have the honour of introducing Philharmonic Concerts in this Settlement, as he has done in Peru, Chile and Buenos Aires, once a month. He further begs those Ladies or Gentlemen who wish to receive Lessons will determine soon as in case sufficient numbers cannot be obtained, he proposes proceeding to Calcutta to practice his profession.*

However, the acid-test of this Signor Masoni is a review of a concert given by him:

*Monday evening the 26th (26th April is presumed since the review appears in the 6th May issue), the European portion of the Settlement were in a measure enlivened by the performance at a Concert which was numerously and respectably attended both by “the beauty and the fashion” as well as by most of the Gentlemen of the Settlement. This pleasing innovation on our ennui originated and was conducted by Signor Masoni,*
whose advertisement appears in our last and Madame Petit de Biller, a French Lady, supported by 3 Amateurs. The Programme of the concert was as follows:

1st Part
An Overture of Rossini’s on the violin, by Snr. Masoni, accompanied by 2 Amateurs on flutes
Duet from Barbero de Sevilla, sung by Snr. Masoni and an Amateur
Cavatina in the Opera of Elizabeth, sung by Madame Petit, accompanied on the piano by Snr. Masoni
Concertante of Duport’s on the Piano Forte by Snr. Masoni and flute by an Amateur

2nd Part
Duet composed by Snr. Portagallo, sung by Snr. Masoni and an Amateur
Grand Duet of Forvaldo and Doriska, sung by Madame Petit and Mr. Masoni with piano accompaniment
Beautiful variations on “Hope told a flattering tale”. Composed by Snr. Masoni and performed on the violin accompanied by two amateurs with flutes

We should be acting an ungracious part were we to attempt to criticise any part of the performance, especially as we believe it gave general satisfaction to the auditors—We should rather praise such an effort to arouse the public especially on the part of the Amateurs who willingly came forward. Madame Petit sung her part with great skill and feeling and Signor Masoni’s performance on the violin deserves our highest commendation; in such a masterly manner did he perform on that instrument that every person in the room must have admired his skill and execution. We understand that Sig. Masoni purposes giving more concerts occasionally should be enabled to remain in the Settlement. We are also informed that the Performance commenced at 7 o’clock and finished at about 10 in the evening.

Signor Masoni was also to weave his charms on the inhabitants of St. John’s Island:
On the evening of the 9th (this review appears in the Singapore Chronicle 17 June) Signior Masoni again delighted the lovers of Music in this Settlement, with a display of his capabilities on the Violin, and assisted by the Amateurs, who so kindly lent their aid on a former occasion, produced a Concert of Music, vocal and instrumental, which for some hours beguiled the time of “Life’s dull round” and put us in mind of former days. We are and ought to be thankful to any one who will halt and step in, whilst passing St. John’s Island, for the purpose of amusing us, and trust the encouragement SNR. MASONI may receive will give him no just reason to repent having, for a time pitched his tent among us. The Evening’s entertainment commenced with a Turkish Overture composed by SNR. MASONI, who assisted by three Amateurs, two on the flute and one on the violin, performed this novel piece with spirit and effect. We are informed that the young Gentleman who in this piece played the alto violin has not been more than two
months under the Professor’s instructions; if so, it says much for the Master, as well as the scholar for he sustained his part with much ability and without embarrassment. The selection was wholly Italian, consisting of nine parts. The Cavatina for the Opera L’Anese del Celebre Puen was sung by Madame petit De Biller in an enchanting manner (SNR MASONI presiding at the piano). This lady’s voice is not powerful but full of sweetness, harmonising it well with the chords of the instrument. In the second part of the Entertainment this Lady and Signior sang a duet from Rossini’s Gaza Ladra. The accompaniment on the piano by Masoni was, we hear, of his own composing. But what shall we say of the Professor’s variations on Robin Adair. It is well known that he has led orchestras not only in Italy, but also in the capital cities in South America and we really think that he might go to London or Paris and meet with few who could surpass him in that most difficult of instruments. The Piece was, rapturously applauded—after which, at the request of the company he played “extempore the variations of Nel cor piu. We really feel inadequate to express in sufficient terms...of this finished performance. He produced the tones of a flute, clarinet, flageolet and hautboy, in rapid succession and imitated the notes of various birds. Not a whisper could be heard throughout the room “silence seekest pleasure” At the termination, a spontaneous burst of applause from all parts of the room assured the Professor that his merits were duly appreciated. We conceive the thanks of the Settlement are justly due to the highly gifted Amateur who we know patronised SNR. MASONI’s on his first arrival his own exertions have been unceasing and we trust will not now be relaxed as the “life of dullness and monotony” is fairly broken.12

Masoni’s brief excursion gave rise to a visit by a relative of his in 1833:
The Italian musical performers who so lately delighted the society of Macao have arrived here on the ship Allalevie on their way to Calcutta. We understand they propose giving a concert tomorrow evening (Friday 1 November 1833) and that arrangements are in progress to that effect. From the acknowledged talents of the leader, M. Planel, a relative of Snr. Masoni’s and indeed of the other performers, we have no doubt the community will enjoy a musical treat but seldom to be met here.13

Like Masoni, Planel and his musical entourage did not disappoint:
The concert which we noticed in our last as about to take place was well attended on Friday evening notwithstanding the high price of tickets—3 Dollars. M. Planel, the lion of the evening, performed some most difficult pieces on the violin which were deservedly applauded; he likewise accompanied Mesdames SchIERONI and Caraveglia on the piano; whilst they sang several fine Italian airs, both singly and in duet. The performances (Vocal) of those ladies were likewise much applauded, some of them being in our poor judgement, of most difficult accomplishment. We have no doubt the debut of this musical corps (And dramatic also at option) will meet in Calcutta, with that substantial patronage which they seek. M. Planel bids fair to emulate Snr. Masoni in talent and skill and if his exertions be crowned with similar success we will term him a fortunate
man. We understand Snr. Masoni realised 40 000 Sicca Rupees during his stay in the ‘City of Palaces’.

As far as the Singapore Chronicle is a source of information, Masoni completely disappears from the discourse but reappears in the news in England in 1834:

The friends and admirers of Masoni will be delighted to hear that he is making a most favourable impression in the first musical circles in England. The ears of Royalty have been gladdened by his strains, and the chief professors and amateurs have contributed him to notice. The following is from the Brighton Gazette, but we hope to find something in the London papers of a latter date, shewing that so favourable a commencement has had a pleasant sequel. Ought not the European community of Calcutta to blush that they permitted so highly gifted a musician to quit them, and that too in a state of poverty and distress; let them take a lesson from this and learn to appreciate talents which they have at their command. A Florentine named Masoni, about 35 years of age has recently arrived in this country from Calcutta, and we perceive by accounts in the Foreign journals that his musical fame as a violinist, has spread through the eastern world. The Bengal papers which we have seen, speak in rapturous terms of his performance; and give accounts of overflowing houses on his departure from that country. Masoni arrived in Brighton last week; and through the recommendation of the Earl of Munster and Lord Burghersh, was honoured with the command of their Majesties to perform before them on Friday evening, at the Palace. He commenced with a piece of his own composition, “Introduzione Polonesa” and then played an overture of his own “La Graciosa” which elicited much applause; but in the variations of Rossini’s celebrated “Non piu mesta” in which he was accompanied by Sir George Smart, his talent was more particularly developed. This piece was executed in a style for pathos, precision and brilliancy of execution, has we should say, scarcely been equalled. Lipinski’s music, it is well known abounds with difficulties; but it was easily accomplished by Masoni. Paganini’s pizzicatos, harmonics, tenths and chromatic double shakes were performances in which he stood pre-eminent; but we question whether Masoni does not surmount such difficulties as triumphantly as Paganini; the difference appears so trifling, that we scarcely know to which the distinction should be awarded. Masoni’s arpeggios and rapidity of his staccatos are indeed extraordinary; in these two particulars, he may be said to excel Paganini. Sir George Smart, who accompanied him on the piano, was evidently much gratified; and his performances were often interrupted by the approbation of the Royal party. We believe that Masoni will play again before their majesties on Friday evening. We augur from the above that this musician is likely to create a sensation in the musical world and we hope to hear him perform in public previously to his departure from Brighton.

Much less is heard of M. Planel.
Another rich source of documentary evidence is to be found in Charles Buckley who records a review of the performance of *She Stoops to Conquer* in the Singapore Chronicle of July 1834:

Judging from the loud and continued plaudits of a respectable and well-filled house, it afforded universal satisfaction. To say that the amateur performers acted their parts well is only doing them bare justice...to the amateurs who, though few in number, delighted the audience with several *Italian* overtures and some of Rossini’s best airs, the community must feel much indebted. Their kindness is the more to be felt, as had they not volunteered their services, the manager must have had recourse to those indefatigable scrapers of cat-gut, commonly known as the *Malacca Fiddlers*, whose exertions, we know well, would have destroyed all the harmony felt on so agreeable an occasion.\(^{16}\) This is the first we hear of what in all seriousness would have been a strong ensemble. Evidently, their performance left Buckley with a somewhat different reception. On the 18\(^{th}\) April, 1844, when *Miss in her Teens* or the *Medley of Lovers* and Fortune’s Frolic was performed, the Singapore Free Press observed how the pleasures of the evening were much enhanced by the performance of the *Amateur Orchestra*, which played some beautiful overtures with great skill and effect. It is seldom indeed that a small place like Singapore can boast of such a large number of really scientific and accomplished musicians as the gentlemen who so kindly lent their aid on Thursday.\(^{17}\)

The Singapore Free Press, in reviewing *The Conquering Game* and *The Mummy* on 27 November 1845, also recalls the Amateur gentlemen who attended the orchestra deserve the highest praise, the music was exquisite, and perhaps no part of India, of the same limited extent as Singapore, can boast of an equal number of efficient performers. The proprietors of the theatre ought to be...very grateful for the assistance of these gentlemen. It gave us great pleasure to see the house so well filled and graced with the presence of all the beauty and fashion of the Settlement.\(^{18}\) A Singapore Free Press review of a performance of the 27 September 1846 of *Damp Beds and My Young Wife* and *Old Umbrella* makes a small but telling comment that the excellent music of the 21\(^{st}\) Regiment’s Band added not a little to the evening’s entertainment.\(^{19}\)

While every opportunity is made to luxuriate in detail with regard to musical activity and performance here in Singapore, it is doubtful that the same observations are made in England. Burton Benedict’s article on ethnic identities through visual symbols at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851 informs us the Malay Archipelago was represented by only three exhibits consisting of Dyak barkcloth, natural products and the model of a pirate boat. (*Catalogue II* (note 10, 588)).\(^{20}\) We are not told of the details of the natural products but the nefarious activities of the pirates in their now infamous boat were already well-described and deplored in the early accounts of the Singapore Chronicle.
Of the entries on musical activities in Turnbull's work, there appears in her discussion of social life at the turn of the century, when Singapore "was a cosmopolitan city but largely an Anglo-Chinese preserve." It was a time when "for the affluent, life was becoming more pleasant."²¹ Again, Turnbull looks towards the existing clubs and the rise of news ones as an indication of the need for entertainment:

Liveliest of all was the German Teutonia Club, the centre of European social life and of musical activity, which had a strong following among the Western community at the turn of the century.²²

Charles Buckley records how in 1856, the German Club called the Teutonia Club, was started on the 28th June by about seven members and the first committee was composed of Otto Putifarcken, Arnold, Otto Meye, and Franz Kustermann. It was opened in a house in North Bridge Road behind where Raffles Hotel now is, but a little way further towards Rochore than the end of that building...it was moved to Blanche House which is still standing on Mount Elizabeth, near the present Club building. The first club house was built in 1862 and many entertainments were given in it.²³

In 1857, a fund-raising event for the Calcutta Relief Fund included:

Members of the Teutonia Club [who] gave a vocal and instrumental concert for the benefit of the Calcutta Relief Fund, in the Masonic Hall of the “Lodge Zeitland in the East” which was kindly placed at their disposal by the Brethren for this benevolent occasion...Each of the two parts of the Programme commenced with an overture—the first Guillaume Tell by Rossini and the second Stradella by Flotow both well executed by the 38th M.N.I which was in attendance by the kind permission of the Officers of the Regiment...the solo on the Violin cell with piano accompaniment, Fantasie de l’Opera de Lucia de Lammermoore, arranged by Mr. Laville was excellent and greatly relished...the solo Das Muehlrad was splendidly given and we were particularly taken by the charming little duett Das Maigloechchen which was sung beautifully and rapturously encored...and many other pieces. But it was in the Quarietta that the power of the club was seen or rather felt to the greatest advantage ...the proceeds of this concert will form no insignificant item in the column of Singapore subscriptions to the Calcutta Relief Fund...²⁴

Evidently the Liedertafel in 1856 boasted amateurs of some considerable talent for their performances, including vocal solos, duets and quartets by the Germans must have been the envy of the non-German audiences as the Singapore Free Press states:

...we are sure that many, besides ourselves, who were delighted listeners last night to the perfect harmony and admirable effects produced by trained vocalists singing together in parts must have envied that portion of the German system of education which adopts music ... as a branch of itself.²⁵ The review made a subtle awareness of the difference in national cultures with concluding remarks Nothing tends to soften
national asperities or to strengthen national alliances, as the inter exchange of such benevolent actions.”

In the *Singapore Free Press* editorial on the formation of the Singapore Amateur Musical Society (S.A.M.S) in 1865, competition is sensed between the Liedertafel and S.A.M.S as evident in a writer’s exhortation that both societies would soon appear before the public in the harmless rivalry with the members of the German Club.

We come across another musical organisation in the context of advertisements of the *Savage Club* in the 1862 season presenting *On and Off*, *Number One Round the Corner*, and *Cool as a Cucumber*. *The Singapore Amateur Instrumental Association* will kindly assist on this occasion. This instrumental ensemble reportedly assisted in the concluding season of the *Savage Club*’s performances at Barganny House on Thursday and Friday, 11\(^\text{th}\) and 12\(^\text{th}\) December 1862 in performances of *Plot and Passion*, and the Burlesque of *Fra Diavolo or the Beauty and the Brigands*. We were also told that this would come with original music and new scenery, dresses and appointments. The Straits Times review of the last regular performance of 13 December 1862 is interesting in one respect; the glaring omission to mention details of musical assistance of *Plot and Passion*, and the Burlesque of *Fra Diavolo or the Beauty and the Brigands*.

Charles Buckley informs us that from time to time, in Singapore small parties for practising music had been formed, but had never attained any length of life. Buckley precedes his discussion on the Amateur Musical Society that appears in the chapter "1865": in this year the Amateur Musical Society was formed among the English community. He notes the *Amateur Musical Society* was formed among the English community and mustered about thirty to forty members. *The German Teutonia Club* had its *Liedertafel* for some years before. The high tenor voices of Mr. Otto Puttfarcken and another were of invaluable service and the singing of the club was unusually good. After they left, the Liedertafel was fortunate in having Mr. Bremer among their number; he had a powerful high tenor voice and used to sing the leading melody clearly, over the voices of the other twelve or fifteen members. There has rarely been a singer like Mr. Bremer in Singapore and he was always ready to help. On one occasion in the Town Hall he sang Balfe’s “Come into the Garden Maud” in a way those who heard it often spoke of afterwards.

The Amateur Musical Society was conducted at first by the organist of St. Andrew’s Cathedral but it was Mr. Neil Macvicar (a book-keeper with Martin, Dryce and Co.) who in 1860 used to play the piano accompaniments and keep musical activity going. According to a Singapore newspaper, Mr. Macvicar was presented with a watch and chain as a *slight momento* by the trustees of St. Andrew’s Cathedral for playing the organ for ten months to the congregation at the cathedral. Buckley also elaborates on the
presence of a small amateur orchestra. The D’Almeida family was the musical nucleus of the place. With the formation of an Amateur Dramatic Society in 1860, the amateurs, which included two of the D’Almeida family, got together a small orchestra for the purpose of playing at the performances. The Dramatic society was called the Savage Club and they rented Braganny House which was close to Tank Road, which had a large centre room. Performances were held regularly for several years we are told and good standard plays, including some Shakespeare and modern comedies like “Still waters run deep” in a very capable way. It was a private entertainment for the subscribers only. Given the limited audience capacity, a performance was given twice so that the first part of the alphabetical names were asked the first time and the remaining part to the second performance. Mr. Jose d’Almeida played the viola, Dr. Robertson, Mr. Edward d’Almeida and Mr. G.H. Brown the violins, and Mr Knight, the violincello. There were one or two more; but their names are not remembered.

We are informed this first Amateur orchestra, which did not consist of more than about six players, played at the first concert of the Amateur Musical Society on Thursday, 28th December 1865. Included among the works performed were the Overture to the ‘Caliph of Bagdad’ and Haydn’s first Quintett. Given that the Society comprised only male voices, members sang part songs in a way described:

In these days they seem as rather curious musical efforts, for they were sung from the usual setting for unequal voices, so that the tenors were often, if not usually, singing above the music written for the trebles and the basses above the altos. However, it was thought satisfactory for ‘the good old days’ as Mr. R.O. Norris always expresses it. The German Club singers on the other hand sang from the music arranged for male voices, and having Mr. Bremer’s powerful voice to lead, it was musically correct. There was a quartett; and a duet The Larboard Watch well sung by the two brothers Thomas and Charles Crane, who are both now living in England; and the newspaper paid compliment to the singing of one solo, the Village Blacksmith in which the compiler of this book made his first appearance and sang the first solo, it is believed, in the Town Hall; but he was soon afterwards eclipsed at the future concerts of the Society, by Mr. William Hole, at the present day in Johore who had a much better voice. A negro melody and Locke’s old music to Macbeth, sung in a remarkable manner that has been described, ended this, the first concert in Town Hall...the amateurs were informed in print, by the musical critic of the newspaper that it was a splendid treat.30

Locations for performances are somehow a mystery until clues are provided in some form of documentation. In the newspapers of the period, performance venues are a glaring omission. Phan Ming Yen’s research in 2000 uncovered surprising venues long forgotten. In the 19th century, the site of the Old Hill Street Police Station was also the location of the Assembly Rooms, in a building that was the main public meeting space for the European society between 1845 and 1856:
Although built as a police station and barracks, the significance of the Old Hill Street Police Station (OHSPS) today as the headquarters of the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) lies in the history of the site: a site once associated with entertainment and education. It was here, between 1845 and 1856, the Assembly Rooms, a space for public functions and a building that housed a theatre as well as a school, once stood.  

Phan Ming Yen notes that the details on the Assembly Rooms can be found in Charles Burton Buckley’s *Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* which was written in 1902. Buckley mentions a map lithographed in London in 1854, in a very dilapidated state which is interesting as showing exactly where the old Assembly Rooms were.  

A copy of the map is currently available at the National Archives of Singapore and it does indeed indicate the location of the Assembly Rooms as being where the Old Hill Street Police Station stands now. Further research in the course of this work has also revealed that among the performances that took place in the Assembly Rooms include a vocal recital by the then well-known British soprano Catherine Hayes (1825 - 1861) and a violin recital by Martin Simonsen. Eventually, the main performing space for both theatricals and music was to be shifted over to the Town Hall (present day Victoria Theatre) that was completed in 1861 and handed over the Municipal Commissioners in 1864.

The Town Hall had been built with funds raised by public subscription supplemented by the government as well as funds raised through amateur theatricals. The venue comprised two halls: the Lower Hall (or Lower Room) which served as a Theatre and the Upper Hall (or Upper Room) which was used for concerts. The Upper Hall must have been a space with good acoustics for even in the 1930s, Edwin Arthur Brown still had fond memories of it, calling it one of the most perfect rooms, acoustically, that it has ever been of my lot to sing in. It was perfect and I am certain that there were no halls in the East like it. Rental of the Town Hall for performances was a source of revenue for the Municipality although receipts do not always indicate the frequent use as for most of the engagements, no charge is made. The Municipality had used the Town Hall for its offices until 1892, after which it moved to a new building near Finlayson Green, vacating the Town Hall solely for public use.

We learn that an amateur musical society has been organised under the conduct of Mr. Fentum the organist and choir master of St. Andrew’s Cathedral with about thirty to forty members. The writer of this latest piece of information also delivers the fledgling ensemble cautionary advice:

*Such musical establishments have been established from time to time but have always failed for want of a good leader; a good desideratum which is now amply supplied. Mr. Fentum has had some practice in conducting such bodies and we understand proves an excellent leader. We wish the enterprise every success. There is more musical talent amongst us than people imagine and it only requires good management to be fully*
developed. Some of the musical societies previously established failed in consequence of the members being unwilling to sacrifice other past times to music; at first the meetings were regularly attended but gradually they were neglected and in the end had to be abandoned. Eight or nine years ago, when the Philharmonic Society sprang into existence it was joined by at least forty members, among whom were many excellent instrumentalists, and with very little practice some excellent music was discoursed, but alas! in a few months, when the novelty wore off, every now and then one or two members absented themselves on a plea of dining out or being otherwise engaged; and finally it not infrequently happened that second fiddle or flute; or first violin or basso met to play Haydn’s Symphonies or some grand concerted music. The end under such circumstances was inevitable, and in about twelve months of its birth the society died a natural death. In 1862, the rivalries of the two dramatic corps gave an impulse to the musicians and two musical societies started but soon then to meet the fate of the first. If invitations to dinner were refused persistently on the grounds that they interfered with musical meetings, people would learn to recognise the claims of the Society as paramount and take care to invite the members on off nights. We believe that musical powers are equally distributed among mankind; and that the English in Singapore are likely to be quite as successful as their neighbours, if they will but persevere. We have as journalists placed before the members of the Amateur Musical Society the rocks upon which their predecessors split and trust that they may steer clear of them under the skilful guidance of their accomplished helmsman and soon appear before the public in harmless rivalry with the members of the German club.

Whatever harmless rivalry meant, either as musical or cultural competitors, we are witness to the proposal of a concert by the Amateur Musical Society: We believe propose giving a vocal and instrumental concert on the 28th December. We should like to see at the first concert the members of the German club giving their more inexperienced brethren a helping hand by singing a chorus or two; it would look well to see the young society start under such auspices.

The Amateur Musical Society gave its concert on the 28 December 1865. Excerpts of the concert review are presented below::

Hail Smiling Morn, Carnivale and Gipsy Chorus were vociferously cheered and the last was encored...the solo was a success for a first appearance of the singer who acquitted himself admirably. We cannot say too much in favour of the piano solo although performed upon not the best of instruments. The quartet was exceedingly well sung and we only regretted that more part songs did not appear on the programme...although the Quintett was well executed, it grew tedious and it was clear that, both musicians and audience were very glad that the last chord was struck. A set of lively waltzes or a polka would have given greater satisfaction. Such severe music as Haydn’s quintets, played even by the most skilful musicians, is never popular. Grand old Locke’s Macbeth proved the gem of the evening as we anticipated. The tenor solos were splendid...the choruses
were given with great precision and had it not been for their length would undoubtedly have been encored. The chief tenor solo deserved repetition and we were surprised that it was not called for. The rest of the pieces went off well. We think a comic song or two would have enlivened the evening. We know that one of the amateurs could have given a smart Irish ditty in that line if he had pleased...we should not forget to mention that the concert room was tastefully decorated and by the introduction of a set scene behind the singers their voices were thrown well forward and could be distinctly heard at the furthest end of the room.42

Events surrounding the 28 December 1865 concert inform us of a new ensemble amidst cautionary warnings of a disciplined need to sustain musical activity and exhortations of redemption of English pride in the face of a rival German Club through musical activity. Events surrounding the concert of the 3rd May 1866 make startling revelations of attitudes of the British towards the localised Chinese community in Singapore. For Phan Ming Yen, among the earliest instance of the practice of music was an occasion of the assertion of colonial power could be found at the second concert of the Singapore Amateur Musical Society (S.A.M.S) on 1 May 1866 for the benefit of the Chinese Paupers' Hospital.43 This institution was initiated by the wealthy Chinese merchant Tan Tock Seng who in 1844 had chaired a public meeting appealing to the government to build a pauper hospital.44 The hospital was opened in 1849 and located on Pearl's Hill built with funds mainly from private charity, a small property assessment, medical assistance, medicines, a financial grant from the government and a donation of $7,000 from Tan himself. The building fronted a swamp that was used as the town's main rubbish dump and it was a grim place where paupers where brought in with ulcers, sores and dropsy and mortality rate was high. As the hospital committee admitted in 1857: No-one will enter who can crawl and beg, unless compelled by the police. 45 At the time of the concert, the hospital was in a state of insolvency. According to the Singapore Free Press, although much had been done by the government and individual charities the hospital was still in debt. The newspaper argued that it was the duty of the government to prevent the hospital from closing but while it remained inactive the evil keeps ever increasing and demands instant steps to relieve it.46

This particular crisis became the motivation for a concert by the Singapore Amateur Musical Society. Much of the discourse surrounding the music and the hospital is made available in a review of the concert:

The second concert of the Amateur Musical Society...was given for the benefit of the Tan Tock Seng’s Hospital; an institution which is at present in a suit of insolvency, and unless strongly supported must be abandoned. The example set by our Amateurs...we trust will not be lost on the Chinese who are perhaps more interested in the matter than we are, as nine-tenths of the inmates of the poor house in question are of their country. The Chinese are naturally benevolent and will, we feel certain, respond heartily to the charitable exertions of the Europeans; they merely required a lead and are sure to
follow suit. The programme offers all lovers of music a splendid treat...We sincerely trust the effort of our Amateurs to revive one of the most important charities in our midst will be warmly responded to and supported. It would not be a bad idea for our Chinese friends to make a collection during the day, and add it to the proceeds of the concert. The public care of the destitute poor is an interest so distinct, so large and so much a matter in which all are concerned that we hail with pleasure any undertaking that is likely to tend towards their relief...But it was to provide fund to grapple with a peculiar form of human misery that the Concert was given by the Members of the Amateur Musical Society...namely in aid of the unfortunate wretches for whom Tan Tock Seng’s Hospital affords an asylum. This Institution founded years ago by an enlightened Chinaman as a refuge for his diseased and leprous fellow countrymen is somewhat deeply involved in debt and it is with difficulty that the necessary funds are found to carry out this undertaking of such immense local values and one whose object is not only to initiate means for curing the helpless beings to whom we have referred; but also to give them food and shelter, thereby preventing them from lying about and infesting our streets with their loathsome presence. Much has been done by the Government and by individual charity in support of the hospital but a debt of some $3000 still remains a heavy burden upon its usefulness and we have good reason for thinking that unless the money is found to liquidate this sum, the whole institution must collapse. As we have before indicated, we deem it to be the duty of the Government itself to provide measures against such an event occurring...the Chinese inhabitants themselves seeing that it is they who are chiefly benefited by the hospital and probably if the long talked of transfer takes place, something of this kind may be done. But in the meantime while Government is inactive, the evil keeps ever increasing and demands instant steps to relieve it. We were well please therefore to perceive last night on entering the Concert Hall such a large assemblage of our fellow residents present, and hope that the Amateurs will be able after paying their own expenses to hand over a considerable sum for the hospital. The Hall itself was decorated with great taste and the groups of evergreens intermixed with the roses all the way down the sides of the room had an exceedingly pretty effect, and does the utmost credit to the designer. Our anticipations of an excellent entertainment were by no means disappointed and we consider that the marked improvement both in music and in singing, since the first public appearance of the Amateurs shows what pains they have been at to acquire a complete knowledge of their parts.

The Overture Il Barbiero di Seviglia was excellently played and elicited applause. The Glee Spring-time was sung in capital time and with expression, The Octett, being an entirely new piece was well-received and we were surprised it was not encored—All among the Barley was tastefully rendered and seemed to please the audience. The duet All’s Well an old favourite of most people, was sung with exquisite taste and we shall be glad to hear the gentlemen another time performing together. The solo The Birdcatcher, composed by the conductor of the Society, was sung with good effect, and
on an encore being called for the audience, was favoured with the Last Rose of Summer. Though we should have preferred to have heard the first one, again, God Bless the Prince of Wales, a solo and chorus, closed the first part of the evening’s entertainment and was executed with great taste and feeling. The Second part began according to programme with “Scotch Airs” but unfortunately the instruments being rather flat, the effect was not so good as was anticipated, still in this country it cannot be expected that any thing will remain long in tension and therefore the slight failure in Pot Pourri must be attributed to the slipping of the violin pegs, and perhaps an unfortunate turn of the flute in the wrong direction. We were very much pleased with the Songs Phillis is my only joy, and the singer acquitted himself well and was deservedly encored. We pass over the Glee, Winds gently whisper and make a few remarks upon the Trio, When shall we three meet again, and we congratulate the singers upon their success. It was very well performed and we trust to see the same Trio in another piece of the same descriptions. The Laughing Chorus was the piece that pleased us the most and it was vociferously encored. After the Gipsy Chorus a short speech was made by the Honorary Secretary stating that in compliance with a special request made by the committee of the Agri-Horticultural Society an extra concert would be given on the 17th instant in aid of the Botanical Gardens, by that owing to the time being somewhat short, it would of course be impossible to prepare many new pieces; consequently he begged that the audience would not be disappointed if several which had been produced on a former occasion should again be brought forward. This announcement was received with much applause. The evening concluded with God Save the Queen!

We may add that we do not think that the S.A.M.S could have found a better object that the Gardens on which to bestow the proceeds of their next meeting, and we hope that the public will respond as heartily to the second call upon them as they did last night, we may also suggest that the concert be given in the Mess House at Tanglin which we believe possesses a fine hall for that purpose. The Singapore Free Press of 13 September 1866 reported of a concert held on Tuesday, the German Liedertafel and the Amateur Musical Society joined together in the Town Hall in a concert of sacred and secular music for the benefit of the Singapore Institution school…the singer (compiler of the book) who sang the bass recitative and air “the people that walked in darkness” from Handel’s Messiah reportedly garnered his first encore. Buckley mentions Mr. David Rodger who was judged not a musical man but who probably attended the concert to please Mr. Macvicar who was book-keeper in his firm, who did not think anything of that song, for it sounded like a man groping about in the dark, and there was no tune in it. For Buckley, it was a curious appreciation, quite unintended of the genius of Handel.

The name G.B. Fentum seems to have garnered more than a passing mention: Last night Mr. Fentum gave his Concert of Classical And Secular music at the Town Hall; he was honoured by the presence of Governor and Lady Ord, but we are sorry to
say by a very small audience, of whom a large proportion were ladies. The concert opened with a chorus *Rhine Song* by Mendelssohn, sung by the members of the **Singapore Amateur Musical Society**. Then came Mendelssohn’s Second Concerto in D minor for the Piano Forte with **Band accompaniment**. A Solo by Kucken “the Maid of Judah” was next well sung by the principal baritone of the German Musical Society. The Trinklied by Marschner, a German drinking song, followed and obtained the first encore of the evening for the members of the **Liedertafel**, who then sang another part song, concluding the first part. Some well-known airs from Norma, arranged for band and Piano.\(^{50}\) We are even offered a brief review of G.B. Fentum’s recital the next week: Among the public amusements in addition to the Races, Mr. Fentum, the talented organist of the Episcopalian Church gave a concert on 30th April which was fairly attended and very successful.\(^{51}\) Mention of Fentum again appears in a review of concert: *Mr. Fentum’s Concert at the Town Hall last evening under the patronage of H.E The Governor and Lady Ord was one of the best given that have been given here for some time past.*\(^{52}\)

The reorganisation of the Madras Army had immediate consequences for supplying entertainment for the public at large via the medium of the Band. One of the most notable achievements of the **Singapore Amateur Musical Society** was the formation of such a Band. During the 1870s, the Band of the Musical Society gave a number of concerts. We are given some idea of this when it is reported in the Singapore Daily Times on the 20th March 1874. *The Band of the Singapore Musical Society will give their first public performance weather permitting at 5 o’clock tomorrow, afternoon on the Esplanade.* We learn a little more from the concert preview given on the day itself – 21st March 1874:

*A New Band, the members of which style themselves from the Singapore Musical Society, are to make their debut in public this afternoon on the Esplanade, should the weather prove favourable. This establishment of this Band is an enterprise that should be viewed with favour by the community. Some time ago, subscriptions were taken for the support of a Band under the leadership of Mr. Iburg, who, after getting together a number of players and making arrangements to procure the necessary instruments, has been prevented by his departure from carrying out his intentions. The present Band is, however, the outcome of Mr. Iburg’s scheme; and as we understand they will be entirely dependent upon subscriptions and such employment as they may be able to obtain for their services at evening parties and entertainments, they deserve every encouragement.*\(^{53}\)

Programme details were made available in the Singapore Free Press where the Band gave performances presumably in the format of the Madras Native Infantry band concerts between 21 March and 25 April 1874. Curiously, we hear nothing of this Band after 1874.
Two visiting performers made their mark in Singapore in a series of concerts. Phan Ming Yen records that

*The concerts of the virtuoso Hungarian violinist Ede (Eduard) Remenyi (1828 - 1898) who was a friend of Liszt and whose playing was said to influenced Brahms' Hungarian Dances, in Asia in 1886 does not seem to have been recorded elsewhere. Remenyi had performed in India and then subsequently in Singapore, China, Japan, Saigon and Manila in 1886. His first concerts in Singapore on 1, 2, 4, 5 and 8 June 1886 drew much considerable excitement and publicity from the Singapore press and public. See The Straits Times (ST) 16 February 1886, 28 and 31 May 1886 for pre-publicity articles and ST 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9 June 1886 and SFP Vol. IV No. 25 12 June 1886 for reviews of the concerts. Later in the same year, Remenyi had returned to Singapore for three more concerts on his way back to Europe. His season in Manila, according to ST 26 October 1886, was "a great success artistically, but financially it fell short of what was confidently anticipated." Remenyi had scheduled two concerts on 25 and 27 November 1886 with a third that was organised based on the response from subscriptions, on 3 December. See ST 25, 26 and 29 November and 1, 2 and 4 December for pre-publicity and reviews and also SFP Vol. V No. 23, 27 November 1886 and Vol. V No. 24, 4 December 1886.*

Subsequently in 1896 Phan informs us that:

The Polish pianist Antoni Katski's (Antonie de Kontski) recital in Singapore on 20 January 1896 does not seem to have been recorded elsewhere except in the newspapers of the day. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* states that Katski (1817 - 1899) embarked on a world tour of East Asia, Australia and New Zealand in 1897 during which he died but makes no reference to his tour of 1896 during which he played in Singapore (Vol 10, p. 412). A composer and pianist, Katski was decorated by many kings in Europe and his playing was "characterised by great delicacy of touch and brilliance of execution (Singapore Free Press, 16, 18, 20 and 21 January 1896 and ST 21 January 1896 for pre-publicity and review of his recital). In fact, de Kontski’s concert of 20 January 1896 featured the *Andante, Scherzo, Presto Agitato of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata, Op.27 no.1* must have been inspiring enough to have facilitated a ‘second’ performance in a different medium. In an advertisement in the Singapore Free Press, 24 January 1896, the Band of the 5th Fusilliers, led by Bandmaster, J. Wallace, featured Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata on Saturday 25th January 1896 in the Botanic Gardens alongside their usual repertoire.*

One avenue to discover what significance Western/ Western Art music may have had for a community in Singapore is offered in an advertisement on Items for sale which includes the following:

**NEW MUSIC**
Summer Dreams Waltz
Dawning of Love
Inventions by Gautier
Ariadne by May Orleleere
Clytic “ “
Caro Fior by Moorat
Bon Tom Polka
Aimee Waltz
South Kensington Galop by Caroline Levithian
Hypatia Waltz
Idalia Waltz
Violin Music Popular Nigger Melodies
Ball Room Treasures, a collection of 60 Waltzes, Polkas, &c,
Bell Violin Music
65 Humurous and Motto Songs in one volume

Just as an unnatural death concerned the life and work of a man of Portuguese descent his profession, we believe being that of a musician, becomes the subject of a Court of Law, we read of another incident, where listening to music became the subject of an altercation with the Law. This case was mentioned in the Straits Law Journal, April 1889 of the case of E.P.C. Ralph v H.A. Chopard. This case was tried before Mr. Kershaw on the 8th and 9th March 1889, when the Magistrate dismissed the charge, at the same time, stating his reasons for his decision. Being subsequently asked to state his reasons in writing, he did so as follows; – The Defendant was charged with causing obstruction contrary to the Police Regulations, with regard to the traffic at the Town Hall at 10.30pm on the 7 March 1889 (sub-section 5 of section 31 of Ordinance I of 1872). The evidence shewed that on the night of the 7th March, when there was a performance going on in the Town Hall, the Defendant drove up to the door in a Ricksha and remained sitting in the Ricksha near the door. E.P.C. Ralph requested him to move on. He at first refused to do so but ultimately did move on driving away in the Ricksha outside Town Hall grounds. No other carriages drove up while this was taking place and no actual obstruction was caused and it was clear that the constable would never have arrested the Defendant if the matter had stopped at this stage. But after driving away the Defendant got out of the Ricksha and walked around to the back of the Town Hall and stood there on the road between the Town Hall and the Supreme Court, listening to the performance which was going on in the Town Hall. There was no traffic going on in the road, and the Defendant caused no actual obstruction, either to the public or the road, or to the persons entering and leaving the Town Hall. The constable told the Defendant to move on. The Defendant refused to do so and the constable arrested him. The question was whether the Defendant, by refusing to move on, had committed any offence. So far as regards the General Rules and Police Orders mentioned in sections 32 and 33 of “The Police Force Ordinance 1872” it appeared to me that no offence had been committed by the Defendant simply standing on the road and not moving on when requested to do so. If he had caused any obstruction or been
guilty of any disorderly conduct, the case would have been very different. By stopping the Ricksha at the entrance longer than was necessary, he probably committed an offence under section 19, sub-section 10 of the “The Summary Criminal Jurisdiction Ordinance, 1872,” but he was not charged under this Ordinance, and as, I thought he was wrongly arrested, I did not amend the charge; in my opinion it is an offence for a person to stop a Ricksha on the road longer than is necessary for the purpose of alighting, but no offence merely to stand on the road, provided no obstruction is caused. I therefore dismissed the charge.59

We are informed of the setting up of the Philharmonic Society in 1891. This is some distance from the presence around 1834 of amateurs who, though few in number, delighted the audience with several Italian overtures and some of Rossini’s best airs, the community must feel much indebted and another available ensemble described by Buckley as those indefatigable scrapers of cat-gut, commonly known as the Malacca Fiddlers, whose exertions, we know well, would have destroyed all the harmony felt on so agreeable an occasion.60 Mention is made of an Amateur Orchestra in 1844; a Singapore Amateur Instrumental Orchestra in 1862, Teutonia Club’s Liedertafel in 1859; a small orchestra, which included two members of the D’Almeida family for the purpose of playing at the performances for the Amateur Dramatic Society in 1860; the emergence of the Singapore Amateur Musical Society which for a while had a Band of the Wind band tradition initiated by Mr. Iburg initiatives prior to his departure while the Amateur Musical Society was associated with G. B. Fentum during its western art concerts.

In his thesis Music in Empire, Phan Ming Yen uncovers evidence of an Amateur Orchestral Society described by E.A.Brown in "Music" One Hundred Years of Singapore Volume Two p. 407. Here, Brown states that the an amateur orchestra was founded in 1884, and in 1888 he [Edward Salzmann] was made conductor. The orchestra gave a popular promenade concert in 9 May 1887, when an orchestra of twenty-seven played under three conductors, Mr J. E. Light, Mr Salzmann and Mr Galistan. The orchestra again is mentioned in reference to Salzmann becoming its conductor. Possibly the first mention of the orchestra is recorded in the Straits Times 8 January 1885 and the Singapore Free Press, 10 January 1885 Vol. 11. No.12 while first detailed mention of this ensemble can be found in a letter to the editor of the Singapore Free Press, 26 September 1865 Vol. III No. 13 information revealed is that the Eurasian community had formed a musical society called The Amateur Orchestra and they meet every Saturday evening to rehearse. The orchestra was subsequently affiliated with the Mutual Improvement Society, (SFP, 6 March 1886 Vol. IV No. 10) and gave a concert on 3 December 1885 (SFP, 2 January 1886, Vol. IV No. 1). At the orchestra's concert on 16 October 1886, the SFP had noted Galistan's role in the formation of the orchestra: Mr Galistan is at present the conductor of the Society which owes much to him, as one of those who started the orchestra from a small beginning … (SFP, 23
October 1886, Vol V No. 17). The Amateur Orchestral Society had initially been formed by members from the Eurasian community. Mr. Galistan was a bandmaster of the Military Department of the Johor government in late 1884. The Amateur Orchestral Society was not listed in the *Singapore and Straits Directory* until 1886. According to the directories for that year and 1887, Galistan was the conductor with Salzmann as sub-conductor. Salzmann became conductor in 1888 until 1890 (*Singapore and Straits Directory* 1888 p. 114, 1889 p. 152, 1890 p. 128). By 1891, the Singapore Philharmonic Society was formed and the Amateur Orchestral Society virtually dormant prior to the formation of the Singapore Philharmonic Society (*SFP*, 20 March 1891). However, this account is possibly the first time an Amateur Orchestra appeared in the public sphere in a level of coordination and formalisation unprecedented.61

Information about another philharmonic society appears albeit indirectly: *The members of the Philharmonic Society of St. Cecelia of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd are being entertained to a picnic at St. Edward’s Teluk Koro. Last year the least of the patron saint of the society (St. Cecelia) fell on...*(print not legible) November and as usual its members should have been entertained to a complimentary dinner, but the idea had to be abandoned owing to the vicar, who is ex-officio President of the society, being suddenly called away to Penang, on business and it was decided instead of a disaster to have a picnic and to have it on the anniversary of Singapore.*62 We are not sure if there is a continuation of this society for there is information that the Catholic Club put up an *important vocal and instrumental concert* on 8 February 1907 at the Victoria Memorial Hall at 9pm, under the direction of Mr. B. D’Cruz. Programme included the *Gloria* from *Mozart’s Twelfth Mass*, some good orchestra pieces and various vocal and instrumental solos. *We are also informed that several of the musicians of the Band of the Royal West Kent Regiment are permitted to assist the orchestra on this occasion.*

According to a report read at the first annual general meeting the Society in 1892, the Philharmonic Society was formed in February 1891 when a group of gentlemen met for its very purpose.63 Although the identity of the men were not stated in the report, one can assume from a *Straits Times* article on the society's first Musical Evening on 25 May 1891 that they included: St Clair, Salzmann, John Finlayson and John F. Craig.64 These four were the only personalities mentioned in the article on the formation of the society. Finlayson, a partner in the Boustead and Co and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce,65 was the first president of the society. Craig, later a representative of Syme and Co who, according to Walter Makepeace in *One Hundred Years* - was "greatly interested in music and took a large part in the organisation of the Singapore Philharmonic Society" became its secretary.66 A circular was issued on 18 March and within a month, 184 applications for membership were received.67 On 11 April, the *Singapore Free Press* had reported that the number of applications had come "quite up to expectations and it is already sufficient to ensure the success of the scheme, and more
are coming in everyday." On 16 April, the *Singapore Free Press* announced that a meeting of the General Committee of the society would be held on 17 April, adding that that there "has been a very gratifying response … and the membership of the society is being added to daily."

The first detailed account on the formation of Singapore Philharmonic Society is that of a lengthy leader that appeared in the 20 March 1891 issue of the *Singapore Free Press*. Here, Finlayson was announced as the president of the general committee of the society, while the governor, Cecil Clementi Smith, its patron. St Clair was editor of the *Singapore Free Press* at that time and the assumption can be made here that St Clair wrote the leader, for it has been noted that he held the leading article as the only important feature of a newspaper. Among the musical things he was noted for, first, he was *one of the best-known amateurs in the colony*. Walter Makepeace called St Clair a *skilful musician* in *One Hundred Years of Singapore* and made note of his great power in building up the social and artistic life of Singapore. According to Brown, St Clair made his first appearance in Singapore as a bassist at the 9 May 1887 concert by the Amateur Orchestral Society.

It needs to be emphasised that most of the orchestral ensembles were reliant on an organisation to supply some of its musicians with suitable approbation. It is not surprising that the Amateur Orchestral Society which was succeeded by the Philharmonic Society was brought about by a military bandsman. It seems that the only way in which orchestral or philharmonic forces were able to perform what they did was to be supported or supplemented by musicians from a regimental band. How important this fit is can only be gleaned from a newspaper article about developments in London: *From a home paper we learn that at last the French pitch is to be adopted instead of the unnaturally high one commonly called “Concert pitch”. It has been announced that this year the Philharmonic society in London will lower its pitch to the diapason normale or French pitch. Again, by the Queen’s regulations, all military bands are required to conform to the Philharmonic pitch. No doubt there is a good case here for a Parliamentary grant in aid, or even counties might handsomely come to the aid of their territorial regiments for it is by no means every regiment whose officers could so substantial an expenditure over and above ordinary band maintenance charges. Here in Singapore the matter is of great importance in the interest of local music…so as to improve the conditions under which orchestral music has at present to be played...* (emphasis mine)

How important this information serves its local situation can be deduced from preparations for a Popular Orchestral Concert on 8 April 1899, featuring the second and third movements of Mendelssohn's Second Piano Concerto in D minor, besides selections from Wagner's *Tannhauser* and two movements from a Haydn symphony. The orchestral forces employed for the concert numbered at 43 was comparatively large,
27 amateurs and 16 members from the band of the **King's Own Regiment**, the regiment stationed in Singapore then. The band members primarily supplemented the wind section of the orchestra for it was *naturally impossible to find in any musical community in the Far East more than a small number of Amateur players of wind instruments*. This is not the first time for either supplementary regimental support nor the concerto: *Last night Mr. Fentum gave his concert of classical and secular music at the Town Hall...Mendelssohn’s Second Concerto in D minor for the Piano Forte with Band accompaniment...Some well-known airs from Norma, arranged for band and Piano.*

This practice continued with the tearing down of the Town Hall into what is known as Victoria Theatre. The Singapore Philharmonic Society led by its president, W.G. St. Clair, was helped by Mr. and Mrs. Salzmann who sang and accompanied songs for children and were later to know to organise Children’s Concerts. The Eurasian presence, by now already established with the formation of the Singapore Recreation Club, was reinforced. In an advertisement dated 1905, we are informed in the Singapore Free Press in the 1905 Season that the second of the Series of Children’s Concerts will be given in the Town hall on Thursday 13 April, at 5.30-6.30pm. Heads of School please note. These concerts are for European and Eurasian children who are admitted free without ticket. Regimentoal assistance was also extended to the Children’s Concert series where a special "Children's Concert Fund" was set up based on donations of $1 or more from adults who wished to attend to cover expenditure on gas, bandmen's fees and transport, printing and incidental expenses. Another example of the Popular Orchestral Concert was one scheduled on 20 June and advertised on the 16th June 1905. The repertoire included Mendelssohn’s Overture to Son and Stranger, the Andante from Tchaikovsky’s 5th Symphony in E minor, La Reine de Saba by Gunoud; Mazuka Hungaroise, La Tzigane by Louis Ganne; Waltz, Geschichten des Wiener Wald by Strauss; and Romance Simple by Ambrose Thome. This concert we are told also included Instrumental solos and songs. Admission was free for members of the society. Tickets were available with seating plans at Robinsons. By 1913, however, the instruments and other equipment of the orchestra of the Singapore Philharmonic Society were thick with dust in a dark corner of William Graeme St. Clair's *Singapore Free Press* office.

By the late 19th century, there was an increasing number of Straits Chinese who were adopting Western customs, taking on to European sports and past times. In 1885 a Straits Chinese Recreation Club was founded and in 1897, Lim Boon Keng, a third-generation Straits Chinese born in Singapore who was the first Chinese Queen's Scholar and legislative councillor from 1895 to 1902, founded the Philomathic Society. Lim, together with Song Ong Siang, began The Straits Chinese Magazine in 1897, published in English, which *aimed to promote intellectual activity amongst the Straits - born people and will afford room for the discussion of useful, interesting and curious matters connected with the customs, social life, folk-lore, history and religion of the varied races who have made their home in this Colony.*
In 1898, Edward Salzmann wrote an article on Chinese music for the magazine as well as harmonised a Chinese melody. His judgement on Chinese music is startling:

*Now that the Chinese are evidently about to seriously compare their own methods, whether in warfare, Science or Art, with those of the western nations, it is probable that Music will also occupy the attention of the future professors and teachers of that art in China. It is well understood that Chinese music is, as music, in quite a rudimentary state...the European orchestra of the present day...must be allowed to be a most beautiful combination of musical sounds, even if the music played be beyond comprehension. Judged by this standard, Chinese music cannot stand. When we consider the instruments now in use, the want of system, and the discord of untuned notes, it must be admitted that no beauty can be claimed for Chinese music at the present time. It is but seldom that Chinese music has been written down in the western notation; a few attempts have been made chiefly in connection with Mission work...in the opinion of many people competent to judge, there is plenty of talent in music among the Chinese, if they were properly trained. Should they be begin to study the western system, there is little doubt but that before long a very great improvement would be heard.*

Amidst the excitement of organising these concerts, we find an interesting excerpt from the Straits Chinese Magazine (Vol.10, Issue 3, 9/1906) has a view on Western music and the Straits Chinese community:

*Whether Western music will be as popular with our Straits-born Chinese as football, e.g., is with Malays is a question of time, and of education. The signs of the times point favourably in this direction. The pianoforte is gradually being introduced into Chinese homes and the number of Chinese children who take lessons on it is gradually increasing. The violin is also becoming a popular musical instrument with our young people. Time was when Malay tunes played without notes was all a Chinese youth aspired to on the violin, but within the last ten years or so, the Straits Chinese have taken kindly to Western music, playing from notes. Singing is also beginning to be considered as an accomplishment. The pity is that no serious attempt has yet been made to organise singing classes for solo and chorus parts. Some years ago, the Chinese Philomatic Society has a music section, and for over two years, Mr. Salzmann as tutor, the violin class was making good progress when it had to be suddenly abandoned. Quite recently, a similar organisation has sprung up, under the name of the Straits Chinese Amateur Musical Society with a club house very handsomely furnished and with a strong membership for a time at Wallich Street. We would urge upon our people who have any taste for Western music to rally around this Society, which is yet in its infancy, and to give it encouragement by becoming active or subscribing members. For some inexplicable reason, our Chinese boys and girls are denied the privilege of attending the Children’s concert which are given from time to time by the Philharmonic Society. They are thus handicapped in their musical education. We ought therefore to do what we can to encourage any movement that has*
for its object the training and development of the minds of our people in this branch of the Fine Arts. 87

In fact, Phan’s research reveals that when in 1921 the orchestra of the then defunct Singapore Philharmonic Society was revived, upon St Clair’s return to Singapore following his retirement in 1916 from the Singapore Free Press, there appeared to have been a shift in attitude. 88 If in 1906 the Straits Chinese Magazine felt the Chinese community excluded from the Children's Concerts of the Philharmonic Society, now, in July 1921, there was an announcement that a concert that was largely in the nature of an experiment was to be given for the Asiatics. 89 Comprising a pleasant miscellaneous programme of a bright character the concert was at one level indeed an experiment for it was held in order to discover how far that will be to the liking of an Asiatic audience, of whom the Chinese will doubtless furnish a large majority. 90 For the Singapore Philharmonic Orchestra, the concert was a gift from the members of the Orchestra to all those Asiatics who may be able to appreciate the music presented for their entertainment. 91

However, beyond just an experiment, the Philharmonic Orchestra had hoped that the Asiatics will come to see that through the medium of such musical entertainments, there is on the part of the European lovers of music, a very real interest in the artistic progress of the non-European community. 92 In this manner, the orchestra hoped that the concert would create a genuine good feeling between the different classes of a very mixed community: and that in itself is an aim to be promoted and encouraged in every possible way. 93

According to both the Singapore Free Press and the Malaya Tribune the concert that was held on 22 September 1921 at the Victoria Theatre for the Garden Club and the Straits Chinese Recreation Club was well attended. The reviewer for the Malaya Tribune, a daily founded in 1914 by Lim Boon Keng and a group of Eurasians, found the programme excellently chosen and was of the right educational value. 94 The Singapore Free Press hoped that the success of the concert should make this effort the forerunner of many more. 95 A young schoolteacher at St Andrew's School named Tay Lian Teck played a violin solo in the concert. Tay would later become a Municipal Commissioner and Justice of Peace as well as a Legislative Councillor. 96

Alec Dixon in remembering the early 1920s informs us that Singapore’s most notable achievement in the field of amateur entertainment was, of course, the annual production of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera by the city’s Amateur Operatic Society. Among those who gave away their time and energies to these productions were Colonel Howard Tyte (Superintendent of Prisons), Captain Geoffrey Freyberg, R.N (Master Attendant), and Chief Inspector F. Minns (Bandmaster, Straits Settlement Police). Captain Freyberg, I
remember designed and produced some very convincing scenery and stage furniture for the production of H.M.S Pinafore. It is interesting to recall that, when the Society produced the Mikado, the Japanese Consul-General and other members of the Japanese community were most helpful in the matter of costumes and stage settings. Every year, after the final performance of the current opera, it was customary for members of the cast, wearing their stage costumes, to join in the dinner dance at Raffles Hotel. And I for one, shall long remember the colourful scene when the whole company of the Yeomen of the Guard marches on to the ballroom floor of Raffles with a flourish of halbers and a clatter of pikes. Apart from much home-produced entertainment, Singapore was regularly visited by professional theatrical companies, both English and American. Then there were the occasional visits of internationally famous artistes, among them Fritz Kreisler, Josef Hoffman, Anna Pavlova, and Clara Butt.⁹⁷

If Salzman had informed us of the ways in which Chinese music was made available in Western notation...made chiefly in connection with Mission work.⁹⁸ Consequently, we are informed that:  

The excellent unaccompanied singing of the little Chinese children of St. Andrew’s Medical Mission on their Prize Day on December 13th was a good illustration of what careful, patient teaching is able to accomplish. One feels too that a real Christian influence is being brought to bear in that small school of 40 children.⁹⁹

It should not surprise us to discover the ways in which western notation went quite well alongside Christian missionary zeal. We have noted a Philharmonic Society from the Cathedral of the Good Shephard (Catholic) although very little has been uncovered of its musical activities, repertoire, performances and ways in which it served missionary work. However, it is instructive that the sustained efforts at facilitating western art music (even if sometimes more English and more vocal and choral) seem to stem from personnel attached to St. Andrew’s Cathedral throughout the 19th century and even into the 20th century. The Cathedral Monthly Paper of St. Andrews in 1928 informs us that:  

The three performances of the Messiah on February 17, 20 and 21 were well patronised and were very well rendered. The soloists were Mrs. Battishill (Soprano), Mrs. Watson (contralto), J.W. Haines (tenor) and Roy Brown (bass). Mr. Thornley Jones was at the organ and the conductor was Mr. E.A. Brown. The chorus of about 100 strong did excellently and the orchestra with the help of members of the Duke of Wellington’s Band are to be congratulated on their efforts. Many of those attending must have heard the Messiah sung at home and by famous artists and massive choruses, but all will agree that this local performance was in every way worthy of the traditions connected with this oratorio, and was a real inspiration. We owe a great debt to Mr. Brown and those whom he trained for the patient labour that such an effort represents. We are sure they are amply repaid in knowing that they helped and inspired those who came to listen. The financial result will mean that the Organ Fund will benefit to the extent of about $400. This is mainly due to the system of programmes, which were sold for the
subscription performance on the last night. On the other two occasions the collections came to $117 and $175.\textsuperscript{100}

An Advertisement dated Saturday 5 April 1930 (p.7)

RAFFLES HOTEL
Monia Litter and his Orchestra
Programme for Sunday April 6 at 9.30pm
Overture La Princesse Jaune c. Saint-Saens
Opera Fantasy Faust C. Gnoud* (spelling in original)
INTERVAL
Valse Pathetique M.Baron
From the Opera Goal M. Mussorgsky
(The Fair at Sorochinsk)
INTERVAL
SUITE (From the Opera Ugeno Onegin) P. Tschaikow (missing the sky)
Valtz
Introduction and air of Lanski
Polonaise
GOD SAVE THE KING

Monia Litter and his orchestra were also at the Raffles for a different reason and function. We learn something of this ‘infiltration’, for instance in an article in the Straits Time 1500 invitations have been sent out by Sir Cecil and Lady Clementi for the dance to be held on 3 June in honour of His Majesty’s birthday...the Band of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Welsh Regiment and Monia Litter’s orchestra from Raffles Hotel will be present. The first dance will be at 9.45pm after which selections will be played by the regimental band. The second dance will be at 10.20pm. The subsequent items of the evening’s entertainment have been arranged with alternate dance music and selections by the regiment band until 12.40.\textsuperscript{101} The presence of Monia Litter and his orchestra need an introduction. Raffles Hotel advertised this group as being recognised as the best and most popular dance band east of the Suez.\textsuperscript{102} Quite clearly, Monia Litter was able to operate at two different performance modes when there was occasion to.

One of the most interesting spaces for further discourse is during one of the most traumatic periods of Singapore’s history, the Japanese Occupation. Although coverage was given to Western arts music activities during the Japanese Occupation in the Syonan Shimbun and although individual memoirs have made passing reference to such activities, little has been made out of these brief accounts. Cultural Medallion recipient Paul Abisheganaden recalled that Beethoven and Bach were the two composers who were revered as gods during the Japanese occupation and that a lot of music as promoted in the schools. There was an orchestral ensemble Syonan Kokkaido Orchestra, formed during the Japanese Occupation.\textsuperscript{103} But perhaps the single most comprehensive
account of Western musical activities of this period to date in recent times and in a public medium comes from Alex Abisheganaden, who lived through the war, in his article 'The Music Score' for The Straits Times in 1982. For Abisheganaden, it seemed that music came as a relief to the period or rather, there was a suggestion that music had the power to triumph over adversity:

*Though one would have expected the grim period of the Japanese occupation to stifle the sound of music in Singapore, this was not the case.*

That which was referred to as "music" by Abisheganaden was essentially Western art music. In fact, Abisheganaden makes a careful distinction as to the type of music that was allowed to be performed during the Japanese occupation. From his account, which one can assume to be from experience, it seems that a certain musical culture and musical taste had evolved which was dictated probably more by politics than by aesthetics:

*European classical music (as opposed to American or British) was not banned. In fact, during the war years, the Victoria Theatre (then named Syonan Kokaido) was the venue for weekly concerts by the Syonan Tokubetusi Orchestra with Walter Rayman as leader-conductor.*

Nevertheless, despite this form of censorship, from Abisheganaden's account, a lively musical scene seems to emerge in which the ability to perform or the knowledge of music was one held in some esteem by the occupying Japanese forces:

*The orchestra, comprising the best European and local musicians, gave two concerts each Sunday - the first at noon and the other at 3 p.m, at Tokyo Time (It was the practice during the Japanese Occupation to observe Tokyo time which was then 2 1/2 hours ahead of ours). The theatre was always packed for both concerts. In addition to a monthly pay, each player was also received one kati of rice, half a kait of sugar and five packets of Koa cigarettes! The manger of the theatre then was Paul Gerentzer, an excellent percussionist from Hungary who also served as concert arranger.*

Two concert programme leaflets, for a concert on 12 December and a pair of concerts on 25 and 26 December 1943, in Abisheganaden's possession reveal that the printed time of the concerts were from two to four pm and five to seven pm. While the programme leaflets were no more than a square piece of paper that measured 18.5 cm by 18.5 cm and containing a listing of the programme, information on the concert time and venue, much can be gleaned from these documents.

The Orchestra, as it was known in English, seemed to have been interchangeably called *The Augmented Syonan Orchestra* or the *Syonan Orchestra* or *Syonan Symphony Orchestra* and it was under the patronage of the Syonan Tokubetu-Si, the Japanese municipal government. Its concerts were billed as a *Popular Concert*. The choice of programme for both concerts bears out Abisheganaden's observations. Both concerts...
comprised music mainly by Italian, German and Hungarian composers, the only oddity being a Tchaikovsky piece, the Russians during the war being an enemy of the Axis powers. Both concerts inevitably included a Japanese work. With the exception of the overture, works performed were either mainly dances or dance-like in nature or songs, perhaps thus hinting that these concerts had as their aim to entertain or to lighten up the mood of its audiences. More significantly, the concerts were not entirely musical events. Both concerts included dance performances. The concert on 12 December, as printed in the programme leaflet, comprised the following:

Overture Euranthe Weber
Waltz Gold and Silver Lehar
Naga-uta Tsuru Kame
Fantazie Eugin Onegin Tchaikovsky
Slow Waltz Danced by Mrs Gerentser & Miss Vicky.

Interval

Trio Espana Danced by Mrs Gerentser & S. O. G.
Suite Dance of the Hours Ponchiellis
Saxophone Solo Valse Marilyn
Dance Hongroise Transcriptions by R Wiedoeff played by Gy. Kontor
Potpourri Gypsy Primas Kalman
Selection "Ryuko Uta"

Despite the musical restrictions, the programming strategy of the orchestra remained sensitive to the mood of the times. The programme for the concerts on 25 and 26 December for instance seemed to have borne in mind the Christmas season as it included Christmas songs and more dances than the earlier 12 December programme:

Overture Wilhelm Tell Rossini
Waltz Voice of Spring Strauss
Ko-uta Haru-same
Fantazie Inspirations of Beethoven Arranged by Urbach
(a) Thai Dance Danced by Miss Rozi Domingo
(b) Doll Scene at midnight Danced by Mrs Gerentser & Miss Vicky

Interval

Parade of the Tin Soldiers Danced by Miss Katinka Gerentser & S. O.G
Selection of Popular Christmas Songs Arranged by Rhode
Electric Guitar Solo (a) Ameno Blues
(b) Shina No Yoru

By Special Request 2nd Hungarian Rhapsody Liszt – Soloist J Dodo Mailinger
The orchestra was conscious of promoting forthcoming concerts hence the advertisements on the single leaflet. On the programme leaflets of the two aforementioned concerts, the orchestra announced a forthcoming Strauss recital. The December Strauss Recital was held on a Wednesday at 7 pm while the following Strauss recital was held on Saturday 1 January 1944 at 7 pm.

Lau Bian Chin, a piano teacher who lived through the Japanese Occupation also makes mention of Western art music activities during this time. In her privately published A Musician Remembers, Lau recalls a string orchestra comprising Chinese students and being invited to perform for wounded Japanese soldiers. Like Abisheganaden, Lau recalled that musicians were not allowed to play any works by British or American composers. And like Abisheganaden, Lau's memoirs hint at the power of music to transcend the harsh reality of the time:

*One day we had a lesson on the moon and the teacher asked if anyone could play the Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven. My friends and classmates pointed to me. The next day I played the Moonlight Sonata to the whole class on the class piano... A small string orchestra made up of Ong Kim Siong, Kathleen Yeo, Ong Kim Keat, me and others were formed... Later on we invited by our Japanese teachers to give a small concert to some wounded Japanese soldiers in the General Hospital... It was an awful sight to see the wounded soldiers some without legs or hands, but they liked our classical [sic] and some even ventured to smile a little and to clap warmly after our performance.*

Lau too refers to the Syonan Orchestra although she refers to David Apel and not to Reimann or Gerentser. Lau however is more specific about the composition and size of the ensemble:

*My friend, Marie Aroozoo’s piano teacher Mr David Apel, a Hungarian Jew formed a small orchestra of mainly East European Jews, and they performed every Sunday at the Victoria Theatre. This was free of charge and I used to attend these Sunday afternoon concerts quite often.*

Abisheganaden’s recollection of a "packed" hall for the concerts and Lau’s recollections of attending Sunday afternoon concerts often contrast with the Japanese side of the story. Shinozaki Mamoru who first served as a press attaché and then was later with the Syonan Tokubetu-Si as Chief Education Officer and Chief Welfare Officer. In his memoirs *Syonan My Story - The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*, he gives an account of a Singapore that is devoid of music. In fact, in the only section in his book in which he talks about entertainment, there is no mention of the Syonan Orchestra. The only time Shinozaki mentions an orchestra in his memoirs is on the occasion of the then Emperor Hirohito's birthday celebrations. Even then, he refers to the ensemble as being...
a Hungarian orchestra, perhaps because of the composition of its members. Yet, it is curious that he makes no mention of the orchestra being under the patronage of the municipality:

> I expect many Singaporeans can still remember that first Emperor's birthday celebrations. There was a concert at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Japanese music played by the Hungarian orchestra, and a Japanese opera by a troupe from Shanghai.\(^{113}\)

What Shinozaki notes, however, in the segment on entertainment, is the exclusion of the local population from the theatres:

> There was very little entertainment of any kind, no enjoyment. All the main theatres were reserved exclusively for Japanese soldiers. Unnecessarily, Singapore people were shut out of most luxurious bars and restaurants. Even had they been open to them few could have afforded to have gone inside; they did not have the money.\(^{114}\)

This detail sits poignantly with recollections by Alex Abisheganaden’s brother Paul who suggested that there was a greater promotion of music even in restaurants and cafes:

> Every restaurant had at least a pianist, if not a pianist and violinist or a guitarist who could sing. The bigger restaurants could even afford a small group of musicians and every evening there was community singing.\(^{115}\)

In fact, the only reference Shinozaki makes to recreation is the formation of a sports association which in contrast to Alex Abisheganaden's account of the Syonan Orchestra and which if Shinozaki's word is taken to be accurate, seems to have been a level-playing field among the population of Singapore then:

> One day, Professor Nakajima of Tokyo University, accompanied by Mr G H Kiat, came into my office and suggested that we form a sports association. I promptly agreed and so the Syonan Sports Association came into being. Lots of youngsters joined; we used the Jalan Besar Stadium. This was in fact the only institution where everybody was treated equally, Japanese, Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, Arabs - all were on exactly the same footing.\(^{116}\)

The *Syonan Sinbun* not only gave ample coverage to the orchestra but also to other performing arts activities providing much detail which informs us of what to expect from reading the papers beginning with a concert for the benefit of the wounded Japanese soldiers occupying central space:

> “If music be the food of love, play on, Says the Love-sick Duke Orsino in the opening lines of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. Last evening, wounded and sick Nipponese soldiers listened with rapt attention for a full three hours, squatted under a threatening sky on a wet quadrangle in the Syonan General Hospital, to a musical concert by the
Syonan Orchestra, directed by M.Gaza Gerenster, could well have said, “If music be the healing of all human ailments, then play on and on!” The present reviewer is not a musical critic in the accepted sense of the term. Indeed he cannot tell the difference between a waltz and a serenade but he can appreciate good music: he can be moved by pathetic music: he can rise to the heights of rapture with a piece intended for that very purpose: he can enjoy the youthful rhythm of a swing piece. One of the oft-given pieces of advice to the young reporter by editors is to be reserved in one’s comments to be miserly with superlatives: but last evening, when one saw the reactions of those fighting men who had not so long ago escape a thousand deaths to music of music of the highest order produced by a skeleton orchestra —three violins, a cello, a trumpet, a bass, a piano and last but not least, the drums, the sticks by a master—none other than Gaza Gerenster himself, he cannot but be superlative in his comments. Indeed the significant factors of the concert were not only the high order of the music served out but also the cultured and intelligent appreciation of good music by the singular audience. It is impossible by mere juggling of words describe this phenomenon if it is Syonanese still remember accurately what world famous musicians have said about Singaporeans musical ear. You should have been in the midst of those wounded and sick audience: you should have watched the twinkle in their eyes: you should have watched the ever changing moods produced by those gallant fighting men by the music. Suffice to say that no orchestra has ever before, played to a more appreciative audience in this island. Indeed last night one felt that one had to be really sick in order to fully appreciate this good music. It would be invidious to single out any one member of the orchestra for special comment because it was as a whole that the orchestra succeeded. But it must be said that if M. Gaza Gerenster has a mission in life it must be to make people happy. A magnetic (musical) personality bearing striking resemblance to Paul Whiteman, Gerenster is indeed a past-master in the art of making people joyous. The audience specially enjoyed the Nipponese pieces which were played by request and encored repeatedly. In one instance the audience accompanied the orchestra vocally. The lusty full-throated way in which they sang made one wonder whether they had rehearsed the song before! The Nipponese National Anthem had to be played twice. The orchestra finally left with repeated requests to call again. Raga(s) Ayakinam.

Programme details of the pieces played were as follows:
1. Overture: Rakoezy Overture by B. Keler
2. Waltz: on the beautiful Danube—J Strauss
3. Fantasia: Verdi’s Triumph—I Weninger
4. Pot-Porri: welcome Vienna-N Dostal
INTERVAL
5. Pot-Porri: Hungarian Songs- B. Leopold
7. 2nd Hungarian Rhapsody—F. Liszt
8. Fou Su Ka
EXTRA: Serenade of Drigo
And more than ten pieces played by request. \(^{118}\)

To the charge that musical activities in the public sphere or public broadcast were not a level playing field, there appears the formation of a young Malay orchestra:

The Young Malay Orchestra which was formed a fortnight ago will be on air at 10 o’clock (Tokyo time) tonight from the Syonan Broadcasting Station (wavelength 25 metres). This orchestra had its last rehearsal on Friday at the Cathay in the presence of the officers of the Propaganda Section. Selection of Nippon-go and Malay music will be rendered tonight. The programme is as follows:

10.00-10.05 Opening announcement
10.05-10.15 Talk on Hinomaru (Nippon National Flag) by Mr. Onan Siraj
10.15-10.45: The Strength of Asia
Young Malays
Musulims
Koojoo No Tuki
Anak Ikan
Ikotu Odate
Dondang Sayang (Swing)
Koko Kusinku Kioku
Kimigayo\(^{119}\)

Within the first few months of occupying Singapore was the task of uniting its inhabitants in favour of a singular agenda. This was of course best served through Music and none more powerfully politicised than the Kimigayo: National Anthem of Nippon:

The most important medium through which the people of a nation can express their loyal sentiments to their beloved sovereign and their country is the National Anthem. Therefore on the shoulder of the men who are set the task of selecting the piece and setting it to music rest a responsibility of National importance. It might therefore come as a surprise to many that until the Meiji Era, Nippon did not have a National Anthem. At this time, a body of famous Nippon scholars were assigned to select a piece from the national treasury of poetry and set it to music. In the selection of the music, the scholars were assisted by a Western musician of note, Herr Franck Eckert. Eckert was a German and was Director of the Marine Band from 1879-1898. He also assisted to found the band of the Toyoma Gakko (Army Music Academy). Eckert also did a great deal of establishment of the band of the Imperial Guards. The scholarly body of selectors were indeed faced with no easy task. They had to find a piece that would appeal to the nation as a whole and not only to a few scholars. The piece they selected had to interpret fully the sentiments of the nation. One of the most popular forms of poetry in Nippon consists of the 31 letters. This form of poetry is called Waka in Nippon-go. Recently it has been referred to as Tanka. It consists of five lines of respectively 5,7,5,7,7 letters. Some of the
most famous pieces of Nippon poetry have been written in this form. So it is not surprising that after long and assiduous search and study, the present National Anthem, the Kimigayo, was found in the famous Kokinshu Anthology of Waka Pieces. The Kimigayo’s quiet dignity and its imposing sentiment appealed to the audience. The selection of the piece has meant that the task was only half done. there was as yet the equally important task of setting it to music. At the time Western music was not widespread in Nippon. But day by day becoming more and more international in her outlook, the music was harmonised and arranged for Western musical instruments. Herr Eckert assisted in this formidable task. In the national anthem is found the secret of Nippon culture, philosophy and thought. The words were written a long time before the world was aware that were the sun rises there was a nation of highly cultured men and women. The music is comparatively modern. Below is given the Romanised version of the Kimigayo and its literal English translation:

**THE KIMIGAYO**

Kimi ga Yowa
Chiyo ni Yachiyo ni
Suzare Ishi no
Iwao to narite
Koke no musu made

(translation)

Thousands of years of happy reign be Thine;
Rule on my Lord, till what are pebbles now,
By age united to mighty rocks shall grow
Whose venerable sides the moss doth line

The Kimigayo was played for the first time at court of Tentyo-Setu of Neizi-Tenno (Emperor Meizi) in 1880.¹²⁰

Yet there are ways in which the Japanese agenda engendered a galvanisation of social forces not previously achieved. The late Ruth H.K. Wong informs us that until the Japanese Occupation, the British Government hardly made any attempt to achieve an integrated system of education with common goals and objectives across the various localised immigrants of Chinese, Indians and other communities as well as the Malays, who included those of Indonesian origins. The Japanese in 1942, she relates, introduced a concept of educational purpose and need with far-reaching consequences:

They compelled all school children to attend a daily flag-raising ceremony, followed by physical fitness exercises. Common youth activities were zealously promoted and teachers of all streams were regarded as belonging to a common service. For the first time, teachers of English schools met with those from Malay, Chinese, and Tamil schools. The Japanese also forced integration through the use of a common language Nippon-go.¹²¹
It would be difficult to deny that the flag-raising ceremony would suffice as the most appropriate space to have ensured the proliferation of the Kimigayo and a pro-Japanese agenda. Nor was this specifically a Singaporean predicament. Nazir Naim (born in Selangor 1916), was a teacher when the Japanese 25th Army rolled into Malaysia in December 1941. He was assigned to the Kuala Kangsar Malay School and later selected for Shihan Gakko. Mohd. Nazir’s arrival at the school was certainly memorable. Each day before class, students were required to undertake gardening. A normal day’s work would include Nippon-go, Japanese songs and lectures in Japanese on various aspects of the administration. Nippon-go took up most of their time but they were also required to take up sports, including sumo, judo and kendo. Mohd. Nazir recalled that teachers’ responsibilities were rotated on a weekly basis. They had to deliver a daily address in Japanese during the school assembly immediately after the Kimigayo and the flag-raising ceremony. The speech would touch on various aspects, including the need for the trainees to observe rules, punctuality and personal hygiene.122

While further research can shed light on exactly what was taught in schools in Singapore, the Malaysian experience was that both Japanese and Malay songs were an integral part of the educational landscape. Teachers were taught these songs, which they later taught their students. Many teachers could remember whole songs like Tokyo Ondo (Tokyo Chorus song) and Haru Ga Kita (Spring has come) and tunes of songs like Heitei San Arigato (Thank you Soldier) and Fuji San (Fuji Mountain). The lyrics of Heitai San Arigato explicitly exhorted (if not expected) the appreciation of the sacrifices of Japanese Soldiers while children as well as teachers were taught seishin, patriotism and respect for soldiers. Not much attention was paid to correct pronunciation: some semblance of similar sound would suffice. Songs, especially Malay songs, were an important component of the Japanese propaganda machinery targeted at the masses, especially Malays in rural areas. These songs, Japanese or Malay, sought to glorify Japan, to justify the presence of her soldiers in this country and denounce British colonialism. In essence, these songs were praise for the Nippon Jin (Japanese) and denounced the West, especially Malaysia’s previous colonial master. In Malacca, most of the songs were patriotic Indonesian songs plus a few Japanese songs. Towards the end of the Occupation, there was a perceptible shift of focus in Japanese propaganda when it ceased to harp on the might of the imperial army or the courage of the Japanese soldiers. In line with the changing military situation, they sought to arouse feelings of love for one’s country, notably among the Malay-Muslims. This kind of propaganda team included young Malays who sincerely believe the Japanese meant good such as one Hamid who was formerly assistant inspector of Malay schools.123
The Japanese Occupation is also significant for the ways in which lesser-known or recognised communities emerge in the public sphere through music-making activities:

Members of the local Filipino Association will give another musical and variety performance at the Syonan General Hospital today to entertain the sick and wounded Nippon servicemen on the occasion of Tentyo-Setu. The Filipino entertainers made a hit with their initial show last Saturday and will present an entirely new programme specially prepared for the occasion. There will be a musical concert by the Association’s Orchestra, which will feature several musical numbers by leading Nippon composers, followed by a variety show consisting of comedy, acrobatics and animal circus. The show will commence at 5pm. The sick and the wounded servicemen at the hospital were full of praise at the hospital for the fine show given by the Filipinos last Saturday and formed the opinion that it was the best performance seen in the hospital so far. Today’s show is by special request. 124

As would have been expected, Western art music and dance items (while not American or British in derivation) constituted the most powerfully advertised musical activity:
The Syonan Times reports of a SYONAN GEKIZYO: Concert by the Syonan Orchestra on 16th and 17th May 1942:
Saturday 16 May: from 3-5pm for civilians, for 6-8: Officials and Civilians
Sunday 17 May: from 2-4pm for soldiers: 5-7 pm for civilians
M. Sinozaki—Chief Officer of Education125

Programme for To-day’s Concert
The following is the programme of music to be played at the Syonan Gekizyo by the Syonan Orchestra to-day and to-morrow. The Orchestra is under the direction of Geza Gerenster and will be conducted by Feri Krempfl
National March Aikoku Kooshin Kyoky arranged by Aplebaum
Overture Tannhauser Wagner
Waltz Fryhling Stimmen Strauss
Fantasie Aida Verdi
INTERVAL
Weiner Waltz Danced by Mrs. Gerenster
Saxophone solo, Valse Venite, Wiedoeuff played by Kontor
Spanish Dance Danced by Mrs. Gerenster
INTERVAL
Selection, Lilac Time Schubert
Rhapsody, 14 Hungarian Rhapsody F. Liszt
Potpourri Selection of Nippon Songs, arranged by Aplebaum126

An idea of what was reportedly available on radio broadcast offers a reader the impression of cultural and communal inclusivity:

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124
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126
Syonan Broadcasting Station – Wavelength 25 m and 225 m, Frequency 12 Mcs and 1.333 Kcs

Today (12 June 1942)
7pm Nippon-go News relayed from Tokyo
7.30 pm Chinese Music-Mandarin song recital from the Studio
8.20 Nippon-go lesson no.40
8.30 News in Malay
8.50 News in Tamil
9.10 News in Hindustani
9.30 News in Cantonese
9.50 News in Hokkien
10.10 News in English
10.30 Close down

Syonan Times, 8 August 1942
Comfort Party Provides Rare Entertainment

A packed house, comprising of officer and civilian member of the Gunseibu, Syonan Tokubetu-Si and Sendenhan, was given a rare treat on Thursday when they were entertained to a delightful programme of Nippon music and dancing presented by the Comfort Artistes Party at the Dai Toa Gekizyo. To those who were fortunate enough to attend the show, it was indeed something new, something different from what they had seen before. For two hours, the audience was kept enraptured by an exhibition of dancing and by a selection of songs by those two well-known Nippon artists, Mr. Kameziro Isli and Miss Aiko Saido. If constant practice and resourcefulness are indispensable to success in dancing, then it must be said that the visiting dancers have taken great pains in order to attain perfection. The keynote of their dancing was simplicity and grace—well in keeping with the culture of Nippon. The programme was divided into two parts—the first consisting of musical scores excellently rendered by an orchestra under the leadership of Mr. Takio Niki coupled with vocal solos by Mr. Isli and Miss Saida. The second half comprised principally of dances. Possessing a well-cultured tenor voice, Mr. Isli sang Getsu-Getsu-Ka-Sui-Moku-Kin-Kin (Monday-Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-Friday) which means there is no holiday in the Navy. This was followed by “Shanghai Dayori”—a soldier’s letter from Shanghai to his mother composed in music and “Akatsuki ni Inoru” (Praying at Dawn) describing the brave determination of soldiers in an expeditionary campaign. If the audience had appreciated Mr. Isli’s singing, they had not long to hear something equally brilliant when that charming songbird of Nippon Miss Aiko Saida stepped on the stage. Possessing a pleasing personality and a sweet voice, Miss Saida immediately made an impression with her first number “Komori Uta”, a lullaby. Her second song was “Minami no Watari dori” (Migratory birds of the South Seas) which she sang in Blues tempo; the third “Osima Busi” the most popular folk song of the Island of Osima off Tokyo Bay.
The second part of the programme opened with “Buyo no deki agaru made”—a display of basic forms of movement in the training of dancers. The series of various dances that followed was characterised by the graceful movements of the dancers. Sent to the Southern Regions of the Osaka Mainiti and the Tokyo Niti-Niti Press Companies for the purpose of entertaining men of our Imperial Forces, the Comfort Artistes Party will shortly be leaving Syonan. We wish them the best of luck and look forward to a return visit by them. Just as the Fillipino community had made a contribution towards entertaining wounded Japanese soldiers, the Indian community were reported to have provided a similar offering: It is very seldom that Syonan has an opportunity of enjoying a high-class programme of Indian music, singing and dancing and the excellent show presented by the Broadcasting section of the Indian Independence league at the Dai Toa Gekizyo (formerly Cathay theatre) on Friday night, therefore, received an enthusiastic reception from a very appreciative audience comprised of Nippon soldiers. The theme of the programme was based upon the cultural development of the nations of East Asia and the programme included Bharatha Nattyam, Kathakali dances and songs of India, dealing with village life among the masses of the Indian people and depicted scenes and incidents which marked the various stages of Indian progress as a result of urbanisation. The whole show was excellently presented and beautiful costumes showing the result of great care and thoughtful planning on the part of the producers, Mrs. E.V. Davies and Captain Jahangir of the Indian National Army, who were responsible for the organisation and production and have to be heartily congratulated for the splendid entertainment they provided. There was a repeat performance last night for the Nippon troops. Tonight there will be another presentation for the Indian troops only, whilst the presentations on Monday and Tuesday will be open to holders of complimentary tickets issued by the promoters.

A similar form of entertainment was given out on Thursday October 22 1942 at the Dai Toa Gekizyo (Cathay theatre). The subsequent caption read in capitalised text: RECORD CROWD THRILLED Never was the former Cathay Theatre so tightly packed as it was on Tuesday night when Syonan people were entertained to an excellent programme of Nippon light music, solos and ballet items at the Dai Toa Gekizyo (Cathay theatre?), presented by the talented artistes of the Osaka Mainiti and Tokyo Niti Niti Comfort Party which has just completed a successful tour of the Southern Regions. The performance was held under the auspices of the Syonan Tokubetu-si ad the many hundreds who were fortunate enough to see the show went away very impressed with the treat provided. Before the show started Deputy Mayor Toyoda addressing the large throng said: “We have invited you this evening to introduce the Osaka Mainiti and Tokyo Niti Niti newspaper comfort party which under the auspices of Syonan Tokubetu-si will present
to you a series of musical items and dances. This party has travelled throughout the South Seas Regions to console our Imperial Forces and is now on its way home. They have kindly consented to spare their valuable hours and have specially arranged this evening for the sake of the people of Syonan. We always have in our mind the welfare of the people and therefore we take this grand opportunity offered by the comfort party and thank all members of the party for their kind hospitality in giving us Nippon music and dances. We are really happy to have this entertainment which I hope all of you will fully appreciate. The dancing team of the party represents a tendency in modern Nippon dancing and we present to you several items for your entertainment. Besides we have a special programme for a Malayan song which everyone presents this evening knows very well, that is “Teran Bulan” which will be sung by one of the noted singers of Malayan Borelo Ballet party and will be danced by Miss Iya, one of the attractive members of the consoling party. Thus we hope to have your full appreciation. I sincerely hope that you will enjoy this programme to the utmost.” If the audience was thrilled at the brilliant singing of Mr. Kameziro Isli and and Miss Aiko Saida, in the first part of the programme they showed just as much appreciation after the interval for the ballet numbers presented by Mr. Takaya Eguti and Miss Misaoko Miya and also of Misses Katuko Masumura, Kazue Kuwahara, Hiroko Nihai.

Mr. Isli’s first number was Aizu Bandai-Zan (a folk song of North Nippon) followed by Soshu Yakyoku (Suchow Serenade), a Chinese song and Getsu-Getsu-Ka-Sui-Moku-Kin-Kin (Monday-Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-Friday) which means there is no holiday in the Navy. A crescendo of cheers greeted Miss Saida as she stepped on to the stage. Possessing a pleasing voice, this modern Melba sang Hoko-Wo-Osamete (Laying Down Arms), “Minami no Watari dori” (Migratory birds of the South Seas) a song composed during the voyage to the south and lastly “Osima Busi” (A folk song of South Island off Tokyo Bay). It would be invidious to pick out any particular number in the second part of the programme for special mention. Every item was exquisitely performed by supple and talented Nippon ballerinas. A touch of Malayan colour was added to the programmewith the inclusion of a dance to the music of Terang Bulan by Miss Misaoka Miya. Looking exquisite in a Malay sarong and kebaya, she rendered her own interpretation of the dance to the singing of the Malayan Bolero Ballet Party.130

On January 15 1943, The Syonan Shinbun informed its readers of musical censorship, encapsulated in a title, Enemy Musical Compositions Put on Black List:
Domei, Tokyo, Jan 14-The Information Board in collaboration with the Home Office has black-listed approximately 1000 American and British musical compositions which include mostly jazz numbers as inappropriate to the times. The complete list is shortly expected to be made public following which the police will enforce an edict throughout the country. The authorities have indicated that the War of Greater-East Asia is an ideological clash between the Asiatic and Anglo-American nations as well as an armed conflict and therefore, the musical tastes must properly be directed. The ban on public
and private playings of the black-listed numbers include jazz pieces such as Dinah as well as light compositions including “Aloha Oe” and numerous folk songs by Stephen Foster.\textsuperscript{131}

Because music wielded considerable influence on the sentiments of a people, the Japanese felt it necessary that in the midst of a war the musical tastes of the public should be properly directed. Accordingly in January 1943, the government imposed a ban on some 1000 American and British ‘musical compositions’, a list which included not only military or patriotic songs like \textit{Wembley Military Tattoo}, \textit{Anchors Aweigh}, \textit{Colonel Bogey}, but also love songs and jazz. There were notable exceptions; some British-American songs like \textit{Auld Lang Syne}, \textit{Home Sweet Home} and \textit{The Last Rose of Summer}, had already been popularised in Japan and well-assimilated with Nippon sentiments and escaped prohibition because they extolled desirable qualities such as comradeship and love of home. Other light music included \textit{Dinah}, \textit{Aloha Oe}, \textit{Kisses in the Dark} and the music of Stephen Foster was deemed unacceptable, while jazz even before the war was considered undesirable by true lovers of music.\textsuperscript{132} In Singapore, a journalist eloquently condemned Western music in the following terms: \textit{When we retrospect and observe how we were in the past poisoned unknowingly by the demoralising music of our enemies, we discover the most appalling things. America and Britain have utilised the sacred field of music in order to corrupt the minds and souls of the people of Greater East Asia, and thereby, aid in the achievement of their sinister designs to seize control of and dominate East Asia. Our enemies, in an attempt to destroy the peoples of East Asia and as an anaesthetic agent to aid in the accomplishment of their world domination, had mixed a deadly potion into their hideous music. With various noisy and debased musical instruments, they created music without any great depth of feeling or artistic value and with the devilish utilisation of it, they schemed to steal into our souls and poison us slowly and unknowingly from within.}\textsuperscript{133}

To replace Western music, there was a movement to popularise the ancient music of East Asia. Several months later, a recital of Nippon gramophone records which demonstrated the charm and beauty of Nippon Songs and of Nippon interpretation of music, the Penang Shinbun put the agenda forward with a good measure of enthusiasm: \textit{With these examples of typical Nippon music to assist them local orchestra leaders will have no trouble in giving their public really good music. The going of Western tunes will indeed prove no great loss to the world of music when by comparison Nippon rhythm and harmony expresses so much more aptly the emotions and ideas of the peoples of East Asia.}\textsuperscript{134} In British Singapore, the Syonan Shinbun announced that on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} January 1943 there had been plans made to popularise East Asian Music: \textit{Domei, Tokyo January 20 – An exhaustive investigation into the music of all races in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is being planned by the Nippon Musical Culture Society with the assistance of the Board of Information, the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai Society for International Cultural Relations and the Broadcasting Corporation of Nippon. Several Nippon musicians will be dispatched to various regions}
for the work this year according to the plan. It is understood this investigation is to promote and popularise purely Co-Prosperity Sphere music. In addition, the Nippon Musical Culture Society will compile a list of recognised classics for the benefit of the peoples of the Southern Regions. At the same time, members of the Society will compose new lyrics and tunes based on Greater East Asiatic melodies. In Nippon, a series of concerts and lectures will be given to popularise the music of the Southern Regions beginning with a concert by the Yashiye Fujiwara Opera Company at the Hibiva Public Hall on March 8. Meanwhile, Nippon musicians will be sent to various areas in the Co-Prosperity Sphere to introduce music of a high quality.\textsuperscript{135}

In line with the agenda of producing and making available music of high quality, the first of February 1943 brought about news of a Beethoven concert:

\textit{LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN—the poet, the musicians often speaks to us in a language that transcends the writings of the scientist and the philosopher in the expression of the fundamental mystery of life} so says the writer. \textit{How true it is!} Those who attended Saturday night’s Beethoven concert—and what an appreciative audience it was to say the least, must have felt that they had a musical treat of the highest order. For one who is not a musical critic it would be invidious to particularise on any item, especially as all of them were executed in the spirit of the great composer. The orchestra as a whole displayed perfect technique and understanding and the soloists too were in brilliant form. All played with feeling under the inspired leadership of conductor Krempl. It is to be hoped that similar concerts of such great masters as Schubert, Bach, Brahms and Chopin—to mention only a few—will following in due course. Musical talent is not lacking in Syonan and it seems that the future of classical music in Syonan-to is a very bright one. If yesterday’s audience can be taken as a criterion, then support will not be found wanting.\textsuperscript{136}

The very careful selection of music from European traditions (excluding British) is couched in more benevolent terms in the Syonan Times of the 9\textsuperscript{th} April 1943. By suggesting that such European selections (not British or American) answered the need for good music, here at Syonan, the orchestra was seen to make such a valuable contribution:

\textit{Exactly a year ago today (April 9), the Syonan Orchestra, composed of eight instruments only, gave their first concert to hundreds of wounded Nippon soldiers and sailors at a hospital somewhere in Syonan. This marked the birth of the musical side of cultural development in this island and since then considerable progress has been achieved by the presentation of good music to the people of this city. To celebrate the first anniversary of their inauguration, the Syonan Orchestra, considerably augmented will present a special concert at the Syonan Kokaido on Sunday, April 11. Highlighting the programme will be a special arrangement of Nippon martial music, from the Meiji to the Syowa era, by Mr. Aplebaum, the orchestra’s pianist. Reviewing the past year, Mr. Paul Gerentser, the Hungarian founder of the Syonan Orchestra stated that \textit{“if}}
appreciation of good music is an indication of cultural development, then the people of Syonan are moving in the right direction. One has only to visit the Syonan Kokaido during a Sunday concert to realise the number of people representative of every community in the city who appreciate good music, he said. The following is the program for the First Year Anniversary Concert by the Augmented Syonan Orchestra at the Syonan Kokaido (Former Victoria Theatre) on Sunday from 2-4pm and 5-7pm:--

- Overture, the Caliph of Baghdad (Boldieu);
- Waltz Acceleration (Strauss);
- Fantasie, Pique Dame (Tchaikowsky);
- Bolero, danced by Mrs., Gerentser and Mrs. Bain;

INTERVAL;

- Parade of the Tin Soldiers, danced by Miss Katinka Gerentser and the Syonan Orchestra Girls;
- Suite Rhapsody Andalouse;
  a) Zapateado
  b) Curruly Solea;
  c) Dondang Gitana (Ross);
  d) Potpourri

On the 21st May 1943, we are informed of a Symphony Concert which drew reportedly drew a full house:

Music of a high standard was provided to a large and appreciative audience at the Syonan Kokaido last night during the grand symphony concert by the augmented Syonan Symphonic Orchestra featuring the works of Mozart and Haydn. The orchestra, almost 40 strong under the baton of D. Aplebaum gave an inspiring interpretation of the variable moods of the two masters whose choice works were featured for the first time in the history of the island. The manner in which both last night’s concert and the recent Beethoven concert were received by the public was, by itself, a tribute to the orchestra. The works of masters like Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn and others if they are interpreted as beautifully and faithfully as in the last two concerts are bound to have a great influence on the musical trend in Syonan, an influence that could only be for the better. The selection was a most happy one and the rounds of applause which greeted the completion of every item showed that the audience fully appreciated it. The Military Symphony by Haydn was a most fitting finale. The instrumentalists are to be congratulated on their excellent performance and they can take pride in the fact that the hard work they have put in has been crowned with success. Syonan should indeed, be proud to have such a fine orchestra, and it augurs well for the future of classical music in Malai.

In 1948, the Education Department arranged for the holding of the grade examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. This was added to the presence of the Trinity College of Music which had support of a private Music School in
In an article in the Straits Times dated 9th August 1982, on Western art music activities in Singapore since 1900, Alex Abisheganaden informs us that:

In the late 1920's, Mr. Anciano, a Filipino resident, opened (our first) Far Eastern Music School and in the 1930s, this school presented candidates for the Trinity College of Music local examinations. The newspapers in Singapore then were already publishing results of the Trinity College exams. For instance, the Singapore Free Press, on June 2, 1926 reported the following:

The Inspector of Schools, Singapore and Labuan, informs us the following pupils were examined in Singapore by Professor C.E. Lowe, FTCL of the Trinity College of Music and were successful... Miss Iris Ess is the first candidate to obtain her Associate Diploma in Singapore. The Singapore Chamber Ensemble which was founded in 1950 consolidated and the performances of Western chamber music in their ‘household concerts’. The Musical Society arranged concerts and recitals by visiting artistes from time to time. The Junior Symphony Orchestra, sponsored by the Department of Education provided the opportunities for the younger school-going musicians to perform ‘serious music’ and this was further enhanced by the formation of numerous choirs. Victor Doggett, a clarinettist in the British Army who later became one of the most sought after piano and theory teachers, initiated the Singapore Music Teachers Association. Tony Beamish Music in Malaya 1950s observed how in the past few years, Western classical music has gained a firm foothold in Malaya and it is extending its influence steadily, with a growing number of young Malayans studying the piano and string instruments, both here and overseas. The man in the street does not appreciate this classical music and probably he never will to any great extent, but it is of more than passing interest that its circle of adherents is widening every year. Much credit for this must go to the Singapore Musical Society and to other societies in the Federation, which not only organised concerts and recitals by artists of world renown, but which have gradually built up from scratch groups of performers of considerable ability and promise. Of these the Singapore Chamber Ensemble, the Music Society Symphony Orchestra and the Junior Symphony Orchestra, as well as a number of choral societies, have earned well-deserved praise in the post-war years. The fact that Bach’s St. Matthew Passion could be performed in Singapore in 1954 in such a manner that internationally famous soloists taking part did not feel out of their element, speaks volumes for the progress classical music has recently made. The appreciative Malayan audience for it is growing, a fact that is clearly reflected in the concert box office and in the support that classical music programmes now receive from the radio-listening public. An equally telling moment also arrived for the performance of the Coronation Concerto by W.A. Mozart at the Victoria Memorial Hall, in 1953 (presumably in celebration of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II that year). The pianist on that occasion was Walter Susskind supported by the Singapore Musical Society Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Gordon van Hien. Tan Shzr Ee recounts how Benjamin Khoo conducted newly-formed amateur group known as the Singapore Musical Society (SMS), sharing the podium with Singapore conductor Aisha Akbar, baritone/conductor
Choo Hwee Lim and European musician pioneers Gordon Van Hien and Ken Palmer. While many members initially were expatriates, a growing number of Asians and Eurasians, along with Khoo, began to join the group. Strength in numbers fluctuated from 60-100 through the 1950s and 1960s. The society gave at least one choral concert each year, putting on works from Mendelssohn's Elijah (1957) to opera choruses (1960) to a choral version of Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue (1963), with its accompanying orchestra. A choral section of the Singapore Chamber Ensemble led by Paul Abisheganaden provided occasional vocal-music events slotted into an orchestral series. No mention was made of the St.Matthew’s Passion which was given in 1954.

Shzr Ee informs us choral concerts were also presented by other groups affiliated with institutions such as the Trinity Theological College, the Wesley Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship, the Chinese Methodist Church, the Tamil Methodist Church, the Singapore Guard Regiment Society Of Musical Friends, the Alliance Francaise Mixed Choir, the Serangoon District Boy's Choir, the Singapore Vienna Choir, Aisha Akbar's Suara Singapore Singers and Goh Say Meng's Chorale Musicale. This is in stark contrast to the 19th and early 20th century when St.Andrew’s Cathedral was known for providing most of the musical delectation. Alongside the growth of serious choral music, barber-shop quartets (like Khoo's Benny Singers and Harry Tan's The Gospel Melody Makers) and musical groups (like YMCA's The Sceneshifters) thrived in semi-classical genres that were developing in Singapore.144 We are also made aware that in the days preceding the National Theatre Trust, there were two well-known musical impresarios, Donald Moore (Donald Moore Entertainments Limited) and Goh Soon Tjoe, who were able to bring in a number of international performers and performances.

From an instrumental and orchestral point of view, the only established musical institution was the Singapore Musical Society, known previously as the Singapore Philharmonic. The Society’s concerts consisted of both choral and orchestral and sometimes included appearances by visiting musicians. Additionally, there was an annual music contest and an annual performance of Handel’s Messiah. Not many compositions were known. Lucien Wang Maan Seng, a piano teacher, (born Guangzhou, China), studied with a Russian pianist in Beijing and later spent five years at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, studying with Cocteau. After settling in Singapore, Lucien Wang had a collection of her songs published in 1946, most of which were written for the Mandarin–speaking musical community. Leong Yoon Ping’s brief survey of the composition as a career in Singapore also notes that two well respected musicians could be considered forerunners in promoting classical music in Singapore. Huang Wan Chen, a well-known singer and vocal instructor, presented two Chinese art songs ‘Whai Ren’ and ‘Hu Bu Qui’ in 1946 that captured the hearts of many. Subsequently in 1957, Ting Zu San also presented more than thirty pieces of art songs and sacred pieces...considered pioneering pieces in the music culture of Singapore.145
Shi Yu Yi, a former music teacher in Zhong Zheng high School published his Military Songs and hearing the Flute at the Frontier which provided early models of writing in the style of marches. There were three who concentrated on writing for children; Huang Kuen Yuan, Aisha Akbar and Zubir Said, writing in Chinese, English and Malay respectively. They were later joined by Lim Lee and Lin Xue Jiau. Opportunities for further studies in Music were unavailable in Singapore at this time and the fortunate ones either had the means to study abroad or were awarded scholarships. Leong Yoon Ping studied piano, composition and conducting at the Guildhall School (London, UK) while Ng Sai Ming studied conducting, composition and music education at the Westminster Choir College (US) and Soh Kay Cheng studied orchestration and composition in the Singapore School of Education. Other composers included Kam Kee Yong, Lim Tiap Guan and Lee Yuk Chuan. 146

There was an increase in amateur organisations, particularly choirs, supported mainly by the Mandarin–speaking population. One of Shze Ee’s account of choral music during the 1930s and 1960s, has been the nature and identity of the Chinese choirs. Demographically this would not be surprising but it is revealing that in a pre-dominantly colonial framework the Mandarin speaking population made their presence and impact. Tan informs us that:

*This period coincides with "modernising reforms" were held throughout all aspects of culture in China. Western art and popular music and film thrived in Shanghai and Beijing, even Christianity and the attendant choral music activities. Following the May 4th modernisation movement of 1919, group singing activity took on a new function. Music, and especially the mass-oriented genre of choral music, was to reflect the "advancing" spirit of the times. (This idea was crystallised into the agenda of Socialist Realism at Mao Zedong's Yan'an forums of 1938.) Close links between Chinese communities in Singapore and the Mainland meant that versions of Chinese music activity here took the form of anti-Japanese sentiments already prevalent in a China, a country whose outer reaches were beginning to be occupied by Japan. Given this sense of wholesomeness already present as a Chinese tradition, choirs, spread, each identified by its own conductor and style. Rehearsing weekly and putting on concerts every year, they sang Chinese folksongs re-arranged for four-part choruses, as well as arias or excerpts from Italian opera. These choirs, accompanied by a piano, were characterised by their spirited, heavy and high-vibrato styles.* 147

Our research also notes the presence of Mo Zexi, (b.1935), who settled in Singapore at the age of five. He is reportedly the founder of a Mandarin-based orchestra and choral conductor and composer. For him, musical arts in China begin with courtesans. It gradually replaced by other form of musical genre such as *xi qu, suo chang, ping tan*, which involved instrumental accompaniment and action. During the 1920s and 1930s, overseas Chinese graduates introduced the idea of solo and chorus singing into the Chinese culture. Such a culture was soon blooming in institutions and cultural troops.
According to Mo, music often mirrored the life of the people of a particular time when Malayans were abused and ill treated by both the British and Japanese Imperialists. Thus Malayan composers turned to writing anti-colonial and anti-Japanese songs. The periods can be divided into pre-war, Japanese occupation, and post-war till 1960s. The Japanese Occupation marked the most terrifying and painful era. Such a harsh treatment had caused much unhappiness amongst the people. After the WWII, the British imperialist returned but the terms in the white and blue paper only help to benefit the colonists. The Malayans, according to Mo, gathered together to fight against the colonists and imperialists. One of the songs sung by them carries the following text: Victory, victory, victory belongs to the people.

This period of uncertainty allegedly marks the birth of several Malayan composers such as Chang Hong, Hong Chang, Li Qiu, … etc and several other unknown composers who came from either from China or were local composers. The most outstanding local composer was Ye Li Tian. Together with Ren Kwang, they founded “Tong Luo” and Ye served as the president of the society. His musical style is greatly influenced by the early Russian revolution music. Mo listed some of the compositions which unfortunately most of the manuscripts were missing. Amongst the compositions, the song “Singapore River” was once a popular song about life during the Japanese Occupation. Music composers during 1960s were Li Hua and Qiu Jiu whose lyrics were concerned mainly with the social environment of their time. The fact that it was not widely broadcast correlated with the intense pressure from authorities translated into exercises of censorship and forcing societies, associations and alumni organizations to dissolve. On the other hand, Mo tells us that unscrupulous businesses and some immoral intellect (refers to those who had no sense of social responsibility) encouraged the development of popular music of that time. According to Mo, these pieces focused on trivial issues and bad tastes in music. Performers would be both dancing and rocking insanely or they would put their heads low (understood to mean that the performers looked down, with very little or no fighting spirits, soulless). These performers made use of music to convey “unhealthy” emotions and such compositions, in his view, had negative influences on impressionable and innocent youth, adversely affecting the development of the country; articulating essentially a Platonic or Confucian view. Mo observed that during the 1950s, societies or associations encouraged the singing of “art songs”, folk songs, foreign language songs, and “popular” music. Among these songs, most of them (the lyrics) lacked the life and energy, nor did it have the value in its use for revolution or fighting for independence.148

This purpose could range from making a political stand against the Japanese, to creating "good art" in the face of sentiments of "unsavoury" Yellow musics generated through the Shanghai film industry. Usually not reflected but worthy of question is the reception of the Chinese who were performers in the Western art tradition by their larger community. Chinese choirs in Singapore went underground during the Japanese Occupation (1942-45), but resumed activity later. The number of choral groups and
member grew during the 1950s and 1960s. Leong Yoon Pin and the Rediffusion Youth Choir (later formed as the Metro Philharmonic Society in 1959 as a chamber String ensemble), Madam Lee Howe and the Lee Howe Choral Society, composer Samuel Ting (founder and first president of the Composers’ Association) and his Herald's Choral Society, and composer Lee Yuk Chuan, with his Melo Art Choir and later NTUC Choir. In the 1960s, Lee Howe and 10 other groups began the tradition of organising joint annual concerts. Around the same time, the then-Ministry of Culture also started its own festival for choral music (though this did not survive into the '70s). Many choral groups which had sung their way through the 1960s - the Sing Sheng Philharmonic Chorus, the Melo Art Choir - are still active today, if on a smaller scale.  

It can be observed that the attitude towards singing in a choral or vocal group in the Mandarin-conversant community required far more than interest. Joining a choir was less an avocation but more the means towards a larger, noble purpose in life; what Chua Soo Pong identified a group and prominent characteristic in the Chinese dance traditions as ‘wholesome cultural associations’ and its participants were committed art workers...animated by the idea of creating dances which reflect social reality and their aim has been to pass their message to the people...adopting a kind of social commitment clearly different from that of women’s clubs leisure classes...critical of the present social system arguing that their art should reflect the hard facts of life and encourage people to reform society...disapproved of individualism and advocated collective creation. They believed strongly that theatre dance must be created for the people and tried hard to establish a close relationship with the audience”

What was true for dance somehow had similar sentiments in the Mandarin-speaking community for choral activity. Their zealous colleagues elsewhere in China had become a cause for concern in the 1960s. A long standing tension between Chinese community in Singapore and its relations in China escalated during the Cultural Revolution, which raised fears of the communist insurgence and its effect on Chinese Singaporeans, particularly those with sympathies with China. The following release issued by the Ministry of Culture in 1967 implicated music’s role in a way here as to suggest guilt by association:

A Chinese songbook entitled “Revolutionary Songs” has been proscribed by the Singapore Government. Any person selling, distributing or possessing this publication is liable to prosecution. This publication consisting of 104 pages has red covers of which the front cover carries a picture of four armed men killing their enemy. Most of the songs are quotations from Mao-Tse-tung. The publication has been banned principally because it is intended for use by local pro-Communist elements as paraphernalia for organising riots and destruction of public and private property in Singapore. These songs call on people to resort to violence in order to establish a Communist regime and there is little of musical worth in them. This publication will therefore serve as a stimulus to get teenaged children to go on the rampage at the
behest of adult pro-Communists, who plan these disorders in the safety of their homes and offices. 151

Given the particular situation in Singapore, there was considerable difficulty in obtaining appropriate music for these choirs, hence an immediate demand for works to be written for these new ensembles. One of the most prominent of them was the Li Howe Choir, founded in 1952 by an outstanding vocalist Miss Li Howe, who was, not surprisingly, a composer of various operas and vocal works. Much of the music written during this period helped in supplying the choral groups with as much material as possible, extended to transcriptions, arrangements, translations besides original compositions. Also active was the Choir of Singapore City, founded in 1959 and the Good News Singers, founded in 1961. These and a number of others provided opportunities for composers to present their works and were significant in the 50s and 60s. The Singapore Peoples Association founded in 1960 was quite active in promoting cultural, especially musical activities. Like the National Theatre, the Peoples Association organised its own choir, Chinese Orchestra and String orchestra as a well as a marching band and bagpipe band.

The establishment of the National Theatre in August 1963 was a milestone. More directly cultural in its concern with the arts is the National Theatre Trust, which was also established as a statuary body in 1960. 152 Its first task was the construction of a national theatre as a permanent memorial to the attainment of self-government by the people of Singapore and also for the promotion of a Malayan culture. Financed partly by funds raised directly by and from the people, the National Theatre was completed in 1963 and, to signal an emphasis on Singapore’s cultural place in the region, commemorated its opening with an island-wide, 8-day Southeast Asian Festival. The then Minister of Culture, S. Rajaratnam in a foreword to the programme, wrote, This festival would no have been possible when the countries of Southeast Asia languished under colonial domination. He went on to add that the heritage common to the countries in this region should not merely be a nostalgic reminder of a glorious but rather dim golden age that is no more. 153 The National Theatre Trust activities served, to bring about greater understanding among the different cultures and assist the government in its primary task...to create a unified nation out of the many racial and cultural groups. 154 The National Theatre and Peoples Association concentrated on general cultural activities with a view to performances. Creative musical work was not on their agenda. Besides the Chinese musical organisations, there was a Malaya Musical Club, founded and headed by Zubir Said, who was to write the national anthem of Singapore. The three main sections of the National Theatre comprised the Singapore National Orchestra, The National Theatre Chinese Orchestra, The National Theatre Choir and Dance Company.
Upon independence in 1965, the main objective was to transform the new republic economically from an entrepot centre to an industrialised economy. The immediate problems of unemployment, the need for internal defence, training for the work-force, housing, foreign capital investment, took precedence, if not priority. The performing arts manifest in concerts, broadcasts of folk and art music of the Chinese, Indian and Malay traditions, as well as repertoire of European art-music tradition (largely 17th to 19th centuries) continued to be the fare offered. The number of choral groups increased to more than 30 in the 70s and there were more taking part in musical activities. The National Theatre Choir was formed in 1968, in 1970, the Good News Choir visited Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and the Singapore Youth Choir participated in a music camp in England and won a prize. School choirs were widely established within nearly every primary and secondary school. Many young musicians performed in the annual concerts of the Youth Festival. The Society for the Promotion of Sacred Music in Singapore was only one of a number of religious musical organisations active in the 70s with an annual sacred music contest. With regard to education, the Music Department of the Singapore School of Education trained many musicians including a number of young composers. There was a sharp increase in students taking the graded examination systems (Associated Board, Trinity College…). Among the private music institutions, Yamaha School of Music was the most active.

From the 1970s, there seemed to be a decided shift in focus. In a speech to commemorate the opening of the recently completed Japanese Gardens or SEIWAEN, the appreciation of constructing such a garden as an art-form made him devote a substantial portion to the effects of music and its role in Singapore society. It strikes me as something of a minor scandal that Singapore does not have a symphony orchestra. He compared Singapore as a sea-port to places in the UK, like Liverpool, which had the Liverpool Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Bournemouth, a holiday resort by his estimation, which had a symphony orchestra and a well-known Festival Orchestra in Bath. I trust something will soon be done to establish a symphony orchestra in Singapore. Perhaps we can do it in two stages, starting with a chamber ensemble, expanding eventually to a full size symphony orchestra. But it is important that the members are full-time professionals. It costs money to maintain an orchestra—the labourer is worthy of his hire and this applies to musicians, no less than to others, that is to say, good musicians. He defended the matter of a full involvement in classical music by insisting that such a pursuit was not about keeping with the Joneses or being snobbish and snooty. He was well aware of those in the classical music community who, tend to adopt superior airs. This is a mistake. They are not superior, they are just lucky...that they have one source of enjoyment and delight unknown to their less fortunate low-browed brethren. He went on to talk of the benefits of a taste for the arts as making for a cultivated and rounded personality, desirable not only in itself but of further value beyond the arts. He spoke of a self-made millionaire who, without the sense of cultivation or a taste for the arts, is eventually unable to, bring up their children.
properly. So we see numerous instances of squandering of family fortunes by wronglybrought up children. Being generally crude and uncouth types, these dissipate their family estate through foolish extravagance.\textsuperscript{157}

The entire discourse of this famous speech is best dealt with in a separate paper. Energies are reserved particularly for two musical practices of which the symphony orchestra occupies considerable exhortation and persuasion on the part of Dr. Goh. If one considered the Singapore National Orchestra, there was already a symphony orchestra. The National Theatre Trust offers us some detail:

\textit{In April 1970, Norman del Mar visited Singapore with an additional task; to present his views and suggestions on the establishment of a full-fledged philharmonic orchestra. This was a follow-up from an ad-hoc planning committee formed by Dr. Goh Poh Seng, Chairman of the National Theatre Trust to determine the status of the Singapore National Orchestra and consider the feasibility of establishing a full-fledged philharmonic orchestra, taking into account the administration and finances involved. A report resulted from a series of meetings, prepared and submitted to the relevant authorities for further consideration.}\textsuperscript{158}

Since there were already plans to consider the formation of a symphony orchestra, why was there a need to consider the absence of a symphony orchestra in Singapore something of a minor scandal?\textsuperscript{159}

If, however, one considers the events leading up to this speech in 1973, there is an undercurrent of a reversal of fortunes for the symphonic orchestra which can only be understood first in the balance sheets of the National Theatre Company’s Accounts. In December 1970, there was a net surplus of $6,035.71. A year later, this surplus had turned into a $59,663.53 loss. Somewhere between that period came the announcement of a suspension of all concerts following a shortage of funds. In fact what does become evident is also present in the company accounts. Expenditure for the three main sections, National Orchestra, Chinese Orchestra and Choir are recorded in 1970 as 38,422.48; 18,979.59; and 28,801.00 respectively, are now seen in a different light in 1971. Expenditure for the Choir came to $24,796.75, the Chinese Orchestra accounted for $20,209.75 but there was no expenditure on the National Orchestra. This is all the more startling considering that despite no honoraria for the National Orchestra in 1971, the National Theatre Company turned up a loss. Financially speaking, the western orchestral tradition was probably seen to be a financial liability of an apparently fathomless nature.

Creatively, however, 1971 marks yet another milestone. The National Theatre Trust annual report of 1979 gives us a brief summary of a concert entitled, Concertos concert by Four soloists accompanied by the Singapore Chamber Orchestra (in aid of the Singapore Cultural Foundation) which was given at the Singapore Conference Hall on 26 August 1979:
It is sometimes heartening to see amateurs joining forces with professionals to share the challenges of a performance. This was the case of the concertos concert in which four soloists performed to the accompaniment of the Singapura Chamber Ensemble. This orchestra was incepted by Kam Kee Yong in 1971 and it comprised his most talented students who were of a very young age.\textsuperscript{160}

The 1970s were regarded as a period noted for the emergence of patriotic songs. Tien Ming En (Singapore, How Youthful You are), Goh Say Meng (Singapore River) Samuel Liew (Sing a Song of Singapore), Charles Maddox (Land of Our Birth) Oon Siew Lan (Fair Shore of Singapore), Rudy Mosbergen (Selamat Datang) Tan Ik Koon (Merlion) and Chuang Heng Shiong, writer of a collection of Praise Songs for the Nation. In 1974, the National Theatre and Radio Singapore jointly organised “Our Songs” a song contest covering both music and lyrics. In the 1977 presentation, over 100 pieces were submitted, using Chinese, English, Malay and other languages as text. Some of the composers were also responsible for the setting up of the ensembles. Leong Yoon Ping—The Singapore City String Orchestra; Kam Kee Yong—Singapore String Orchestra. The Cultural Division of the Singapore government, responsible for the National Theatre, followed on with the establishment of several concert halls, the Singapore City Hall, Victoria Theatre and Victoria Memorial Hall and sponsored a variety of public concerts and festivals including a Youth Festival, Singapore Arts Festival, Singapore Drama Festival and the Singapore Chinese Music Festival.

The establishment of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in 1979 was the most important event since the formation of the Philharmonic Society in 1891. Well-known conductors and soloists were responsible for numerous concerts every season. The choral society newly formed under the symphony orchestra managed to introduce an entire opera and cantata to the public. The Singapore Composers’ Association further promoted the writing of songs in languages other than Mandarin, as well as instrumental music, making a significant contribution to the national characteristics of multicultural Singaporean culture. The National Theatre Trust Annual Report of 1980 informs us of an initiative \textbf{A Presentation of Chinese Songs by Singapore Poets and Composers}

(In association with the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and The Singapore Association of Writers- at the Singapore Conference Hall on 15 March 1980)

\textit{To encourage more compositions of local songs, seven composers and six poets were asked to collaborate and pool their creative talents together. Their efforts were heard in the concert, admission to which was free. The composers were Goh Say Meng, Kam Kee Yong, Lee Tack Fah, Leong Yoon Ping, Lim Tiap Guan, Shen Ping Kwang and Samuel Ting, and the poets included Tan Ying, Du Gong, Miao Mang, Tang Hua Sok, Wong Yoon Wah and Zhou C’an.}\textsuperscript{161} The second presentation of Our Songs, a presentation of Chinese Songs by Singapore Poets and Composers in association with the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and Singapore Association of Writers in the Singapore Conference Hall in June 1980 offers us this brief:
Local audiences were treated to yet another concert of songs written and composed by our own talented songwriters in the presentation of ‘Our Songs’. A total of 12 Chinese songs were presented, performed by well-known soloists as well as choirs of the Heralds Choral Society, the Young Voices Choir and Mellow Art Choir. The project, started in 1979, was aimed at generating greater interest among Singaporeans in locally composed songs.162

The Third presentation was at Victoria Concert Hall on 22 February 1981: This concert, the third in a series, was one of the many steps taken to encourage local composers to present their works. Seventeen new Chinese songs, both classical and contemporary in style were featured at the third presentation of ‘Our Songs’. Of the participants were some first-timers, consisting of five new composers and six new lyricists. Veteran composers like Samuel Ting, Lee Tack Fah, Leong Yoon Ping and Shen Ping Kwang were also featured together with veteran lyricists Zhou C’an, Chen Hua Su, Hwang Lung Hua and Tan Yin.163

The setting up of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra marked a decided strategy in affirming a western art music tradition that had seen its rise in the 19th century. In his book From Handel to Hendrix, Michael Chanan tells us that Karl Marx was: One contemporary observer who perceived the relationship between the musical life and the organisation of capitalist production...Marx saw the orchestra conductor as a representative of capitalist interests. The capitalist mode of production, he wrote: “has brought matters to a point where the work of supervision, entirely divorced from the ownership of capital, is always readily obtainable...An orchestra conductor need not own the instruments of his orchestra, nor is it within the scope of his duties as conductor to have anything to do with the ‘wages’ of the other musicians.”164

Elsewhere in his three-volume Das Capital, Marx argued that: All combined labour on a large scale requires, more or less, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious working of the individual activities, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the action of the combined organism, as distinguished from the action of its separate organs. A single violin player is his own conductor; an orchestra requires a separate one. The work of directing, superintending, and adjusting, becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under the control of capital, becomes co-operative. Once a function of capital, it acquires special characteristics.165

This transformation may be regarded an economic anomaly in a capitalist production perspective. Yet its identity as a state-supported ensemble marked a break in the almost predictable cycle of the failures of many amateur orchestral ensembles before it since 1834. As a fully professional orchestra, it enjoyed support from the government and the public. The orchestra’s first director, Choo Huey, announced a policy of playing
compositions by at least one Singaporean every season. This period was also marked by an increase in the number of concerts presented by the then Ministry of Culture and National Theatre Trust in a “Music for Everyone series”. Two or more concerts were scheduled on the same night; a situation unthinkable not just ten years ago. Despite these strides, the concert-going public seemed to have voted in favour of performances with attendance. For those of whom composing was much desired, a milestone was achieved with formation of the Composers Circle in August 1980, which effectively became the national body for Singapore composers and came under the National Theatre Trust. The National Theatre Trust provided the Composers Circle with the relevant forum for the composers themselves. Bernard Tan gave a talk on composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, composer Hsu Tsang Houei on his own works in 1981, a talk by John Cage specialist Margaret Leng Tan (based in New York) on new possibilities for the piano, Leong Yoon Ping on some 20th century musical phenomena and included an elaboration of his 23 settings of a Folk theme and performance of Hsu Tsang Houei’s Burial of the Flowers. The Circle helped to organise “Our Songs” concerts which were now extended to include instrumental and orchestral music. In 1983, a concert was presented at the Asian Composers Conference in Singapore with a string orchestra, Chinese instrumental ensembles participating and the premier of five new works.

There was consensus in the view that composers in Singapore face a problem not unlike their counterparts from societies around the world. Despite having unmitigated support of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, National Theatre Trust and Ministry of Culture (today, the National Arts Council under the Ministry of the Information and the Arts) in terms of commissions and performances, it concerned them that the support had not translated into well-known Singaporean performers or performing groups forming a queue to engage composers to write for them. Neither has it translated to an increase in the general concert-going public or attracting a new supportive audience in significant numbers. The view was still that the composer was done a favour when his/her work was performed rather than a concert felt incomplete without one Singaporean work within the programme, putting the role of the composer in Singapore society in this way:

The Singaporean composer thus has every right to feel his lot is a difficult one.....however the musical community as a whole and society at large also have a perfect right to ask why the composer would be given a hearing. It is inevitable, perhaps even more so in a fast-developing and pragmatic country like Singapore, that the question of relevance will be an important one.....if he, as a creative artist, is to demand attention from society, he must come at least halfway to convincing society that his work is vital to the cultural and social ethos of Singapore. Generally speaking there is scarcely a composer in Singapore who depends on composition as a main source of income....at the present time, publishing and performance of new music is Singapore are not commercial propositions.
Recognition for composers came in 1982. Leong Yoon Ping was the first composer to be awarded the prestigious Cultural Medallion for his contributions; coming in the face of other Cultural Medallion recipients, this represented for the first time affirmation of creative work. That prophetic struggle between composer and society seems to have continued, added to the biblical prophecy that composers are probably not fully recognised within their own society.

One of the most tenuous arguments put forward is the future role of the composer in society:

Perhaps we can think of the role of Singapore composers in society as an ever-expanding series of concentric circles. The innermost circle is that embracing the composers only; the next circle represents the musical community; the next circle represents the artistic community; the last and biggest circle stands for the whole of Singapore society. The composer in Singapore must eventually realise that he is part of the social and cultural life of Singapore and that his inspiration is eventually to be drawn from his largest circle. If he is convinced of this, then he will surely make a real contribution to the cultural legacy, which is left for the future generations. When society fully realises that it has a duty to ensure that such a cultural heritage is built up, then it, in turn, will surely realise that the composer is a vital part of its lifeblood.\(^\text{168}\)

Many more composers have, since, gone abroad to further their musical studies. Leong Yoon Ping, Phoon Yew Tian, Bernard Tan, Joseph Peters still continue to make their contribution via their compositions or performances of previous works, a younger generation of local composers have distinguished themselves with performances not only by Singaporean ensembles but also by international ensembles. Additionally, composers from abroad who have spent a considerable amount of their time and energies here in Singapore have started to make their contributions felt. John Sharpley, John Howard, Eric Watson, Robert Casteels are some names who have arguably enriched the repertoire of Singaporean works in a very unique way—these persons have been granted permanent residence in Singapore. Moreover, composers like John Howard and Eric Watson have made their compositional contributions to the National Day celebrations.

For Tan Shzr Ee, choral music in the late 1960s signalled the revamping of the image of choral music in Singapore. This initiative took place in schools. Throughout the 1950s, these teachers, formerly of the Singapore Musical Society, brought choral singing into the school system with identifying an elite group of a cappella singers selected from a body of already-existing school choirs in Singapore. When the Singapore Youth Choir was established in 1964, Benjamin Khoo led the ensemble in its formative years to be succeeded in 1969 by conductor-teacher David Lim to form a Young Musicians' Society while still receiving support from MOE. Musicians from the Society performed at official functions and pageants and also represented Singapore at overseas festivals and
competitions. The Singapore Youth Choir was not the only youth group active. Other choirs were established through MOE initiatives through the 1970s and 1980s, each with a distinctive portfolio of a cappella works. These choirs met up and sang together at the annual Singapore Youth Festival, launched in 1966. Like the Band Movement, the event, involving preparations lasting several months, became equally well known for histrionic displays of highly charged emotions at competitions alongside the performances. In 1987, the late Education Minister Tay Eng Soon conceived a project known as the Choral Excellence Programme; a group of and from school choirs were handpicked, groomed musically. This project grew into a biennial singing competition proper a few years later, and was incorporated into a separate segment within the Singapore Youth Festival. The contest was held to promote the development of singing as well as a composition. Each year that it ran, a "set piece" by a Singaporean writer was commissioned. Today, the Choral Excellence Programme and SYF Competition still enjoy their successful runs, still supported by the Ministry Of Education.

Some groups, such as the Anglo-Chinese Junior College Choir and the Victoria Junior College Choir, as well as the SYC, have ventured overseas and won prizes at international competitions. School groups were not the only new ensembles of the 19070s to early 1990s. A number of institution-based organizations have also emerged, including the Civil Service Choir, the SAF Men's Choir, the University Madrigal Singers, the United World College Choir and the Singapore Symphony Chorus (choral arm of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra). In 1994, the Philharmonic Chorus, an independent, semi-professional a cappella outfit emerged into the public sphere led by Cultural Medallion recipient Lim Yau.

Throughout its process, music-making seemed to have witnessed a number of phases: singing as leisure, as "art", in support of "religion", and even the articulation of a social cause and in the case of the biennial Sing Singapore campaign, launched in 1988, expression of national pride and fervour. As is likely to take place, given the proliferation of Christianity, albeit the number of denominations, singing in churches continues although they form only one dimension of greater church-music activity, even with decided emphasis on solo pop-style worship-leading; reminiscent of the charismatic movements of the 1960s. If anything, hymns appear to have been best preserved in the Chinese churches, deemed a more conservative group than English congregations. The Mandarin choirs themselves are still active, and hold yearly concerts. But without a social "cause", and faced with alternative distractions in an English-educated society, they suffer the problem of an ageing population. English-speaking school/youth choirs, on the other hand, have become the "phase" of the moment. Schools continue to outdo each other annually at competitions. Yet, as members of Chinese choirs also rightly point out: Without the framework of the school or competition mechanism, these groups cannot survive. Members leave the choir when they graduate. Some may form alumni choirs or return to sing "back-up"; most simply
stop singing. A possible solution of this stalemate, as composer Leong Yoon Pin sees it, is to encourage greater dialogue between English-speaking and Chinese choirs. This, he has done with his own Chinese-dominated Metro Philharmonic Society, through setting up a youth arm specialising in new repertoire.

A recent development is the spin-off phenomenon headlined by acappella ensembles and lighter groups such as Budak Pantai, In Accord, Vocaluptuous and Octmented. Their members, who once trained under the framework of school choral singing, are pushing themselves into new pockets of music-making. Malay dikir barat troupes exist within the context of school groups and appear in SYF presentations. This has already moved on to incorporate Mandarin acappella groups. There are other choral groups that continue to "survive" without the change and adaptation to new environments, fuelled on the belief that what they have been doing is still the right thing.

In the arena of Indian musical activity, we find traditional solo singing occurring alongside a "made-in-Singapore" phenomenon: The Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir, choral extension of the Singapore Indian Orchestra, led by Lalitha Vaidyanathan and formed in 1985. For many Indian music lovers, the imposition of harmony on traditional fare is sacrilegious to the concept of individual improvisation in Indian music. But as far as this group is concerned, its existence is justified, if only out of the sake of finding a new form of vocal expression contemporary to traditions in the West. As for the so-called Western traditions that are the mainstay of choral music in Singapore, we find, ironically, the gradual harking back towards an "Asian" slant, if not, a "Singaporean" identity. A little has been said about the so-called "Singapore" choral sound, characterised by the "tangy" blend of youthful voices. Every two years, at the Singapore Youth Festival, as part of the Choral Excellence Programme, a new set piece is always commissioned from a Singapore composer. The SYC itself also premieres a new Singaporean work every year. 169

Do Singapore composers write consciously in a "Singaporean" manner? Exactly what is identifiable with a Singaporean manner? In his presentations to schools as a composer, Kelly Tang has discussed this construction of a sense of identity for identity’s sake with an apocryphal Singaporean Seventh Chord, to match French, Italian and German sixth-chords which have made their claim in fame in music compositions and music theory books.

Ting et.al., inform us of the ways in which the composers of the 1960s and 1970s created an atmosphere of patriotic compositions – creating the perception (rightly or wrongly) of an agenda or innate function of a composer within a socio-political environment and of a rather precarious relationship between composer and society, specifically society in Singapore:
The Singaporean composer thus has every right to feel his lot is a difficult one.....however.....a creative artist...to demand attention from society...must come at least halfway to convincing society that his/her work is vital to the cultural and social ethos of Singapore. Generally speaking there is scarcely a composer in Singapore who depends on composition as a main source of income...publishing and performance of new music is Singapore are not commercial propositions.\(^{170}\)

Do composers feel the burden of being patriotic or nationalistic in their creative attempts? Will this interpretation of creativity have made them more accessible to a larger audience? Kelly Tang, a composer familiar with writing music in art-music, pop, jazz and Christian gospel, offers his views on relationships between creative effort and society:

*The assimilation of western art music and its attendant cultural heritage makes me feel like a cultural beggar. First generation composers felt they needed to inscribe an Asian-ness within the dominant aesthetic—in so doing they liberated the subsequent generation of Singaporean composers. Today our composition students feel “If I wrote/composed with a folk-tune—it would be so superficial and an insult to my country”.* \(^{171}\)

As a result, most groups take pride in accurately...
The fact that a disproportionate amount of the music performed by the SSO each year consists of performances of well-known repertoire from the 17th to the 19th centuries makes the problem equally vulnerable in the symphonic orchestra tradition.

One of the main events in the 1990s was the focussed formation of the National Arts Council in 1991 from having had the Ministry of Culture. Its stated mission was to:
Develop the local arts and culture,
Cultivate artistic talents, and,
Aid the growth of arts organisations and artists by rendering support morally as well as in terms of resources.

The NAC is also working diligently to create an environment in Singapore conducive to the development of the arts. It aims to raise the awareness and appreciation for the arts among Singaporeans, thus moving Singapore closer to its goal of being an oasis for the arts. To achieve these, it regularly organises various events such as the Arts Festivals, the Chinese Cultural festival etc. It also collaborates with the local arts circle to promote all manner of artistic programs. It has expended tremendous efforts in training and education too.

The National Theatre that opened in 1963 to serve, to bring about greater understanding among the different cultures and assist the government in its primary task...to create a unified nation out of the many racial and cultural groups, was by 1984, declared unsafe on structural grounds and that it had "outgrown its usefulness" and demolition work carried out in 1986. Construction work on Esplanade was begun in the mid-1990s. Throughout this time, the centre that was built at a cost of $600 million from public funds became a focus of debate and discussion among the arts community, converging on October 2002.

On Friday evening, 11 October 2002, a day before the official opening of Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay, Singapore's new national performing arts centre, a concert was held to commemorate the national inauguration of Esplanade's 1,600-seat state-of-the-art Concert Hall. Called the National Inauguration of the Concert Hall, the event featured the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) in three works under the baton of music director Lan Shui. The first half comprised the world premiere of Singaporean composer Er Yenn Chwen's *Fete* and Bach's Concerto for Two Violins in D minor BWV 1043. The second was solely that of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 op.125, *Choral*. The artistic philosophy behind the programming aimed to highlight the acoustics of the hall as well as the range and "colour" of the orchestra, as SSO music director Shui explained:

*The first piece highlights the brass and percussion. The second piece is scored mainly for strings. And in the Beethoven, the first three movements involves the full orchestra while the last movement has chorus with soloists.*
The concert was solely for invited guests, mainly sponsors who funded the building of the arts centre, members of the arts community and former staff of Esplanade, with the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong, as guest of honour. In his message for the programme book for the event, Lee had called it a significant milestone in our nation's artistic history. To date, this Concert Hall remains possibly the first such purpose built venue in Singapore's history. As Michael Wong Pakshong, chairman of The Esplanade Company that manages the arts centre noted in his address in the programme book for the concert:

*It has been articulated at various junctures in Singapore's history that the absence of a good concert hall for music performances has impeded the development of musical activities. Now, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay's Concert Hall will change all that.*

While comparisons are odious, there were nevertheless significant differences between both arts centres. Where the National Theatre comprised a single auditorium seating over 3,000, Esplanade comprised two large purpose built venues, the Concert Hall and a 2,000-seat Theatre, the smaller Recital Studio and Theatre Studio and outdoor performing venues. At the time of its opening in October 2002, Esplanade was equipped with state-of-art theatre technology. In fact, its very facilities had enabled Singapore to be the only Asian stop for Cameron Mackintosh's musical *Oliver!* with its intricate and complex set design in March 2003.

The interest shown by the public in the centre was immense. The two-day Open House that aimed to give the public a preview of the centre a fortnight before its official opening drew nearly half a million visitors. Expectations heaped on Esplanade were immense. The Esplanade Company that manages the centre had set for itself the vision of being a performing arts centre for everyone. The President of Singapore, S. R. Nathan, who officiated the opening of the centre, expressed similar hopes: *I hope Esplanade will be a common space that will inspire and awaken the creativity in each of us.*

At the centre of such optimism is the Concert Hall, a venue regarded as *Esplanade's Jewel.* Designed by renowned acoustician Russell Johnson of Artec Consultants, the Hall is equipped with the trademarks of Artec designed venues: adjustable canopy, reverberation chambers and acoustic curtains, features which allow the hall to be made suitable for any acoustical requirement. The importance of the Concert Hall was such that it had necessitated a separate inauguration from the official opening of the arts centre. As Benson Puah, Chief Executive Officer of The Esplanade Company explained in an interview the three reasons for the event: *It is such a special hall that I felt it needed pride of place to be inaugurated separately. Also, we wanted to specially thank our two sponsors, Singapore Pools and Singapore Totalisator Board. And we wanted to*
provide an opportunity for the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO). We created the platform for the SSO and invited them to do the honours.  

Expectations on the impact of the space on the development of the arts scene were indeed high, especially from those within the SSO. In 2003, the Concert Hall would become the orchestra’s performing home, the venue where it would hold its annual season: previously, the orchestra performed mainly at the Victoria Concert Hall (VCH), a building that dates from 1905, originally constructed as a public hall to commemorate the reign of Queen Victoria. For the SSO's music director, Shui, the new Concert Hall would allow the orchestra to further explore repertoire it had previously seldom performed, such as Bruckner symphonies:  

*VCH is not a hall for Bruckner. For Bruckner you need space, you need air, you need much more resonance and this new Concert Hall, it has more space and we are not just talking about physical space.*  

Cham Tao Soon, chairman of the board of directors of the Singapore Symphonia Co Ltd that manages the orchestra was equally hopefully of the heights which the Concert Hall could elevate the orchestra to as well as further introducing "fine music" to a wider audience:  

*The acoustics at Esplanade will also bring out the best in performances of the classical repertoire...it gives the SSO an opportunity to make a quantum leap. Esplanade offers specifically designed concert space for all musical genres, including symphony music. I look forward with great enthusiasm to working with Esplanade to enhance the national appetite for fine music, to the establishment of Esplanade as the focal point for the arts in Singapore, and to the continuing artistic development of the SSO into a world-class orchestra.*  

The Concert Hall certainly impressed two other orchestras who performed there during Esplanade's Opening Festival. Wrote Lorin Maazel, music director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, of the orchestra's Asian tour in his official website:  

*The new concert hall (one of the Esplanade theatres) is a feast for the eye, a joy to the ear. Powerful reverberant acoustics with accent on high frequencies.*  

For Serge Dorny, artistic director of the London Philharmonic, the Concert Hall was a prime attraction and it would be eventually instrumental to pitching Singapore long term into the international arts spotlight. He told *The Straits Times*, the nation's leading English daily, that *All orchestras around the world touring Asia and the Pacific rim will want to play in it.*  

Phan records the reception of some among the community who felt...the programming of the SSO and the SDT...in terms of cultural imperialism. A reader had written to the press, questioning the selection of the Singapore Dance Theatre and Symphony
Orchestra in inaugurating both venues, lamenting the lack of "Chinese-ness at the Esplanade's opening ceremony...The SSO and SDT are hardly what you will call performers of indigenous cultures, are they? You need to stretch your credibility to breaking point to call these two organisations champions of arts of our cultural roots. So we have ominous disappointment here. A more appropriate alternative to the SSO would have been the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, resplendent in their Chinese tunics, and performing the rousing Dagger Society (Xiao Dau Huei). That would have been an aural, visual and emotional high.  

For this reader, the "cultural roots" of the people of Singapore are determined by the present population profile of the country and its geographical location in Southeast Asia. This being, an island at the tip of the Malay peninsula with a population of over four million of which 76.7% are Chinese, 13.9% Malays, 7.9% Indians and 1.5% other races. There were also others in the public who viewed Western performing arts as being foreign and who expressed concerns on the dangers of constant publicity of and exposure to media promotion of Western performing arts. Thus wrote Chia Buk Chua, who had 15 years of formal education in English but who nevertheless had "an affinity for Chinese opera and Chinese classical music and very little interest in Western opera and Western 'classical music' in a letter to the press:  
If the media continues to promote Western performing arts, as it has been doing for the last 25 years, then I am afraid only Western fare will find an audience in Singapore and, for it to remain commercially viable, the Esplanade would have no choice but to look West. We will then get trapped in a vicious circle and the Esplanade will become our $600-million edifice to alien performing arts.  

There is no denying that for the acoustician, the Concert Hall was built primarily as a space for a Western symphony orchestra. Said Russell Johnson, who had also designed the Morton H Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas and the Kimmel Center, home of the Philadelphia Orchestra, when asked in an interview if Artec considered the specific cultural situation and needs of the community where a hall is built:  
When one of the goals is to provide a place for symphony orchestras to make music, to build one of the four or six best concert halls in the world, there are basic requirements which must be fulfilled. Good acoustics for Western music are good acoustics for other genres.  

Wong in his message for the programme book of the National Inauguration of the Concert Hall however, was careful to stress that the range of performances scheduled at the Concert Hall for Esplanade's Opening Festival demonstrated variety and the adaptability of the hall:  
... from the intimacy of a song recital in Jessye Norman's concert to a tribute to Singapore Chinese pop in Xingpop ... to the haunting rhythms of the music of Cape Verde ... from a Malay concert ... to the concerts of the London Philharmonic.
Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra ... This diversity of musical events ... is a demonstration that the Concert Hall can serve as a common space where boundaries are crossed and where cultures meet.195

Despite the fact that the Concert Hall was built upon the construction principles of the best of the 19th and early 20th century concert halls in the West such as the Concertgebouw, Carnegie Hall and Musikvereinssaal,196 despite the fact that the SSO would be a major user of the Concert Hall and despite the fact that the hall was designed by an acoustician who primarily saw the use of the space for performances of music from other cultures vis-à-vis that of Western symphonic music, there is thus a conscious attempt on the part of the arts centre to stress that the Concert Hall is for music of all cultures and for all people.197 Or was it because of all these factors, that there was a need to stress that it was "only when music of all traditions can play and feel at home in this Concert Hall that its role in Singapore society will be fulfilled?"198

This stress for diversity from the managers of the venue and from the public is revealing of two mindsets. First, in a multicultural society such as Singapore, no one culture or art form should be allowed to dominate a particular space, especially one that was built from public funds. This need for diversity in Esplanade's programming strategy in its mission to meet the needs of a multicultural audience was highlighted in a leader for The Straits Times written during the course of Esplanade's three-week Opening Festival: ... management should also be taking in comments on the Durian's artistic mission made by world-weary performers who play there and ponder the meaning of the periodic sniping on the assumed dichotomy between Eastern culture and Western art forms ...Still those who are not fans of Western genre do not care to see a $600-milion complex get saddled with an image they cannot relate to. The festival offerings have not been overtly Western, but programmers need to keep cultural eclecticism in focus at all times.199

While considered democratic in its emphasis for diversity, Phan observes the language nevertheless belies an initial fear of Western performing arts form dominating the programming philosophy of a national performing arts centre. Such fears thus reveal another mindset: an attitude towards Western classical music that views its presence as still being a cultural element foreign to Singapore. In fact, even more than half-a-year after its opening, there seems no escaping the perception of Esplanade as a space having been created for Western aesthetics. And the responses to such remain combative.200

At the launch of the first Asian congress of the International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA) on 18 June 2003 held at Esplanade, Graham Sheffield, artistic director of Britain's Barbican Centre asked: For all the sincerity behind building Asia's premier arts venue, and the trend of Asian arts gaining in the West, was not the Esplanade
ironically, still tailor made to the sonic and aesthetic ideals of Western arts? Singapore's Ambassador at Large, the first and former chairman of Singapore's National Arts Council and a director on the board of Esplanade, Professor Tommy Koh replied: *We did not ask to be colonised by the British for 150 years.*

For Phan, *the answer is laden: barbed with a sense of acceptance and irony. It is at once an acknowledgement of the legacy of Singapore’s colonial heritage. It is also a critique of that heritage, if not reflecting the continuing struggle to reassess and perhaps ultimately reject that heritage. To say "We did not ask to be colonised by the British..." is also to mean, "If we could, we would not want to have been colonised for 150 years, if, at all."*

Discussion
A vast array of themes become evident in the discourse as rich as it is enigmatic. It is clear that much of the music had been Euro-centric; British at first, Japanese constructions of a Euro-centric practice for a brief period to a global outlook in the present.

What is evident is also the way Euro-American art music has permeated the social fabric of those who lived in Singapore. It is not enough to discuss the impact of Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian communities throughout almost two centuries when we learn of contributions, both social and musical by German, Filipino, Japanese, English, Portuguese, Arab and Indonesian communities towards a Singaporean social and historical fabric. If nothing else, Dixon’s comments on the 1920s are worth a repeat for the gaps created:

*Singapore’s most notable achievement in the field of amateur entertainment was, of course, the annual production of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera by the city’s Amateur Operatic Society. It is interesting to recall that, when the Society produced the Mikado, the Japanese Consul-General and other members of the Japanese community were most helpful in the matter of costumes and stage settings.*

From a musical perspective, the *Amateur Operatic Society* in the 1920s seems to have little or no information about the society, members, instruments, modus operandi, support systems, repertoire, leaders, to name a few.

Like the Filipino community who rose to prominence in the public sphere during the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese community is one which there is considerable lack of information. Scholarship in this area would certainly be helpful in coming to terms with a community whose presence in Singapore was only associated with war atrocities during the occupation of Singapore.
At another level, musical cultures are also seen to interact and influence musical practice. For instance, it is not possible to deny a correlation between the role of Christian mission work and western art music, as much as contemporary composition has become more sensitive of an Eastern if not more Southeast Asian context. It is also not possible to deny the correlation of regimental bands and the orchestral tradition in Singapore.

At the epistemological level, there is a problem in identifying musical works that articulate the difference between western music and western art music as well as the Euro-American tradition. The nature, role and identity of this musical practice help raise questions about it in a way that an examination of capitalist modes of production, division of labour, among others can provide explanations to justifying cultural capital alongside financial health and wellness. At the heart of this practice, there is an aspect of this study which Phan Ming Yen has simply identified with silence, in fact many forms of silences. There was at one level, silences in narratives and silencing in narratives; events brought to light that had never been discussed since their taking place and since their being recorded for the first time in the newspapers. Another level of silence emerged as a prerequisite of the performance and enjoyment of music and the practice of music as a necessity to silence. Perhaps the most subtle and telling act of silencing is the way in which the Esplanade was built to justify scientifically and technologically that, good acoustics for Western music are good acoustics for other genres. In encountering and breaking through these levels of silences, it was and still is difficult to refute a view that the remembering and practice of Western music represents a means for the European community to recreate a sense of their home in a colony of the Empire. This process was seen as necessary because it worked alongside the assertion of power and superiority by one culture (the coloniser) over another (the colonised) in the face of the fear of the loss of the self-respect, pride and identity of the coloniser.

Does an equal-tempered tuning system, set with A=440 Hz as the universal marker for all musical traditions around the world as well, make an unchallenged assumption that musical practice of the Euro-American tradition can now be justified economically and politically as a universal? This question of spatial imperialism, like other questions raised are useful when they invite future and further scholarship in understanding what appears before us as a rich, diverse and diffuse narrative in this musical practice in Singapore.
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5 Thursday 8 May 1828 Issue 108

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8 Singapore Chronicle, Thursday, 10 April 1828 Issue 106. The Coroner’s entry records it as Friday last which would date the death as 4 April 1828.


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12 THE CONCERT, Singapore Chronicle, Issue 163, 17th June 1830, (From a Correspondent)


14 Singapore Chronicle, Thursday, November 7, 1833 Vol.3, no.45

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17 Buckley, Charles Burton, op.cit., p.744.

18 Ibid, p.746.

19 Singapore Free Press, 27 September 1846.


22 Ibid., p. 113.

23 Ibid., pp.629-630.

25 SFP, 3 September 1857.

26 Ibid.

27 SFP, 28 September 1865.

28 Ibid., pp. 750-751.


31 Sim, Leong-Ho, Tan and Gittins eds. op cit., p. 13.

32 Buckley, Charles Burton. An Anecdotal History of Old Times Singapore; Fraser & Neave 1902, Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1965 (Reprint 1969) p. 572. It is of interest to note that until the time I did research on the Assembly Rooms for the occasion of the inauguration of Old Hill Street Police Station as MITA Building following its restoration, the Assembly Rooms seemed to have been ignored by most historians post 1965.

33 Copies of the maps showing the location of the Assembly Room can be seen at the permanent exhibition on the history of Old Hill Street Police Station at MITA Building today.

34 For review of the concert by Catherine Hayes, see The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (SFP & MA Weekly) 22 March 1855. See also Buckley's comments in An Anecdotal History p. 613 that are based on the SFP review.

35 Now lost to history, Martin Simonsen played at the Assembly Rooms on 3 and 11 March 1856. According to advertisements and reviews that appeared in SFP 28 February 1856, 6th and 13th March 1856, Simonsen was Director of the Philharmonic Society of San Francisco and violinist to the King of Denmark.


40 Singapore Free Press 28 September 1865.

41 Singapore Free Press Thursday 7 December 1865.


44 For origins of the hospital built by the Chinese merchant and pioneer Tan Tock Seng see Turnbull. op cit., pp. 62 - 63 and Danam, Jacqueline, Chua, Christine and Mesenas, Geraldine eds. Singapore’s 100 Historic Places Singapore: National Heritage Board and Archipelago Press pp. 132 & 133. Although known as Chinese Pauper's Hospital, the hospital was later renamed Tan Tock Seng Hospital and relocated in 1861 to new premises on the corner of Serangoon Road and then Balestier Road and finally in 1903 to the its present location at Moulmein Road, in Phan Ming Yen,op.cit., p.139.
45 Turnbull. op. cit., p. 63. in Phan Ming Yen, op.cit., p.139.

46 SFP, 3 May 1866, in Phan Ming Yen, op.cit., p.139.

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52 Straits Times review of the concert at the Town Hall 18th June 1870.

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54 Phan Ming Yen, Music in Empire, op.cit., p.109.

55 Phan Ming Yen, Music in Empire, op.cit., p.110.

56 Singapore Free Press, 24 January 1896.

57 Straits Times 30 October 1886.


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70 SFP, 20 March 1891.

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For discussion on definition and identity of the Straits Chinese, Straits-born Chinese, Peranakan and Baba, see Rudolph, Jurgen. Reconstructing Identities: A Social History of the Babas in Singapore Vermont: Ashgate 1998 pp. 25 - 64. See also Tan Chee Beng. The Baba of Melaka: Culture and Identity of a Chinese Peranakan Community in Malaysia p. 44. Rudolph has argued that the terms 'Baba', 'Nyonya', 'Peranakan', 'Straits-born Chinese' and 'Straits Chinese' sometimes used synonymously have changed in meaning over time. From 1852, the legal definition of 'Straits Chinese' was that of a 'Straits born Chinese or 'Chinese British subject'. The Straits Chinese not only considered themselves native to their birthplace but also the legal identification by the British colonials and 'subsequent self-identification as 'Straits Chinese' came to be associated with status, wealth and the availability of local-born 'Chinese' women'. (p. 43), in Phan, Ming Yen, op.cit, pp.165-167.


Virtually all references, if any at all, to the Singapore Philharmonic Society's orchestral activities end with Brown's account, "Music" in One Hundred Years of Singapore Volume Two. In the course of Phan’s research efforts, attempts to revive the orchestra in the 1920s have never been discussed nor documented by any writer or historian. See SFP & MA Weekly 2 March 1922 for St Clair's last concert on 23 February 1922 and SFP & MA Weekly, 2 March 1922 for attempts to revive the orchestra.

SFP & MA Weekly, 21 July 1921. The announcement that appeared in the Singapore Free Press was sent to the newspapers for publication.
94 "Orchestra Concert: Yesterday's Creditable Effort" Malaya Tribune, 23 September 1921. The programme included Mozart's Overture to Don Giovanni, Offenbach's Barcarolle from Tales of Hofmann two English songs, Sullivan's The Lost Chord. Tay Lian Teck played the Brindisi Valse by D' Alard. The concert concluded with the march from Wagner's Tannhauser, in Phan Ming Yen, op.cit., pp.201-203. Phan Ming Yen, op.cit., pp.201-203.

95 SFP & MA Weekly, 29 September 1921, in Phan Ming Yen, op.cit., pp.201-203.

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104 Abisheganaden, Alex. The Music Score, The Straits Times 9 August 1982

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117 Rapturous Musical Treat Enthrals Wounded Troops—Syonan Times—10 April 1942.

118 Rapturous Musical Treat Enthrals Wounded Troops—Syonan Times—10 April 1942.

119 Syonan Times 20 April 1942: MALAY ORCHESTRA ON AIR

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124 Syonan Shinbun, 29 April 1942: Entertainment for Wounded Servicemen

125 Syonan Shinbun, SYONAN GEKIZYO: Concert by the Syonan Orchestra, 16 May 1942.

126 Syonan Shinbun, SYONAN GEKIZYO: Concert by the Syonan Orchestra, 16 May 1942.

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128 Syonan Times, 8 August 1942, Comfort Party Provides Rare Entertainment.

129 Indians give high-class comfort show to troops, September 20 1942.

130 Syonan Times, 22 October 1942, High Standard of Entertainment at Dai Toa Gekizyo (Cathay theatre)


136 Syonan Times, 1 February 1943, Beethoven Recital attracts big crowd.

137 Syonan Times, 9 April 1943, Beethoven Recital attracts big crowd.

138 Syonan Times—9 April 1943—People’s Need for Good Music Met in Syonan

139 Syonan Times, 21 May 1943 Symphony Concert Draws Full House (Friday Review).

140 Alex Abisheganaden, 80 years of Music, Straits Times, 9th August 1982.

141 Singapore Free Press, June 2, 1926.
A proliferation of ensembles and activities is best summarised below:
The Singapore Chamber Ensemble; The Children's Orchestra; Singapore Philharmonic Orchestra; Singapore Musical Society, reportedly formed in 1935, organised many orchestral and choral concerts, competitions and outreach programmes; Singapore Music Teachers' Society formed in 1952; Small orchestra of Radio Singapore; Singapore Symphony Orchestra 1961 (Amateur); Goh Soon Tioe String Orchestra; Kam Kee Yong String Orchestra founded in 1965; National Theatre Company 1968 setting up a quasi-professional orchestra. In 1968, it conducted auditions for National Symphony Orchestra; National Choir and Chinese, Malay and Indian Orchestras. This was to help generate the first Singapore Festival of Performing Arts in July or September 1968; Shalom Ronly-Riklis helped trained the Singapore National Orchestra in 1969 for the 150th Anniversary and National Day. Also trained the Singapore Youth Symphony Orchestra said to have been in existence since the pre-war period; NTUC Choir (1970 conducted by Lee Yuk Chuan); Singapore Children’s Orchestra started in 1970—60 children were selected from Catholic High, St. Nicholas, Serangoon South Primary and Hua Yi primary school ranging 7-12. The Young Musicians Society which was formed in 1969 and continues to this day in its own space in town.
163 National Theatre Trust annual Report 1980/1, p.15.
166 Ting Chu San, Leong Yoon Ping, Tan Tiong Gee, and Bernard: Singapore, op.cit., pp.112-114.
167 Ibid., pp112-113.
168 Ibid., pp.113-114.
170 Ibid., pp112-113.
171 Interview with Kelly Tang, May 2004.
172 Interview with Kelly Tang, May 2004.
175 Straits Times 8 May 1963.
176 For a quick overview of the history of the National Theatre there is a website: http://www.getforme.com/whatsgone_places_NationalTheatre.htm. For history of the National Theatre Trust within the context of the present day Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, see http://www.mita.gov.sg/abtmis.htm. See "Chairman's Review." and "Overview to Cultural Promotion Section.", National Theatre Trust Annual Report 1984/1985 pp. 4 & 5 with regards to the impact of the closure of the National Theatre in January 1984. For the closure of the National Theatre Trust, see "Review.", National Theatre Trust Annual Report 1990/1991 p.4. The staff and assets of the National Theatre Trust were absorbed by the present day National Arts Council which was formed in 1991. However, the history of Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay dates back to the 1970s when the idea for an arts centre was first raised.
177 By the time it opened on 12 October 2002, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay was one of the most anticipated arts projects in both the Singapore and international arts scene. Comprising a 1,600-seat Concert Hall, 2,000-seat Theatre, three studio spaces and outdoor performance spaces, Esplanade was also a centre controversy among both the architecture and arts communities in Singapore from 1992 when The Esplanade Co Ltd (then known as Singapore Arts Centre Co Ltd) was formed to manage the project until its completion in 2002. For a quick history of the project, see Tan, Hannah and Phan Ming Yen, eds. Opening. Singapore: The Esplanade Co Ltd, 2002, a limited edition book published in commemoration of Esplanade's opening. For international media coverage of Esplanade, see Ken Smith's "Eastern Promise." and Eva Johansson's "Only Time will Tell." International Arts Manager, UK: Alain Charles Arts Publishing Ltd, December 2002/January 2003. See also Wayne Arnold. "Singapore Offers and Architectural Symbol for the Arts." The New York Times, 3 December 2002. For early discussions on the project, see Janadas Devan "Is Art Necessary" and Koh Tai Ann and T. Sasitharan , "Commentary" in Art vs Art: Conflict and Convergence Singapore: The Substation, 1995, pp.50 - 71. For Singapore media, see Tan Shzr Ee "Its showtime at the Esplanade" The Straits Times (ST), 13 October 2002 and
"Esplanade helped S'pore draw more visitors", The Straits Times, 5 December 2002. I was involved with Esplanade from 1996 - 2000 as editor, The Arts Magazine and subsequently programming officer and was writer, editorial consultant and artistic director for Esplanade's MusicBox from September 2002 - April 2003.

178 For the attention given to Esplanade's Concert Hall by the international music scene, see Michael Quinn. "Russell Johnson: The designer behind Singapore's new concert hall on the challenge of creating performing space today" in Gramophone, January 2003, p.19.

179 "The Space of Sound: An Interview with Lan Shui." Phan Ming Yen and Tan, Hannah, eds. National Inauguration of the Concert Hall. Singapore: The Esplanade Co. Ltd. 2002, p.17. This 36-page programme book contains details on the event, including an interview with Benson Puah, Chief Executive Officer of The Esplanade Co, the acousticians of Esplanade, Artec Consultants and Lan Shui, music director of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

180 Ibid., p.3.
181 Ibid., p.5.

182 The Vision statement of Esplanade reads: "Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay is a performing arts centre for everyone.".

183 Phan Ming Yen and Tan, Hannah eds. Opening Day 12 October 2002 Singapore: The Esplanade Co. Ltd, 2002 p.3. This 40-page publication was a souvenir programme book for the invited guests at the official opening of Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay.


185 Ibid., p. 8.
186 Ibid., p.17.
187 Ibid., p.21.


189 Tan Shzr Ee. "Will Durians turn the arts around?" ST, 16 October 2002. The London Philharmonic Orchestra performed at Esplanade's Opening Festival on 14 and 15 October. Because of its architectural features that results it in resembling the local fruit the durian, Esplanade is commonly and affectionately referred to as such by Singaporeans. See Tan and Phan eds. Opening. Singapore: The Esplanade Co Ltd, 2002.

190 Ibid.

192 Foo Siang Luan, Shika Roy, Ng Wei Kok, eds. Singapore 2002 Singapore: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, p. 45.


195 Ibid., p.5.
196 Ibid., p.13.
197 Ibid., p.5.
198 Ibid., p.5.
199 "Durian of all Tastes." ST, 27 October, 2002.
200 Phan Ming Yen, Music in Empire, op.cit., p.17.
201 Tan Shzr Ee. "Is Asian arts still kowtowing to the West?" ST, 21 June 2003.
203 Ibid., pp.3-5.
204 Phan Ming Yen, op.cit., pp.196-197.
Musical Practice of the Mayflower Minstrels

While the definition and identification of Peranakan is one that is riddled with much difficulty, we would like to simply concentrate on a musical practice that seemed in the Oral History Board to have become associated with the Straits Chinese community. An important point to consider with the Peranakan community in Singapore is their affinity not only with their tradition but also with elements of Anglicisation. In this respect, the Mayflower Association was partly English in its orientation and a stronger part where their brethren in China seemed to be a priority for offering help, creating a curious mixture of affiliation and benevolence, redolent of colonisation.

Phan Ming Yen’s thesis draws attention to an increasing presence of Straits Chinese (either greater subscription or a larger number) during the late 19th century who were adopting Western customs, taking on to European sports and past times. In 1885 a Straits Chinese Recreation Club was founded and in 1897, Lim Boon Keng, a third generation Straits Chinese born in Singapore who was the first Chinese Queen's Scholar and legislative councillor from 1895 to 1902, founded the Philomathic Society. In 1897 also, Lim, together with Song Ong Siang, started the Straits Chinese Magazine, published in English, which "aimed to promote intellectual activity amongst the Straits-born people" and will "afford room for the discussion of useful, interesting and curious matters connected with the customs, social life, folk-lore, history and religion of the varied races who have made their home in this Colony." The related issue here concerns plans, in 1895, put forward for the formation of a public band to give weekly musical performances "in one or other of the public grounds of the town." The Singapore Municipal Commissioners had offered a contribution of $15 for one public performance a week on condition that voluntary subscriptions could be raised up to a similar amount to allow for another performance within the week.

Called the Santa Cecilia Band, the fund raising was taken up by a committee comprising both Europeans and Chinese. That the Chinese community showed interest in this band was evident in the spaces in which the band was proposed to perform: an afternoon performance at Esplanade and a second in either People's Park or on Hong Lim Green, both spaces within Chinatown. The honorary secretary of the committee was J. F. Craig who was one of the founding committee members of the Philharmonic Society and who in 1896 was its vice-president.

Initial attempts to raise the funds however were difficult. Although the band gave its first performance on 18 April 1896, by 20 April, only half the amount required had been raised and the Chinese community was criticized by a reporter of the Singapore Free Press for its lack of support: It is very disappointing to find that our numerous wealthy Chinese friends are so very backward. Up to this morning, only four have agreed to subscribe. There must be many hundreds of well to do Chinese who are willing to
support the band in its performances for the Chinese in the Public Park and on Hong Lim Green.\textsuperscript{7}

However, on 8\textsuperscript{th} May, when the Band was scheduled to perform at the Chinese Recreation Club at Hong Lim Green, the Singapore Free Press was glad to report that "a comparatively small sum yet remains to be made up for the amount required to enable the Band Committee to draw the sums voted by the Municipal Commissioners in aid of the public band performances."\textsuperscript{8} The newspaper also reported that "it is hoped shortly to get several Chinese airs and have them harmonised by the band for the benefit of Chinese subscribers." By the end of 1896, the Santa Cecilia Band had been performing at the Esplanade occasionally with the "Corporation contributing in all $525 towards the cost."\textsuperscript{9} Its performances certainly attracted the Asian population of Singapore for "the want of an elevated band stand is much felt as the Chinese and natives frequenting the Esplanade crowd so on the bandsmen as to detract greatly from the value of the performance."

The Santa Cecilia Band did indeed provide musical variety to the public, as the Singapore Free Press reported on 18 December 1896:

\textit{Tonight there is the competitive attraction of moonlight music in the Gardens and moonlight music by the Sea. The Santa Cecilia band plays on the Esplanade while in the Gardens sweet music will be discoursed by what might be termed (on this occasion) the band of the Rival Brigade. "You take your choice", though you need not pay your money.}\textsuperscript{10}

The Santa Cecilia Band programme comprised a selection of dances, including Evette, a waltz by Andre Latouche, L de Wenzel's polka Bonhomie, H. L. Darcy Jaxone's waltz Baby and short works including the intermezzo Shadowland by R. Farban, Sousa's overture Sans Souci and Bleger's Rose Damor. The "Rival Brigade" of course was a play on the name of the Rifle Brigade Band, the Rifle Brigade being the regiment stationed at that time in Singapore.\textsuperscript{11} There is however no further mention of the Santa Cecilia Band in the Singapore Free Press' weekly listing of events nor in the Singapore Municipality reports from 1897 onwards.

Both the Straits Chinese community, or at least a segment of, and Salzmann had been in contact for in 1898, he had written an article on Chinese music for the magazine as well as harmonised a Chinese melody.\textsuperscript{12} He had also been giving violin lessons for two years before the classes were "suddenly abandoned."\textsuperscript{13} However, by 1906, the magazine reported that "the signs of the times point favourably" in the direction of Western music being popular among the Straits Chinese, with "the pianoforte gradually being introduced into Chinese homes and the number of Chinese children who take lessons on it is gradually increasing."\textsuperscript{14}
Apparently 1885 was more than a coincidental date; our research comes up with the first documented instance of a Minstrel presentation announced by the European Police of a performance that the Curacoa’s Minstrel Troupe intend giving tonight at 9pm at the Police Bahru, kindly lent for the occasion by the Inspector General of Police and Officers. The programme is comprised of comic songs, breakdowns, stump speeches duetta&c, and looks very attractive. From what we have heard of the Curacoa’s Minstrels, we believe they are a great success and as admission is free, we would advise everyone who wants to spend a cheap and enjoyable evening to go there.\textsuperscript{15}

It is not clear whether the Minstrels featured in that 1885 concert had an impact that enabled the beginnings of the Minstrels of the Peranakan Mayflower Association. According to Matthew Chua, the Mayflower Group was formed in 1927 from a small badminton group the Mayflower Badminton party – Wong Peng Soon and other badminton champions from there, this brother, himself and other friends decided to organize a minstrel party and hence branch out to drama.

Matthew Chua learnt singing chords for vocal training and solfege. By the time he was ten to twelve years old, he performed in front of a live audience in his village. There was only one violinist, Matthew’s brother and Matthew sang and played the ukulele. He had a good ear for music. His brother learnt the guitar subsequently and Matthew would accompany him on the ukulele.

Nevertheless, for Matthew Chua, since some of the members could play instruments, they agreed to join in. They learnt to play and practice and eventually the numbers grew larger as more and more musicians joined. If some of the musicians couldn’t play well, Matthew’s brother would bring them to their home and give them tuition on any day that’s convenient to them (the weaker orchestra members) or at night. His brother would train and guide them until they were able to join the minstrels.

All the group members were men; there were no lady-musicians. They come back from school, remain at home and were not allowed to take up music or anything. Even if someone came to play music at home or practise music at home every week, one didn’t see ladies coming out as they would likely be in the kitchen preparing food to entertain the musicians that evening.

Matthew’s brother’s house was resembled a training school of music. His brother didn’t take any money from them as he was willing to help them. It was a form of enjoyment rather than a profession where they would have to collect money for lessons. They would play Malay keronchong and Melayu Asli songs. Later, minstrel parties, consisting of violin, guitar, ukulele, mandolin, blowing instruments and side drums, became the rage. Arrangements of music were made so that the entire ensemble could practice.
While orchestras were relatively unheard of, minstrel parties were the norm. Hence, the **Mayflower Musical and Dramatic Association** was formed and usually performed music or drama items. Music was provided for the Chinese community. For example, if any clan needed fund raising for any school, they would approach the Mayflower Association for the music, while the dancing portion would be put up by students of the school. If there was a function at the Chamber of Commerce or at the Great/ New/ Happy World (where yearly anniversaries were held), every minstrel party (or ensemble/orchestra) would be invited to entertain the crowd in the amusement parks.

Each party would perform for one night and the celebrations lasted about a month. If other associations called for overseas relief aids (ie: to China – where flooding of the Yang Tze Jiang river, Yellow river (Huang He) or Henan regions and famine besiege the common-folk), minstrel parties would perform to help raise funds. Sometimes, the drama and music dances are performed and the minstrel parties would serve as the ‘background’.  

The Mayflower Association was well known among Chinese Associations and Chinese Schools because they provided support and help by playing music. ‘Ling Lang’ was the dialect name of Mayflower Association. The Mayflower Association is one of the few parties around. Other Peranakan people would also set up their own parties to provide aid to China. During the Japanese invasion of China, the minstrel parties would help support the Chinese. According to Matthew Chua, although they were born in Singapore, support would still be given to the people in China.

With the Mayflower Association, no monies were exchanged for performing dance music, orchestras at parties and functions. In return for performances, usually a silver cup or a momento would be presented to them as a token of appreciation. Sometimes, a shield might be presented, with the name (Mayflower Association) and presented by the Association who invited them. On the 15th day of the Lunar New Year, there would be a procession in Singapore where every minstrel party in Singapore would take part in a procession at night. That is the time when all the ladies were allowed to go outside of their home to celebrate Chinese New Year. Otherwise, they would be kept indoors. Since that is the last day of the New Year, that would be the only time they can enjoy going out of the house; to the town hall or Anson road to watch the procession. Every party would hire a big lorry and decorate the lorry and they would play right up to Guilman House in Telok Garden.

Matthew Chua formed a band with his teacher, playing the ukulele. They practiced every week and because they were a dance band, much time was spent at the cabarets of Great World, New World and Happy World. While they played non-stop dance music, as amateurs, they didn’t get paid nor asked for money except transport costs.
Matthew’s minstrel party was asked to try broadcasting at the local station. From a small station in Orchard road, Cathay Building, they moved to the British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation. Sometimes they were invited to play for birthday parties. Transport would be paid for and the band would go to play for whatever parties, largely because they enjoyed the experience. The band was usually given a silver plated cup for the music rendered. Even in the cabaret, $25 was the money used to cover for transport.

When they were at the cabarets, there were 3 bands. *After we played 2 or 3 tunes, another band would continue straight away...dance orchestras usually consisted of clarinets, trombones, saxophones, among many other instruments, including bass, contrabass and piano. Dance band performances usually ended at midnight. Cabarets paid for each song and when another piece was played, people paid again. This is how the cabaret girls made money and the cabaret made money...people often paid for drink and other food while they danced. We were invited to the broadcasting station to broadcast once a month. Quite a lot of parties happened once a month, not only in English but in Mandarin. The Chinese musical associations would also hold parties.*

There were about 40-50 members in the Mayflower group. Out of the 40-50 members, half of them were active musicians. There were not only the Singapore born Chinese Peranakans joined but also those from the Chinese school – good musicians from the Cantonese clan. **Yeung Ching High School** had a brass band, so they would join in. Even the band master would come along when his students were in the band and they played dance music. Orchestral sheets were obtained from London, if not from local music suppliers. They would get the latest hits and before they sell, they would ask the band to sample some of them. The instrumental configuration was violin, guitar, trumpet, cornet, drum, side drum, jazz set, piano, trombone. Matthew’s brother would arrange the music and conduct the band. Matthew’s duty was to help print the music. *My brother would arrange and write the music and I would print the music for the members to practice. So we had chemical earth. We would put a pen knife, pull cap size and wet the earth. The music is written with a stiff nib and we would use the edible/copy ink (for endorsing) for the ink pad. When it was dried up, it would be laid in the pad for sometime, and the original copy is removed. A plain fresh copy would be laid on the pad and any number of copies would be printed.* When the music was copied at home, music was distributed to the members weekly. Every week, at practice, new music would be distributed there was an abundance of music scores. Different types of music were practiced before they performed at other people’s home for a function. Expenses were collected from members based on a monthly subscription of a dollar. Members would have their own instruments. Dance music included the foxtrot, waltz, tango, chacha, rhumba, to name a few.
Chinese tunes and Malay pantuns were only performed when there are requests from Straits Chinese at parties. Matthew’s brother could sing pantuns very well and he liked pantuns. They played Chinese songs, especially when Chinese schools invited them to perform for fund raising. The band would practice and then go for performance, encouraging dancing to the Chinese tempo, or singing. The band served as accompaniment whenever people wanted to sing. The band would be supportive of all kinds of music including Chinese music, whereas other parties may not be willing to perform Chinese songs. No money was exchanged for performances or services rendered. The association would go to the shop to buy a silver cup/ trophy and after that, they engrave their names on it with words of appreciation for services rendered to them, in the event of relief fund, like school building funds or flood relief funds….Every year, whenever there was news of disaster in China, every minstrel party and drama section would perform in the Peranakan language like ‘The Merry Lad’ and the ‘Wills’ Minstrel party. Usually the association came to know about the party through friends or they come across the address and they would write to us… or if the President (of another association) or officials wrote to us. So when they received the letter, the event was brought across in meetings and then a discussion about what token [donations] to help China. People were very understanding at that time; all the clans. We would never turn them away.  

Other minstrel parties too, when given chances to perform, would practice and play, even for shows. In the early days, there were Dondang Sayang Peranakan parties where they would sing the pantun when members passed away they would come with the gong and the violin to sing pantun at night. They would sing pantun for the departed soul for a few hours and then on the funeral day, they will be in the lorry, they would also play the dandang sayang song for the departed ones also, building on the life of the deceased and the love for them, something like that.  

There were possibly several minstrels and minstrel parties; around the Geylang and Katong area. The minstrels were not confined to the Peranakans. According to Matthew Chua, Indians, the Tamil party, Malays, they have their own. That’s why I say you cannot count how many parties there were...even the Chinese have their own minstrel party. They played Chinese music. The Cantonese know all the Cantonese music. They played modern music at minstrel parties. They had to bring [their own] instrument also. Tamil the same, Tamil community, Malay community, they join together. Not only the Peranakan or the English-speaking group. As long as they know how to play, they form their own, their own minstrel party. They gather all friends from...in the area where they stay, then they form and they have their own minstrel party….somebody would volunteer to play music, to learn to play music…we give them free music lesson.
Tony Danker not only corroborates Matthew’s observation but also believed that most of the minstrels were Eurasians. They formed their own groups and were identifiable because of their ability to play the repertoire and play the same instruments. They were called minstrel parties because of the black and white minstrels from Europe/London/America...They played violin, guitar, ukulele, tambourine. That’s why they were called minstrels...old marches...they were part of those pieces that those black and white people used to play...Black and White Minstrel shows in Singapore...locals used to go around with their faces painted with charcoal...for birthday parties...and things like that...groups of entertainers...and there were quite a few of them...they visited homes during Christmas playing tunes.... could be the English who brought this music to Singapore.  

The Mayflower minstrel parties did not ask for professional payment for their services since it was believed to be largely voluntary and were in it for the sense of fulfillment and pleasure gained in the experience. Perhaps it stemmed from the entire experience being enrichment rather than a full-time endeavour as well as the desire to be recognized as amateur musicians of very best quality of performance. This would go some way to explain why they were keen to test themselves out in entertainment zones. There were no thoughts of professionalism or money demanded for services rendered: We have never such in our mind you know? We play for the sake of joy – we want to be very happy, “I like to go to the party, to join somebody’s function and play a bit, so that they can join us...” That is what we have in mind all the time. Not like you call for the brass band you’ve got to pay. Some professional band, they have – the “Ong Cheng Piu” Brass Band. When you call them you have to pay. We, we amateurs... we’re not professionals. So we never think of demanding money. As long as we go, we play for you, entertain you people, you provide us with makan, fill our tummies, that means we are happy already. We enjoy. We think they are inviting us to your party. So we, every time we provide you money... give and take. So sometimes people in appreciation for the service, ok pay the transport “How much is the transport to and from the journey?” we will charter a bus, ok $15, $25 whatever, they give in red paper, with that money we pay to the transport. We went to all the amusement parks, we never demand anything. We’re happy to be there. Then the radio station, the same thing. They have transport, we want to get the experience, we want to see how the radio station like. That is how I spent my time, with those musicians out with all these musical parties...there was no dress, [just] a plain suit...earlier [we had] a white suit, tunic, trousers with shirt, white coat as one looked neat and tidy...later on somebody started...we put on the lapel of our open coat, the other party will have badges...For us [to perform for the occasion] it was free but for professional one had to pay...like during the early days, marriage processions needed brass band. So they call for professional brass band to play for them all the way and they had to pay.
According to Matthew Chua, the Mayflower group lasted until after the beginning of 1937 which marked the Sino-Japanese war and in a sense that ended the group’s aspirations and motivation. With the Japanese occupation, Matthew remembers being sent to the concentration camp. After that everyone was too busy. So we never played anymore. Some of them died. Most of the party were like that. Some fortunate one they revive. Some of the parties they revive for a short while only then they died.25

Matthew’s preoccupation was not only with the minstrel party. His skills at playing the violin enabled him to join the **Young People’s Orchestra** at Victoria Theatre near the Memorial Hall where practices were held. Rehearsals were held by Mr E. A. Brown. Matthew was a junior at that time. **Every Monday, we would have a classical music practice. Every quarter of the year, they (the orchestra) would provide entertainment for the school children. Every three months to encourage them and to appreciate classical music. We make them take part. They would join the School choir and they would sing as we played...there were all kinds of nationality in Singapore. A lot of European people came to join in the activities...good musicians... even their ladies. The French, the Italian, the German, the Dutch... they all came to join us in the orchestra. It was time well spent. Every evening for about two hours, practicing from 6 o’clock to about 8 or 7... about one and a half hours or two hours like that.**26

From its ambiguous beginnings to its flowering and fading away, this musical practice is one that continues to puzzle. If the Association began in 1927, it could not have emerged from a vacuum. Perhaps this is where future scholarship will help provide the links. It is probably that Song Ong Siang’s efforts towards the Straits Chinese Magazine in Singapore around the turn of the 19th century to provide sufficient impetus for a later group to appropriate the activities of the Minstrel party. The issue of the Peranakan community being so well versed with keronchong, asli, pantun and don dang saying are also puzzling because it would seem so much second nature for them to pursue these activities instead of a Minstrel party.

A full-length article on Malay Opera by Shaik Othman bin Sallim draws on its similarity with Bangsawan in the Straits Chinese Magazine of 1898 which may provide some clues.27 **The Malay opera is, so far as I know, the only kind of dramatic performance for the large section of the community speaking the Malay tongue. It is as popular among the Straits Chinese as among the Malay people: and it is no uncommon thing to see the ladies galleries filled en masse by the Straits Chinese women. I used to wonder why the Straits-born Chinese themselves have never taken to acting, even in the shape of private theatricals. On enquiry, I was informed that the stage was regarded as a low and degrading profession, and that the actors on the Chinese stage come from the lowest and poorest ranks of the people. I suppose therefore that so long as such is the current opinion, there is no likelihood of the Straits Chinese going on stage. And yet I think it cannot be denied that even the stage may be utilized for the purposes of**
educating the people towards higher views of life, domestic happiness and morality. One fault which an European or a native with a proper sense of delicacy will instantly detect in the Bangsawan plays is the exhibition of rude and filthy manners as well as the use of coarse, if not indecent language. It is not unfair to say that some of the plays would lose much of their popularity were these objectionable portions to be left out.

I must confess however that I am not altogether satisfied with the explanation given to me by my Chinese friends as to the reason why the stage is shunned by their people. Not only the “Bangsawan: but the Chinese theatres or “wayangs” are largely patronized by the Straits-born Chinese who do not thoroughly understand the language of the actors. I take it therefore that the passion of the Straits-born Chinese for the drama is just as strong as that of any other class of our community. Why should not some of them form themselves into a dramatic company and act popular English pieces, translated into fairly good and intelligible Malay to start with? They will not do so, because they are too independent and dislike anything that demands a constant mental strain. I may be wrong in venturing this statement, but that is my honest impression.

It is entirely possible that the dramatic company and acting of popular English pieces were translated at some opportune moment to emerge in the practice of the Minstrel Party among many other possible directions. Perhaps in the present context, the Minstrel party might be frowned upon for its potentially racist and demeaning content in a perceptibly odious form. Its use in practice by the Peranakan society functioned as a ‘gift’ to the non-English conversant Chinese community as well as fund-raising and charity events. In his work Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview, Jurgen Osterhammel identified three basic elements of colonialist thought: the construction of inferior "otherness"; the belief in mission and guardianship and the utopia of non-politics. Charitable aims and acts notwithstanding, activities presented by the Peranakan community would have to consider that these music making activities first lent their services, upon invitation, towards fund-raising activities for the non-Anglicised Chinese community and assistance towards a home called China; secondly, marked the line quite clearly between Anglicised and non-Anglicised Chinese communities; and thirdly, all too easily lent the impressions of utopian non-political motivation, considering that for services rendered, appreciation could arrive in the form of trophies, momentos, food and transportation. The extent to which benevolent colonialism was being practiced will need a more critical examination in relation to the innocuous practice of musicians of the Minstrel parties. Insufficient material at this stage makes this once most popular practice among many communities in Singapore the subject of future research and scholarship.
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1 Phan Ming Yen, Music in Empire, Western Music in 19th century Singapore through a study of selected texts, Unpublished MA dissertation, Nanyang Technological University, 2004, pp.165-167. For discussion on definition and identity of the Straits Chinese, Straits-born Chinese, Peranakan and Baba, see Rudolph, Jurgen. Reconstructing Identities: A Social History of the Babas in Singapore Vermont: Ashgate 1998 pp. 25 - 64. See also Tan Chee Beng. The Baba of Melaka: Culture and Identity of a Chinese Peranakan Community in Malaysia p. 44. Rudolph has argued that the terms 'Baba', 'Nyonya', 'Peranakan', 'Straits-born Chinese' and 'Straits Chinese' sometimes used synonymously have changed in meaning over time. From 1852, the legal definition of 'Straits Chinese' was that of a 'Straits born Chinese or 'Chinese British subject'. The Straits Chinese not only considered themselves native to their birthplace but also the legal identification by the British colonials and "subsequent self-identification as 'Straits Chinese' came to be associated with status, wealth and the availability of local-born 'Chinese' women'. (p. 43)


4 Administration Report of the Singapore Municipality for the year 1895, p. 18. Again, as with the ensembles formed during the 19th century in Singapore mentioned in this thesis, the course of this research has not revealed any other reference to the Santa Cecilia Band aside from its mention in the newspapers and the Administration Report of the Singapore Municipality., in Phan, Ming Yen, op.cit, pp.165-167.

5 Ibid., in Phan, Ming Yen, op.cit, pp.165-167.


7 "ST Cecilia Band." SFP, 20 April 1896., in Phan, Ming Yen, op.cit, pp.165-167.

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13 "Straits Chinese and Western Music" in SCM September 1906 Vol. 10 No. 3, in Phan, Ming Yen, op.cit, pp.165-167.

14 Ibid., in Phan, Ming Yen, op.cit, pp.165-167.

15 Singapore Free Press, 1885.


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.

23 Interview with Tony Danker, 4 June 2004.


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.


28 Ibid., p.131.

29 Ibid., p.131.

Musical practice of Wayang in Singapore

As with all definitions, there are problems of meaning, connotatively and denotatively. Wayang here refers to the numerous dialect-based musical theatres found in China with further sub-groups in each dialect tradition. However, this excerpt from the Straits Chinese Magazine in 1903 entitled Wayang Kassim seems to offer an alternative view of it being entirely Chinese:

The Malay theatre has been engaging the attention of the public of all classes and nationalities for some time from the highest to the lowest in the land. His Excellency the Governor patronised one play in company with the U.S. Admiral and both were believed to have found much to please them. Personally, I do not think much of the Malay Theatre, indeed I do not expect any good of any kind from the Malays! If the Governor and a certain portion of the public found any pleasure at all from Malay theatres, it must be due entirely to the novelty of the thing, and perhaps also as an encouragement to the management of these theatres to move onwards and make some progress; as for any real intrinsic worth in themselves I am sure there is none. The Indra Zanzibar Theatrical Co., have certainly gone ahead of their kind and deserve recognition for their work; but what is good in them is not themselves but the Dutch girls whom they have called in to their assistance. I should personally wish to see improvements made in the Malays themselves, for then would all the honour and glory belong to them as of right.1

Most of the records of the performances of Chinese Wayang in 19th century Singapore appear in reports, letters, memoirs and various lost works, all written by overseas English J.D. Vaughan author of “Manners & Customs of the Chinese in the Straits Settlements, Singapore, described in great detail the performances of Chinese Wayang. Vaughan came to Singapore in the early part of 1842.2 His impressions were that the Chinese in the Straits were all ardent fans of wayang; turning up night after night to watch the performances. He pointed out that the performers of Chinese Wayang at the time were mainly Cantonese, Teochews and Hokkiens and males impersonated female roles. In Vaughan’s opinion, the convincing performances caused the audience to be lost in them. He reserved highest accolades for the clowns (chou), claiming that they were on par with the comedians in Great Britain. He also mentioned children roles suggesting that like adult roles, their roles also encompassed a variety of characters. He gave the following account with regards to the performance of wayang: 3

A xiuyuan is actually a structure with a stage and a backdrop of about 10 feet. There are two doors on the stage for the actors to make their entrances and exits. There are some very simple stools for the audience to sit on during performances. The entrance fees range from 5 cents to a dollar...While the performance is going on, the audience usually smoke as they chat nosily. However, once the performance comes to an interesting part, they will be very attentive...For a Westerner, it is an unforgettable experience once he walks into this mass of polluted air in the hazy xiuyuan.

Vaughan believed that because everyone seemed to differ in their opinions as to what the stories were, no one seemed to know exactly what the plots were about. Besides performers of “theatres” at regular locations, Vaughan also mentioned open air performances. He mentioned stages for open air performances which usually did not have backdrops. The band consisted of four to five people playing simple percussion instruments like wooden clappers,
gongs and cymbals. Although there were no backdrops, the actors were able to deliver the performance symbolically. Even though the stage design was simple, the costumes worn by the actors were extremely elaborate; robes of silk with dragons, phoenixes and floral designs sewn on with golden threads. Charles Wilkes, head of the American Trade Commission watched performances of Chinese Wayang on his visit. He reached Singapore in early February 1842. His short stay coincided with the Chinese New Year, so he got to watch Chinese Wayang and it left a deep impression on him. Wilkes observed the dialogue of the actors had a strong rhythmic feel to it because of the accompaniment provided by percussion instruments like clappers, gongs and cymbals. There was also a conductor who controlled the band.4

It is very likely that the Chinese Wayang described by both Vaughan and Wilkes was actually a form of thanksgiving to the gods; especially so since Chinese immigrant workers often built temples, held rites and staged shows to thank the gods/deities for their blessings in a strange land. Staging performances along the streets in Singapore was problematic because the colonial government was wary of possible security compromises as wayang drew large crowds. As a result, in 1850, 87 leaders of the Chinese community, including Tan Kim Seng and She Youjin petitioned to the colonial governor in the hope of gaining permission for Chinese to freely stage Chinese Wayang in front of temples during festivals.5 However, the colonial government passed the Police Act and Conservancy Act in 1856 resulting in strict control of Chinese gatherings, street performances and demonstrations. The non-compliant had to pay fines ranging from 100 to 500 dollars.6 This measure antagonized the Chinese community. With the support of secret societies and merchants, a mass strike took place on 2 January 1857, almost all the Chinese shopkeepers on the island took part in the strike as a form of protest.7 Riots were also organized in the middle of March because the police had chased spectators who were watching street performances.8 From then on, the colonial government realized politically, it was not advisable to interfere in the customs of the Chinese immigrants. Moreover, these practices were to be seen as acts of thanksgiving meant for deities and not for a general audience.

Singapore was in the midst of rapidly developing its agriculture and mining industries and engendered demand for labour bringing a further influx of Chinese migrants. The number of Chinese in Singapore by had risen to 164,041 in the early 20th century from 54,572 in 1871 and rose to 418,866 by 1931.9 Census Reports of 1881 recorded the presence of 240 Chinese artists in Singapore (including actors and painters). With the ease of migration at that time, most of the actors who came from China had wayang background. An interesting observation in the census was the categorization of wayang actors as “professionals”; much the same category as teachers, doctors, engineers and government officials who accounted for only 4.8% of the total population. This was in stark contrast with their lowly status in China and as would have been in Chinese culture and value systems. There were already women actors at the time, 14, according to the census.10

The period from the 1880s to the 1930s is best described as a golden period for the development of wayang in Singapore. Its rise in popularity was commensurate with the influx of Chinese migrants to Singapore. It was naturally an endearing thing for these migrants to be able to watch on foreign soil, performances from their hometowns. This also was their primary pastime. At the same time, these performances also gained popularity
among the upper class Chinese, particularly so among the merchants. Thus, troupes of various sizes were established and there were also frequent changes of troupe owners.\textsuperscript{11} Many of the troupe owners were actually Chinese merchants who had profited considerably from the entrepot trade in Singapore. This expense on wayang seemed a partial indulgence of their fortune on their recreation. One of the earliest Chinese newspapers, \textit{Le Bao} illustrates the attitudes of the merchants by describing the lavish gifts such as high quality costumes and accessories given by the merchants to the performers and musicians of wayang.\textsuperscript{12}

An excerpt from the Singapore Free Press gives us an idea of the way in which wayangs formed part of an opulent setting:

\textit{On Saturday night last night the ‘spirits of the departed’ were suitably entertained by the Hokkien Ghee Hin Kongsee, whose display of the good things of this part of the world was one of the largest and most magnificent that has been held this year...There were altogether \textbf{21 sets of wayangs} in full play placed at a good distance from one another, including \textbf{several Chinese concerts}. Notwithstanding this unusually large number, there were enough spectators to see and criticise the merits of each. Their genial headman Mr, Gun Kum Lian, assisted by Mr. Gun Chok, received a large number of residents at the Kongsee house, who were most hospitably entertained. We understand that the amount expended for the whole affair exceeded $3000. This closes the sumbayang season of 1886 which has been altogether very successful and creditable.\textsuperscript{13}

Troupes could also be hired to perform at the residences of rich merchants. For example, She Liancheng threw a feast in his house in celebration of the lawsuit he won for his late father She Youjin in 1891 and he also hired a Chinese Wayang troupe to perform on that occasion. Naturally, the audience at such a performance was limited to invited guests.\textsuperscript{14} Chinese Wayang troupes were also hired to perform during important festivals in the Straits colonies. For example, the 50\textsuperscript{th} and 60\textsuperscript{th} anniversaries of Queen Victoria’s coronation were celebrated in 1887 and 1897 respectively and there was Chinese Wayang being performed on almost every street in Singapore on both occasions.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, even the officials serving on the colonial government often brought important foreign visitors to watch Chinese Wayang.\textsuperscript{16} One such visit is summarised below:

\textit{The entertainment given in honour of the marriage and Accession of H.I Majesty and Emperor to the Throne of China, by the Consul to the principal merchants and his friends of the “Celestial Reasoning Association”, “Straits Chinese Recreation Club” and also the “Tong Locke Whee” at the Consulate was a brilliant success. The Chinese here are evidently making the event a gala day and are decorating and illuminating their houses. They have also \textbf{theatrical performances on stages} in different parts of the town. It is the express wish of the Chinese that we should take this opportunity of acknowledging their great obligation to the government for the permission to have these performances.}\textsuperscript{17}(emphasis mine)

Most troupes are believed to have been hired from China or Hong Kong. Before a performance, the troupe owners would often advertise in the papers for the sake of drawing more crowds, often making grand claims about the skills of these actors.\textsuperscript{18} That however, did not prevent wayangs from being the subject of the public nuisance complaints from those who had no inclination for it. Section 268 of the Penal Code for instance declared that:--\textit{A person is guilty of a public nuisance who does any act...which causes any common injury, danger or annoyance to the public or the people in general who dwell or occupy property in}
the vicinity...or annoyance to persons who may have occasion to use any public right. If the inhabitants of a district are persistently annoyed a petition of house-holders to the Chief Police Officer should set the law in motion. The authority of Yahayah Merican v. Khoo Hock Leong 1878. July 29, reported in Kyshe’s Reports, the Court will at the suit of a private neighbour restrain by perpetual injunction the performance of a wayang or Chinese theatre in a house adjoining his if it causes a nuisance. 

In actual fact, a relatively uncomplimentary reception of wayang performance was recorded by H. V. Pederson who wrote “Door den Indischen Archipel (it was translated into Dutch and published in 1902). In it, there was a part in which he described his experience of watching Chinese Wayang with his friend:

In the evening, we strolled to the nearby temple to watch a street play. In the large open space in front of the stage, there were about over 200 people with pigtaile sitting on the ground while watching the play. The stage was very high. Tonight’s story seemed to be centred on fighting plots. The actors wore masks that suggested aggression...They gave a loud cry and started fighting. The offensive one directed his spear at the opponent while the defensive opponent used his shield to protect himself...Subsequently, a few elders in long robes appeared. They violently tossed their long beards and started to sing as if in dialogue. Next, a few performers that looked like they were doing aerobics appeared, making somersaults and jumps on stage. Their agility was truly impressive. In the whole show, the most important part had to be that of the main singer. There were about 4 to 5 musicians in the band. They sat at the rear side of the stage. The music they played were a cacophony of metallic and wooden sounds, not very pleasant for the ears... (emphasis mine)

During the late 19th century, wayang underwent a transition from mobile traditional art performance to one with a fixed venue. As such several performance venues were specially meant to be rented out to Wayang troupes. They were known as xiyuan (theatre garden/ theatre). As early as 1878, the Chinese Ambassador to Great Britain Zeng Ji Ze (son of Zeng Guo Fan), also an envoy to Great Britain and France, made a stopover at Singapore and he wrote the following in his diary:

There are around 100,000 Chinese and 70% of them are Hokkiens, 30% are Cantonese...There are corridors, clans, restaurants and stages. All these can be found. Li Zhong Jue, who came ten years after Zeng Ji Ze, also wrote the following in his famous work “Customs in Singapore”:

There are both male and female troupes in the xiyuan. There are about four to five of such places in dapo (presumably South Bridge Road today) and about one to two in xiaopo (presumably North Bridge Road today). They mainly stage Cantonese operas; there are also Hokkien and Teochew ones.

In a drawing of the “Map of the City District of Singapore” by Major H.E. McCullum (an engineer for the colonial government) in 1893, spaces marked as xiyuan in the which existed in the 1880s, identified three xiyuan: Smith Street; Wayang Street; and New Market Road. These early xiyuans were usually very simple and they were often overcrowded too. The municipal council conducted checks on xiyuans once every six months. It was thus discovered that some xiyuans even had actors and their families living in them: There are 20 to 80 people living in some of the xiyuans. Some sleep in cubicles formed by dividing the room using wooden boards. The others either sleep along the corridors or at
any empty space they can find. All sorts of rubbish can be found in the corners of the house and no one bothers to clean the place up. Buildings like this often have not been cleaned for years.  

The natural consequence was the Straits Settlement Government Gazette, October 25, 1895: *In this Ordinance "theatre" includes any theatre room booth or other place open to the public or any class of the public in theatre which there is carried on any stage-play circus conjuring dancing, *wayang*, mayong, mundu, joget, ronggeng* or other operatic or theatrical performance of any sort whatever.*

From 1 January 1896 onwards, all newly built *xiyuans* were required to possess blueprints and certificates issued by the municipal council to show that they were up to standard. Existing owners had to abide by the following terms in order to renew their licence biannually:

1. The building had to be used as a *xiyuan* and approval had to be given by the municipal council. In order to be given approval, the building had to satisfy certain requirements. For example, the walls had to be built with bricks or stainless steel and not wooden boards.
2. The aisles and staircase in the *xiyuan* had to be at least 4 feet wide.
3. Each seat in the *xiyuan* had to have an area of at least 3 square feet.
4. All actors, their families, employees and owners were not to reside in the *xiyuan*.
5. The *xiyuan* had to stop its operations every six months for the purpose of spring cleaning and refurbishment. Only when the municipal council was convinced that the requirements had been met could the licence be renewed.

Although most facilities in the *xiyuan* did improve after the passing of the law, the problem of overcrowding was not eliminated. In the annual report of the municipal council in 1915, it was pointed out that:

*Although regular and spot checks are conducted frequently at the xiyuans, they still often appear to be overcrowded. The main reason behind this is that the xiyuan owners sell both entrance tickets and seating tickets. Thus, we are in the midst of forming a committee to examine the modifications made to the laws regarding xiyuans. Starting from 1917, the control over xiyuans will be even more stringent. All those xiyuans who do not satisfy the requirements will have to develop new blueprints. Those who did not comply risked not having their licences renewed.*

Additionally, fire-fighters were required to be on the standby whenever shows were taking place in the *xiyuan* as there was no electricity supply and most *xiyuans* used oil lamps and coal gas for lighting, thus making them prone to fire. Accordingly the financial report of the municipal council, particularly under the category of “Fire Brigades on Standby at *Xiyuans*”, saw an annual income increase from 2,025 dollars in 1915 to 5,146 dollars in 1924. This shows that the authorities not only firmly enforcement the new rulings but made the wayang operators pay for the safety.

By the late 19th century, congestion in the city area caused a movement to the suburbs resulting in villages of varying size. Not surprisingly wayang found its way there; this shifting of sites was not without its ramifications. Recorded are a series of letters to the Editor of the Singapore Free Press echoing similar sentiments:
DEAR SIR—Is it asking too much to inform me of the reason why a certain class of Chinese clubs is permitted to desecrate Sunday within sound of the European Sunday observing community? It appears to me that the Ordinance in force for the due observance of that day is somewhat inconsistent in its application inasmuch as every Sunday is specially devoted by a certain class of Chinese to indulgence in gambling, etc, etc, besides other doings of a nature I fear not quite in accordance with our ideas of what should be, and “Wayangs” with full orchestral accompaniments. The gambling, etc, etc, and the other “doings” can be safely left to the care of our guardians of ‘morality’ but the “Wayangs” I think, should be observed in the Sunday Observance Ordinance. Why should the noise arising from these “wayangs” be allowed to disturb the peace due to Sunday? In the neighbourhood of Scott’s Road, there existed a Chinese club on the conduct of which I would prefer not to pass an opinion. It is better perhaps, but the noise emanating therefrom was mild in comparison to that which disturbed the neighbourhood on Sundays 19th and 16th instant. On the evening of the latter, two Wayangs, no less, both in the same compound situated near the fork formed by Campong Jawa Road and Bukit Timah Roads, close to the end of Scott’s Road, were in full blast. Campong Jawa was literally blocked to vehicular traffic by the usual type of Chinese costers’ portable kitchens and al-fresco restaurants. The refreshment department in connection with the “Wayangs” no one would reasonably object to if the odours arising therefrom are ignored and the road kept clear but the awful noise created by the accomplished artistes comprising the orchestra should not be allowed: what between the deafening crash of the cymbals, the loud monotonous beat of the drums, accompanied by the occasional blast from an instrument the sound of which is not unlike that of an Alpine horn with all the musical tones shut down by the manipulation of an inebriated amateur, it seemed as if Pandemonium was let loose....All day long, night also until gunfire on Monday morning, the performance continued without a break. I dare swear if others than Chinese attempted to make night hideous in the manner obtaining last Sunday night and Monday morning, the result would be different to a mild remonstrance only, from a suffering member of the community. Where are the Police? Why should descendants of a race whose natural instincts in matters musical are at total variance with that of the European be allowed to violate the day of rest and rational enjoyment as observed by the principal civilising nations of the world? The remedy is quite simple. Let the Chinese community enjoy their pleasures by all means but their “music” (save the mark) be restricted to week days only and not later than 11pm. Surely that could be done. It is so in effect elsewhere and no hardship entailed either. Thanking you in anticipation for inserting the foregoing in your valuable paper.

A SUFFERER

We believe there is no provision in any Ordinance dealing specifically with noise nuisances but on the authority of Yahayah Merican v. Khoo Hock Leong, reported in Kyshe’s Reports, the Court will at the suit of a private neighbour restrain by perpetual injunction the performance of a wayang or Chinese theatre in a house adjoining his if it causes a nuisance.

Section 268 of the Penal Code says:—A person is guilty of a public nuisance who does any act...which causes any common injury, danger or annoyance to the public or the people in general who dwell or occupy property in the vicinity...or annoyance to persons who may have occasion to use any public right. If the inhabitants of a district are persistently annoyed a petition of house-holders to the Chief Police Officer should set the law in motion. ED. S.F.P
SIR:--Several of your correspondences have been complaining lately of Wayangs and other musical (?) entertainments and of their inability to abate the nuisance. I would suggest a trial of my method, and that is to get up and visit them armed with a small Malacca cane and stop them by sheer force of being a “Britisher”. I found it successful the other day, when a Wayang was playing near my house. I gave them until past eleven p.m., and then my better half and myself being seedy and unable to get a wink of sleep, I got angry and dressed and visited the show as one of the public, armed as aforesaid, and shortly after arriving there I said “berhinti ini bising” and it “berhintied”, after some persuasion and trouble, including the refusal of two offers of handfuls of silver and a pressing invitation to enter and have a drink. Subsequently, I had the Towkay prosecuted and eventually he was fined. The new Ordinance is lamentably failing in a most vital respect, and that is where the Chinese M.L.C (Municipal Legislative Council?) scored, for it does not apply to private wayangs but only to those ‘open to the public or some section of the public’ but perhaps a lawyer might be able to find a chance of a loop-hole through which to drive the proverbial coach and four in the work “section”, for if you and I, Mr. Editor, can visit a wayang without let or hindrance, surely we are a “section” of the public though possibly an unimportant section, as least as far as concerns your obedient servant.

“INSOMNAMBULIST”

“And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day,
Shall lift up their tents like the Arabs
And as silently steal away.”

MR. EDITOR—Let the music be Chinese tom-tom music and I guarantee the cares of the day will not budge an inch. A Chinaman’s house in the upper part of Killeney Road considerately treated the midnight air last night to a vigorous and lengthened recital on the tom-tom, much to the delectation (?) of the European would be sleepers in the neighbourhood. The quarter is a European one and I think this fact should weigh with the organisers of the entertainment before they attempt a repetition of it. It should certainly attract the attention of the Police authorities.

SUFFERER

SIR— Permit me to avail myself of the opportunity offered by the letter signed by A Sufferer to corroborate fully all he says regarding the nuisance of which he complains. I regret to say that I am a fellow sufferer to such an extent that I have already threatened Mr. Lee Cheng Yan who is responsible for the annoyance with legal proceedings. One would think that a person who mixes with Europeans and knows their customs and habits so well, would be well aware what an annoyance such nightly performances must be. When Supt. Bell was residing in the neighbourhood he managed to bring some persuasion to bear, which mitigated it a little, but it has now got worse than ever. It is hoped that Mr. Lee Cheng Yan will have sufficient consideration for his neighbours to put an end to the nuisance without obliging them to take steps to compel him.

I am Sir,
Yours truly
E. Nathan
SIR:--The inhabitants of houses in River Valley Road, Killeney Road, Institution Hill and that neighbourhood generally, have had a magnificent opportunity presented them, during the last few days, of studying the technical intricacies and intense beauties of Celestial music even when living in recognised European localities. The writer is informed that the occasion giving rise to this unusual order of things is the occurrence of Chinese nuptial jubilations. The celebrations appear to be on a large scale, as is testified by the number of guests continually arriving at the house where the happy pair are staying. The civilised West prefers to spend its honeymoons in quietude and comparative solitude but the enlightened Celestial evidently likes to make as much show and noise as possible during such happy periods. After melancholy and irritating banging of gongs, interspersed with the accompaniment of drums, and lasting for some five days, the neighbourhood above mentioned was on Sunday (the quiet Sabbath of happier England) treated from 5.30pm to midnight, to the incessant charivari of a high Celestial order, varied occasionally by shrill Chinese songs. The latter appeared to be mainly comic, to judge by the shouts of boisterous laughter that greeted the various verses, especially towards midnight.

It is true that the monotony of the Chinese music, which to the uncultivated mind resembles the noise usually met with a working smithy, was interspersed with music given by a band of musicians playing European instruments. The two orchestras evidently vied with each other as to which could make the most bunyi-bunyi. They followed each other in incessant rotation. The writer has just been awakened this (Monday) morning by more Celestial music from this same house at the hour of 5 am, and the intolerable row has already lasted nearly an hour. He trusts his “boy” is right when he states that to-day sees the close of this unexpectedly rich musical treat given gratis to the community at large. The un-musical and those whose ears do not appreciate the beauties of Celestial music, especially when such appreciation entails the total banishment of sleep during ordinary sleeping hours, will doubtless desire, with the writer, if they live in the neighbourhood in question that the enlightened Chinese would spend their honeymoon in European fashion, or in neighbourhood un-infested by the orang-puteh, or say at Selitar, by the sea, or any such places, so long as these be out of sight, out of hearing and out of mind.

ONE WHO HAS SUFFERED

Wayang troupes during this period had mostly male actors. However, in the early part of the 20th century, what was known as “women troupes” also surfaced. A minority of the actors are believed to have come to Singapore as “contracted workers”. They might have come from Hong Kong, Shantou or Hainan. As they had not paid off their transport fees, they had to sign contracts and “work” for their employers for one to two years.

In 1910, F. V. Hochberg, witnessed some wayang while touring the villages in his brief stay in Singapore:

After lunch, we toured the suburbs by car. We went in the direction of Katong. The roads were filled with coconut trees.... We alighted at a Chinese village where a performance of Chinese Wayang was going on. The actors were busy putting on their make up in the backstage, painting their faces with various striking colours including black, white, red and green. Their faces looked like masks.... Then, they changed into their costumes: some wore their robes sewn with golden threads, some put on wings and dragontails of arresting colours, some put on the guise of the clown ...
The early 20th century was a major event in the course of development for wayang here. This was the formation of **Ba He Hui Guan** by the artistes on 26 November 1906. **Ba He** was previously known as **Li Yuan Tang**, believed to have been already established around 1857. “**Ba He**” “Union of Eight” referred to the union of eight branches. The eight branches were Zhao He Tang (*sheng*), Qing He Tang (*hua lian*), Fu He Tang (*dan*), Xin He Tang (*chou*), Yong He Tang (*wu*), De He Tang (*da wu*), Shun He Tang (*jie xi*), and Pu He Tang (music and set). Over the next 20 years, amateur troupes also came into being. The main ones were Yu Yu Ru Yue She (1912), Hai Tian You Yi Hui (1913), Tan Hua Jing Ying Ci Shan Ju She (circa 1920) and Liu Yi Ru Yue She (1929). These amateur performers joined the groups mainly due to their interest for Chinese Wayang. They often gave public performances to raise funds for charities.

In the pre-World War I period, xiyuans were also often used for fundraising or publicity purposes other than wayang performances as evident in Song Ong Siang’s documentation of two such events. Li Chun Yuan organized a fundraising performance in 1909 for victims of the big flood in Guangdong. In the same year the xiyuan was used for publicity to aid the anti-opium campaign. Performers were either Cantonese or Hokkien and tickets were sold between two and fifteen dollars. During the performances, paper fans and snacks were sold at highly inflated prices. Performers received many flowers and gifts, only to put them up for auction at high prices in order to generate more funds for the campaign. Song also mentioned that during the 1911 revolution in China, the xiyuans on Wayang Street often organized fundraising campaigns to help the revolutionaries.

Other than at the xiyuans and along the streets, wayang troupes often staged performances on the stages (*xitai*) found in temples too. In the early days, the bigger Chinese temples often had a permanent stage built in each of them. For example, the Thian Hock Temple had a stage built in front of it (the year it was erected should have been around the 1880s because the front of the temple had yet to undergo land reclamation before then and in 1893, McCullum’s map already reflected the existence of the stage). This stage was later demolished as a result of the construction of the Hokkien Clan Association. Judging from a blueprint of proposed improvements to the walls in 1907, the stage itself was probably quite grand at the time. Another stage (*xitai*) which was similar was built next to the Wu Cao Tua Peh Kong. This was demolished years ago together with the Cao Clan Association. Compared to the xiguan (this should be an alternative term for xiyuan), such xitais were naturally much more simplistic in terms of design. They were normally four to five feet aboveground. The stage was in the shape of a square. There were no seats and no makeup rooms. As there was very little space on the stage, the actors usually did their makeup below the stage before climbing up the ladder at the backstage to wait for their turn to appear onstage. At times when there were no performances, these xitais were used as classrooms for either private or public schools.

Between 1930 and 1940, we are informed of stiff competition Chinese Wayang faced from other forms of entertainment and the uncertainties of the political situation, all the troupes had to innovate in order to survive. Located at the intersection of Tanjong Pagar Road and Cantonment Road and built in the late 1920s, Lao Shi Jie, also known as Huan Le Yuan, was owned by someone named Lin De Jin. He invited actors of Peking opera, Zhang He Lou and Meng Xiao Pei among others, to perform. Although there were only civil plays (they were
lacking in manpower), the performances were nevertheless very popular among the audience. The success of this ushered in the emergence of a new form of performance venue. In 1931, Da Shi Jie You Yi Chang/ Big World was established at the intersection of Kim Seng Road and Jalan Bukit Ho Swee. Soon after this, New World was started at the intersection of Serangoon Road and Rangoon Road. Gay World was also established at Geylang Road. These “worlds” were huge; they not only had xitais, they also had stores, restaurants and various entertainment facilities like billiard rooms and game stalls. Customers could walk into the “worlds” and watch performances, shop and dine. Furthermore, the price of admission was far cheaper than that of the traditional xiyuan. Thus, the traditional xiyuan came to be under threat. According to accounts by Zeng Tie Ying, troupes in the 1930s preferred to perform in the “worlds” because in a typical xiyuan, the troupe owner had to make a down payment for rental to the xiyuan owner. If the ticket sales were not good, they would have to make a loss. However, the owner of the amusement park would normally give money to the troupe as a form of remuneration because he wanted to attract more customers. The amount of the remuneration depended on how well the amusement park flourished. For Big World, due to the lack of proximity to the city area, there could be an extra payment of 70 to 100 dollars. The remuneration also depended on how famous the troupe was and how attractive the kind of play to be presented would be for the audience. At that time, Cantonese operas were more popular, so the Cantonese troupes received a higher remuneration than those troupes performing in other dialects. From the point of view of the owners of the amusement parks, such extra payments used to attract troupes were necessary; there was a time when the shop owners in a particular “world” refused to pay rent because there were no Cantonese operas featured there. The “worlds” mentioned above changed the troupes they hired frequently.

Street Plays:
After the 1930s, street plays became popular in Singapore. Judging from the number of permits issued by the colonial government for the purpose of staging street plays for thanksgiving (to the gods), and the total income it collected from this having increased from 4,749 dollars in 1915 to 56,889 dollars in 1934, it can be surmised that the street plays were indeed getting popularized (refer to Table 2). However, it is believed that the engagements for street plays were largely accepted by troupes who did not manage to get opportunities to perform in the amusement parks. Cantonese wayang thespian Liao Xing Hua said in an interview: At that time, Cantonese operas were very popular. We often had to perform all seven days in the week! The Chinese Wayang performances at that time were mainly long plays and each one could last for three to four days. If we had had to terminate the story halfway through due to street play engagements, the audience would have been displeased. Besides, the remuneration for street plays wasn’t much. Unless we had no venues to perform at, we would not accept engagements for street plays.40

On the other hand, the rise of street plays also created some problems for security. The annual reports of the police force had mentioned repeatedly that secret societies had caused armed fights through the control of troupes who were allegedly mainly the Teochew clan troupes; which explains why there were fewer Teochew plays in the Entertainment Worlds. As secret societies often created trouble during street plays, the colonial government had to blame the atrocities on street plays out of desperation, and so in 1934, banned street plays.41
Moreover, during the mid to late 1930s, the Japanese invasion and massacre of Chinese in China incurred the wrath of many overseas Chinese beginning a mass boycott of Japanese products and various fundraising campaigns. The Chinese in Singapore and Malaya organized various fundraising campaigns under the leadership of Tan Kah Kee. The response from the overseas Chinese community was overwhelming. Wayang troupes participated actively in the effort by holding fundraising performances and spreading anti-Japanese propaganda. After the Double Seventh incident in 1937, a group of merchants who were also wayang enthusiasts (Lim Bo Seng was among them) formed amateur Peking opera groups holding fundraising performances at Big World, New World, Gay World and Empress Xiuyuan. Other amateur groups established during this period included Tao Rong Ru Yue She and Xing Hua Ru Yue She.

From mid February 1942, the Japanese troops occupied Singapore and renamed it Syonan-To. In the first few months, the Japanese went on a search for anti-Japanese members and all cultural events came to a halt. Subsequently, in its bid to establish the “East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”, the Japanese attempted to get rid of all Western influences and Western movies were the first to be banned. However, the Japanese did not intervene in the area of wayang and on 29 April 1942, when the local Chinese were celebrating the Tian Chang Festival many troupes were “invited” to perform in various locations day and night. In reality, despite the tyranny of the Japanese troops, the major “worlds” resumed their operations after the workings of society became more normalized. Thus, troupes began to perform in amusement parks once again. In addition, radio stations also invited them for recordings in the hope of making their programmes more interesting. The Japanese military also often ordered the troupes to perform at factories and dockyards for the sake of entertaining the workers there who were really victims of forced labour. In a later period, the troupes even gave fundraising performances under the arrangements made by the Overseas Chinese Association. These were to aid the overseas Chinese and the Eurasians who were on their way to create new settlements in Johore.

In the early stage of the post-Japanese Occupation, wayang experienced a resurgence of popularity. Some xiuyans in the amusement parks (e.g. Chongqing Xiyuan and Shanghai Xiyuan in Big World) had mainly Peking operas. The Pu Chang Chun Xiyuan in New World had mainly Cantonese operas. However, as films were seen as greater potential for profit-making, Shaw Brothers gradually turned their attention away from wayang towards films. Gradually, the xiuyans in amusement parks were converted to cinemas and nightclubs while the xitai (“a stage for plays”) became a getai (“a stage for songs”). Wayang troupes at that time mainly faced problems because of a lack of actors and performing venues. Many actors who had come to Singapore also returned to China or Hong Kong at this time, causing wayang to dwindle further. The owner of Guang Hua Troupe, Liao Xing Hua, who was himself a wu sheng, said that there were around 150–200 members in the troupe before the war, but after the war, this number had dwindled to 70–80. He explained that the lack of requisite skilled expertise made it impossible for some major plays to be staged as these required more than a hundred performers.

Other local troupes like Lao Sai Tao Yuan Teochew Troupe also faced the same problem of shortage of actors. Although this troupe tried scouting for actors locally, it was not successful. Later, they requested to import 15 actors, musicians, and mentors from Shantou...
through the Immigration Office but it was not successful either. This might have had something to do with the civil war happening in China at that time. At the same time, the Ministry of Labour started to pay attention to the issue of child labour. The modified labour law set a minimum age for an individual to start work. Under a labour act passed in May 1949, children and youths under the age of 17 were not allowed to work as actors unless they held the permit from the Ministry of Labour. This permit was meant to be given only to healthy and physically fit children. Thereafter, some professional troupes found it even harder to source for child actors. According to the annual report from the Ministry of Labour in 1951, there was a total of 496 requests for permits for child actors. Among these, 291 were approved, 130 were pending approval and another 66 were rejected. Most of these child actors were employees of troupes. 7 of them were with Teochew troupes, 5 with Hokkien troupes, 6 with Cantonese troupes, 3 with Shanghai troupes, 2 with Foochow troupes and another 14 with Teochew music troupes. The rest were with either Malay or Indian troupes. At that time, almost all the Hokkien troupes were performing at the amusement parks while the Teochew troupes went to various places to perform (local and abroad). The Ministry of Labour took into considerations that it was difficult for the working conditions of the children to be monitored while the troupes were on overseas trips. Thus, it arranged for General Hospital and Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association to conduct regular checkups for the child actors. From the 1950s onwards, child actors gradually decreased in numbers. According to statistics, there were 300 permits issued to child actors in 1954. Two years later, the number dropped to 195. In 1969, there were only 70 such permits issued. In the 1950s, there were already signs that Chinese Wayang was on the dwindle. Some lesser known troupes were even on the brink of bankruptcy. When Liu Yuan Wu tried to apply for a permit to bring in a Teochew opera troupe of 80 people from Bangkok for a six-month performance, the application was rejected immediately by the Ministry of Labour. The reason given was that the local wayang industry would suffer even more in the face of foreign competition. The Ministry of Labour advocated helping the local troupes so that they could continue to survive.

The social disturbances of the 1950s and 1960s affected the wayang industry in Singapore. Some troupes had to make overseas trips in order to survive. According to Liao Xing Hua the main sources of income at that time for the troupes were overseas performing trips to Malaysia and Thailand. One reason for the decrease in the number of troupes here was the urbanization of Singapore. In the 50s, the populations in the villages were still very dense and the villagers would always eagerly await the Chinese Wayang performances during the Seventh Month of the Lunar Calendar (Zhong Yuan Festival) and at the thanksgiving events. When there was a wayang performance, there would also be an open air bazaar where food, furniture, books, magazines, cloth etc would be sold. Thus when there was a thanksgiving street play, it was always very lively. In the 50s where villagers were generally not affluent and the entertainment industry was not developed, such street plays became the main source of entertainment for the villagers.

With the quickened pace of urbanization, many villages, originally the hubs of wayang performances, were converted into new towns (HDB estates) and factory belts. As a result of complaints by HDB dwellers over the level of noise made by wayangs, the police force limited the number of places where troupes could erect temporary stages for performances from the 1970s onwards. This restriction caused the number of performances to decrease


each year. Thus, some troupes had to disband due to their inability to survive. Others either reduced the number of performances or concentrated on touring Malaysia and Thailand. Some troupes also had to resort to cutting down the number of actors. For example, Heavenly Eagle/Tian Ying and Glory/Guang Hui gave the major roles to Hong Kong actors and the secondary roles were given to part time actors.\footnote{As the expenses of a Chinese wayang performance were quite high, the ticket prices were high too. This made it difficult for them to compete with the cinemas. According to Zeng Tie Ying, the ticket prices for Chinese Wayang ranged from 1 to 5 dollars. But the movie tickets at the time cost between 75 cents to $1.50 by comparison. Liao Xing Hua also pointed out that Shaw Brothers employed cost-cutting measures too. It employed troupes to perform in amusement parks and tour Malaysia on a contractual basis. Towards the end of the 1950s, when Shaw Brothers realised that wayang was not longer profitable, they stopped employing actors altogether. Thus, some risk-taking individuals formed their own troupes and rented the xiyuans in the amusement parks from Shaw Brothers to stage professional wayang performances. However, they only performed for 4 to 5 days in a week. In the 1960s, this was further reduced to 2 to 3 times a week. Often audience numbers often fell short of expectations by as much as half.\} Movies clearly had a debilitating impact on wayang. Attempts were made, however, to make movies based on wayang in the 50s and the 60s sparked off yet another round of interest in it. However, this revival of interest was insufficient to prevent a diminished wayang market made worse by worsening performance standards. Nevertheless, amateur troupes began to thrive in the 1960s. The establishment of the people’s theatre in Chinatown spurred on the renaissance. This theatre has undergone several renovations and today, it has air-conditioning facilities, a seating capacity of over a thousand, modern sound and lighting systems. It also has a central location, thus it has become the main performing venue for local amateur Cantonese opera groups and foreign professional Cantonese opera groups. The Victoria Theatre and the National Theatre were also once 2 ideal venues for these groups to perform at. In the 1960s, there were amateur groups such as Qiong Lian You Ju She, Yi Guang Ju Tuan, Serangoon Qiong Ya Xiang Cun Lian He Hui Xi Ju Zu, Chinatown Cantonese Ge Ju Tuan and Dun Huang Ju Fang. Of these, Dun Huang Ju Fang established in 1981 had the highest achievements and it was also the most active. The leading thespian was Madam Hu Gui Xin. The new generation of amateur wayang actors all had the courage to innovate. They understood that if they wanted to attract the audience and maintain the interest the younger generation had for Chinese Wayang, then the traditional art had to improve in order to keep up with the expectations of the new era. Thus, during a performance, they would screen bilingual subtitles so that the audience would understand what is being said or song even if they do not understand dialects. The more important thing was that, the younger actors now had a more systematic form of training. Thus, their rate of improvement accelerated and the standard of their performances was also raised gradually. Public organizations played an important part in encouraging the interest in Chinese Wayang. Since May 1968, RTS introduced a weekly programme on wayang appreciation, inviting locally known groups. The Ministry of Culture helped organize drama festivals and since August 1978, wayang was one of the categories featured. To help alleviate the financial burden of amateur groups, the Ministry of National Development came up with a plan to aid local theatre so that there could be financial support for local plays and Chinese Wayang.
On the other hand, foreign troupes continued to receive great support from the audience. For example, when Xin Tian Cai Teochew Troupe and Hong Kong Zhong Yuan He Teochew Troupe came to the south in 1969 and 1970 respectively, they had very good ticket sales at New World and Gay World. The Hong Kong Zou Feng Ming Cantonese Troupe (1975) and the China Guangdong Cantonese Troupe 1980 also received great support. These foreign troupes brought with them a revamped form of Chinese Wayang performance. Their elegant lines, new props and new settings influenced the development of Chinese Wayang in Singapore greatly. They also gave part of their earnings to the National Theatre and individual schools, thus establishing the link between Wayang and arts education in Singapore. Perhaps one of the most notable features of the support for wayang has been the National Theatre Trust which continued since its inception to find sufficient support for wayang even till the late 1980s.  

A number of groups are seen in the public sphere to promote the performance and appreciation of Chinese opera in Singapore today:

**Siong Leng Musical Association**

This organization led by the late Teng Mah Seng, promotes Nanyin, wayang from the Hokkien tradition. Joseph Peters informs us the music of Nanyin is based on the just intonation modal pentatonic system. It has a basic repertoire consisting of three categories of music:

1. **chih** – (47 works which can be either sung, played with musical instruments)
2. **P’u** – (has 12 and is only for instruments)
3. **Ch’u** – (is exclusively for voice and an extensive repertoire)

According to Chia Wei Khuan, Nanyin, which literally means “The Music of the South”, can be traced back to as early as the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). It was originally a form of music for the palace. There were two historic episodes resulting in differently evolving forms for Nanyin: The Jong Jin revolution during the Jing Dynasty where court musicians were forced to migrate to the southern part of China, particularly in Sichuan and another in the coastal province of Fujian. It was in the historical city of Quanzhou and Xiamen that Nanyin continued to flourish and evolved into the form we know today. The second was a cultural negotiation with influences from the Tang Dynasty. It was probably during the nineteenth century that Nanyin was spread to Southeast Asia and in Singapore was established 1819, Nanyin found its way here in the similar manner and was popular with the Hokkien community. Siong Leng Musical Association is one of the most active musical groups of the Hokkien community that has preserved and promoted this ancient art form in Singapore for many years.

The information on Nanyin is scarce. However, from two articles that published in the *Nanyang Shang Bao* and *Lianhe Zaobao*, it is believed that the performance of Nanyin generally adhered to the tradition repertoire brought in from China. The main musical instruments used are, namely, the erxian (a two-string fiddle), the dongxiao (a vertical-held six-hole bamboo flute), the pipa (a pear-shaped four-string lute) and the sanxian (a long-necked three-string instrument). A singer usually takes the place at the centre of the ensemble, holding a clapper in hands to mark the first beat of every measure. A full array of percussion instruments consist of hand-bells, gongs, cymbals, woodblocks, as well as a set of
short hand-held bamboo pieces known as sibao which are made to vibrate against each other in fast tempo.

From an article in the programme book of *International Nanyin Concert and Symposium*, the Siong Leng Musical Association began as the Heng Yun Ge Nanyin Association (Horizon Cloud Pavilion), was formed in 1901 and was the most active Nanyin group in the Malaya Peninsula. With the 1937 *Lou Gou Bridge* incident in China, which led to the outbreak of war against the Japanese, Heng Yun Ge Nanyin Association took it upon itself to gather support for the Chinese through its fund-raising concerts. Unfortunately the colonial government began to clamp down on its activities for fear of incurring the wrath of the Japanese. The action caused an internal dissent and the Association was disbanded. A few dedicated members, however, continued the fund-raising effort under the name of Yun Lu (Cottage of Cloud) Nanyin Association. Again, these efforts provoked violence protect from the Japanese and the operating license of Yun Lu was withdrawn. Following a period of quiet inactivity, some members reorganized themselves and re-established what we now of, as the Siong Leng Musical Association in 1941.

Till the early 1970s, Nanyin music was performed, following traditional practice. One of the most significant contributions of the Association was to provide music accompaniment to dance *Journey to the Lakes* shortly after World War II, a performance which was made into documentary. Malcolm MacDonald, Governor-general of Southeast Asia who saw it in London was so impressed that at a welcome function for his visit to Singapore, he specifically requested for this music to be performed. In 1947, the Association was invited to perform in Johor Bahru for an official gathering, with as many as one thousand guests from many foreign countries. The enthronement ceremony of Queen Elizabeth II in Singapore on 2nd June 1953 was marked by a performance by the Siong Leng Musical Association.

Ramifications of the formation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 were deeply felt with Nanyin music, specifically with issues and practices of cultural exchange. Singapore’s post-independent period of modernisation and industrialisation saw a decline in the appreciation on Nanyin with factors cited such as limited repertoire, the proliferation and promotion of Mandarin, but perhaps more so, a decided preference for music of Western art-music and popular culture. Teng Mah Seng, who assumed leadership in Siong Leng as chairman, initiated the organization of an inaugural Southeast Asia Nanyin Conference in 1977, making it a platform for exchange and sharing of both musical and academic ideas. At the inaugural Southeast Asia Nanyin Conference, Ong Pang Boon, the then Minister of Labour and Guest of Honour, pointed out in his speech articulated a need to nurture a new generation of successors through systematic teaching and learning to prevent Nanyin from fading into extinction. At the opening of the new Association premises at Bukit Pasoh Road, the same Minister expressed concerns that if Nanyin could not keep up to the latest trend and development of the modern the society, the heritage might lose its appeal and be abandoned.

There were at least two outcomes of these events. Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan decided to take turns hosting these conferences, which not only gave impetus to Nanyin but also stimulated a revival of in the land of its origin, Quanzhou. Subsequently, numerous conferences were held in the cities of Quanzhou and Xiamen. The initiative was a little later
to coincide with economic reform in China, which enabled frequent music exchanges between Siong Leng and China, specifically teachers such as Zhou Sheng-Xiang and Chen Jia-Bao, who were engaged to teach at the Association. A Nanyin network was firmly established through visits to Nanyin groups in the Philippines, Malaysia, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Secondly, Teng Mah Seng was also responsible for several hundred new-style Nanyin lyrics based a wide range of contemporary subjects, with Zhuo Sheng-Xiang composing the melodies. The project is highly significant because it was a bold attempt to fuse modern idioms into the traditional art form. The result was The Complete Book of Great Nanyin Melodies in three volumes. Following that, the Association also launched a compilation of his works entitled New Nanyin Songs: A Selection of Composition of Teng Mah Seng.

Nanyin received recognition on an international Occidental stage at the Llangollen Musical Eisteddfod in Wales, 1983 when Teng’s wife, Madam Ong Guat Huah was awarded Third Prize in the Folk Song Solo singing Reminiscence, by Teng Mah Seng and Zhou Sheng Xiang. Additionally, the Association’s ensemble won fourth prize with a performance of Trotting Horses.

With management succession systems put in place, the death of Teng Mah Seng on 5th December 1992 due to cancer, enabled successors, trained by him, to able to continue the tasks and responsibilities of the Association to a new level. A Teng Mah Seng Cultural Arts Foundation was founded in March 1993 with the Association, under the leadership of Ong Pheck Geok, Teng Hong Hai, and Music Director Wu Qiren, the promotion of Nanyin was intensified through involvement in the traditional and Liyuan opera, experimental approaches to to Nanyin, organizing Nanyin symposium and publishing Nanyin music and education resources. With assistance from the National Arts Council, Siong Leng has participated in the Singapore Arts Festival, Opera Festival and the Composer’s Forum on Traditional Music. Apart from staging many short operas and opera excerpts, it has produced full-length operas that incorporated unconventional content, music, style and presentation. These operas include Sakyamuni (1993), Mu Lian (1995), The Life of the Buddha (1996), The Tragedy of a Crane-Besotted Emperor (1997), The Eminent Vinaya Master Venerable Hong Yi (1999) and Motherly Tears (2002, 2003).

**Chinese Opera Institute**

The Chinese Opera Institute was established in August 1995 as a non-profit organisation with the support of the National Arts Council. It is a training and research centre responsible for the promotion of all facets of Chinese opera, both practical and theoretical through lectures, demonstrations, performances, publications, and training programmes. The institute aims to strengthen and enlarge the audience for traditional Chinese opera by popularising it in schools and community centres by assisting their productions of Chinese opera. The COI aims not only to innovate in order to create interest but also to preserve tradition. According to Dr Chua, many young people prefer Huang Mei (Mandarin opera) in the beginning because they can speak Mandarin.
The Chinese Opera Society
The COSS was established in August 1992. Its three strategies are
1. The use of English in their publications and subtitles during performances,
2. Conducting talks and demonstrations for students and the public and
3. Experimenting with new ways to present Chinese operas.

The Chinese Opera Society has brought to Singaporeans various opera troupes from China. These included Chuan Opera, Peking Opera, Hebei Opera and Sichuan Opera. Well-known Cantonese opera troupes have also been invited to perform here.

Chinese Theatre Circle Ltd.
Established in 1981, the Chinese Theatre Circle (CTC) has been promoting the art of Chinese Opera, dance and music locally & overseas and in June 1999, registered as a charity under the Charities Act, 1994. In 1984, CTC paved the way with its Bringing Chinese Opera to the People project, organising a series of Cantonese Opera performances at Community Centres. It also conducted talks and demonstrations on Chinese Opera in USA colleges and universities in 1992. Its signature opera A Costly Impulse was recorded live in Beijing in 1993. In March 1995, it became the first non-profit professional performing Chinese Opera company in Singapore and was subsequently awarded the "Excellence for Singapore Award" in 1997 for its efforts in promoting Chinese Opera in Asia and in the world. CTC made its debut in the Arts Education Programme in 1995 under the auspices of National Arts Council and has since visited more than 100 schools and junior colleges, presenting talks, demonstrations and performances of Chinese Opera to more than 200,000 students. In June 1998, CTC started the first Chinese Opera Teahouse in Singapore to create greater opportunities for the appreciation of Chinese Opera. In October 1999 it presented Madam White Snake and helped to raise more than $300,000.00 for the Dover Park Hospice. From 2000, Madam White Snake has been presented in English, Mandarin. CTC went further with a presentation of Chinese Opera in Malay in August 2001. CTC to date, has staged more than 2,000 performance in Singapore and at least twenty countries in different continents.

There are many other clan-based societies and temple-affiliations which are also engaged in similar activities specific to their genre of wayang. According to Juntaronont and Mak 1994, there are about 170 Chinese temples in Singapore. A professional troupe usually performs at an average of ten different temples each month and returns to a temple previously performed in during the same month for a different religious occasion. The audience at a Chinese street opera performance consists mainly of middle-aged and elderly people and at certain sites, as well as foreign tourists. Two groups of audience are identified—those who want to watch and attend to it and those who prefer to stay at a distance and attend for social reasons, chat or smoke (or both).64 Lee Tong Sen informs us that four Chaozhou opera troupes and at least 8 Fujian opera troupes perform street opera regularly. Groups get their opportunities to perform during the Hungry Ghost Festival and the annual opera gala at the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong temple. There are usually about 30 members, manager, stagehand, musicians and performers. Their average age is about 50, most members are between 50-65. They are sometimes known as the dapigu (hit-on-the-bottom) the professionals for whom apprenticeship was served with the cane. Dapigu also distinguishes the professional from the amateur. Their wage is $30-$40 for three nights of three hours. Opera performers have a low
esteem of their profession, at least not in contemporary urban Singapore. The regular Chinese opera is viewed as outmoded as a form of entertainment and relegated to the practice of customary religious practices. Nevertheless, professional opera troupes continue to be patronised and supported by a regular community and constitute an integral social process among the Chinese communities today. There are three genres of Chaozhao opera troupes:
1. qingchang—pure singing
2. zouchang—walk-singing
3. regular street opera.

Street Wayang
What has to be established in future scholarship is to understand wayang in its two pronged manifestation, staged-wayang/opera and street-wayang/opera. One of the most comprehensive studies of and fieldwork on street opera in Singapore has been carried out by Lee Tong Soon, who notes that during the 1960s, there was a general decrease in the number of professional opera troupes, accompanied by a concomitant rise in popularity of amateur groups.

Lee attributes the decline largely due to:
1. A general disinterest in Chinese opera among the younger generation;
2. A decrease in the number of older-generation opera enthusiasts
3. An influx of technological developments such as television and film
4. A fall in the performance standards of professional troupes.

The overall discussion of street wayang from the 1960s onwards has been its fate in a post-independence predicament in Singapore where government placed emphasis on political consolidation, economic expansion and the general process of nation-building. In the following decade, Chua Beng Huat described Singapore as a new social order characterised by instrumental rationality and a population with a strong achievement motivation. Emphasis on moulding a disciplined work-force and rewarding educational success came with the aim of achieving industrial success. As such the argument is built around the need for the arts and culture to abide by the dictates of the logic of economy. The demands made of ‘culture’ based on industrial success and economic development, in Lee’s terms, transcended the symbolic aspects of cultural construction, such as the practice of ethnic arts and traditions. As far as individual group identity was promoted through the cultural practices of the respective communities, they were according to Chua Beng Huat restricted to largely privatised celebration of festivals, dances and ornamental adornments.

We are informed of the aims of the government of Singapore during the late 1970s and early 1980s in constructing an overarching national identity based on the ideology of multiculturalism. The ideal of a national culture in Singapore was envisaged as one that transcends the respective ethnic cultures that constitute the population. Koh Tai Ann drew on a statement from the Prime Minister’s Office in 1986:

*The government’s policy was not to “assimilate”, but to “integrate” our different communities, in other words, to build up common attributes such as one common working language, same loyalties, similar values and attitudes, so as to make the different communities a more cohesive nation.*
There were four distinct educational systems in colonial Singapore and slightly beyond independence, each using the official languages (English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil) as the major medium of instruction. English was instituted as the sole medium of instruction in 1987 to ensure national cohesiveness through the use of “one common working language”. At the same time, a second language that is the ethnic tongue, was retained and made compulsory for students for the purposes of retaining ethnic identity through language. For Lee, the annual Speak Mandarin initiated in 1978, as far as the Chinese-dialect speaking community in Singapore was concerned, was part of the government’s effort to produce a common language among the various Chinese communities whose identities were more dialect-based. More importantly, there was a gradual emphasis on ethnic traditions, in terms of language, religion, customs and other expressive forms:

There is encouragement not only of traditional religion but also of the so-called traditional arts to remind the different communities of their cultural roots; to express individually the identity of each community and collectively to express Singapore’s multicultural identity; and as a means to create culture in itself.

During the 1980s, there was a decided shift in encouraging ethnic identity through advocacy in traditional arts and art-forms and customs balancing the needs for continuous industrial growth and success in economic development. Lee believes that since the late 1970s, there was growing concern about the gradual demise of ethnic cultures in Singapore because of the influx of Western style that came together with industrialisation. The inculcation of so-called Asian values and ethnic roots, therefore, came to be regarded as essential defense against the encroachment of western social values. Education policies in the 1980s reflected the emphasis on moral education and religious knowledge; made compulsory in the school curriculum in 1984. Major festivals of the well-known ethnic groups in Singapore were organized and supported by government agencies in the domains of traditional art, rituals, costumes and food. For Lee, traditional art forms, especially Asian ones, constituted an important resource in the process of constructing national identity and culture in Singapore.

Given the fragility of wayang in these circumstances, Chua Soo Pong informs us while the professional troupes were fading, many amateur groups sprang to fill up the vacuum and they inculcated discipline and morality in the practice of Chinese opera. Joanna Wong of the Chinese Theatre Circle (CTC) explains that amateurs played a very important role in keeping themselves alive...through the efforts of a groups of enthusiasts (amateurs) whose objective was to raise the standard of amateur performance and to attain higher artistic achievement, amateur performances improved in quality. Joanna Wong was for a considerable period part of the National Theatre Trust and wayang had continued to be promoted alongside Chinese traditional instrumental music as well as the Chinese Orchestra. The Annual reports indicated strength in these areas as well as the reports of sustained interest and support of wayang when organized through the National Theatre Trust.

According to Lim Geok Eng, amateur groups proclaimed as the real salvation of wayang. Such amateur groups have received adulation for reviving Chinese opera in Singapore through their experiments in and improvement of artistic skills, bringing about a higher standard of performance which often transcended those by professionals. Lee points out that this however raises the question of conditions governing the rise of amateurs with
respect to the decline of professionals within a similar social context. To assume that amateur groups *predominate*, in Lee’s words, over the professionals, first acknowledge parity of standards of excellence across both groups but do not sufficiently account for the ways in which this has been arrived at in the history of opera troupes in both domains.82 Not too long before this, Lee (1998: 51) recalls that during the Japanese Occupation many troupes were disbanded but those that remained were allowed to perform in order to appease the people and to project a peaceful image. Indeed there was a saying that, in the eyes of the Japanese, professional opera performers are never in the wrong. 83

Chinese Opera, in Lee’s argument, falls into the category of culturally symbolic expressions of communal identity associated with the more popular practice of the traditional arts in the Singaporean context. From one point of view, Chinese opera, among other traditional practices become worthy of preservation as an ‘authentic’ local tradition. However, these traditional forms, seen as fundamental to constructing a new social order, are framed within the discourse of cultural policy such that it is the amateur groups of street wayang performers rather than professional troupes that have received public attention in the process of reviving cultural culture and the arts in Singapore. This is the basis of Lee’s concern in contemporary Singapore where amateur opera groups constitute the institutional culture of the state, their activities recognized and promoted as an urban, modern and artistic configuration of a traditional expressive form central to national discourses on culture and the arts. Not surprisingly, members of these groups possess qualities identified in a capitalist economy; tertiary education qualifications, economically well-off, holding permanent jobs – all of which enable the luxury of advocating the practice of Chinese Opera. Amateurs claim that main purpose is to promote Chinese opera as an art form and engage in intellectual discourses of Chinese Opera performance, such as analysis of musical modes, vocal styles and performance techniques, among other aspects. Lee paraphrases Daniel Neuman’s observations in his study of Gharanas in North India, *the amateur Chinese Opera troupes in Singapore have, in totality of their characteristics, practices and ideologies, a reality that seems a microcosm of what the Singapore Government wants the country to be...educated, culturally vibrant, artistically well-versed.* 84

This is in stark contrast to professional opera troupes who belong to what one might call folk or unofficial culture, and their practices are considered customary and marginal to the dominant culture defined by the state. They are relegated to the realm of religious practices and their performances are perceived as inconsequential to the development of Chinese opera in Singapore in particular and culture and the arts in general. More importantly in the history of Chinese opera, the amateur groups have come to define the performance of Chinese street opera, formerly associated solely with professional troupes. He goes on further to add that *Chinese Opera in Singapore is being dominated by the amateur opera groups, partially or wholly supported by the government.* 85

Lee argues that exalting amateur groups in Chinese Opera in contemporary Singapore creates an artificial history, creating a situation that ‘real’ professional troupes are now relegated to performing exclusively in religious contexts. Using James Clifford’s phrase, he argues that the art-culture system created in the process of nation-building in Singapore, that has elaborated arbitrary systems of values and meaning in which various social practices are defined. In this way, only ‘suitable’ practices are acknowledged and emphasized while other
are effectively obliterated. With specific reference to Chinese street-opera, Lee argues that the art-culture system in Singapore has generated a particular system of performance aesthetics which presumed a parity between the professional and amateur, indirectly favouring the latter, only because the amateur seems to fulfill the aesthetic criteria articulated by the system but also because it constitutes a symbol or perhaps a model, towards which Singapore aspires. At the same time, the conspicuous presence of amateur groups in government sponsored events and writings about Chinese opera in Singapore, perpetuates the norm that favours, and indeed, encourages, the acquisition of a transcendent or aesthetic sensibility towards the arts. Whether or not economic conditions are involved, the emphasis is to participate in the field of arts for leisure, knowledge, self-development, and more importantly, for the promotion of art and culture. Definitions of professional need a little more explanation. Lee argues although the CTC is an organisation with salaried staff (unlike professional wayang troupes who perform street opera daily), it is seen as performing Chinese opera for the main purpose of cultural avocation and are positioned in contrast to members of wayang troupes who are not involved in the state’s discourse on culture, at least not explicitly, but perform only to earn a living. This art-culture system generated in the process of nation-building in Singapore, privileges the possession of an aesthetic ‘distance’ in artistic pursuit and simultaneously encourages such acquisition.

Much of the discourse provided by Lee Tong Soon are built on an understanding of street opera/wayang and a view that ‘amateur’ performing groups are somehow seen as a privileged group, certainly over those ‘professionals’ whose opportunities do not extend beyond the temple grounds. That is not to suggest Lee does not appreciate the amateur presence. While accepting not to disagreeing over the commendable standards of performance of amateur groups, the imputed judgment of parity, inequitable funding and support of both groups only serve to mark a divide between the two instead of reaping a dividend from their joint presence.

Further scholarship will have to critically examine, the nature, role and identity of professionals and amateurs as well as the nature, role and identity of street and staged wayang. An interesting corollary of this process will also have to consider tactics and strategies of mark wayang troupes, cultural associations in the convergences and collisions of tradition and modernity. Finally, there needs to be a critical examination of the ways in which the performances by these ensembles, as creative and re-creative endeavours, identify and indemnify them; both within the discourse of tradition and modernity as well as the formation of a Singaporean identity, constructed or evolved out of necessity, within local and international settings.
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Music of Western popular culture in Singapore

Lee Tong Soon’s entry on Singapore discusses popular music in Mandarin and English largely in terms of independent song-writing styles that turn out singular names like Dick Lee and what is attributed to him as Singapop. That which is defined as independent creative-based writing is somehow assumed to take place in the 1990s.

The definitions of popular culture are somewhat misleading. If one considers the socio-historical perspective, connotations of the term popular in Singapore stretch back to the 19th century when it was reported at a Western art music concert that *such severe music as Haydn’s quintets, played even by the most skilful musicians, is never popular...We think a comic song or two would have enlivened the evening. We know that one of the amateurs could have given a smart Irish ditty in that line if he had pleased...*¹

This concert review in the 19th century not only grants us access to the perception and reception of music practiced by the expatriate community in Singapore, it also makes quite clear their preferences. This would have had very different implications for a local audience at the time; assuming there was a local audience.

Another instance of ‘popular’ appears in an advertisement “Items for sale” which included the following excerpt:

**NEW MUSIC**

**Summer Dreams Waltz**

**Dawning of Love**

**Inventions** by Gautier

**Ariadne** by May Orlelere

**Clytic** “ “

**Caro Fior** by Moorat

**Bon Tom** Polka

**Aimee** Waltz

**South Kensington Galop** by Caroline Levithian

**Hypatia** Waltz

**Idalia** Waltz

**Violin Music** **Popular Nigger Melodies**

Ball Room Treasures, a collection of 60 Waltzes, Polkas, &c,

Bell Violin Music

65 Humurous and Motto Songs in one volume.² (emphasis mine)
The next few terms popular appear in two very different contexts:
A Popular Orchestral Concert scheduled on 20 June is advertised on the 16th June 1905. The repertoire included Mendelssohn’s Overture to Son and Stranger, the Andante from Tchaikovsky’s 5th Symphony in E minor, La Reine de Saba by Gunoud; Mazurka Hungaroise, La Tzigane by Louis Ganne; Waltz, Geschichten des Wiener Wald by Strauss; and Romance Simple*** by Ambrose Thome. This concert we are told also included Instrumental solos and songs. Concerts were free for members of the society. Tickets were available with seating plans at Robinsons.³

About twenty five years later there appears this advertisement dated Saturday 5 April 1930 (p.7)
RAFFLES HOTEL
Monia Litter and his Orchestra
Programme for Sunday April 6 at 9.30pm
Overture La Princesse Jaune c. Saint-Saens
Opera Fantasy Faust C. Gnoud* (spelling in original)
INTERVAL
Valse Pathetique M. Baron
From the Opera Gopak M. Mussorgsky
(The Fair at Sorochinsk)
INTERVAL
SUITE (From the Opera Ugeno Onegin) P. Tschaikow* (spelling in original)
1. Valtz
2. Introduction and air of Lanski
3. Polonaise

GOD SAVE THE KING

Monia Litter and his orchestra were also at the Raffles for a different reason and function. We learn something of this ‘infiltration’, for instance in an article in the Straits Time 1500 invitations have been sent out by Sir Cecil and Lady Clementi for the dance to be held on 3 June in honour of His Majesty’s birthday...the Band of the 2nd Welsh Regiment and Monia Litter’s orchestra from Raffles Hotel will be present. The first dance will be at 9.45pm after which selections will be played by the regimental band. The second dance will be at 10.20pm. The subsequent items of the evening’s entertainment have been arranged with alternate dance music and selections by the regiment band until 12.40.⁴ The presence of Monia Litter and his orchestra need an introduction. Raffles Hotel advertised this group as being recognised as the best and most popular dance band east of the Suez.⁵ Quite clearly, the Monia Litter ensemble was able to operate at two different performance modes when there was occasion to.
The term popular can also be attributed to the New World Park, one of the entertainment worlds in Singapore, located at the junction of Serangoon Road and Kitchener Road constructed in 1923. Built as the first of the three “Worlds” in Singapore, it thrived from the 1920s to the 1960s, opened and run by Ong Peng Hock and Ong Boon Tat, both sons of Ong Sam Leong. Around 1940, Shaw Organisation came to own 50% of New World. One of the first structures to be erected within New World was a singing stage, a restaurant, and numerous ‘kiosks’ where various entertainment outlets were housed. The concept of the three “worlds”, New World, Great World and Happy (Gay) World, originated from Shanghai, rather akin to the modern day theme parks, or perhaps the occasional fun fairs and carnivals that are set up on a semi-permanent basis. Its greatest feature was that it gathered ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ forms of entertainment in one place. One could find in these “worlds”, ‘getais’, cinemas, dance halls, entertainment parks, ball courts, restaurants, shops, stage performances, cabarets, skating rinks, and retail shops. They had many gambling stalls and a Ronggeng too. It was also accessible to most people because it was centralized.

The Performing Stage could be described as popular entertainment during the 1950s especially after the Japanese Occupation. Most of the nightlife in Singapore then was to be found in New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night. New World’s dance hall, as one of these many forms of entertainment, drew many young couples before the advent of the cinemas and had a dance floor that once reportedly accommodated 500 couples. The cabaret girls, also called taxi girls, were mostly Chinese and a few Eurasians, Indians and Filipinos, but no Malays at all. Although they were available for dances at just eight cents a dance, most of them spoke good English and a few had even completed their Senior Cambridge exam (equivalent to the current ‘O’ levels). People from all walks of life visited the cabaret; there was the Chinese towkay, the British soldiers, navy personnel, managing directors of firms and even the former Sultan Ibrahim of Johore would visit occasionally, along with a large entourage. The cabaret girls lived within the vicinity of New World. Cabaret hours began at 7 o’clock and went on to 12. There were also tea dances that commenced at 4 in the later afternoon. More significantly, the band comprised of Goanese and the leader, also a Goanese, was Mr. De Silver.

Hawaiian Bands
The late Captain Abdullah Ahmad remembers as a 16-year old being part of a “keronchong orchestra Hawaiian band” together with Hamzah Dolmat and Zain Blackout. He recalls I was involved in bangsawan music and had an opportunity to study many things about the elements of music with my own creative abilities. The period in question was the heyday of the Bunga Tanjong cabaret, New World, Great World and The Pagoda and these performing venues were crucial years in his development as a growing and youthful musician. He recalls the demands made on good repertoire and good performance standards with the opportunity to perform in different
locations which were significant for his musical development. However, these
opportunities did not last long and Captain Abdullah felt hampered by the need for
further development. Which is why he took the opportunity in 1946 to travel as a
member of the Donyada Latin Quartet Suikuri Review, a Japanese programme, to visit
various countries in Asia like Hong Kong, Manila, Taiwan and Bangkok for two
months.\textsuperscript{15}

The puzzling reference to a “keronchong orchestra Hawaiian band” seems to merge two
known performance genres. However, Tony Beamish informs us of their proximity in
his description and discussion of Music in Malayan culture in the sixth chapter suitably
titled \textbf{Music and Letters}:

\begin{quote}
Many people are unaware of the great wealth of Malay folk music in the country,
because they do not often get a chance to hear it...Modern Malay “kronchong”
orchestras, playing \textit{dreamy music similar to Hawaiian}, record commercially in
Singapore, and are a big draw with all communities. They specialise in sentimental
songs that are firm favourites both in Malaya and over the water in Indonesia. It is
anyone’s guess whether the kronchong orchestra is more popular than its rival
attraction, the Western style dance band.\textsuperscript{16}(emphasis mine)
\end{quote}

The performing venues are corroborated by Joseph Peters in his observation of popular
dance forms in 1950s where various dance spots or nightclubs (the most famous of
which was Bunga Tanjong at the New World Amusement Park), were the venues for
their proliferation. The nightlife in Singapore revolved around amusement parks and
these parks helped form hubs even for other forms like \textbf{bangsawan} and people flocked
to these clubs every night to dance.\textsuperscript{17}

Dennyse Tessesso\-hn,\textsuperscript{18} writing in a few books about the Eurasian community in
Singapore, mentions guitarist Tony Danker who first made a name for himself in the
David Lincoln Orchestra playing music for kronchong and later distinguished himself
playing with top-notch Hawaiian Band musicians like Harry Martinez and Barney
Morier, at gigs and performances for radio broadcast. Sam Gan recalled that among the
many musicians in the performance spaces, \textit{there were these musicians who were}
\textit{working full time and these groups of musicians who were part-time}. Horace clarified
part-time musicians as non-union musicians. As Horace pointed out \textit{they did}
functions...\textit{parties, weekend dances...not holding down full-time musician jobs...free-
lance... In those days, any family having a wedding or function...would have a
band...Tony would be working with Barney Morier and the Hawaiian band
players...not mainstream professional musicians...Tony did play with the Hawaiian
bands...Harry Martinez (Billy’s dad) and Baby Lau...that’s the Hawaiian
scene...Barney Morier...Hawaiian practitioners did nightclubs...Westpoint...(out Pasir
Panjang way)...the Hawaiian guitar ensemble was another valid piece of musical
practice...a very big thing...They had their followers...Westpoint was one...Pasir Ris
there was another one...old hotel at the old Pasir Ris...Katong...Penang Way...anywhere there was a beach...you know the old Bedok before they reclaimed that land...there would be some of these old houses...there would be a Hawaiian scene and they would play there...amazing thing...that was again a different thing going on...these people had been doing this since before and after the war [Japanese Occupation]...Hawaiian music lovers...these were as Sam said, different kinds of music happening in Singapore, like ethnic music...joget...but Hawaiian was big...Hawaiian was comparable to the cabaret scene...(Sam):You had these night clubs that catered to these and they were usually located along the beach...you looking at the Pasir Panjang Beach and that was ideal...and there was one in East Coast...Pasir Ris...and they’d do parties...I worked when I was off from school...we would go and do all the army bases...Sarang Barracks was for the officers...Changi itself NCO....in the barracks itself...Changi Road...Changi Ferry point was where the Changi yachts were based...weekends is for the officers...Wednesday is pay day...Wednesday is for NCOs and you play for the NCO club...Changi had one, Tengah had another one...one in Seletar...so all the barracks will have bands working...but local bands...and the local bands will be playing music of that day...and the funny thing is that we would go there and its not just the band playing...we would have a show, Hawaiian dances...cabaret, floor shows. 

Tony Danker was one of the many practitioners involved in the musical practice of Hawaiian band music. It was for him more or less a way in which the Eurasian community found a sense of identity in the performance of Hawaiian Band music: 

In [my] day the Hawaiian band was like the pop band of today...Hawaiian bands were very prominent...most of the Hawaiian bands comprised Eurasians...that’s how they got in very nicely with Hawaiian band music.

To the question, why was there the interest for Hawaiian band music, his response was: Beautiful melodies and beautiful Hawaiian music....then Hawaii itself was regarded as a paradise in those days....and they [those who appreciated it] said it was paradise music...actually you do get good Hawaiian songs......I remember I used to do a broadcast with Barney Morier and his Stardusters for radio every week...before that I used to do radio broadcasts with Harry Martinez and his Royal Hawaiians...Barney has now settled in Western Australia. I used to love Hawaiian music...why not? Because I had a chance in Hawaiian band and in the keronchong band to show off my skills...whereas if you played in the orchestras of old, the guitar always took a back seat, just strumming away...that kind of thing I don’t like to do...it was only when we had Benny Goodman and the sextet...after the war...it was they who brought the guitar to the forefront...Charlie Christian...then there was this guy with three fingers called Django Reinhart...and the Stephen Grappeli quintet from France...these were the groups that brought the guitar to the forefront....Django Reinhart was my hero.
To the question of how that music had become part of the community and who was responsible for its proliferation, Danker’s response was:

*We got the things from the records...they were selling a hell of a lot of Hawaiian records recorded by a guy called...Saul Hoopie [spelling may vary*] and his Hawaiians...now he had two recordings and we learnt a lot of his songs through his recordings... we had records...this travelled by word-of-mouth and someone in the community bought into it...because the guys would hear what we learnt from the records...they would be interested to know how you learnt this...who is that (composer, performer)...where you got it from and all that...word gets around....chaps are playing good music by so-and-so...you can buy it from the record stores...and it goes on...and there are other Hawaiian guitarists and so on...Ronnie Macintyre [spelling may vary*] was another one...great Hawaiian players...*

*After the war (Japanese Occupation) I was playing Hawaiian band music with Harry Martinez and the Royal Hawaiians at the Café Hansen as well as military bases... I ran a group, had a saxophonist, drummer, pianist and bass player...we used to be known as the Combo a la carte...we got around to a lot of military bases...we did quite well...we were playing to [personnel in the] Sergeants Mess...we could play the music which was popular with these people when they were young...in their 40s and 50s...you could tell they loved this music which we were familiar with...when we played My Old Man, they loved it, The Berlita Waltz...St. Bernard’s Waltz, the Gay Gordons where you had them dancing...we used to play every Saturday...there was a night when we played in one place until midnight and went off to play at another place after midnight...we would begin at about 8pm...people would come in need some time to warm up and slowly start dancing...round about 11pm or so, we’d take a 15-20 minute interval and after that it depends...if they wanted to go on until 1 am...it all depended but we would oblige...there never seldom a time we finished at 12...at least one or two in the morning...and beyond the time, it was additional charge...double rate...on a good night there were two gigs...the places we were travelling...we would get transported from one place to another...our drummer...he was the guy...people who play the tom-tom...real tom-toms...he’d never use it to play music...he’d used it for a beer table...at the end of the night we’d look at the empty glasses, they were big glasses....he used to look at me and I used to look at him and he used to ask me where did all that beer go to...and I said I didn’t know. I learnt a lot from the military...catered to their tastes...until the pullout came...in the late 1960s...then our tenure was gone...*
Rock n’Roll
Horace Wee and Sam Gan point to the fact that prior to the meteoric rise to fame of Bill Haley and the Comets and Elvis Presley in music of popular culture in the Euro-American tradition...the pops of the day were rooted still in the tradition of Tin Pan Alley... The change they believe came about in the late 1950s... and the big culture shock to the musicians of the day...especially for those of us who became established...was when the Beatles, the Shadows came...Cliff Richard and the Shadows, came to Singapore.....and all of a sudden you have a bass guitar...a very loud amplified sound...not a smooth, well-rounded and refined sound...very raw...If you describe it now, it did sound very raw...when it first came on...it was in its infancy...the recording technician had not gotten in yet...in fact it wasn’t even [mediated by] a recording technician...it was the players...the people who played it were from a different school...they weren’t qualified musicians...they couldn’t read...they just played...Half the time they couldn’t even play the instrument...sometimes its good that way because that’s how a new artform or practice evolves...when someone goes in blindly innocent...you don’t now what’s impossible...so that’s why in those days it was loud....discordant...mainly because [in our view] they didn’t tune their instruments properly...it became a big shock to the professional musicians [like us] of the previous twenty/thirty years....and of course it was greeted with great resentment...you remember when Sam talked about how in the heydays of the big band scene, there were always the quality musicians who could read music....and those who could not....this actually became the other way around....but then the professional musicians looked at these pop-up stars...and say they only play three chords...hardly in tune (because they could hardly tune properly) and they couldn’t even read a damn note...they [the professional musicians] were rather dismissive of them...and there was a lot of tension between both parties...the rock n’ roll musicians looked at the professionals with disdain...old men...and the professionals looked at these people and said ...like a bunch of amateurs... [or] something really damning... An alternative reading appears in Joseph Pereira’s recollection of popular culture beginning with the example of Cliff Richard and the Shadows playing at a concert at the former Happy World Stadium in 1961 influenced duos, trios and quartets to quick changes in their instrumental configurations with a lead singer; three guitars, drummer and lead singer (occasionally a keyboardist). According to Pereira, the proliferation of pop bands through the mid-1960s enabled the Quests, Checkmates, Easybeats to find steady work in clubs and shows were mainly possible through the Sunday tea dance—a socio-cultural institution of which 95% of the audience was British from about 1963. Before that conventional bands played the cha-cha. In such settings veteran bands always allowed for guest slots for newcomers. It seemed there was no lack of these in hotel lounges, country clubs and dance halls. The British military camps provided the other main outlets not only as opportunities for the local bands but also to listen to
imported R&B releases from the UK. Given this impetus, local bands took the cue by playing covers from Rolling Stones, The YardBirds and Alexis Korner with full encouragement from the service men. Blues records were not as yet distributed in Singapore.  

Horace and Sam remember the names of these earlier-mentioned bands in a very different way. Their emergence is by no means fortuitous: three people came into the scene...Jimmy Lee, Watson Tay, Jack Lim...out of these three, the guy who was the driving force behind the scene was Jimmy Lee...and he went to study in Perth and they formed a band of local undergraduates; one of them was killed in a car accident recently (Herbert Beng-one of the members of the Bambinos)...and two other Australians...he came back and thought of this as potential...he had [probably started up] this organisation called Quill Organisation...he told these musicians, the ones we said can’t play can’t read, “I will get you the jobs...I am your managing agent...and he said I will guarantee you so much (money) if you are not getting a job but you must come down and practice...I give you the studios to practice everyday”. Jimmy Lee formed little groups...there were those who wanted to join them...he had their support...he made money out of them...he got a lot of young ones...like the Quests...Western Union Band...a number of them who appeared in the 60s...Heather and the Thunderbirds...Silverstrings...the pop scene...the entertainment side of things...  

Pereira also believes the Vietnam War escalation in the mid-1960s brought American GIs into Singapore for R&R and with them soul, R&B, Motown and Chicago blues, making substantial influences on the repertoire and performance modes. Popular GI venues like Serene House, Newton Towers, Shelford Club and Ria Country Club helped both ways; special USO tours helped to bring local groups like Sonny Bala & the Moonglows to appearances in South Vietnam. The period leading up to 1968 saw the rise of many groups and opportunities that meant performances at the National Theatre and Stadium Negara in KL. The British military forces began to withdraw from Singapore beginning in 1968 through the 1970s. The military camps and mess halls, sources of gigs for Singaporean bands disappeared slowly.  

**Popular Culture and Bad Press**

Pereira informs us that the tea dances came to an abrupt halt in the early 1970s, largely out of social disorder—continual stream of fights and brawls that unfortunately accompanied the music. The 1970s brought about changes in the reception of rock n’roll musicians in ways not conceived before. This reception was in reality more of anxiety, evident in the then Defence Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee’s speech in 1973:  

*Let us not consider the subject of music as a trifling matter, of no import in the state of affairs. The ancients knew better. Both Plato and Confucius correctly recognised which music as an instrument of state policy could play in producing the desirable type of*
citizen. Neglect in Singapore on this subject has given rise to serious problems. I refer to the widespread popularity of the barbarous form of music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification. Voice accompaniment takes the form of inane tasteless wailing. It is barbarous music of this kind that is mainly responsible for attracting the mindless young of Singapore to the cult of permissiveness of the western world. It is hardly a coincidence that the problem of drug-addiction has become serious where performers and audience foregather. I trust the Ministry of Home Affairs will take stern action against this menace.\textsuperscript{31}

What is most unfortunate here is when the Ministry of Home Affairs was called upon to take stern action by the Defence Minister, it was not made clear whether the menace was the \textbf{music} or the \textbf{drugs}. What was clear from the message was the correlation between music and type of citizen and the invocation to Plato and Confucius to predicate music and appropriate citizenry. In any case, both drugs and barbarous music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification became targets in an effort to deal with the menace.

For many trained musicians like Horace Wee and Sam Gan who had worked in respectable circumstances, playing Dance Band music, which became synonymous with Jazz, as well as cabarets and hotels, the emergence of Rock n’ Roll, Carnaby Street, Pop (including psychedelic pop) and Rock/Heavy Metal had considerable impact on altering their perspectives, if not their livelihood. First one of the most famous jazz performance outlets known as the Golden Venus, slowly gave way to another social institution called the tea-dance parties. The Tea-dance parties were the socio-cultural infrastructure that supported Rhythm and Blues, Carnaby Street, Psychedelic Pop and Rock and Roll, to name a few. Eventually, it meant that dance band and jazz musicians were either compelled into or adapted to become conversant with these more popular practices to maintain their livelihood.

Therefore when rock n’ roll became associated with drugs and sometimes violent behaviour, it acquired the status of a legal and political menace – an enemy of the state. Rock n’ roll musicians had to adapt to playing opportunities at private parties, music festivals and concerts. During the 1970s, private sponsorships allowed for a number of rock-revival shows at the National Theatre with acts by Sweet Charity, Humble Origin, Unwanted, Fragile and Heritage; eventually not sustainable enough both in terms of finance and musicians. This environment was not helped by the interconnection of the music, musicians and drugs and the consequences of such a connection. Chris Ho (1999) refers to the period as the \textbf{Great Concern about Drugs}. Clubs housing local bands began to close, TV stations refused to feature male performers with long hair, a prohibition of rock concerts and rock songs restricted from airplay and even the restriction or prohibition of rock music and musicians eventually reached the National Theatre. It would seem that the 1970s and 1980s saw local bands playing music of
western popular culture having a hard time establishing themselves, let alone their own music. Something of the period drew on a buzz in musicians’ circles. Cultural Medallion recipient Jeremy Monteiro recalls...

...you know there was a time when the government banned live music....People like Roland Sandosham and Louis Soliano would remember this more clearly....when I came into the scene, they had started live music for 2 or 3 years already.....I think the government was confused by the long hair, music, drugs, violence, alcoholism and all sorts of stuff...that’s when anything in relation to the whole phenomena not only received bad press but also first reactions....when I started working, things were quite alright.  

What is puzzling was the possibility that drugs was not the only factor in considering a government ban. It seems that there was more than one mitigating factor for the government ban. Joseph Pereira offers an explanation: in December 1969 the government banned tea dances...the implication being that the institution of tea dances was responsible for decadent behaviour over the weekend by our young...up and coming bands lost one avenue where they could gig and get exposure. The second ban came about in 1972. There was a fight and stabbing at the Boiler Room which was in Mandarin Hotel...implication again to do with music inflaming violent tendencies in the young. The government imposed a ban on live performing bands at night clubs and discos...permitting only a disc jockey to spin discs at discos.

The closest evidence of government enforcement comes with Burhannudin bin Buang’s Honours Year project on Pop Yeh Yeh where he notes that the Public entertainment license was introduced in 1969.  

Apart from Dr. Goh Keng Swee’s speech and much speculation about the ban on live entertainment and its concomitant ills of drugs, alcoholism and violence, much of this period surrounding the “ban” will require more careful and separate research.

Music of Popular Culture as a Livelihood

Both written and oral accounts refer to their endeavour in musical terms. What does not seem to emerge, nor is it made explicit is the financial predicament of musicians. Sam Gan and Horace Wee remember how they began as unionized members. Because they possessed musical certification, could sight read and requisite musicianship skills suitable for the profession, their membership in the Musicians Union during the 1950s affirmed them as professionals, with codes of practice and proper conduct. That respect was manifest in remuneration packages commensurate with professional practice. By the late-1960s into the 1970s, changes in these financial arrangements affected them musically. The connection with drugs had an adverse effect on musicians lives and living and performing in Singapore. Sam and Horace recall how during the early 1970s there was the ban on long hair, the current western music, rock etc...associated with drugs...a "yellow culture" as it was termed and that Western influences were decadent. As a result it became difficult to engage bands. A lot of club owners turned to the now
growing Disco movement... less overheads, hassles and they did not pay for any copyright fees then. So the first nail in the coffin for LIVE music. During the "yellow culture" days, musicians with long hair were not allowed to sit with the customers of the club and generally regarded by even waiters as second class citizens. eg. musicians were sneered at and called "band boy" [a form of insult].

In my e-correspondence with Joseph Pereira, *Our working bands were in a quandary because many of them were professional musicians and depended on it [live gigs] for their livelihood. Many bands went overseas to places like Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Europe and elsewhere. Others became lounge musicians which escaped the ban because there was no dancing allowed in lounges... this lasted till 1977 when the government lifted the ban.* Pereira informs us that after the American GIs, the "American oil men" came in and this influenced the development of country and western among local musicians. Those active at the time informed me that country and western was practiced and well supported by musicians and members of the Eurasian community; the "Spooners Road Boys" who were located around the Tanjong Pagar area and were apparently a household name before Matthew and the Mandarins made the country and western style their trademark. It has also been suggested that Country and Western offered no threat of violent or rowdy behaviour from either side, performers or audience and its general tone and tempo was one that was seen to be permitted in live performances.

Horace and Sam point out that the "live" music began to shift to Hotel Lounges as a result of this situation. There was still some live music going on. Matthew and the Mandarins were still playing at the Shangrilla bar. I was playing in Richard Ortega's Band for live cabaret shows at the Shangri La Supper Club around 1977 and the Lost Horizon Club in the basement of Shangrilla was still using live bands like Western Union and if I'm correct the Xperiments, Flybaits (or New Faces). We would go and play the supper club shows sometimes also at the Lost Horizon. Some happened to be more in the pop vein, eg. Elvis type shows etc.

There was of course far more at stake in rock n' roll and gigging than simply wanting to be heard and become famous in this setting. Horace and Sam recall *since the late 60's a lot musicians failed to have any CPF contributions because of the way establishments engaged them to cut costs. eg. a 3-month lumpsum contract with an extendable 3 which was a far cry from the musician that was a highly regarded professional in the 50's.* Horace Wee explains that during the early 1960's (1961-1964 probably), the *then President of the Musicians Union Mr. Slava Tairoff was very active in trying to preserve the rights of the local professional musician. One of the things he negotiated with the government authorities was the implementing of the one for one regulation when it came to allowing foreign musicians/bands to perform in Singapore. For every foreigner the club has to engage a local musician or at least a local band. Sometimes the foreign
band may have been a ten-piece ensemble so to be flexible the club engages a local five-piece ensemble. This enabled some form of protection and the reason for allowing foreign musicians was to elevate the local standards; the overseas band should also be of a higher standard than the locals. This was negotiated with the help of a certain Mr. Devan Nair who was then president of the AUPE and a labour organisation leader as well as Mr. Roy Daniels from the Ministry of Labour.\footnote{41}

On balance though overseas bands saw good groups coming in as pop groups, not only players but also performers...first one being the Maori High Fives...and we had from the Philippines, Brown Boys, D’Starlights. I put them as being responsible for this revolution. This was an eye-opener in the entertainment scene. Here was something more than good musicians sitting on the stand playing very well...they were also entertaining and they were playing today’s music and requests. They couldn’t read music but that wasn’t the point...the customer gets music and he gets more...he’s paid for entertainment.\footnote{42}

The problem was that by the time the ban on live acts had allegedly been lifted in 1977, Joseph Pereira recalls, agents discovered Filipino bands. They came cheap, were more versatile, talented and had very finely honed stage acts. By contrast our bands were still sloppy on stage. So they came in their hordes driving our musicians once more out of work. By the mid Eighties more and more of these Filipino bands were working in Singapore and more and more Singapore musicians were quietly quitting the profession.\footnote{43}

One of the most revealing aspects of the support of popular culture (or perhaps its return) became evident in the Annual Report of 1977 under Improvements to the Theatre, more specifically under Sound Reinforcement System:

*As the sound system of the theatre was more than 10 years old a committee was set up to study and plan for the improvement of the acoustic system of the theatre. This resulted in the award of tender for the new sound reinforcement system costing $235,000. The main features of improvement to the sound system are as follows:

  a. A 16 channel (expandable to 20 channels) mixing console with individual equalisation replacing the 8 channel mixer to improve the input facilities;
  b. Installation of higher frequency horns and base speakers in low frequency enclosures to ensure even sound pressure level at all times throughout the auditorium;
  c. Installation of 2 sets of high-powered high frequency loudspeakers for “rock and pop concerts”;
  d. A wireless microphone system with 6 transmitters and 4 receivers to give drift-free reception. This would clear reception problems encountered by opera and drama performances in which free movement of artistes is of prime importance.*
e. Good quality transcription turntable cassette tape decks and open reel tape decks to improve tape and record reproductions.

The sound reinforcement system when commissioned is expected to upgrade the acoustic effects of the theatre. It will make the theatre suitable for varied classes of performances.  

What is also noteworthy here is recorded in the performances by the National Theatre Symphonic Band Concert at the Victoria Theatre on the 20 September 1978: The band performed with a guest conductor, Mr. Mitsuo Nonami, who was also the Chief Band Director in Yamaha Foundation, Japan. A popular local musician, Mr. Hillary Francis also made his appearance with the band as a guest vocalist. Hillary Francis (also known among his contemporaries as Raymond Hillary Francis), was known as the singer of a band called the Sandboys, one of the first few local bands to be formed in Singapore.

However, Horace Wee and Sam Gan pointed to an even more devastating phenomenon in the mid-1980s: in 1985, Singapore’s first recession, hotels appealed to the government to help as they could not afford to hire both foreign and local musicians. Somehow the whole ruling (from the negotiations between Roy Daniels, Mr. Devan Nair and Slava Tairoff of the Musicians Union) got dropped and it opened the floodgates...anybody who could be categorised as a musician even if they were not....was allowed to come in. That spelt the death of the local music scene. They brought in a whole lot of cheap Filipino bands who were not musicians...but entertainers. Basically that was money flowing out of the country because they would be sending foreign bucks earned, back to their home country. This floodgate of poor grade or even non-musicians coming in undermined a whole job market of Singaporean musicians. No decent job could be had by a local musician....unless he/she wanted to come down to that level of a very low pay almost equal to these foreign performers. And that is the current position of the local musician to this day. This sent the whole industry into a downward spiral.

Discussion

With specific reference to musicians in performing careers, Alan Wells’ and Lee Chun Wah’s survey on music culture in Singapore through record companies, retailers and performers discovered that all of the musicians in their sample had a high turnover rate as groups. Much of their repertoire was built around rock and pop, “top 40” material and ‘any or everything’. Both club and pub bands played ‘covers’ and it was recorded that in the view of their customers, the more closely they replicated the recorded hits, the better. As a result, most groups take pride in accurately ‘covering’ Western pop hits.
That is not to suggest that a lack of ability. A considerably large proportion of the respondent musicians acknowledged having written or performed original material, having made demos, and even records. Their feedback was quite resounding with respect to creative work:

Several who had composed work reported resistance by club owners and managers to unfamiliar performances...musicians claimed that Singaporean audiences were not supportive of local talent.49

In the area of threatened livelihood, a common concern expressed was the employment of bands imported from the Philippines. Although these Filipino musicians were respected for their musical prowess and entertainment ability, the concern expressed by Singaporean musicians was the comparatively much lower wages. Filipino musicians and ensembles accepted (rumoured to be as low as $2000 a month including food and lodging for an entire group).50 The fact that a number of local bands had already been displaced in clubs and hotel lounges was sufficient validation of their fears. Several of the interviewed musicians expressed the view that they had no union to defend their interests.51

What does emerge in the study is the sum total of the proliferation of foreign bands, in some cases much cheaper wages and a perception of more superior musical prowess. What emerges as a recurring theme is the local musicians perceptions of the local audiences as not being supportive of local talent.52 What also appears puzzling, until further research is undertaken, is a perceived absence of a union. Oral interviews mention the presence of a Musician’s Union well into the 1980s.

However, Wells and Lee also note that it is in this particular field Malays and Eurasians were highly overrepresented in the bands...to a degree ‘outsiders’ in the predominantly Chinese Singaporean society and...find creative opportunities in popular music.53 Considering this predominant demographics, the considerable presence of Eurasian and Malay communities in creative opportunities in popular music is seen not only as a good thing because of the inversion of demographic versus real representation but also that structural practice by musicians of Western popular culture is not constructed out of rules of majority or massaged communal representation through political tactics and strategies.

What is worthy of further study of these styles against the listening preferences of local groups here in Singapore merit fieldwork studies in their LP, Cassette and BASF Cartridge collections to come to terms with what groups and music was considered worthy of a personal library or at a creative level, what influenced the next group of musicians. Suffice to say, the 1970s were overshadowed more by the association of hippie lifestyles and attitudes to living and being productive more so than their musical preferences.
To what extent were National Campaigns reflected at the microscopic level or rather did National Campaigns identify deviant groups as “enemies of the state”? The earlier emphases of the 1960’s and up to the mid-1970’s had been political consolidation and economic development, with national survival as the main goal and “the rugged society” its inspiring catch phrase. The next national campaign was environmental, summed up in the slogans, “A Clean and Green City” and “Singapore the Garden City”. This marked the transition from preoccupations with the basically material or physical bases of life to the more aesthetic, summed up in the next catch phrase “gracious-living”. The metaphor of cleanliness permeated throughout the 1970s with an eye on unclean habits, behaviour or manner of dress. What was to follow has become an annual event – a National Courtesy Campaign centred on the slogan “Make Courtesy Our way of Life”.

Indie

The beginnings of an independent style of writing in music of Western popular culture – indie pop – are a little difficult to gather until further research is underway to examine these aspects. On the political front, the official signal that the 1980’s would see more emphasis on the development of the arts as a community activity to encourage individual creativity, and as part of a growing entertainment and leisure activity, came with the establishment of a Cultural Development Committee in 1980 by the Ministry of Culture. Not surprisingly, when the People’s Action Party (PAP) issued its election manifesto in 1984 called Agenda for Action….. A Vision of Singapore by 1999, the catch-phrase was a “a cultured society’ and the target “Singapore – City of Excellence”. The Agenda’s notable feature was to take Singapore beyond being a developed society in the economic sense; it is also to be “a society culturally vibrant”, “a cultured people finding fulfillment in non-material pursuits”. Excellence in all fields was to be achieved through the encouragement of creative ideas and talent such that Singapore would become “a cultural centre of good international standing”. In contrast to the earnest tone of the past, the aim now was “to make living in Singapore fun”. The emerging concern of the younger leaders with culture not only in terms of creating a national cultural identity as such, but also (and perhaps, more so) in its sense of a pursuit of “the higher goals and the individual’s self-fulfillment” has arisen from a perception that people were no longer satisfied with the merely material, and that the growing number of younger, better-educated, relatively sophisticated and affluent Singaporeans wanted more say in matters affecting their way of life.

This appeared, confirmed by the PAP’s drop in popularity during the December 1984 general election. The Agenda for Action with its glowing emphases on culture and excellence notwithstanding, perceptions of over-regulation by the government of people’s personal lives and correspondingly of the economy seem to have led on the one hand to a drop in its electoral popularity and on the other to blame being placed on the government for the economic recession, the effects of which were felt soon after. This
has stimulated the government to attempt a self-correction and to announce policies, which will encourage individual enterprise and initiative in both the economic and the cultural spheres. For instance, a major reorganisation led to the dissolution of the Ministry of Culture, its portfolios of Information and Cultural Affairs being split between the two newly constructed Ministries of Communications and Information and Community Development as from January 1985. The People’s Association and the Community Centres which formerly came under the Prime Minister’s Office, together with the Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture, was now subsumed in the Ministry for Community Development. At the same time the government announced a first ever five-year plan for ‘cultural promotion’ doubling the budget for cultural affairs from $5.5 million to almost $11 million. Many community centres scattered throughout the island would be used to popularise the arts for the many. S. Dhanabalan, Minister for Community development noted, “Cultural promotion cannot be confined to high-brow culture for the select few” but would include “folk dancing, singing, arts and crafts, guitar groups, Malay, Chinese musical groups, even pop bands.” The apparent change of heart came in 1984 when the Singapore Police Force organized a ‘Police and Friends’ concert featuring a growing number of high-profile local rock and pop bands who just a decade ago would have been clamped down.

The 1980s were largely described as the DIY/Indies period in Singapore. Piracy ensured greater dissemination. Pirated cassettes were available for S$2 and for a teenage music fan with not much money, this was too good to be true. Ex-writers from the Sunday Monitor which folded in 1985 decided to write a fanzine called BigO (Before I Get Old) in the same year. This fanzine was different because it was said to encourage writing original music in Western popular culture in the local context. This period also coincides with the advent of new technologies, an increasing affluence and level of education, greater urbanisation, the sense of globalisation taking place and a changing political landscape. The period witnessed the rise of punk and new wave bands, particularly from the UK. Interestingly, Susan Pearce’s exploration of the interaction between objects and people drew on an example of punk in England which as she points out looks back to a subculture diction in the seventeenth century, where the word ‘punk’ meant ‘ruffian’ or even ‘goblin’. She identifies its emergence in the attention of the public in 1976 and has been described by Wilson and Taylor as:

*A classic case of avant-garde shock tactics. An assault on all received notions of taste, it is significant in being almost the only one of the post-war youth/culture/music movements fully to have integrated women...Punks created an alienated space between self and appearance...fit wear for the urban dispossessed...constructed out of the refuse of the material world...* 

Not surprisingly, some of the names of groups seem to bear out this sentiment: The Oddfellows, Force Vomit, Rotten Germs, Band of Slaves, Corporate Toil, Pug Jelly, Opposition Party, Concave Scream, to name a few among them.
The 1980s in Singapore also witnessed the concomitant rise of DIY production of musical recordings via cassettes and fairly competent domestic recording systems. This period is also coincident with the advent of new and accessible technologies (hence the dissemination of demo tapes of fairly reasonable quality), an increasing affluence, a higher level of education among the population, greater urbanisation, the sense of globalisation taking place and a changing political landscape. Demo tapes found their way to BIGO publications and eventually the transition from cassette tapes to CDs much later into the 1990s until it folded recently. BigO started to ask for a forthcoming compilation. In 1987, The Anywhere lounge was the venue for ‘alternative concerts’ called No Surrender organised by BigO, a first showcase of a different breed of performers in ‘popular culture’. This was followed by another concert at the Marine Parade National Library in December 1987 called the Xmas Underground Gig. The event was covered by the then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, which seemed to mock the effort. The Festivals of Arts 1988 at the Botanic Gardens provided further opportunities. In December 1988, Chris Ho organised ten years of punk at the old Rediffusion Auditorium off Clemenceau Avenue (currently Paradigm). In the process, toilet mirrors were smashed and the auditorium floor was covered with fluids including blood. 1989 moved on with a release of Rough Cuts from Home 1 and 2 which was actually taped off a programme hosted by Chris Ho on Rediffusion radio. Another fanzine The Exploding Cat came out but lasted only two issues, covering a broad range of issues. More releases followed in 1990 and the opening of the Substation on 6 September 1990 featured a marathon concert for the DIY scene. 1991 saw an acceleration in the proliferation of DIY albums, by which time BigO was then regarded as a glossy magazine and Mega Z filled its original shoes. BigO did become a magazine in 1991 and local bands began to get radio airplay. TNT Studio opened up in 1993 providing all DIY participants with recording opportunities. Much of the ‘indie’ productions were in themselves indicative of the fragility of their practice and much of that fragility continues to exist in the present.

In the 1990s Singaporean rock n’roll, R&B, blues bands performed in small circles of pubs and lounges like Crazy Elephant, Anywhere, Bernies’ BFD and Roomful of Blues; not quite the Golden Venus but the resurgence of the blues. Singaporean musicians generally agreed that music, particularly rock n’ roll, was one of the few ways to discover one’s own identity and gain acceptance outside of school and sports, as much as it did for those of the Golden Venus era. The 1990s also saw a greater proliferation of independent voices from across a number of domains, from tertiary students to practising lawyers, professionals who wanted to express themselves via music. They were hardly restricted by means and they seemed to possess sufficient capacity to pen their lyrics and songs which were largely diatonic and pop, R&B, folk rock, soft rock ballad format.
Paul Zach (Zach’s Shack on 91.3FM) counts among the first few media to publicise local acts and this was taken up by Michelle Chang more prominently via Singapore Jam during the brief tenure of 99.5FM (which ceased operation in December 2003). Philip Cheah of BIGO (which also folded recently) and Chris Ho, in thought, word and deed, functioned as the broadcaster of many of these young amateur proponents. Names of groups were decidedly attention getting: The Oddfellows, Force Vomit, Rotten Germs, Band of Slaves, Corporate Toil, Pug Jelly, Opposition Party, Concave Scream, to name a few among them.

The internet became towards the late 1990s a new and well established haven for many aspiring artists to publicise themselves on the World Wide Web. For some, no expense was spared in the production of a CD and then having the confidence of marketing it on the net. Many of them have websites where interested parties can have e-access to them. Local websites like Audioreload, guapunya.com, as two of many examples, have allowed fans and other participants access to groups and group members and their comments on the scene. Not all of it is positive; Burhannudin of Urban Karma recalls how he had to endure insults, not knowing if they were real or simply immature rantings by fans of rival bands.59

Several other musicians have produced music what is perceived as reflecting multiracial context of Singapore. Chris Ho’s Buddy Buddy mixes English with Malay words, MC Siva Chy and the Kopi Kat Klan’s “why U so Like Dat” criticises yet celebrates the widespread use of the Singlish patois. Chris Ho became for the punk and pop avant garde both an example and an independent and still influential voice across a number of media including radio programmes where he has distinguished himself by introducing “the now sound of the future”. He currently hosts the morning slots on a new radio station Lush 99.5FM (the frequency of the previous NAC-run Passion Radio 99.5FM) as well as an Radio Singapore International (RSI) Programme during a weekday afternoon focusing on local acts.

Singapop

Around the 1980s towards the 1990s, Craig Lockard identifies Dick Lee whom he considers the most important local singer and composer in the local English music scene. Lee Tong Soon accords him the honour of being the progenitor of Singapop. This research has not come across another artist in this Singapop tradition. He is considered a major figure in music of popular culture in Singapore, particularly with songs that often deal with the mixed cultural context and confused identity of the plural society...Lee has specialised in creating a distinctively Singaporean sound and mood, integrating Asian genres into his commercial mix of jazz, fusion, electropop and classical styles. His thoughtful lyrics, some utilising Singlish, probe realities and mythologies of Singapore
Some background into Dick Lee is necessary here. C.J. Wee Wan Ling points out that Dick Lee is from the colonial-created, English-speaking Chinese minority…and grew up in middle-class Singapore. His early exposure to jazz, contemporary pop and Stephen Sondheim Broadway soundscapes (instructive that Wee notes this was a privilege available to those growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in Singapore) – make their contributions to his Asian pop style. Lee’s background is Peranakan and uses this background in his work.61

His music contains a strong element of nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s. As the occasion demands, appropriation of popular/folk Thai, Filipino and Japanese tunes (Wee prefers pirate to appropriate) sometimes arranged for scat or bebop background. When he performs he tends to use Singlish which is riddled with non-English expressions, as a local marker.62 For full visual effect, Dick Lee appears in video cameos and album covers with a combination of resplendent traditional costumes with trendy street-wear/work-wear. The labels come fast and furious, cultural magpie, frivolous, mere entertainer but as Wee points out “he has avoided a claustrophobic and binding notion of Asian identity in his music”.63 Although he was well known as part of a singing family trio in the late 1960s and early 1970s, much of his prominence begins with his interest in music in the late 1970s, writing and performing a combination of English-language pop and light-jazz music.64

Beginning in the early 1980s, he increasingly inserted significant local touches into his music. Lee’s regional success really began with Mad Chinaman 1989; in this release he blended traditional Chinese and Southeast Asian music and older Chinese pop songs either to create his own compositions or to be played on top of more contemporary rhythms. The music this makes gestures towards being World music, or at least to being a quasi-World pop. What distinguishes Lee from being labelled definitively as an oriental World Music artist is the too-knowing and sometimes (self-) parodic incorporation of the authentic, an incorporation which simultaneously questions the status or need for the authentic, while on another level proclaiming a true “Asianness”.

In local markets, Lee sold fairly well with university and polytechnic students who appreciated the novelty of his hybrid pop-jazz, despite the critics’ scathing reviews. Given his success in Japan, apparently Japanese youth also like the new sound of his quasi-World pop. Lee’s own sophisticated, witty and cosmopolitan personality, displayed for example in his chic Armani attire, gained in appeal as he began to
foreground the Asian elements of his cultural make-up. Arguably, within Southeast Asia, only Singapore, with its specific Anglo-Asian cultural configuration, could have produced a star like Dick Lee. Initially rejected by the usually humourless political establishment in Singapore for his populist sending-up of local life, Lee has become part of the state’s approach to the national-popular. The Singapore Symphony Orchestra performed Lee’s music in July 1995, in a programme with singers Sandy Lam of Hong Kong and Tracy Huang of Taiwan. As one of Singapore’s best-known personalities, his shows are reportedly often sold-out; he recently hosted a television talk show, was a judge in Singapore Idol 2004, a show modelled after the American Idol Series; his albums sell at around the 15000 (Wells and Lee 1996 tell us that 5000 to 10000 is considered a good number in terms of sales). Public opinion of him remains unevenly balanced between an English speaking middle class who think Dick is not serious enough, while the Chinese speaking population feel he is using their culture inauthentically.

Album and CD productions have formed the bulk of Lee’s musical career. Among his best known albums:
Life in the Lion City (1984)
Suriram (12-inch single 1984)
Fried Rice Paradise (1986)
The Mad Chinaman (1989)* his most popular and creative work to date
Asiamajor (1990)
Orientalism (1991)
The Year of the Monkey (1992)

Wee points out that the very titles are indicative of the pan-Asian and Singapore-Asian ideologies he has chosen to valorise and stage. However, it is significant success he has had in Japan which prompts a further examination of the ways in which his music has had an impact. Koichi Iwabuchi, in his book on popular culture and Japanese transnationalism, devotes a not insignificant space to discussing the perception and reception of Dick Lee in Japan especially when it is contrasted against the backdrop of a Japanese Orientalist conception that ‘their’ future is ‘our’ past, with specific reference to the production of pop music in the 1980s. Accordingly Iwabuchi observes:

*The success of Singaporean musician Dick Lee in the world music genre around 1990 dramatically displaces this perception and threw Southeast Asian hybridity into high relief. Dick Lee has been the most successful Asian pop singer in the Japanese market in terms of CD sales figures. The attractiveness of his syncretic music for Japanese audiences lies in its playful mixing of Western pop and various adaptations of traditional Asian musics. Mad Chinaman (1989) and Asia Major (1990) were particularly well received. It is suggested that in these two album releases he attempted to articulate his search for an impure identity as a Singaporean and an Asian,
respectively, through the syncretic remaking of traditional Asian songs and instrumentals in contemporary (Western) pop music styles.  

The attraction of Dick Lee’s music, at least in Japanese discourse, resides in the combination of two factors. The first is an exoticism which derives from the incorporation of local cultural traditions, and the second is a sophisticated modern music style, backed by the use of the latest technologies. Iwabuchi suggests Dick Lee became a cause célébre for Japanese critics because his music embodied a radical sense of a hybrid Asian identity that was beyond the reach of the self-contained Japanese cultural formation; producing almost single-handedly “a new sound by fusing West and East that Japanese musicians, who just mimic Western music style, could never do”. Iwabuchi, his music presented a different form of cultural negotiation between Asia and the West, a more cosmopolitan mode of hybridisation that Japan had yet to attain. Nakazawa Shin’ichi (1990), a prominent Japanese advocate of postmodernism. He argues that Lee’s music reflects the postmodern condition of Singapore, a floating intersection of culture, which unlike China or Japan lacks a strong sense of communal identity. Nakazawa contends that in Singapore, no attempt is made to insert its diversity of cultures into a nationalising melting pot that homogenizes them: Dick Lee for the first time succeeded in making Asian pop music attain a consistent multiplex structure, so much so that his music suggests the possibility of the mingled existence of multiple different rhythms in one song...Dick Lee as a Singaporean is free from a strong drawing force to the motherland and therefore has attained the freedom as well as the sorrow of a nomadic subjectivity.  

Iwabuchi’s scepticism surrounds Japanese rave reviews on Lee’s music and Singapore that fail to notice the contradictory cultural and identity politics operating in Singapore. It can be claimed that Lee’s music is just a fashionable, commercialised, apolitical pastiche of Western pop and traditional music; that his claim of possessing a pan-Asian identity is purely a promotional strategy; and that his claim operates, within the context of Singapore’s cultural policies, to stress a multiracial, pan-Asian identity in nationalist terms (see Kong 1996; Wee 1996). Iwabuchi argues that Japanese delectation has do far been based on the place of music rather than a cultural politics of the music which tends to negate the reading of Dick Lee and a nationalist agenda. 

Japanese discourses on Lee’s music, although they largely ignore the debate about the music in Singapore, cannot all be dismissed simply as another attempt to domesticate something innovative by casting it either as a chimera of the fusion of “a new sound by fusing West and East” in a way unattainable by the Japanese or as an inferior, exotic, Asian other. At the least some display an effort to appreciate Lee’s music as the embodiment of an Asian modernity whose difference articulates a telling critique of the formation of Japanese modernity and its discourse on hybridism. Perhaps it is the very essence of syncretism that permits its derivations contrasted against a Japanese agenda
which Akihito Saito articulates as one of the Japanese ways of mixing cultures which suppresses its foreign origins, thereby articulating “Japanese-ness”.

As in all pro-Dick Lee sentiments in Japan, there is somehow a slightly different motivation for it. Iwabuchi makes this point in greater details articulating the weaknesses of an enthusiasm for Dick Lee in terms of the Japanese media industry which seems to have relished a phrase “Asia is one” by Okakura Tenshin at the turn of the 19th century. In his famous book, *The Ideal of the East* with special reference to the Art of Japan (1904), Okakura used a binary East-West opposition in an attempt to grasp ‘Asia’ as a coherent space characterised by the existence of ‘love’ underlying art and aesthetics in the region. Rather than attempting to articulate a cardinal Eastern value and aesthetic, Okakura’s work seems to reflect his desire that Asia be given an imaginary coherence by Japan; not just Asian unity in diversity but a curator, “Japan”, through whom this unity could be achieved in the first place. When that curatorial role is taken up by the media industry through technology, as hardware – CDs and software – programming, contests, broadcast media, there is an attractiveness about the way in which Dick Lee was the most appropriate candidate for an Asian curatorial agenda. It is difficult to dismiss a series of television shows broadcast far and wide about *Asia Bagus*, *AsiaNBeat*, *Asia Live Dream*, to name a few, which begins to feature Southeast Asian representation.

Somewhere in all this curatorial discourse about an Asian unity or identity best curated by Japan (where Japanese representation is absent) is the reception of a *Southeast Asian sound* in contradistinction to Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese appropriations of Japanese tunes and sounds. We are offered some clues by Benjamin Ng Wai-Ming’s study of Japanese popular music in Singapore:

*The 1970s saw the golden period of Taiwanese popular songs among Chinese communities in Asia. Most of these Taiwanese songs were Mandarin covers of Japanese enka (urban nostalgic and emotive songs) or kayokyoku (early Japanese pop). They were very popular among the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Chinese Singaporeans became familiar with Japanese tunes, although few realised that their favourite Mandarin songs [were] borrowed from Japanese tunes.*

Another reading can be made of the ‘syncretism’ in the Dick Lee discourse. Peter Trudgill’s study of the sociolinguistics of British pop-song pronunciation discusses the way in which punk, for example, *introduced features associated with lower-prestige south of England accents*:

*The use of these low-status pronunciations is coupled with a use of nonstandard grammatical forms, such as multiple negation and the use of third person singular “don’t”, that is even higher than in other subgenres of pop music and the intended effect is assertive and aggressive. There is also an intention to aid identification with and/or by British working-class youth, and to appeal to others who wish to identify with them, their situation and their values.*
Herein lies some clues of the range in public reception of him; from considerable support from university and polytechnic students who appreciated the novelty of his hybrid pop-jazz to critics’ scathing reviews and an English speaking middle class who think Dick is not serious enough to a Chinese speaking population who feel he is using their culture inauthentically.\(^7\) It is in appropriating and reinterpreting cultural practices which had acquired boundaries, that has resulted in this mixed reception of Dick Lee’s creative work.

One can add to the discourse speculation of a shrewd sense of economic potential to be garnered from what Karl Marx defines as the mistaking of an object for a social relation, or vice versa - commodity fetish. Adam Krims explains the process in hip-hop, particularly the ghetto as source of despair and economic potential: The commodified image of the ghetto forms a libidinal object...leads...to a surplus value generated from the commodification of a lack of value...the music industry has found a way to refold some of the most abject results of world economic production, through a direct transformation...to multibillion-dollar wealth...this refolding...that constitutes hip-hop’s own mutation in the workings of surplus value...without...materially changing the living conditions at either end.\(^7\)

Chua Beng Huat’s recent chapter discusses ways in which the Singlish-Singaporean is identified more specifically in the realms of the Hokkien-speaking community and connotes the positioning of Hokkien speakers as low life...in a country where forty years of continuous economic growth has engendered a substantial middle class...dependent on academic and professional achievements. Therefore, in the view of an educated middle-class Singaporean, Hokkien is being thus positioned, in representation and social reality as the language...laughably low-class ...not a serious language for the civil community.\(^7\)

At the same time, Chua also notes attempts in popular culture in Singapore to glorify the essence of Singlish Singaporean Ah Beng and his feminine counterpart Ah Lian, through the lens of middle-class educated Singaporean consumers, for whom switching code from standard English to Singlish is a marker of ‘authentic’ Singaporean identity.\(^7\) Nowhere else is more amplified than in a recent and hugely popular sitcom series Phua Chu Kang, which makes the everyday existence of a poorly educated but economically successful renovation contractor (a phrase -nouvo riche – comes to mind here).
Applying the arguments of Trudgill and Krims, Singlish ‘emerges’, in the process of economic growth and prosperity, as a ghetto-language with its authentic users forming its cultural ghettos. As a cultural commodity in televised theatre, it has become since the 1990s, something hugely popular within Singapore, to the extent of becoming an internationally marketable asset. The fact it is frowned upon in the recent Speak Good English Movement campaigns has only increased its value.

Applied now to Music, Dick Lee’s creative works arguably contain, together with the use of hybrid pop-jazz musical elements, the use of Singlish (in contradistinction to Singapore English) as a lower-prestige mode of communication. When capitalized upon as a commodity fetish – the notion, which according to Marx,79 both results from and reinforces the more general tendency in capitalist societies to mystify social origins – such strategies become successful in marketing a Singaporean identity. It is difficult to deny the success of Dick Lee in the Japanese markets, made particularly so when the use of Singlish in music. One also needs to consider that much of Lee’s success preempts the successes in theatre-spaces of local film and television in Singapore.

More recent scholarship on Dick Lee is likely to generate further interest and research not only on his music but also of the socio-cultural circumstances of what might best be read as one of the many independent and successful routes taken in the narratives of music of Western popular culture in Singapore. Additionally, there has been very little done in terms of an analysis of the music as well as its complicity or conformity with the textual considerations, whether it is the main, meta- or sub-texts.
Popular Culture in the Malay Community

Yusnor Ef and Burhanuddin bin Buang record notable branches in the Malay community after Pop-Yeh Yeh. In a sense it is difficult to assess the impact of both across popularity of consumption and production except in hindsight. A fruitful area of research would be to examine record or cassette sales at shops, concert ticket sales, broadcast programmes, programmes flyers and any such material that would help examine these areas in greater depth.

For Burhanuddin, Mat Rok as a social phenomenon was as much a part of the landscape with fashion statements, the problem with drugs, long hair, anti-establishment sentiments. Music’s role in the Mat Rok phenomenon is far more complex than the stereotype that generally attends its subscribers. Did the music cause such behaviour? Did the music accentuate behaviour? Was rock music an unfortunate accomplice in social behavioural patterns that may have had no more than a subscription to the music because it was different from other musics? Lyrics of the great rock songs of the period are entirely different in kind from the lyrics that mark the skill and biting wit of one like Bob Dylan and like-minded, like spirited artists.

Rebellious lyrics are now supplanted by sound worlds arrived at via distortion, wailing, crashing rhythms, amplification and by extension decibel levels approximate what many believe to be the closest definition of noise. Yet noise, as Eno observes, has special significance, even power, and nowhere else is this more keenly felt than in rock music: Distortion and complexity are the sources of noise. Rock music is built on distortion: on the idea that things are enriched, not degraded by noise. To allow something to become noisy is to allow it to support multiple readings. It is a way of multiplying resonances. It is also a way of ‘making the medium fail’ – thus giving the impression that what you are doing is bursting out of the material: ‘I’m too big for this medium’.

But the energy levels that emanated from these new groups, the cult following thereafter, the marked observable patterns of behaviour which were by comparison significantly deviant and a potential or real threat to social order, gave rise to new levels of panic and anxiety. The indulgent consumption of nicotine, alcohol and narcotic substances was said to be high in this group and its subscribers, bordering on cult followings, were the youth in Singapore; the very youth on whom hopes were placed, socially, politically and economically, to lift post-independent Singapore out of the threatened existence of third-world status. While the anxiety felt by Dr. Goh Keng Swee in 1973 had its reverberations across Western popular culture of the Euro-American worlds of entertainment establishments, the Mat-Rockers seemed to revel in their situated ‘marginalia’ and were contented to remain accessible to and among themselves. This is discussed in further detail under musical practices of Heavy Metal and Rock.
Yusnor however, draws on a group of performers and singers bred on Music of popular Malay film as well as Pop Yeh Yeh but slowly overshadowing previous practices. The list of performers in the 1970s, while not comprehensive, includes Sharifah Aini, J. Mizan, Rahimah Rahim, Ismail Haron, Sarena Hashim, Zaleha Hamid, Mila Husin, Anita Sarawak, Hamidah Ahmad, Dahlia Ahmad, Sugiman Johari, S. Latifah, Elmi Salleh, Julie Remie to name only a few. The difference was the Western influence in them; hence Ismail Haron was nicknamed Tom Jones because he did Tom Jones songs very well; Eddie Ahmad’s adaptation of Don’t play that Song (You Lied) to Madah Perpisahan; or Ahmad Daud’s Bilaku Terkenang had its inspiration from Charade and Anita Sarawak’s acknowledgement of Korina taken from the hit in the Western world Corina-Corina as examples. There were also Inang, Masri and Joget songs popularised by Sharifah Aini, Rafeah Buang, Ahmad Jais, Orchid Abdullah and Juninah M. Amin. Popular ones included Joget Malam Berinai (Masdor/Ef) and Tunang Tujuh Purnama sung by A. Ramlie to name tow examples. Yusnor Ef also records an affinity with Japanese songs. J. Misan is credited with Hari Ini dan Semalam, Rafeah Buang’s Kenangan based on Senno Memoro and Kembali Untukku by Ahmad Jais. Another strong influence reasserted was Hindustani songs made easier the wide-spread popularity of Hindi film. A. Ramli’s Rindu Kasih was based on Bobby, a Hindustani film which was very popular among the Malay community in Singapore, and his Intanku Liana was based on Aagele Lagja; Sanisah Huri’s Janganku Ditinggalkan from another Hindustani film Chalteh. Groups that were popular during the 1970s were The Emmeralds featuring Julie Sudiro released an album titled Irama Abadi. The Quests, who were not from the Malay community, made their mark with four songs with adaptation to Malay text. The Nite Walkers with soloist Mike Ibrahim were popular for their contribution to songs for children. Others included Saaidah Saad with Hari Bendera, Angsa Ajaib, Eddynor Ali with Oh Bangau, Ahmad Nawab/Yusnor Ef—Mimpiku Malam Tadi, Kassim Masdor/Yusnor Ef Selamat Pagi Cikgu and Mila Hussain’s Pak Pandir.

Yusnor observes the influx of Malaysian artists into Singapore in the late 1970s and early 1980s permeating every sphere of activity. In a sense this signalled the inversion of centre of Malay traditional folk and popular music and culture although in this instance, it was popular culture that was starting to overtake Singapore not long after the separation. Politically, that would have been unavoidable given Malaysia’s focus on nature, role and identity based on a Malay Malaysia; a very different predicament in Singapore. Economically, the responsibility of shifting the position of the economy via industrialisation and modernisation from the 1960s into the 1970s were called on a sudden exigency to staying relevant in the English speaking high-profile commercial worlds dominated by the UK and USA. Perhaps from an economic standpoint, music of popular culture was not as highly prioritised as other more profitable sectors.
On the other hand, Singapore had always been the centre of the Malay film industry, and the recording industry particularly in the era of popular culture, profiting from economic opportunity, possessing the necessary infrastructure for surviving crises. It is therefore quite puzzling as to why the centre of the Malay world should have shifted to KL and return to almost overshadow the original centre. The then Ministry of Culture’s effort in promoting culture and the arts, the legacy of the National theatre and all it stood for, Music for Everyone, and Music for the Millions Series, amidst other incentives. Further research is probably needed here on the correlation of economic upgrading with the promulgation of the arts in Singapore during the 1970s and 1980s. The fundamental question is not so much the one to one correspondence but a study of the ways in which person/s, relationships, religious, social, cultural and political and mediating institutions were seen to act as agencies or instruments in this change.

Yusnor observes a slightly different shift in the 1980s to groups that emerge like Al-Mizan, Al-Jawaher, Hidayah, Orkes Al-Suraya (Medan)…quite clearly Arab or Middle-Eastern influences. Songs like Panggilan Kaabah, Doa dalam Irama take prominence in this sphere. Composer, arranger and lyricist Ahmad Baqi who seemed to have paved the way for others such as Faridah M.Amin, Habibah Osman and Rohayah. This wave, as he observed, was short-lived because of its comparatively lower marketability in the face of popular culture with strong Western influence. Like all other domains, the Malay community was unlikely not to be affected by pop, disco, rock and trash (metal) influences. M. Nasir is probably one of the most influential names in the field of slow rock or rock ballads. Craig Lockard’s assesement of the ex-Singaporean, who left for Malaysia and gained prominence with his group Kembara, draws parallels with Bruce Springsteen in the equivalent world. One might add that commercially Nasir was well in demand while latching on to an Islamic sentiment powered by Indonesian Rhoma Irama.

Of all the rockers, Yusnor recognises a few, one of which is Ramli Sarip, who in Singapore garnered the label “Raja Rock” or King of Rock. Yusnor remembers: Ramil Sarip asked me to write him a song...I said...how can? Your songs [are] all rock...mana boleh....so he said try try...in the end I wrote him a song called Ada Kerja Ada Gaji....in one album named Batu....under Sweet Charity.....for that group I could not write a very mellow sound. The fact that Sarip managed a comparatively successful solo career and still does to this day, has earned him the reputation of something of a rock legend and that reputation seems to have transcended Singapore with the vivid rock image of long hair and the rugged look known and loved by Mat Rokers across the peninsula.
In the incursions into jazz, Malaysian Sheila Majeed became an prominent example, winning a BASF award in Indonesia, where she gained much popularity. Yusnor notes her popularity extended to Japan and the US. We are told of the presence of Amin Sahab, who is associated with M. Nasir and Ramli Sarip but promotes Islamic messages criticising meaningless rock lyrics. A guitarist we are told who established a name in Malaysia was A.Ali, from the group Nite Walkers who wrote children’s songs and has been responsible for writing for singers like Noranizah Idris, Headwind, Zaiton Sameon among others.86

Yusnor also notes that SENADA, EMI, PANDA (Hoover) Records, WEA, LIFE were companies in Singapore. Toady, there is only a publicity office here for high ranking members. SENADA and PANDA have gone. His observations summarise the position that Singapore was the centre of the Malay peninsula form the early 1960s to the late 1970s. Today he laments that popular and promising artistes in Singapore are eclipsed by their Malaysian counterparts. Ramli Sarip is the only representative in the rock and popular culture domain alongside a handful of others. Anita Sarawak is known not only in the Malay community but internationally in music of popular culture in the English speaking world. Iskandar Ismail, who began his life as Hanglose Iskandar in the jazz world, is today demanded as an arranger. The list is small but growing and he claims pride in the Malay community for them: Indra Shahril, Jan Johari, Reduan Ali, Nora Ismail, Bong Shaaban, Ismail Marzuki, Nazim and others.87

A number of performers in pop, jazz, heavy metal and hip-hop circles remain anonymous largely because they perform in spaces which do not resonate with the Malay-conversant communities. One notable example is Bani Faruk who was the guitarist in the group which played in the group Jive Talking at the Hard Rock Café. Bani was known as the George Benson of Singapore even towards the end of his life.88 Other examples include Sheikh Haikel, formerly of Construction Sight, arguably Singapore’s first rapper, Triple Noize, the youngest rap group after Construction Sight and Urban X’change, and many heavy metal musicians who prefer their practice in the English conversant domain. Yet there are those who suggest that in the domain of the Malay music industry, Singaporean artists pale in comparison to their Malaysian and even Indonesian counterparts. Yusnor laments the divide between Malaysian and Singaporean artists in Music of popular culture in Malay has now reached the point of stratification, with a similar cry made in the domain of the English music industry with respect to creative work:

*Musicians claimed that Singaporean audiences were not supportive of local talent.*89
Popular culture in the Chinese Community

Proliferation of popular form of music-making and dance in cabarets and dance bands. Arguably the most popular entertainment during the 1950s in Singapore was to be found in the New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night. Getais enjoyed the best business in New World during the 50s. There was the Man Jiang Hong Getai, Shangri-La, New Nightclub, Feng Feng Song and Dance Troupe, and Broadway. The Man Jiang Hong Getai was used by the famous Zhang Lai Lai Song and Dance Troupe, which met with enthusiastic crowd response. Part of the show included the performance of a series of love ballads between Zhang Lai Lai and the male lead, which was a crowd-pleaser. Zhang eventually moved to the Hong Kong motion picture scene. Despite her considerable success and fame as a singer locally, the troupe was subsequently dismantled. The Man Jiang Hong Getai was then replaced by the Dong Fang Getai.

Joseph Peters’ overview of musics in Singapore also reveals that, Bunga Tanjong at the New World Amusement Park, New World, Great World and Happy World were venues around which a thriving nightlife in Singapore revolved in the 1950s. People flocked to these clubs every night to participate in contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, tango to name a few. Live popular band performances sufficed for all of these types of dances, thus making it economically lucrative and at the same time characterised variety and ‘local’ flavour in entertainment. It would not have been surprising to have speculated participation of the Chinese community in these popular forms.

The arrival of popular culture was initially scorned by those who believed music served a wholesome cause. Composer, orchestral and choral conductor Mo Ze Xi (b.1935) in his article by noted in his narration of music in Chinese culture in Malaya, that in societies or associations have sung some form of “art songs”, folk songs (Malayan min yao), Russian folk songs and ‘popular’ music – Zhou Xuan from the 1930s to the 1940s, Yu Min between the 1940s and 1950s, followed by Liu Wen Zhen and Fung Fei Fei in the 1960s. Much of this music, Mo felt, lacked life and energy and did not possess the value for fighting for independence or revolution.

Nevertheless, the influence of popular film and cabaret from Shanghai and transported to the different Worlds found greater support among the Chinese community who were not much more resistant to dance music and popular songs than the other communities in Singapore. According to Loo Teng Kiat:

Huang Qing Yuan belongs to the 50s. He was well known when Rediffusion was big in Singapore in the 50s and 60s. He was known for his rendition of ballads, likewise for Qin Huai, who garnered intense popularity then. But they were more popular because of the distinct qualities of their voices than their looks. Both men did some appearances on TV in the late 70s and early 80s in the local mandarin variety shows, but were not able to secure their popularity due to the newer and younger 'pop idols' like Sakura.
Ting, who could entertain the audiences with wit and humour and a lot of dancing, a trait seriously lacking in Huang and Qin. Sakura Ting made a big appearance in the Agogo era, and was well known for yodelling in some of her 'country' style, western songs, apart from her already large on-screen reputation. Always energetic and 'sexy' in her colourful Agogo outfit, she gave very lively performances on screen. Her yodelling set her apart from the rest of the singers at that time, and another singer - Pang Xiuxiong - did some yodeling as well. Apart from that, Sakura was also rather big in other Asian countries as well...although only two countries are mentioned; Hong Kong and Indonesia. Unlike Sakura, Zhang Xiao Ying focussed more towards ballads and other slower tempo songs. She appeared very much prim and proper, unlike the dynamic Sakura but Zhang was more popular in the late 70s and early 80s.

Sisters Deng Xue Hua, Miao Hua, and Gui Hua were popular from the late 70s to the mid 80s. Deng Miao Hua is the most popular of the trio, but she started off as a solo act. She sang the theme song of the TV series Xiao Fei Yu (Little flying Fish) and acted in it as well. That's when the swimming team won many medals at the SEA game, and SBC (Singapore Broadcasting Corporation) did a show about it. Ang Peng Siong and his father did cameos in the show as well. Ang Peng Siong didn't get as big a part as his father did though. When she got famous after Xiao Fei Yu, she attempted to get her sisters into the act as well. Unfortunately, they didn't make it big, and I think they did only one album. Deng Miao Hua was, I think, from one of those singing classes organised by SBC at that time. It also produced a handful of singers who performed regularly on the Mandarin variety shows such as Xing, Xing, Xing and Bin Fen Ba San Series.

Drummer Tony Zee recalled the days of St. John’s Hall where for $3, one could get to dance with a hostess for a song. Tony found himself working with the pop group Trailers but also found himself working across domains; what was known as the Chinese pop scene. Around 1965/6, Tony did performances on a Sunday morning called the Early Bird Show lasting about an hour where the musicians would do band backing for artistes like Rita Chao, Sakura Ting, and Lara in what he recalled were the Agogo days. The repertoire consisted of Agogo numbers in Mandarin mostly Taiwan Mandarin but they were local covers. Musicians working in these circumstances needed to know the grooves. Each groove worked like a riff and gave them an opportunity to know how they were going to carry this through the songs. Examples of frequently used grooves:

- Obi Cha Cha
- Hala Hala
- Cha Cha
- Quick Step
- Salsa
Around the early 1970s up to 1972, Tony played Mandarin singles at Maxims which was located at Supreme House (Park Mall today) at the basement. The New World Cabaret was another popular haunt. There were also tea-dances at Katong Palace Theatre, the Celestial Room. Jeremy also discovered his schoolmate Hilarian Goh a very colourful character...used to come in a pink suit and play the theme from the Pink Panther...used to play for Singapore Organ Festivals (Yamaha?)...he won electone competitions...he was playing at Chinese night clubs...at the age 14/15 and he was earning $1600 a month...97

Tony’s critical moment came with an opportunity to work with John Teo, Douglas Tan and Randy Lee, also known as the Stylers, when their drummer had left. The Stylers earned the reputation of being the most demanded Mandarin show band particularly during the Month of the Hungry Ghost Festival. Their performance schedules were packed and Tony played with them from 1983-1985. According to Tony, the repertoire of the Stylers was based on the songs of the 1950s generation and retained their audience as long as this generation had the capacity to be entertained and afforded the expense of attending to them. The musicians worked from a score which had the music in chords, lyrics and bars as well as the groove and each person’s role in it. Parts were already written out and from the samples he offered, they were neatly handwritten by John Teo the band leader and keyboardist. Given their hectic Hungry Ghost Festival schedules, they employed a sort of librarian to maintain the song list with the scores. For instance, certain pieces were to be played that night. This librarian would look through the scores and ensure that the pieces were ready on the stand for performance. Tony remembers their immense library of songs and scores which was a clear edge they had over potential rivals. They were also tight as an ensemble and the impression generated was that their fee of $1800 a night was not something show organisers at the Hungry Ghost Festival contested. From 1986-1990, he worked with Jeramzee and from 1991 to 2001 he played with Jive Talking at Hard Rock Cafe.98

Towards the beginning of the 1990s, the world of Mandarin pop seems to have had either collisions or mergers with what was at one time, a truly unique Singaporean expression, Xinyao. At one level, Xinyao lyricists and songwriters were preparing their material for Hong Kong singing sensations, while at another level, certain names seemed to appear at Xinyao festivals, linked with Xinyao events yet were not considered bona fide Xinyao practitioners. Zhang Fan makes mention of two brothers, Li Wei Song and Li Si Song as exemplars of these ambiguous links with Xinyao:

Si Song is from a different route...Xinyao is from the school...Remember I mentioned the Singapore Artists Association in the days of the 1950s? At one time the association chairman...the chairman at the time, Fu Su Yuin who was a very popular singer in the 1950s. When I was in secondary school (15 years old), I joined the association’s choir. Therefore I managed to associate with this group of entertainers...local
entertainers...besides singers, they are magicians, drama actors, old guard...Wang Sa and Yeh Fong...Fu Su Yuin was the president of the association then...and Si Song and Wei Song, with their father’s encouragement became his students...At the beginning, Si Song and Wei Song started out with a very clear commercial motive...pop approach...they studied under Fu Su Yuin so although they took part in the Xinyao festival in the early days when they even cut records and got an award but then they could not make it in the pop scene...one record hit...like Jimmy Yeh...but they kept an interest in the professional level doing teaching...Li Wei Song Singing School...Si Song established himself as a much demanded producer...EMI gives him singers to do recordings...so it seems they are not much of Xinyao because there were at the time some young people that started off not writing school music...they started off writing pop songs...a completely different route...and also important element...remember I talked about TCS or SBC drama series....each song...they wrote so much of these theme songs...they have this platform you know this including Mu Tze, the theme song from the Awakening (Wu Souw Nanyang) but Wei Song & Si Song wrote a lot of theme songs they have connection with the TCS producers they have this trust...

While the separation is made clear, it wouldn’t be difficult to envision their identity with the entertainment industry. One observer noted how much the songs of Liang Wern Fook, Eric Moo and Loi Fei Huay had created the impression that Xinyao had really gone pop largely because the musical arrangements seem to be ready to compete in the Mandarin pop market. Here is where opinions differed as to Xinyao’s directions. Looking at CCA school activities from 1993 -1997, Xinyao had virtually disappeared. Coincident with this was the emergence of Kit Chan, who was discovered and groomed by Ocean Butterflies. Stephanie Sun, pop or otherwise came from the Li Wei Song School and yet again some confusion with Xinyao. Doubtless there will continue to be the greying of domains long regarded as sacrosanct between the various musical practices.
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Musical practice of Xinyao

Although the Xinyao movement reportedly began in the early 1980s, had ceased by the 1990s and resumed in 2002, its legacy is still felt. In fact, one of the programmes of the opening celebrations of Singapore's first purpose built arts centre, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay in 2002 was a concert called XingPop, a concert of Singapore Chinese pop music from "yesterday till today". In the programme booklet for the event, an article featuring composer and singer Liang Wern Fook was headlined "Xinyao - The Catalyst that brought about Singapore Mandarin Pop". As Liang, who has written some of the more well-loved Xinyao songs, mentioned in the article: One can say that people became conscious of local music after Xinyao started. Of course, what Liang refers to as "local music" and whether or not it is true of all local music is open to discussion that this overview will address. Nevertheless, the point here is the impact that Xinyao continues to exert.

For this research though, that which is of greater interest is how Xinyao grew to become an occasion in which music became a site and practice through which a part of Singapore society constructed and recognised itself. As social and cultural geography Lily Kong notes in her study 'Making Music at the Margins? A Social and Cultural Analysis of Xinyao in Singapore', Xinyao is not only a practice that is but in fact helped in the construction of identity among Mandarin-speaking youth and the empowerment of youth communities in its early stage of development.

Xinyao, as a practice then also raises many interesting questions musical and cultural. Its beginnings in the 1980s acknowledge, among other things, expression in a public sphere. Public appearances not only become sites of individual hearing/s but also expressions, whether they involve individuals who act as individuals or individuals who represent a community. This manifestation in public therefore suggests a deeper level of this collective action, namely ways in which it may have been documented, initiated, nurtured and supported. Other questions arise; namely who supported this endeavour, and in what ways.

The following overview is based on articles in the local newspapers as well as oral and e-interviews conducted with participants. It will look at Xinyao not as a homogenous phenomenon but rather as a practice through which various cultures are evident.

A Brief Chronology

The word itself Xinyao is in fact a shorthand, being an extraction for xin jia po nian qin ren chuang zuo de ge yao (the songs composed by Singapore youths). Xin comes from the word Xin Jia Po (Chinese for 'Singapore') and Yao from ge yao (songs). For
the most basic definition of these "songs composed by Singapore youth" however, Lee Tong Soon's entry for Singapore in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* suffices: "a Mandarin vocal genre accompanied by guitars ..".6

The first reported Xinyao concert, *Sounds of Teens* was held at the Singapore Conference Hall in 1983 while another took place at Hong Lim Green in 1984 as part of Singapore’s 25 years of nation-building and yet another at the Botanic Gardens in 1985. There was sufficient interest created for the then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (popularly known then as SBC, Mediacorp today) to run a radio programme called *Our Singers and Songwriters*, a half-hour programme which was aired on the then Radio 3 on Sunday evenings at 7.30 pm. In 1983, SBC introduced an amateur vocal group category in the Chinese talentime series, resulting in increased participation by a number of Xinyao groups. The movement received its first major act of publicity when one of the pioneer groups The Straw had to withdraw from the contest amidst allegations that they had sung professionally. In 1984, another Xinyao group, San Ren Dui, came out top in that section of the Talentime contest. The release in May 1984, of the ‘first’ Xinyao album, *21 Tomorrow*, a compilation by several groups, yielded sales of 20 000 copies; creating a heated surge of interest in print and broadcast media. Songs like *Chance Meeting* by Eric Moo and Huang Huizhen became the first Xinyao entry to the Singapore Chinese Billboard charts. Thomas Teo and Dawn Gan became the first Xinyao singers to successfully release solo recordings in October 1985 shortly followed by Eric Moo. The Chinese talentime series in 1985 also introduced a ‘Local Compositions’ category. The first two-night Xinyao Festival was held at the World Trade Centre Auditorium in 1985 with help from the Boon Lay Community Centre Readers Club. This was further boosted by the formation in May 1986 of the Young Songwriters Society, which had for its aims, the promotion of Xinyao artistes and activities.

By 1987, however, a forum organised by the *Shin Min Daily News* at the Royal Holiday Inn in August and chaired by a record company owner, yielded after much discussion, the view that the songwriters’ creativity should not be hampered by the term Xinyao. A newspaper article dated 30 August 1987 had the caption "You could rock at this upbeat Xinyao show", with reference to the annual Xinyao Festival at Kallang Theatre, which featured ‘newcomers’ such as strobe lights, back-up dancers, four-piece bands, performers outstanding outfits and slick presentation. Also, by the end of the 1980s, many of the songwriters took to singing their own songs, including Liang Wern Fook and Loy Fei Huei.

The early 1990s however, seemed to have been marked by ebbing of interest in the movement. *The Xinyao Festival*, according to a 1994 newspaper article, was "reduced to a school concert playing to a half-empty hall" in 1990. The Sing Music Awards in 1990 was scrapped because "too few Xinyao albums were submitted for nomination". The
COMPASS press release identifies 1992 as the year the *Xinyao Festival* "ceased existence".

How this decline is viewed however is open to interpretation. By the 1990s, the Singapore Chinese pop music scene had begun to look towards the foreign market, with the emphasis on the "exporting" of Singapore Chinese pop music rather than the "importing" of Chinese pop music from the region. As such, composers had to make "adjustments to Xinyao so that it could relate to listeners abroad." Here Liang has noted that although "some people may feel that it was a pity Xinyao failed to develop beyond a certain stage, I would say that our music had reached another stage of development."

The better part of the 1990s had been concerned with sustaining interest in Xinyao but mainly from public and media. In 1993, a venue for Xinyao enthusiasts and aspirants to sing and present their songs became possible with the opening of *The Ark Lounge* based on a well-known lounge chain in Taiwan bearing the same name (but not amounting to a franchise). Other lounges followed suit, like one called *The Fifties*. In 1994, a radio programme called *Station of Music* was launched through the joint efforts of Radio 100.3 FM and a Xinyao organisation called *Feeling Associates* (reportedly initiated in 1989) with a membership of 10 000 including those from Malaysia. The aim of being selective with what would be aired was to introduce "the better songs to overseas record companies. Hongkong, for example, is greatly in need of songs for its many stars."8

Apart from data about participation in Xinyao activities in school by the Co-Curricular Activities branch of the Ministry of Education,9 not much more has been accounted for in the mixed fortunes of the Xinyao movement until a two-night sold-out concert at the University Cultural Centre featuring Xinyao and Mingge proponents; a COMPASS press-release in 2002 of a revival of the Xinyao Festival in mid-2003, the Xinyao Reunion Concert on 22 March 2003 featuring Eric Moo and Friends and more recently, in late May this year of the launch of Liang Wern Fook’s book and CD compilation.

Appearances form the most outward and immediate sensory data for perception and reception but ultimately, they beg further questions. Despite the age of fast food practices, it is difficult to imagine a teenage mandarin vocal genre accompanied by guitars appearing in large numbers without sufficient explanation.
A brief overview begins with its appearance as a general term for Mandarin ballads by young Singaporeans who made their public appearance in the early 1980s. According to a newspaper report in 1985, it was a name these young singers, lyricists and songwriters coined for themselves during a forum on their future three years ago largely due to the unique character they have created and the identity they have forged. Oral interviews suggest that it was a construction of the Mandarin print media. It should not be surprising for us to note broadcast media interest in this phenomenon. Pang Siew Moi, producer and presenter for the SBC Mandarin Radio 3 programme, Our singers and songwriters, was quoted as saying: It started in 1983 at about the time when Chinese songs written by youngsters here were beginning to gain attention.

This of course does not inform us when the students began. We are informed that in June 1981, Billy Koh and Ng Guan Seng became friends after knowing each other in the Chinese Orchestra of River Valley High School. As they shared a common passion for music, they often strummed and sang together when they were not having classes. When they entered Singapore Polytechnic, Koh Nam Seng joined them. The trio called themselves The Straw for the sake of entering “Talentiime” organized by then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC). The group was officially formed on 6 September in a fast food restaurant. By the time we hear of students from junior colleges and polytechnics forming groups and performing their own ‘ballads’ in their schools as well as songs from broadcast media, notable names included Eric Moo’s group Di Xia Tie and The Straw.

Emergence of Xinyao

Xinyao is understood to refer to songs composed by Singapore youths. The role of oral interviews, in relation to other oral interviews and written discourse, serves more than narratives as we will show. Our initial point is the name Xinyao. Liang Wern Fook recalls when we started writing songs, we didn’t call it Xinyao. Then in 1982, while we were writing a lot of these songs and more concerts and our songs were being played over the radio, the Nanyang Siang Pao conducted a seminar on this phenomenon. Billy Koh attended this seminar. During the seminar, editors and reporters first came up with the term. According to a newspaper report in 1985, Xinyao was a name these young singers, lyricists and song-writers coined for themselves during a forum on their future three years ago largely due to the unique character they have created and the identity they have forged.

Perhaps one of the most difficult moments here is to discuss the emergence of a culture that is Xinyao. If culture is a way of life, it follows that manifestations of this culture were obvious not only in the aural but oral and visual sense. We need only be reminded of Blacking’s view that culture, in the general sense of the life-style of a community, is performed and exists as an inevitable outcome of human sociability and creativity. The extent to which Xinyao was part of everyday discourse would be dependent on a
critical mass of participants to warrant its emergence in a more specific frame. Oral accounts refer to the practice of amateur music-making but no specific reference to Xinyao by name. Oral interviews with pioneer Xinyao practitioners reveal a curious phrase Xiao Yuan. An English translation approximates the college campus. In Taiwan College Songs, the term Xiao Yuan holds no ambiguity. Oral interviews also indicate the presence of songs composed by Singapore youth in Polytechnics. In her academic exercise on Singapore ballads, however, Mindy Lin was informed of the presence of CLDDS leaflets and ticketed programmes organised by literary and drama societies in a few junior colleges. It is not surprising therefore when a senior Xinyao proponent referred quite naturally, in an oral interview, to Dawn Gan as Miss Xiao Yuan, clumsily put in English, the school garden belle. The alternative, campus belle is also plausible.

For a considerable number of Xinyao practitioners, oral culture featured very strongly in at the everyday experience. Lyric sheets could be available (presumably via aural transcriptions since there is little evidence to suggest publications of them) while tunes were sung by students who were able to recall what they had listened to and disseminate it. In all this of course, there is very little mention of any recordings of these everyday experiences. Whatever songs that formed the repertoire of this experience, songs are likely to be first sung to friends at informal gatherings around the piano, with a guitar or other portable instruments, after school, or informal concerts in schools or junior colleges, ticketed or otherwise. Concerts of this nature in schools were likely to have been organized by the Chinese Literary and Dramatic Society and records are likely to indicate that while the term xinyao had not appeared, they would have been advertised as concerts featuring students' own compositions.

With respect to choice of songs, it must be borne in mind that an everyday experience such as this would have been the fertile soil for individuals to sprout in a social practice. These are individuals who were likely to have influenced such choices although it is not inconceivable that the passive majority in this experience had a choice in accepting or rejecting songs that contributed towards a repertoire. There are two ways in which this is suggested: Liang Wern Fok remembers in the late 1970s, (77/78/79), there was a very important school movement—Xiao Yen Ge Shui (College Songs) Chee Yui, Chai Chee. They are all—the same phenomena (College Songs)....they appeared a little earlier, They had a very good collection of songs. these songs I came to know mainly through the radio...like Liu Chia Cheng/Chang songs. To me he was one of he composers whose songs touched me—he wrote beautifully melodious songs (Wa Chia Cai Na li?)...I think these kinds of songs are somewhere between pop songs and school garden songs. Lyrics to such songs might have been transcribed from the radio while the songs would be memorised, then disseminated to other schoolmates via oral transmission and transcribed for whatever instruments were available and who could play them to or with them during or after school.
From the accounts, the music was most effectively learnt and memorised aurally and disseminated orally. Koh Nam Seng started with American folk songs because it was my own interest...through the radio there was a Chinese programme that introduced all the folk songs from all over the world...Radio influenced me a lot during the time I was young...so it introduced me to songs...and I liked to listen to pop songs...I also liked to listen to Taiwanese Campus folk songs...we enjoyed singing them because they really captured the feeling...at campus there was a kind of common...mutual sort of feeling that we shared...so we also sang that kind of songs...then later on we thought of writing our own songs...23

Some practitioners were keen amateur ‘songsmiths’: Before writing Xinyao songs, I played Classical piano...when I was in Secondary Four, I started playing some tunes, some melodies on the keyboard besides practising my Classical music....I found this discovery very self-satisfying—I was able to create very simple structured songs but to me just the simple song was enough for me to express myself...simple chords, simple structures, simple compositions...because I began writing poetry and prose earlier in secondary two, I started to put in words for my own music.24 Nam Seng’s personal view was fuelled by the knowledge that his group was known for its performances of a repertoire of songs...we had a group...so we thought of...everytime we sang songs,[it was] American pop songs, Taiwan campus songs. Why don’t we have song of ourselves, our own songs...we tried and encouraged each other...25

While there are questions surrounding matters of choice of repertoire, there are quite clearly issues of reflexivity in relation to their choice of songs. Given that the radio emerged as a dominant medium of instruction, oral accounts referred to both English and Mandarin pop, alongside descriptions of tong su; roughly translated as the sound of unrefined lyrics which did not speak to them, e.g., singers belting out the tunes, amplified sounds from electric guitars and loud sounds like those from drums, saxophones and brasses. 26

For Liang Wern Fook, Xinyao is somewhere between pop songs and artistic songs. The pop factor is that it is simple and easy to listen, very approachable that is, to me, an important element of a pop song; what we call entertainment.27 For prominent representatives of this everyday culture, Shiyue and Taiwanese campus songs worked as reinforcement of their creative activities; drawing strength from knowing that contemporaries were doing the same. Moreover, the discovery that their schoolmates were composing their own songs as well indicated they were not alone in these activities...especially among SAP schools (where Mandarin was equal in emphasis to English but no longer a first language option) and Junior College connections.

An alternative reading of Xinyao’s predecessors emerges from another site; that of Shiyue by students from Nanyang University. According to Zhang Fan, a proponent and
supporter of Shi Yue and Xinyao, The link from Shi Yueh to Xinyao is, according to Billy Koh at an interview, from the musical point of view, the spirit of creativity (Nantah) which influenced the Xinyao writers. This is because they attended our concerts (Wern Fook attended our concert)...music based on poems. Our third concert was the concert that Liang Wern Fook, Billy Koh, all the young people attended at the DBS auditorium on April 17 and 18, 1981. We invited singers from Taiwan...28 Wern Fook admits to this. I belong to the generation that listened to Shi Yueh...this is the first time we got to listen to our own locals...they are just like us...students...a few years older than us...still pursuing their studies...we felt it (their music) was very refreshing and different—their style of music in Shi Yueh...their efforts had a strong influence and impact on us. In reality, we had been writing songs on our own around this period. Hereafter, we got together and attended other schoolmates school concerts in JCs. However, with respect to the creative process, Nantah’s songs are basically songs for the poetry...it is very artistic, has very good literary values. On the other hand, it causes certain restriction...when you need to compose music for the audience, there are a lot of considerations and you probably need to adjust your music.29 For participants, it is likely that a range of passive response would have ranged from those who were entranced for those in the inner-circle, to the view from the outside which elicits curiosity and sometimes even envy. Tan Wei Ping, in her study on the socio-cultural perspective of Xinyao qualifies her own engagement in the Xinyao community...when I was in Secondary school and JC days, when I saw people composing their own songs, I looked up to these people who could and were doing what they enjoyed doing in life...like pursuing a dream. It is that kind of spirit that motivates people, but I know I can only be a "supporter", and not be one of them.30

Given the reaction against tong su sounds of music of Chinese popular culture, and very likely Chinese dialect (Cantonese and Hokkien) popular culture, anecdotal accounts suggest difficulty in emulating Taiwan campus songs, whose style was described as more refined and did not always fit in well with the Singapore context.31 The same seems true also of shiyue where the very good literary text was not amenable to creative processes in music of popular culture.32

As praxis, Xinyao acknowledges Shi Yue and Taiwan campus songs as their models for appropriation. The question of genealogy is as much matter of perspective and time as much as it is question of space occupied by broadcast and print media. Even if shiyue had been practised in Singapore earlier, Taiwan campus songs were likely to get a first hearing precisely because there were culturally mediated and made public through recorded media before shiyue. It emerges from the oral accounts that Taiwan college campus songs were aural influences but Shi Yue lent confidence to their creative endeavour in the local frame and this is an important step.
A very obvious but little delved into aspect of this reaction to tong su is made a little clearer in remembered in Benjamin Ng Wai-Ming’s study of Japanese popular music in Singapore:

_The 1970s saw the golden period of Taiwanese popular songs among Chinese communities in Asia. Most of these Taiwanese songs were Mandarin covers of Japanese enka (urban nostalgic and emotive songs) or kayokyoku (early Japanese pop). They were very popular among the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Chinese Singaporeans became familiar with Japanese tunes, although few realised that their favourite Mandarin songs [were] borrowed from Japanese tunes._

Gaps in the knowledge are quite easily filled in here. Shiyue, Xinyao and Taiwan campus songs seem to share an aversion to music of Mandarin popular culture as Zhang Fan elaborates:

_When we organised another concert in 1981, we invited guest singers from Taiwan and Malaysia to present their own music. This was the time Taiwan was undergoing a change which reflected a more personal expression, the same time we were singing our songs. For those in Taiwan, there was a sense of awakening. Prior to that, music of this domain from Taiwan was based more or less on Japanese tunes; they had 50 years of Japanese influence. The youth, university undergraduates in Taiwan turned to writing their own material and songs; that’s why they called it college campus songs._

In the face of an ideological rejection, it is now possible to understand the reaction against tong su sounds of music of Chinese popular culture (Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien dialects), and an emulation of Taiwan campus songs, whose style was described as more refined and fit in well with Shiyue and Xinyao practitioners in the Singapore context. Wern Fook points this out:

_before Xinyao movement, people did not respect local singers and local song composers...there was the impression these people are just doing it as entertainers, making it as a living...singing getai or making money for singing in the restaurants, night clubs._

When songs are written and sung in a manner approximating popular culture, they invite associations rightly or wrongly. Two things emerge; confidence in the quality of music-making in Singapore and possibly for the first time on a larger scale than single performer or group, composers of Xinyao gained credibility for creative, rather than re-creative effort and found to be acceptable on an international level, albeit small scale.

**Xinyao as post-protest song culture**

In terms of history, Xinyao, Shiyue and Mingge had an immediate common influence. Practitioners were heavily influenced by the music that came from composers of protest and anti-war songs of the 1960s. Zhang Fan elaborates: _In 1981 we organised another concert...this time we invited guest singers from Taiwan and Malaysia...to present their own music...For those in Taiwan, there was a sense of awakening. Prior to that, music_
of this domain from Taiwan was based more or less on Japanese tunes; they had 50 years of Japanese influence. The youth, university undergraduates in Taiwan turned to writing their own material and songs; that’s why they called it College Songs...We were not influenced by them...we were already writing songs around 1975...April 17 and 18, 1981, we organised another concert at DBS auditorium. We invited singers from Taiwan...three of them who became the pioneers of the Taiwan local song revolution...During that time they expressed themselves through songs much like the ones Bob Dylan wrote and sang.36

Advocates of **Shiyue**, **Taiwan College campus songs** and **Xinyao** seemed to share a basic need to articulate their newly-found individual expression in song; fuelled by American folk artists like Don Maclean, Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul & Mary, to mention a few.37 It attracted an age group who would empathise with, and appreciate the profundity, sophistication and subtlety of the texts in these songs. However, an entirely different and naïve view also emerges, *during my time in Singapore Polytechnic, a group of friends liked to sing pop songs—American pop songs like Blowing in the Wind and we liked to sing in harmony, three parts, like Peter Paul and Mary, like Bob Dylan...I loved to listen to these songs (I still listen to them) because they gave me a sense of what is alive in a song...during the 60’s, there were wars, and one heard voices being raised in a song...At the time we didn’t really understand it totally ...songs like Where have all the flowers gone...maybe it’s a love song, we didn’t really understand that it was about the war at that time...we just liked the music...guitar and voices that harmonise...it captured me...that is how I came to music.*38

This description put into sharp focus the nature of personal adaptation and appropriation. Almost paradoxically, music opens experience to the potentials and potentialities of life but does not necessarily prescribe, proscribe or even describe them. This point is made when practitioners reveal their attraction for the **secondary process of music** of protest-songs as the **primary** motivation for appropriating musical structures to suit their literary texts.39 As with the range of social forces and processes prevalent in local and global cultures, Xinyao retains consonance with syncretic processes in contemporary cultures which co-opt music into a larger totality.

**Xinyao as Mandarin culture**
That Xinyao was lived, practised and ritualised in Mandarin is too obvious to be ignored. As concerns musical and textual relationships in art song, Edward Cone tells us *A song is primarily the melodic recitation...of a poem.*40 Lawrence Kramer views it further as a reading of the text;41 encompassing critical and performative aspects. The act of reading involves phonetic, dramatic and semantic aspects of the poetry. *Poetry*, says Friedrich Schlegel, is ‘spiritual music’... but every art obeys musical principles, and on the highest level itself becomes music.42 In this respect, the concept of **shuo chang** emerges here largely because it is situated in the Mandarin conversant
Elsewhere I have used it relation to the songs of Liang Wern Fook as a way in which music is implicated in the articulation of his individual voice. It is likely that at the physiological and anthropological level, there will be more individual voices as composers.

**Xinyao** was described as contributing to the construction of youth identity in Singapore, even though Chinese ethnic communities account for at least 77% of the population in Singapore. First, on a general level, to consider **Xinyao** the construction of youth identity, is tantamount to assuming **Xinyao** was known, accessible and a relevant example to other practitioners in the musical worlds of **Bhangra**, **Mat-Rokers**, **South Indian film**, as well as music of **popular Western culture, jazz**, to name a few. A community of only a hundred in a musical practice is still a valid and unique community of supporters and believers of their practice. Second, there is an assumption that Xinyao was synonymous with the entire Chinese community in Singapore. In my informal discussions with many tertiary level students and even postgraduate researchers, Xinyao and their public manifestations were not known to a significant proportion of them. Mindy Lin, in her research on Xinyao, points out that SAP schools and Junior Colleges were likely to be the nexus of Xinyao activity, since they had highly developed CLDD societies. The simple constructions, simple chords and memorable melodic lines enabled practitioners to be most effective with the sophistication of proficiency they possessed in Mandarin. We only need reminding that popular culture was very likely to overshadow this more sophisticated Mandarin folk-pop practice, given its longer and more established praxis.

Even before Independence, English and Malay had been valorised as the dominant language of communication across a spectrum of activities ranging from commercial to mundane while Chinese dialects were the mainstay and discourse of communication and commerce in the Chinese community. It is highly unlikely that Mandarin would have been able to compete with Chinese dialects as part of everyday discourse. Mandarin may have succeeded as a main language for those who saw currency in it but English was always a more persuasive language as it guaranteed a more firm foothold in the realities of commerce, science and technology in colonial and post-colonial Singapore. Moreover, the emphasis on industrial and manufacturing science and technology as well its import (and its importance) from English-speaking worlds allowed English to gain currency over Mandarin and this was clearly a disadvantage to persons from the Mandarin conversant community. This disadvantage, it can be said, extended even to the arts, most prominently in Music. Liang Wern Fook spoke of the reception of music as a culture of entertainment and potentially ruinous for family values. Wern Fook however, mentioned studying western classical piano and little mention is made of parental objection to studying music. What was the nature role and identity of classical piano that allowed Wern Fook access to music?
To what extent was Xinyao’s prominence in their public settings dependent on the proliferation of Mandarin in the social and cultural fabric of the various ethnic Chinese communities in Singapore in the 1980s? For a non-Mandarin speaker, the **Speak Mandarin campaign**, initiated in 1978, created a different awareness and consciousness of Mandarin as a language, with greater impact, I suspect, on the English-speaking community in Singapore. The decided focus on the practice of Mandarin at all levels of social interaction, from the service industry even to the food vendors, it seems to me, provided for a galvanisation of social forces not previously achieved. Consider also the transformation of Radio Television Singapore into the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation – a civil service to a government-linked enterprise, which yielded for the first time a concerted and larger scale production of local drama serials in Mandarin based on Singaporean experiences; National Service and the Japanese Occupation (**The Awakening**) and very successfully, the quintessential coffee shop (**Kopi-Oh**). It is difficult to think of Xinyao’s gained prominence in public settings without the concerted proliferation of Mandarin as a language of unitary consciousness.

An alternative reading would be to consider the motivation and that is the view of one Xinyao exponent:

_To me Mandarin... at that time I don’t think it really had...the effect of making concrete the community (Chinese)...its all for economic purposes...it was not a focus on language...not a cultural economy...if Xinyao is considered a cultural miracle it is...because we had something to say...but if you’re suggesting that this campaign helped us...at best it indirectly helped us...It’s a sad thing to say from a cultural point of view._48

Given its press reviews, its sudden rise to prominence such that it was considered music of Mandarin popular culture, that later, that a Xinyao exponent was used to promote the Speak Mandarin Campaign of the 1990s, Xinyao, at least according to its practitioners, must have emerged an opportunity for the music industry. For those who believed in the guitar and Bob Dylan, this must have been a transgression of their original ideals. Nam Seng sees it differently…*If you understand it from a business sense, its not a loss but if you view it from a cultural point of view this is just pop music...Xinyao was different it wasn’t pop it wasn’t commercial...I don’t mind commercialisation...because it really helped to promote...but because that is the nature of commercial growth...you can’t do anything about it...you just want to produce music that people love to listen...we are not producing music in which I want to...if the first reason is to make money...I don’t think this is wrong...but not from a cultural point of view ...if my first reason is culture, I want to know how I feel, what I want to say about the society...if one wants to make money out of this (Xinyao)...then its business._49 (emphasis mine based on the nuance at interview)
Xinyao did become politically implicated in Speak Mandarin Campaigns and particularly so in the 1990s. Tan Weiping makes this point in her e-interview, how in the 1990s, the official organisation tried to use popular culture to create influence on Singaporeans. Xinyao members like Cai Li Lian was chosen to be "spokesperson" for the Speak Mandarin Campaign and Xinyao was included in the programme for the Chinese Cultural Festival etc.\(^5^0\) In 2000, The Chinese Heritage Series comprised arts and cultural performances ranging from xinyao and hand puppetry to Chinese orchestra while in 1999, promotion of Chinese language and culture in an interactive and fun way through an outdoor series of Chinese Heritage programmes included Mandarin a cappella and xinyao, opera, orchestra and Mandarin story-telling.\(^5^1\) Yet in the chronology of events, the early 1990s seemed to have been marked by ebbing of interest in the movement. The Xinyao Festival, according to a 1994 newspaper article, was reduced to a school concert playing to a half-empty hall in 1990. The Sing Music Awards in 1990 was scrapped because too few Xinyao albums were submitted for nomination. The COMPASS press release identifies 1992 as the year the Xinyao Festival ceased existence. The better part of the 1990s had been concerned with sustaining interest in Xinyao but mainly from public and media. In 1993, a venue for Xinyao enthusiasts and aspirants to sing and present their songs became possible with the opening of The Ark Lounge based on a well-known lounge chain in Taiwan bearing the same name (but not amounting to a franchise). Other lounges followed suit, like one called The Fifties. In 1994, a radio programme called Station of Music was launched through the joint efforts of Radio 100.3 FM and a Xinyao organisation called Feeling Associates (reportedly initiated in 1989) with a membership of 10 000 including those from Malaysia. The aim of being selective with what would be aired was to introduce the better songs to overseas record companies. Hongkong, for example, is greatly in need of songs for its many stars\(^5^2\).

Xinyao as Commercial Culture
The controversy of entertaining commercial aspirations, even as it gained prominence, is a long debated issue and evenly matched in argument. The issue had already been broached by the time of an English newspaper article dated 4 July 1985. Team leader of a production team called Fame Tan Swee Wan said, we have been singing for youngsters all along. But now we are growing up and we want to break out of it, our songs cannot remain simple and naive always. Xinyao songs are not for students only. They are songs written and sung by young people who have a common interest\(^5^3\). The album they helped put together was called Fei, translated as fly. Swee Wan said, we adopted the name to signify that the record is our attempt to ‘fly out’ of the old image of Xinyao. We don’t want to restrict ourselves to simple compositions suitable for students only. We aim to reach out to adults and Fei is only the first step. Though we have made our songs commercial, we have not deviated from our purpose of promoting locally-produced songs. We are still creating and singing songs for art’s sake\(^5^4\). Compare for instance an understanding of Xinyao in 1983 when Chinese songs written by youngsters
here were beginning to gain attention. By August 1987 at the forum there was already an identity crisis, the culmination of a debate spanning at least two years when Xinyao practitioners were confronted with the prospect of tapping into the recording industry of entertainment culture in Mandarin. By 1994, the term ‘Xinyao’ no longer means the raw, folksy and school-like songs that guitar strumming students sang in the past. It has now come to encompass a varied and sometimes more sophisticated range of songs that even Taiwanese and Hongkong stars are crooning to.

Even when Xinyao practitioners probably entertained the possibility of using the machinery of popular culture to gain wider dissemination, admission to the lack of experience, (not only with the musical and technical aspects or the recording industry but also in negotiating their creative output with an industry that viewed creativity from a financially rewarding perspective), Pan Cheng Lui, the shyiue practitioner suggested a return to first principles, they should have an ideal and work towards it. There’s nothing wrong with Xinyao going commercial. However, the composers should not compromise and lower standards or write to suit market demands. He felt that the young people’s songs should reflect their feelings towards their surrounding, say, for example, the examination system. Xinyao nowadays tend to be descriptive but that’s not enough. The lyrics should convey a message. For example, the songs of Hongkong singer, Sam Hui, are highly commercial but through them, Sam voices the feelings of workers and other classes of people. We understand what he is trying to say. Our young song composer must strive to do that kind of thing. Mr. Pan also felt that clan associations and funds could help the young composers financially in organising concerts and cutting records to ensure quality control.

The setting up of a commercial sphere for Xinyao inevitably impinges on the changing role of creator as polished performer with its concomitant demands. This change in priority potentially acts as a double-edged sword. From interviews I conducted with those who sang for their friends, Xinyao in its earliest manifestation created no real boundary between good and less convincing performances. There were clearly in their ways of thinking, priorities other than a polished performance. They admired the Xinyao pioneers but their descriptions stop short of idolising them. The presence or absence of productive forces of creative and recreative endeavour in a community supporting Xinyao transpires in a newly negotiated tension between the creator as social author and his/her role and function in a musical world geared now towards a standard of excellence demanded in broadcast media of popular culture. What space is left for the aspiring Xinyao creator who just wants to be heard in concert with his/her friends?
On the other hand, what if Xinyao’s primary goal in commercial endeavour was to protect “community identity”, a recovery of its ideals and spirituality, not an exploitation of it? Purists envision Xinyao as raw guitar-strumming youth songs and seem opposed to the glitzy, pop-like stance taken up by the current generation. Parvati Nair discusses the dilemma in a marginalised community in Spain whose only recourse to prominence in the public sphere was a recording that was relatively successful economically-speaking and provided for them the only means of cultural recognition through the music-making. The issues at stake here no longer hinge on economics but of cultural recognition and dialogue. One facet focuses on culture as economic impetus while another focuses on economics for cultural recognition.

Wern Fook saw Xinyao’s largest single contribution as the point at which singers and composer were respected for their creative effort. By placing Xinyao in the marketplace, Xinyao was inevitably engaged at a larger platform. Acknowledgement of Xinyao in the discourse of musical practices in Singapore and even beyond it sets up the possibility of negotiating cultural differences and cultural identities. How else can one explain Malayan Mandarin art-song, Christian fervour, American folk and protest songs, and sonic flavours of other local Singaporean communities in Xinyao recordings? Are Xinyao practitioners themselves not consumers of world music made available to them by MNCs and TNCs that cross-cultural encounters allow their own musicality to survive and grow?

Parvati Nair informs us of the propensity of a musical practice as an orally transmitted cultural form to adapt to new circumstances whilst maintaining the façade of authenticity and homogenous identity. When an alien becomes “one of the family”, the alien both extends the limits of identity of a musical practice and updates the practice which is so often relegated as ‘primitive’ to the margins of modernity, in an electronic age. The presence of an alien in such a practice locates the participants in the midst of technical innovation and invention of a tradition. The central concern therefore of a musical practice’s evolution is its marketability. In the context of a musical practice seeking international markets, this is no more than...market for a commodity. As such, a musical practice foregrounds the connections and tensions between the cultural and the economic in the context of both the local and global.
Nowhere is this more keenly felt than the tension between re-creations of ‘authentic’ Xinyao culture and contemporary effort which has had derisory labels of *pop-songs* and lyrics which betray a lack of language proficiency in Mandarin. In an unusual way, this particular version of Xinyao culture becomes crucial in establishing support in numbers, much in the same way Blacking identifies participation in music in terms of distance from the music which ranges from enticement to entrenchment. Tan Wei Ping offers her own thoughts:

*Kit Chan and Stephanie Sun are more like the new incarnations of the former Xinyao singers—their songs are largely commercial and catered to the current song-listening Chinese students, and I do not compare them to the earlier 'down-to-earth/simple' compositions that Xinyao originated from. I would not regard Kit Chan as Xinyao singer, but a "post-Xinyao" singer.62*

The other consequence of constructing a commercial package out of Xinyao which began as a secondary and post-secondary endeavour, is the intimidation...*the school kids they see their role models...the products...and these products are produced professionally...and if they still retain the cassette or guitar, they’ll be embarrassed. I think that is probably the reason. To go up to that standard...there are fewer choices...doesn’t mean they cannot write good melodies...just that the packaging is like the first generation when it first began with Tomorrow 21.*

Who should be included in Xinyao culture? The litmus tests of identity and identification surface when two names emerge: Li Wei Song and Li Si Song. According to Zhang Fan, *Si Song was often not associated with Xinyao...he is not really involved. Si Song is from a different route...I mentioned the Singapore Artists Association in the days of the 1950s...the chairman of the association at the time was Fu Su Yuin who was a very popular singer in the 1950s. When I was in secondary school (15 years old), I joined the association in the choir. Therefore I managed to associate with this group of entertainers...local entertainers...besides singers, they are magicians, drama actors, old guard...Wang Sa and Yeh Fong. Si Song and Wei Song, with their father’s encouragement became the students of Fu Su Yuin...In the beginning, Si Song and Wei Song started out with a very clear commercial motive...pop approach...in the early days they even cut records...got an award from China that gave them recognition but then they could not make it in the pop scene...one record wonders like Jimmy Yeh...but they kept an interest in the professional level doing teaching...Li Wei Song singing school...Si Song established himself as a much demanded producer...EMI gives him singers to do recordings...they started off writing pop songs...a completely different route...and also important element...remember I talked about TCS or SBC drama series...each song...they wrote so many of these theme songs...they have this platform you know this...including the theme song from the Awakening (Wu Souw Nanyang) but Wei Song & Si Song wrote a lot of theme songs they have connection with the TCS producers [because] they have [earned] this trust....*
Tan Wei Ping offers a slightly different but balanced reading. *Xinyao* was supported by a very niche group of young people - not very big, but definitely very enthusiastic and committed students from about 16-20 years of age, mainly JC and tertiary. In the early 1980s it was never lucrative until they took on a commercial style in the late 1980s, where music style changed into more complicated musical arrangements. I feel that recruiting new blood in song composing area creates the intention for the resurgence of *Xinyao* festival, but they do not have to use the term "*Xinyao*" again, since the songs now are so different from the 1980 or 1990s *Xinyao*. The youngsters today have no idea what *Xinyao* is. The use of the old term *Xinyao* is the work of former members of *Xinyao* and their nostalgia for the past.64

**Xinyao as Authentic Culture**

It would seem that the very space that they occupied in their sojourn in the school garden (*Xiao Yuan*) was being re-appropriated in or transferred to an inauthentic and incongruent space. Discussion already surfaced the association with *Xinyao*, as popular folk culture, alongside *shiyue* or *Taiwan college campus songs* or both. The frequent mention of the guitar in newspaper articles as well as oral accounts by *Xinyao* supporters is a revelation of how much more than a guitar it is. Folk songs, particularly the songs of Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary and Don Maclean, are nearly always accompanied by a guitar (or more). The guitar in this context no longer functions as just another musical instrument of convenience and practicality; it is transformed, in folk pop genres, into a symbol as powerful as the lyrics of the song, as magnetic as the musical processes in the songs. The guitar in the context of *Xinyao* makes a powerful spiritual and physical connection with its community of supporters, particularly its audience. Unlike the virtuoso musician who is invested with the responsibility to emote in public while his/her audience participates passively, the folk pop icon is somehow invested with social responsibility to amplify and empathise the expression of his/her audience.

It is no accident the newspapers refer to the old xinyao in terms of its humble beginnings, or raw folksy ballads. It is this spatial representation of *Xinyao* that is best known and adhered to. It should not surprise one that reliving and recreating that past became an attraction at selected *Xinyao* Lounges at the beginning. An alteration of these roles has ramifications for audience reception. Tan Wei Ping offers more, *Xinyao* can be heard at 'Xinyao theme' restaurants such as Ark's Lounge in Apollo Centre and Suntec
and musicdreamer.com at Marina Square. From what I know, not all lounges share the same ideals of "Xinyao", commercialization has become a bigger part of the setting up of lounges. Even members of the same "Xinyao" group have different views on "Xinyao". Some stick to the non-commercialised songs of the 1980s and disregard the commercialised songs as Xinyao, whereas others think that both the 1980s and the commercialised songs can be considered Xinyao. Music dreamer is one lounge which holds a lot of memories for Xinyao of the 1980s. They have allocated specific days of a month for Xinyao songs to be played, and they call it "Xinyao zhi ye", which means "the night for Xinyao". The bosses of music dreamer were members of a Xinyao group in the 1990s called "jiao cha dian", means "intersection". That may explain why they feel so much for Xinyao and the movement itself in the 1980s. They are also quite active now in helping out in the Xinyao festivals. From what I know, "tan chang ren" is another lounge which is still very supportive of the 1980s Xinyao. Lounges emerged in the 1990s but not all managed to survive; "mu ji ta" closed down.65

With regard to audience reception, some e-interview accounts suggest revelations about the recent Xinyao Reunion Concerts featured songs that from the Eric Moo concert that I attended recently practitioners of xinyao came mainly from the Mandarin speaking community...from working to middle class...because the words are witty, humorous and meaningful they attract both intellectuals and the working class people alike. These practitioners were mostly in their late 20s and early 30s, the ones who encountered xinyao during their college days and speak Mandarin as a first language to peers and with family members...the genre of xinyao will probably never attract the “ah bengs” and “ah lians” due to the intellectual content [of the lyrics].66

Support systems in everyday settings
In 1986, the Peoples Association organised a nation-wide concert to bring together all the young music enthusiasts to let them say what they wanted heard. They were youth from Xinyao groups of 14 community centres singing with two guitars at most providing the rhythm. In the words of its Regional supervisor (South) Mr. Low Foo Yong: we hope more young people in other community centres will form their own Xinyao groups as it’s a healthy and creative activity. Community centres catered to Xinyao performing groups in which ‘boys and girls next door’ sing about their feelings...any theme that appeals to young sentiments. The Peoples Association, which in 1986 had 24 such groups under its fold, hoped to popularise local ballads by working with Xinyao performing artistes and those who had made their mark with celebrated Xinyao hits. Mr. Kwok Kian Chow, then an assistant director of programmes in the PA, said, Xinyao represents the emergence of a Singaporean expression in music. We hope local compositions in the other languages will come just as far. PA’s role is to facilitate
and coordinate. We want to create more opportunities for enthusiasts to perform, meet and grow through activities like concerts, competition and music camps. Mr. Kwok added that while performing artistes can provide inspiration to budding singers, PA could provide technical support in management, production and administration. Mr. Billy Koh, a Xinyao pioneer saw a role for both grassroot and professional bodies: The PA can help popularise Xinyao at the grassroots level. Professionals can do so by pushing their hits up the charts. For example, more than 70 Xinyao enthusiasts from community centres took part in a PA-organised three-day Xinyao music camp at Pasir-Ris. Veterans and professionals like Eric Moo, Billy Koh and Dawn Gan were invited to give tips and share their experiences. It was believed Xinyao would eventually catch on with the English-educated Chinese community. The first CC organised Xinyao concert was held at Hong Lim community centre in 1984; the same time as the formation of the first CC Xinyao performing group. The PA expected more to be set up. Its good to see other organisations making efforts to promote Xinyao, said Mr. Kwok. PACT (Peoples Association Cultural Troupe) included these local ballads in its performances. Meanwhile, Mr. Tang Guan Seng, the Parliamentary Secretary (Education) said at the closing ceremony at this inaugural Xinyao Music camp that students would benefit more from Xinyao if they discussed the songs with musicians, artists and literature writers. Mr. Tang said experienced and accomplished senior musicians would give the youngsters not only spiritual support but also practical guidance. This would help raise the standard of Xinyao. Unfortunately, as the Xinyao Festival in 1987 indicated quite clearly, only three entries from the Community Centres and schools shared the limelight. This may have prompted Dawn Gan to announce that she hoped Xinyao would not be tarnished by the introduction of awards. I hope everyone will continue to sing Xinyao out of interest.

When Xinyao moved from the School hall setting to the strobe-lights, the way it was reported in the newspapers was that of the numbers of amateur groups and CCs involved….their participation was in a sense alienated from the Awards…people who got the awards were in the scene…big names….there was only one group from a CC which picked up any award of any sort. The situation at the Sing Awards in 1987 could well have been a double-edged sword; while it recognised and affirmed efforts by its better known participants but at the same time it discouraged, indirectly, the very people who wanted to belong to this Xinyao community and were not there thinking of winning any awards. Why then were the Xinyao Awards introduced? Nam Seng offered his version, we wanted people to be able to recognise us…we needed to recognise ourselves as well…we needed to encourage our singers, our composers…that time we were in the Young Songwriters Association…I was the chairman…we wanted to promote…an aim to write music. If they wanted to give us something to say…as the pioneers, they would have thought that we were one of the goals…they would also like to have these goals….then this [Sing Awards] would be a form of encouragement to them…we didn’t
CONCLUSION
Paradoxically, while Xinyao provided opportunities for school garden song amateurs with undreamed of professional recording contracts, focussing on the power of exquisite Mandarin poetry riding on the directness of musical material, it was to become by the 1990s an entrepreneurial package and commercial endeavour. By 1994, the term ‘Xinyao’ no longer means the raw, folksy and school-like songs that guitar strumming students sang in the past. It has now come to encompass a varied and sometimes more sophisticated range of songs that even Taiwanese and Hongkong stars are crooning to. Much of the nostalgia for the past both in spirit and sound can only be recovered in select Music lounges. On the other hand music of present popular culture in Mandarin cannot deny the influence of nor avoid reference to Xinyao.

Tan Wei Ping reflects on the current reality: We cannot compare schools and Community Centres in the present with those of the past. Furthermore, Xinyao is not a term familiar with students today. Different decades have their own popular culture. If their Xinyao is no longer a popular culture among youngsters, then schools and Community centres are a non-issue. We must not forget Xinyao began as a "creation" by a group of people in the 1980s. For this group of people, Xinyao had a lot of significance; from "nothing" to "something" is a great process. But after we have our own songs, the emphasis has changed. Community centres and schools are important in the "creation" process, and the period of passing the Xinyao spirit down, but when it is no longer popularised by and among the youth, the function is not there.

Wei Ping’s last word on the subject draws on her own interviews with Liang Wern Fook: I feel that recruiting new blood in song composing area is the intention for the resurgence of the Xinyao festival, but they do not have to use the term "xinyao" again, since the songs now are so different from the 1980 or 1990s xinyao. and the youngsters nowadays have no idea on what is xinyao. They use back the old term "xinyao", I think its the ex members of xinyao may be seeking their feeling for the past...but different people explain Xinyao differently...Dr. Liang suggests it is not a sense of "past", but about the "future".

Paradoxically, what we do know about Xinyao is more of what it does much less what it is. What was the role played by Xinyao in its community of believers? Was the music the easiest vehicle for transmission of Mandarin youth concerns? Or was Xinyao a social phenomenon most clearly articulated through music? More than two decades later Xinyao is still as exciting as it is enigmatic.
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5 See note 3.

6 Lee Beng Beng, op.cit.

7 Ibid.

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9 Leow Wah Ping, Amy, Music and Gender in Singapore, Academic exercise - Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore 1997/8. The data appears in pp.15-16 of the appendix.


11 Leong Weng Kam, Youths share their songs—Straits Times, September 13, 1985, p.13.

12 Oral Interview with Liang Wern Fook, June 2003.


14 Xinyao Diary, Source: "彳亍"("Chi Chu") #1, translation done by Benjamin Foo, June 2004.

15 Lily Kong, op.cit.


17 Leong Weng Kam, Youths share their songs—Straits Times, September 13, 1985, p.13.

18 Blacking, John, How musical is man?, p.3.

19 Oral Interview with Koh Nam Seng, 13 December 2003, Singapore Life Church 10am. Nam Seng was studying in Singapore Polytechnic at the time.


21 E-interview with Mindy Lin.
26 One is reminded here of the proliferation of music of popular culture among the Chinese Community. Oral and anecdotal accounts with practitioners reveal the influence of Taiwan and Hong Kong, much less China. The reference to instrumentation like saxophone, brasses and trumpets, is likely also to imply a situation of night-club or cabaret.

37 Anecdotal accounts in discussion with shiyue and Xinyao proponents.
Oral interviews with Nanyang graduates who preferred to remain anonymous.

For instance, in the Visual Arts, Portraits, brush painting, calligraphy were considered worthy pursuits alongside painting and drawing, while street theatre or wayang remained firmly in place in the Chinese community compared to Western opera and even Gilbert and Sullivan. This is contrasted with the learning of Chinese traditional instruments as compared to the learning of western classical music.

Interview with Koh Nam Seng, 13 December 2003, Singapore Life Church, 10am

Ibid.

E-interview with Tan Wei Ping.


Chin Soo Fang, Xinyao is back in Style, Straits Times, 2 September 1994, pp. 25 & 28.


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Miss Pang Siew Moi, 24, the programme’s producer and presenter of the SBC Radio 3 programme Our singers and songwriters, was quoted as saying: It started in 1983 at about the time when Chinese songs written by youngsters here were beginning to gain attention, cited in Koh Chew Tin, Fame reaches out for new fans, Straits Times, March 22, 1985,

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71 E-interview with Tan Wei Ping.
Musical Practice of Zafin/Zapin Arab in Singapore

According to A/P Farid Alatas, there has always been a close association in Islam between music and worship, particularly in the Sufi tradition. The zafin, a music and dance form originating in the Hadhramaut, Yemen, and intimately associated with the Arabic lute, is a devotional genre that is unique in that it combines worship and entertainment at one and the same time.\(^1\)

In his research on the Gambus Melayu in Johor, West Malaysia, Larry Hilarian suggests musical instruments have always journeyed along the grain of politics, conquest and economic exploits amongst the communities so linked to trade, mercantilism, adventure and their source of entertainment. The study of musical instruments brings us to the intersection of globalization and diaspora, not in the commercial sense but to the close affinity of intercultural aggrandizement and adaptation.\(^2\) The Arab community have had a dominant role in South East Asian trade since the fifteenth century, possibly earlier. Hilarian suggests that the Arab trade was already in the region as early as the 9\(^{th}\) century AD.\(^3\) When Sir Stamford Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, his blueprint for Singapore included provisions for an Arab district. In giving instructions to a Singapore housing committee in 1822, he stated that \textit{The Arab population would require every consideration. No situation will be more appropriate for them than the vicinity of the Sultan’s residence.}\(^4\) By 1824, we are informed there were 15 Arabs out of a population of 10,683 and Raffles anticipated a rapid growth in Arab immigration.

According to Talib, the first Arabs to arrive in Singapore in 1819 were two wealthy merchants from Palembang in Sumatra, Syed Mohammed bin Harun al-Juneid and his nephew, Syed Omar bin Ali al-Juneid. Their numbers gradually increased and by 1846, there were five important Arab merchant houses. The al-Juneid family in Singapore grew to be a rich and influential family along with the al-Kaffs and the al-Saggoffs and there are numerous streets and a town council named after them. The al-Saggoffs appear to have arrived a little later, as spice traders, but acquired further influence by marrying into a family of the Sultanate from the Celebes and among the many properties they, like the other Arab families, acquired was the \textbf{Perseverance Estate} where they grew lemon grass. The estate is now considered the heart of the Muslim community in Singapore.

Apart from being successful merchants and land owners, the family also became involved in civic affairs and various members held civic office on and off from the 1870s until independence. The al-Kaff family arrived in 1852. All these families lived in mansions of considerable opulence. The al-Kaff house is now a restaurant called the al-Kaff Mansion, as a gesture to preserve the name, but has no other Hadrami connection, either in architectural style or ownership.\(^5\)
Ulrike Freitag informs us of a rare document from the early 20th century which contains instructions from one of the richest men in Hadhramaut to two younger family members, about how to proceed to Singapore where they were to take charge of the family business. Although certainly not typical of ordinary migrants, this document gives a sense of how individuals organised their journeys. The first stage of the journey not discussed in the document, would consist of a seven to ten day ride from the Wadi across the jol to the coast:

When you reach Mukalla, you should stay with Sayyid Hussayn b. Hamid al-Mihdhar. All the money you might require, you will obtain from Salim al-Yazidi whom we have notified. Send presents and letters to your families, children and to us, and write to us from everywhere so that we can rejoice at your well-being. Once you arrive in Aden, we have asked Abd al-Rahman bin Abdallah to write you a letter [of introduction]. When you have met him, follow his instructions. And if you happen to proceed to the haramayn [Mecca and Medina], follow his instructions. We have also asked Muhammad Jabar in Aden to provide you with everything you might need. If there is honey available in Mukalla, get some as a present for the relatives in Singapore. In Aden, buy some halwa, raisins and almonds as presents for your families, for us and the relatives in Singapore. Everything you might need from my money, whether little or much, is at your disposal. You also have my permission to pay sadaga [alms]. When you travel to Singapore, follow the advice of your uncle Abd al-Rabman b. Abdullah. On the day that you arrive in Aden, send a card to ‘Al-Kaff, Singapore, Abu Bakr Abd al-Rabman’, so that he knows that you are in Aden.  

We are informed that in the heyday of the Arab prosperity, the Arabs of Singapore maintained close links with the Hadramawt and a lot of money was remitted home in Yemen. The rich built themselves splendid houses there, the most magnificent being the al-Kaff palaces. They also used to send their sons back to the Hadramawt for a spell to enhance their identity as Hadramis. This custom enabled them to maintain their language and Hadrami culture and even resulted in some Malay being incorporated in the spoken Arabic of the Hadramawt. The Hadramawt was regarded as a cultural training ground and the spell there the final preparation for manhood. Upon their return these youths would take their place in the family businesses. According to Talib, until recent developments like the Rent Control Act, Land Acquisition Act, Administration of Muslim Law Act, Hadramis in Singapore were major landlords, the large families having substantial properties held in wakafs (trusts), which ranged from private family trusts to public charitable trusts. Most of the land in today’s central business district was once owned by Hadrami wakafs. These wakafs, bearing the family names, whether private or charitable, gave considerable prestige to the Arab community among the Muslims in Singapore.

In the 1960s, the independent communist government of South Yemen put an end to the Singapore Hadramis returning home. At the same time, the economic developments in Singapore made the importance of the English language and of education even more essential rendering a younger Arab generation gradually losing a sense of identity and affiliation with the Hadramawt in terms of the language,
tradition and cultural heritage. Some families, in the oil boom of the 1970s, tried sending their sons to the Gulf or Saudi Arabia, where there were first generation Hadrami immigrants already and the young men returned with their Hadrami ties and their Arabic enhanced, but it was not a success. The young men did not like living in Saudi Arabia and their prospects in Singapore were better than in the Arabian peninsula. The 1990 census indicates the number of Arabs in Singapore around 7,000, but unofficial estimates place the number of Arabs at 10,000; some members of the Arab community are being classified as Malays in official statistics. According to Talib, the Arab community is almost all of Hadrami origin.  

From the Singapore Straits Directory, we discover that the Arab Club was established in 1896 while the Arab school was set up in 1898. Not much more seems to have emerged and this warrants further research in tracing the narrative. Our initial foray has had to begin with an oral interview with Mohd. Bagushair, a singer in the Al-Wehdhal Arab Ensemble which is supported by the Arab Association of Singapore. The oral interview has as its primary aim, a recovery of a practice that has recently gained a presence through research efforts by A/P Farid Alatas of NUS as well as A/P Larry Francis of NIE on the Arab and Malay communities respectively, in Singapore. However, through Bagushair, and on evidence corroborated by research, it is hoped that the interview will throw light on a practice that is likely to have spanned much more than a century.  

Many of Bagushair’s earlier experiences take him to the days of his elder brother who was a seminal figure in the Arab-speaking world in Singapore. Bagushair was introduced, via his father, to songs by Abdul Wahab and Kalsom, among others. When I was about six years old growing up my two elder brothers were actually in this kind of music...they were not staying with me but I used to go to Radio Singapore where they used to give recordings...live performances at white weddings and all that....so I was exposed to that kind of music I had two brothers Mohd. Hussein played gambus while Omar played violin....  

Bagushir was born in 1949 around Jalan Eunos in a Malay settlement around Jalan Yasin and Jalan Ismail. At the time, the location was a small contained housing unit, in Bagushair’s terms almost by itself – almost cordoned off. People who lived there were more Riau Malays, some Java Malays. His father dealt with batik, sharks-fin and had a lot of trade between Malaya, Yemen and Indonesia. Bagushair’s father had a deep love for music and used to buy records of famous singers like Abdul Wahab, Farid al Atarasch. Because his father used to travel he was able to purchase records not likely to be available in Singapore - 78s with a HMV label. The music of these singers interested his brothers who were born in Hadramaut. Their mother passed away so Bagushir’s father bought an oud and violin when they were about seven or eight years old. Both his brothers became very good at playing their instruments and were well-known in the Arab community for their musical skills in the 1950s and 1960s in Singapore. Of the two brothers, Hussein the lute player was not English conversant while Omar the violinist was. Furthermore, Omar composed songs and
Bagushir remembered two musical ensembles Omar played; **Mujum Orchestra** and **Samra al’ Fan**. Mujum’s repertoire was Malay classic songs while Samra al’ Fan played music from the Arabic world. Omar was equally conversant across both performance modes. He didn’t sing but rather conducted the ensemble. With Mujum orchestra Omar played Malay music and counted among his group members Normadia and Ahmad Daud. Ahmad Daud was to become Bagushir’s brother-in-law. Of the two brothers, Hussein the lute player was not English conversant while Omar was the opposite; he wrote and composed songs. A song he wrote was **Burung Punggok** which was sung by Sharifah Aini. Bagushair believes Omar composed it and probably was sung by Normadia back then. He remembered following them to Radio Singapore at Caldecott Hill. Omar’s reputation eventually extended to JB and Indonesia.

Bagushir described Omar’s knowledge of the devotional odes but has no idea who moved odes from the Qasidah to song. He also believes Omar did take lessons from someone but does not know who. Omar could read and write music and therefore must have learnt Western notation but again has no knowledge of the person who may have taught his brother. We are informed that Omar was working in the Port Harbour and spoke English but what was even more telling was that Omar played with some of the Filipinos like Anciano, Daroya and even the illustrious Ahmad Jaffar.

**Ensemble Configuration**

In the Mujum orchestra and al’Fan ensemble, Bagushair recalls there were about 12-15 instruments including a violin, lute, accordion, small accordion (pianica), flute, bongos, drum kit, marawas, jambehi. They played for weddings; repertoire included Malay, English and Hindustani songs. Bagushair observed that the affinity for Hindustani music was greater among the Malay community than for Arab music. Samras were very different so this was not the same as the repertoire for the Al’fan ensemble. During his musical journeys throughout Singapore, Bagushair came across Hindi musical ensembles like **Shah Jehan** and more notably **Chandiniraat**, a famed local Hindustani ensemble which was led by Halim Marican who earned the label the Mohd. Rafi of Singapore. These musical ensembles used to participate in band contests in Singapore. This was not uncommon among the Malay community who enjoyed songs from Hindustani film – like, Bagushair recalls, the popular culture version of **Rainbow Battle of the Bands** – but it was more for singers rather than bands. It was something like a Talenteime which suited the Malay community because of their love for Hindustani movies at theatres like Queens (between Lorong 42 and 40), Garrick (where Galaxy stands). Queens had Hindustani and Malay films which were produced or distributed by Shaw Brothers.

**Devotional Context of the Songs**

The texts were devotional and the music supported the means, specifically about the music. Bagushair learnt the songs by listening to records. Although he came later into the devotional songs, the interest developed in him by his late father happened very
much earlier long time ago. The only reason he never pursued it was because he lacked the opportunity. While the music in the repertory is based on a sense of rhythm either a regulated rhythm as in Zapin Arab, or a fast-paced Sharah, they are both devotional. What is considered different is the use of musical rhythm in creating a physiological and therefore spiritual rhythm in an effort to achieve communion with God. The devotional lyrics hardly fit the context of someone performing at the restaurant; if the restaurant is considered entertainment of sorts. However Bagushair felt that the lyrics were devotional in intention and in a sense this context was specific to the Yemeni community here in Singapore.

Cultural practices in the Yemeni community
Actually Samra was meant only for weddings and somehow in a wedding a formal invitation was needed but for a samra one didn’t need an invitation. Everybody was welcome. There wouldn’t be elaborate meals but there was food and drink for all, like an “open house” in the Arab community. Bagushair felt maybe the Samra carries this association even till today. Usually, in an Arab wedding, one would not go to the ceremony and reception without an invitation but in the case of a samra, if one heard about it one could go. If the samra happened on the eve of the wedding, it was usually done on the bridegroom’s side. Bagushair explained that a Samra in the case of the Arab community, acted metaphorically like a fishing net:

Its like there is a wedding and there is a samra…and for the Arab community, everyone in there knows this…it’s a code of behaviour that invites them into the process…this is what I mean by formalisation…Actually after the nikah, there is a samra…those who are invited to the nikah will go to the nikah…those who know there is a samra will go to the samra...A lot of coffee, French loaf and dhalcha (lentils)...By and large in the Arab community, there is a tendency...it is a tacit agreement that samra...this is the practice in Indonesia I think, in very small cities in Hadrahmaut, if someone is getting married, basically the whole village will get involved...that notion was brought here when they migrated here...and its not extended to everyone but only the Arab community...For those who experienced living in a Malay kampong from young with Malays…only the Malays have this sense of an open house. The question is whether was it also the contribution to the Malay culture that the Arabs had engaged in that sense of continuity...It is possible at one level to think that the Arabs have adopted the Malay way...the berinai...only the samra is separate...actually its most of the music.10

Textual Considerations
Bagushir’s repertoire list consisted of only lyrics. How did one link text with the music? How would he know the way the melody line of the words fit in….You have to know the melody and from there you get the words…Where did the melody come from? Bagushair talked about listening to other people singing...from cassettes, CDs, some of the songs are classics, some of the songs I know very well...most evergreen...been around for almost 100 years...So like anybody who has played this kind of music will have these songs in their repertoire....11
It might have been possible to check with sources from Hadrahmaut with repertoire played there. In a way that would suggest something much older but there comes with difference the ways that have changed since at least the 19th century...sometimes they can’t recognise the tune or the melody...because over time...it evolves and that is good...music changes and evolves over time...some of the songs that I know...it has been around a long time...Many of the songs we know the composers of the text...we know the age of the text...but the many of the songs we sing...what we don’t know is how old the tune is and when they were put in place...12

When the songs are sung, there seemed to be different modes of delivery. At one end of the spectrum is half-spoken delivery while at the other embellished song: The Moha...almost every Zapin song including Sharah is half-spoken with violin (accompaniment)...no percussion...a lot of beginnings of the songs...we have to cut it short because...When you have the taksim...there is a lot of speech or singing...that is like the introduction...But the Arabs call it Moha...I think it is called Moha...Ya badi il Jamal is a very catchy tune...but at the beginning, the introduction is kind of long so we skip some at the beginning...because if you don’t understand the meaning behind the words...You find it is dragging...to me I would prefer to have this...Because that beginning is actually the anticipation of the song...which makes it all the more exciting...Arabic singing style has this kind of style...We cut the beginning sometimes because of the audience...In Zapin Arab anyway, if you go straight into the song without the beginning, it does not tell you a lot...Hear the tak sim, then violin...you want to hear a prelude...But then again, it depends on how long...the longer it is, the longer you keep that crowd in anticipation...Its like a coiled spring...anticipation...where your full participation will be involved in it...so this is a way of preparing it and emotionally to some degree as well, because (the song) has to be prepared sometimes...you can’t go straight (into the song)...and sometimes when you start it...like you begin the tak sim on the gambus...automatically you know already...this is going into the song...it just strikes you...From the first few lines already you will know what song is going to be sung and played...13

Another observation worth noting because this seemed to happen very often was the way in which the lyrics of the entire song text were recited first in some of the songs and sung the second time. An example was Warid al Unst. Not all the songs...since they are reciting, they might be preparing the way...you’re allowing the audience the opportunity to hear the text clearly first...they may not catch it...even if you are a native speaker of the language...especially when the context is devotional...It is done slowly...every word is pronounced slowly...I learn the melody and write the text myself...sometimes I listen carefully and try to take down the text myself...and I prefer the words in Arabic rather than Malay...for instance even though Farid has given this to me...I’ve checked it out with others and have had to make corrections...so I actually prefer...you see it is sung as ga-yu but it is actually the
bua-yu...which is different...actually hearing and the actual words themselves tells you the difficulty...sometimes the singers don’t pronounce it.14

Some Zapin Arab tunes like Farijil Ham (this is a heavy one) and Ya badi il Jamal-they are performed within the Arab community, weddings, Samra. It normally happens, unless the Association has a separate one...once a year...I was told that in Johor it is also held on the eve of Hari Raya, Prophet’s birthdate...Maybe it’s the practice...but usually it is associated with weddings, but it has been extended to other occasions and I was told that rich individuals hold weekly sessions treating samra now as music for entertainment.15

Music and Dance
The Gambus and Zapin Arab have religious significance for the older generation but to the younger generation its more like fun rather than having religious significance:
I was exposed to records by my father, my brothers who didn’t stay with me also played things and I went to their gigs...Radio Singapore for recording...I normally learn a song from a cassette or CD and memorise it or learn about it at live performances and then go to look for the recordings...the dance steps are taught by those from the association...they teach you the steps...During my father’s time, how did my parents learnt was by watching others. Watching people dance during the samra...the steps are quite easy to follow...and its something you can develop on your own...but now we have...but its not a very formal way...so like now we’re training the youth...like now, these boys...that performed at the workshop, they started less than six months ago...because they were keen to learn... Sharah is a very fast paced kind of music...like rock n’roll...Indonesians have it as well but theirs is very close to ronggeng...Sharah is the only one where you change dancers...in Zapin Arab, its considered rude to interrupt...In slow paced Zapin Arab you dance together until the end...but Sharah you need such a lot of energy to be able to last the whole songs...normally you can cut in...Some sharah tunes...Ashegil Hahbah, Galdi Mualla, Saralel...16

Repertory
We were informed that the Zapin Arab repertory has about 15-20 songs ...We don’t use Gambus Melayu...Alwi (A band musician) got it either from Egypt or Iraq/Iran...another is either from Malaysia or Indonesia...17 In Yemen, field studies have indicated the use of a quanbus which is similar to Gambus Arab which is smaller but has a skin belly taken from the kambing...the back is wood but the portion which is just below the strings is animal skin.18 It is known to be used in Indonesia, Java but not Malaysia.

Comparing Zapin Arab and Zapin Melayu
Differences between the Zapin Melayu and Zapin Arab:
One is the text....Zapin Melayu is sung in Malay....its not as catchy as our Arab one....Melayu rhythm is very standardised...from end to end there is the same melody
and rhythm...the four verses...repeated again and again...whereas in our Arab ones, some of the songs are like that (repeated) but in some we go for difference...Their melody is much more simpler...more moderate...the rhythm is not so catchy. I notice in the Zapin Melayu, its always a mixed dance...between male and female...in Zapin Arab, its strictly male...the dance steps are different...in my opinion, Zapin Melayu dance steps are more suited to women than men...its too ‘soft’...There are only two rows of dancers...only two persons or four person...in Indonesia, they always do two for Zapin. The Arabs say that the original number of dancers in practice in Hadramaut is two.  

Some dances are choreographed, depending on individuality; not the song or text: Choreographed means that the two have to learn the same steps...And it is only sharah not zapin...so sometimes you find teams...and you know...these people will dance with the same person only...it’s the trend before and still persists...you will notice that some people will dance very well with only certain people...so its not what the Malas are doing...its not considered choreography...there is no special attire for this dance which again is not the same for the Malay Zapin. 

According to Farid Alatas, Zafin or Zapin Arab is part of the culture of local Arabs: Culture is part of their daily lives....its what they pick up when they’re young...not something you study and go to school for...its spontaneous...when I go, I take the kids...sometimes I dance here and the kids follow me.....but once you put on the uniform....

Malay Zapin culture (Larry Francis) According to Larry Francis, in Malay Zapin you must offer salaam.....sometimes its Indian style, sometimes its bowing. They have to salaam (in Zapin Melayu)...in my work I have discussed this in relation to Mak Yong....in all the court dances....you have to salaam...same sequence...its like service to the Sultan. Malays stand or squat.... But they look at the audience....its eye-contact with the audience...contact with the audience because it’s a staged performance.

For Farid Alatas: My conjecture is that the Zapin Melayu is a court dance....its obligatory for the Sultan....salaam is to the Sultan...Our dance is different...whereas in Hadramaut....there are no courts in Hadramaut.....its for the Shabi...people...its for the masses..it’s a social dance...there is no one to salaam to....although I don’t know the origins of the sitting down is...we have is a spoken salutation. Well maybe the taksim is the preparation, the anticipation...so when you hear the taksim, you came to sit down....arrange yourself...but squatting is more to the climax of the song...this is more towards the marwis...we make contact with the musicians rather than the audience. To Larry Francis’ observation that the Malays claim your (Zapin Arab dance) steps are large, Mohd Bagushair had this to offer: Zapin no...Sharah yes...In comparison to the Malay Zapin, our steps are larger...but normal for us may be considered.
In relation to song-texts, Larry Francis wanted to know if Zapin Arab used any pantun like the Malays do in the Malay style. Farid Alatas felt this was something that needed further study:

*I haven’t studied this...most of it rhymes but what kind of rhyme is it? You have the Rubayat...you have pantun, you have Nasnadih, as far as I know many of our songs follow a Qasidah type....almost all the lines rhyme....AAAB...then the next verse AAAB but some it will be ABAB...whether it is Qasidah or pantun I’d have to study that. We use the Qasidah...sometimes the Malays use it to refer to Taksim...used in the introduction. According to Larry’s study, the taksim is used to signify a solo performance.....either violin or gambus...buka and tutup....but they use it rather loosely. Mohd. Bagushair believed that the taksim in their practice was called *Moha*. Larry clarified that:

Normally the gambus is the main instrument...Moha is verbal, part of the taksim...the normal thing. First, normally the Gambus is the main instrument...no drum parts...then the violin behind, then the singer will come in and join in the violin and the Qasidah...then you go into the song. According to Farid, there is a place in Turkey called Taksim....it divides Europe from Asia at Istanbul...so takim is the thing that divides one part of a song from another...which is generally instrumental. Bagushair explains further: Same key but different melody...the key never changes...whether you half-speak or half-sing...*Ya badi il-Jamal* is like that...A specific kind of mode where certain pitches are featured or given greater prominence. Usually at the end of the song, we have a signal at the end of the song – ya salaam, wainak, wainak...in traditional Zapin or Sharah. Larry compared the *wainak* in Zapin Arab to *wainab* used in Zapin Melayu.

Farid went on to explain why it was called *wainak* in the Zapin Arab:

*When we went to Jakarta, including Ahmad Fadar....it was wainak which means where are you...rhetorical...asking God where He is....a call to God now that I have completed my devotion to you, show me your presence...concentrate on devotion to God like in *Ya badi il-Jamal*...the wasaal...means union with God....so after that you have not found God....so you ask, where are you? Its very Sufi.*

To the question of types of Zapin rhythms, Bagushair informed us:

*From my point of view Zapin has one rhythm only...Rhythms....basically about 120-140 beats per minute...the beat is important...because the music has something to do with the dance...the Zapin we have, the rhythm is very restricted.... The Malays are different....the Malays may have more rhythmic variety....Sharah and Zapin are of course different....each has one (rhythm). According to Larry, the Malay community referred to Sharah as Sarah but it was his view that the Sarah was fundamentally the joget. Bagushair believed that the ronggeng steps...are in the Sarah...*
Given some views of the music, the question was asked as to the protocol for dancing in the Sharah and Zapin Arab. Bagushair explained:

*The proper way in the Arab world is always, before when the taksim is started.....in Arab...only in sharah changing of partners is accepted...but in Zapin it is not accepted, unless the person is extremely tired, or injured...in the olden days it was considered rude to do that...against tradition...but nowadays (changing partners) in the Sharah dance is accepted, because it is a very energetic dance...once people get to a certain age, it is very difficult to do.*

Instruments found in Zapin Arab practice usually consisted of the gambus, the violin, flute (usually substituted by keyboard), marwis, jambeh. These instruments were considered the core of the ensemble...Instead of a *jidur* (bass frame drum), the musicians use the *tombak*; an instrument shaped like the hourglass with high frequencies and the sharp attack that is considered important in performance. However, the marwas was considered the main instrument for *Zapin you need marwas, for sharah you don’t need the marwas...no marwas no Zapin...*

**Support system for the Community**

Bagushir and his band are supported in this endeavour by the Arab Association. They do it once in a few months...sometimes once a year at a grand occasion but normally it normally coincides with the main event which is the annual dinner of the Association.....we come under the Arab Association...they provide us with the facilities to practice...a place to store our musical instruments...and we practice almost every Friday...Lorong 37, Gelyang... premises of the Arab Association...Two to three hours...every Friday evenings...the major instruments are...the accordion belongs to...while the gambus belongs to Ali...the rest belongs to the band...we just have it at the association...So the instruments are largely property of the band...We buy on advance and of course over time can afford to buy it up...part of the money from the gigs...goes to the buying of the instruments. I thing the Arab Association was formed during the 1930s or 40s something...I remember the first premises in Geylang Road itself...I remember it was before the war...the focal point was either the Arab Association or the Mosque at Geylang Road....my maternal grandfather was an imam at the mosque...Mualim—he was there from the 1920s up to the 50s/60s...Mesjid Hadijah...the one at Eunos is Mesjid Alkaff...and Meskid Alwi at Bukit Timah....the focal point was Mesjid Sultan...there were lots of Arabs staying around the Lorong 40, 38, 37 area...all have moved out...the business community seemed to work hand in hand with the mosque but kinship was organised into large family units...largest clan is Alsagoffs...connected by generations before...but this is strictly paternal...if you are looking at Alsagoffs in the 1950s...in the region here...hundreds of thousands are related to each other...and networking among them is according to kinship...
Bagushair’s family is very small with no kin in Indonesia...my paternal uncle was in Uganda before the Idi Amin regime...people got together by word of mouth...but later invitation cards...but I remember Aljunied (fellow musician) used to tell me they had a list...they employed people to send the messages out by bicycle...the Business association had a list of members but not much more...

2004 seems to have marked a new awareness for this community in their practice. A seminar-workshop at the National Institute of Education followed by a series of performances and a Channel News Asia documentary have helped draw communities within Singapore to the Arab community.

Discussion
Henri Lefebvre tells us that every society and mode of production produces its own space. Social practice draws to attention use of the body, its sensory organs, gestures, representations of the body which link the body’s relations with its milieu. Bodily lived experience...filtered through cultural intervention ensure and insure mobility of the individual member/s of a given social group, without confusion...constituting a coherent whole by establishing a common language, a consensus and a code. The oral interview attempts to get a sense of the movement as well as raising questions surrounding participants and participation of this lived experience; at one level, creators, performers and listeners; and support systems at another level, that is, those who support its promulgation consumption via broadcast media and/or commodification. In this respect Lefebvre’s triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational space become instructive not only by what solidifies into a convention in a practice but also what is dynamic and fluid, given the nature of change within the community.

For instance it may be possible to understand spatial practice by looking first at the Arab Association of 1896, the Arab school of 1898 and a long standing link between Singapore and Yemen; the location of Kampong Glam as an authentic Arab site; samras, religious and family functions within the Singaporean context where members of the Arab community congregated; the role of Zafin and Shararah, devotional songs, musicians, dance floor space, dancers, among the others as a way of defining spatial practice and the connection with representations of space and representational space.

What emerges from these interviews is very rich data that only succeeds in provoking more questions. If 2004 marks the emergence of musical practice by the Arab community, there must surely be a gap between that and the formation of the Arab club in 1896 and the Arab school in 1898. How was this community sustained? If these were traders, what was the role music and culture played in their lives and those of their families? Who was responsible for the dissemination, teaching and learning of this practice? What was the perception and reception of Arabs living in
the Southeast Asian region, quite far away from Yemen and what was their view of home?

We are informed that the repertory in the Arab community in Singapore is based on a sense of rhythm either a regulated rhythm as in Zapin, or a fast-paced Sharah but they are both largely devotional. What is considered different is the use of musical rhythm in creating a physiological and therefore spiritual rhythm in an effort to achieve communion with God. The devotional lyrics hardly fit the context of someone performing at the restaurant; if the restaurant is considered a space for entertainment. One way to understanding musical performances of devotional texts in secular spaces is the way it serves to reach out to the Yemeni community in Singapore.

Notions of acculturation notwithstanding, Philip Bohlman’s study of the role of chamber music in the lives of the Yekkes, German-speaking Jews in Israel, observes how the music, in this case absolute music, becomes ethically (even ethnically) binding:

*Viewed from a performative perspective, the absence of specific meaning within the text allows meaning to accrue only upon performance, thus empowering any group, even an ethnic community, to shape what it will from absolute music. A gap therefore forms between the content of the repertoire and style of performance situations. It is within the mutability allowed by style that differences in meaning and function of music arise, thereby transforming absolute music into a genre that can follow numerous historical paths...clearly this practice reflects different attitudes towards both the repertoire and the communities that lend the music its distinctive functions and form its different histories.*

This is no different from the Hadrahmi community whose repertoire of devotional songs at a Samra act in Bagushair’s words acts metaphorically like a fishing net for its members:

*There is a samra...and for the Arab community, everyone in there knows this...it’s a code of behaviour that invites them into the process...this is what I mean by formalisation...By and large in the Arab community, there is a tendency...a tacit agreement that samra...also the practice in Indonesia I think, and very small cities in Hadrahmaut, if someone is getting married, basically the whole village will get involved...that notion was brought here when they migrated here...and its not extended to everyone but only the Arab community.*

While it may be true that the motivation is to reach out to the Arab community, its derivations are a little more surprising:...*For those who experienced living in a Malay kampong from young have this sense of an open house. The question is whether was it also the contribution to the Malay culture that the Arabs had engaged in that sense of continuity...It is possible at one level to think that the Arabs have adopted the Malay way...the berinai...only the samra is separate...actually its most of the music.*
In terms of organology, field studies in Yemen have indicated the use of a **quanbus** which is similar to Gambus Arab which is smaller but has a skin belly taken from the *kambing* (goat)...the back is wood but the portion which is just below the strings is animal skin. It is known to be used in Indonesia, particularly Java, but not Malaysia. As far as Bagushair is concerned, we don’t use the Gambus Melayu...Alwi (one of the musicians in the Ensemble) got it either from Egypt or Iraq/Iran...another from Indonesia. In fact, quite a number of the songs in the repertory seem to originate from Indonesia (or sometimes Malaysia) rather than Yemen.

Here is a significant point: while the distance in both chronology and geography is an issue that further research requires in terms of cultural sustenance, Indonesia, particularly Java, has been identified as the closest default setting for cultural sustenance for Arab immigrants like Bagushair. The location of Indonesia as the next most feasible centre for cultural sustenance by the Arab Community in Singapore is telling in the ways the distance from home is replaced by a satellite centre. Some of the revelations at the interview with Mohd Bagushair bear out the notions of syncretic processes in the cultural negotiation. A clue to this satellite cultural capital is found in Talib’s observation that one distinctive characteristic of Hadrami immigration into Singapore was re-immigration from Indonesia, rather than direct from the Hadramawt. Traders arriving in Singapore it seems had their wealth made in Indonesia. Moreover, being already familiar with local customs, they were easily accepted by the Malay communities in Singapore.

Another important aspect of the Zafin and Sharah is that the songs, music and dance are almost inseparable. For many of the older musicians, the devotional texts had special significance for them in the Sufi tradition. There were ways in which protocol was adhered to; it was only men who danced; in a Zafin, it was not considered appropriate to opt out mid-way through the dance or improvise on the steps although performers were very adaptable to spatial considerations – if the dance floor/carpet was too small, smaller steps were taken, etc. In the present context, the younger members of the Hadhrami community have been seen to take part in this endeavour enthusiastically, although as Bagushair points out the Gambus and Zapin Arab have religious significance for the older generation but to the younger generation it is more like fun rather than having religious significance.

Consequently, the repertoire of Zapin Arab or Sharah, which is of a devotional nature, no longer finds itself in specific or specified locations as per function or purpose, but in any location in Singapore where the Arab community is able to foregather. Hence singing and making music to the devotional texts may be found at staged cultural events, outreach concerts, workshops and even an evening performance at a café, besides of course at weddings, samras and other social occasions.
Much of this impinges on the practices of the Arab community here, from performing music with devotional texts beyond samras, outside of the usually established comfort zones of houses into cafés, performances at secular functions among others serving the dual function of establishing their identity and using these events as fishing nets to draw in the Hadrami community members towards a sense and experience of the collective. This goes some way to explain how in this community that whatever used to hold religious significance has evolved to the extent that it may not hold the same authenticity of meaning and significance for a younger generation. This also accounts for the accounts that changing of dance partners in fast-paced dances like the Sharah which might have been considered inappropriate in earlier settings are today given some benefit of doubt is dancers are injured or feel the loss of energy. There is also the stark revelation of the age of the dancers – given that in a place such as Singapore, where the Hadhrami community are few and aging faster than replacements can permit, that many who carry on the tradition are no longer youthful and have had to make adjustments to compensate for this loss of youth while maintaining their tradition and practices.

Much of this exploration is still at the initial stage. Despite this aural interview, the period spanning 1896 and the present is virtually devoid of written accounts, documentary evidence or documentation. Perhaps it is this absence and silence which will provide the motivation for further research into the musical practices and by extension the sociocultural practices of Zafin.
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5 Ibid.


8 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 I am grateful to Larry Francis for pointing out this significant difference.

19 I am grateful to Farid Alatas for pointing this difference he observed during field trips there.


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

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33 Interview with Mohd. Bagushair, A/P Farid Alatas and Dr. Larry Hilarian, 25 April 2004


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37 I am grateful to Larry Francis for pointing out this significant difference.

38 Interview with Mohd. Bagushair, A/P Farid Alatas and Dr. Larry Hilarian, 25 April 2004.

Epilogue

In no way do we believe in a fine-arts system; we believe in very diverse problems whose solutions are found in heterogeneous arts.
(Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 1987, p.331)

We began our explorations by identifying and studying:

- Written sources as might be found in newspapers
- Written sources as might be found in historical data in Singapore
- Reports of societies, trusts,
- Magazines and monthly reviews
- Straits Settlement ordinances/Penal Codes
- Oral History Archives
- Dissertations on studies in Music as practised in Singapore
- Memoirs by those who had lived in Singapore in the past as well as those by private sources
- Payment records for services rendered by musicians
- Collections of photographs, private recordings, concert programmes, pamphlets
- Private collections
- Journals
- Oral interviews with practitioners

Our search in written sources yielded very little information at first. In some instances the writings presented the hazard of single monolithic view, bordering on hegemonic discourse. More information arrived by searching for music’s complicity in beyond purely artistic events. By this stage it was felt necessary that oral interviews although more risky and uncertain might help shed light on scarcity of sources, resources and help build an understanding of each musical practice based on the view in the ‘field’ and an alternative reading of newspaper or particular discourse. A number of informal networks were built, based on word of mouth requests for information, building up network profiles based on interviews with practitioners who recommended other practitioners not only in their practice but in related practice as well. Our research involved collation of data and information on music/musical activities/activities in Newspaper collections which helped towards forming the basis for a comprehensive as possible yet concise account of the various music-making activities in Singapore through written discourse including oral history archives, newspaper reports,
programme leaflets, reminiscences, musical scores if made available to name a few. Every attempt had been made in looking through resources in Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, where possible, other than information in English.

There was also a network being generated by word-of-mouth in helping to corroborate written information with oral interviews. Given that the network was conducted by word-of-mouth, practitioners were at first resistant and reluctant largely out of fear (this was conveyed during and after the interviews) that their practice might be misunderstood or prejudiced in such research studies. However, with time and persuasion, oral interviews were conducted with practitioners who were involved with the various communities who contributed by participating in music-making activities. Interview transcripts were given back to the interviewees for their agreement to publish quotations which may be extrapolated from their interviews. It was also hoped that wherever possible, other forms of evidence may be obtained such as poster information, photographs, CD resources, cassette resources, video-taped performances and any other useful sources. This search was to yield material evidence which have become very useful in dealing with methods of teaching and learning particularly in the absence of evidence of documentation and writing. The data received had to be extrapolated into a more concise account of each musical practice. All the material arrived at was channeled inductively to enable an understanding of music-making in each community. If a practice had musical scores and such data, that can be used profitable. Should there be documentation surviving as recordings, copies of these recordings were made with the agreement of the owner or purchased with the view of serving as archival material for further research.

Our study reveals as much information as it has had with gaps in some of the information. Some other sources at the Archives have been discovered while some names have been identified or pointed to in relation to those with information on the practices, since what has been written or documented is insufficient and requires further information via written documentation and oral interviews. CDs and other related material are still ongoing as there are sources and scarcity of sources that are important to purchase for documentation purposes. Given the relatively scarce area of coverage for this project, the materials procured for this project rested on a number of areas including leisure activities and past-times in Singapore. This proved
extremely helpful in corroborating information that we had only encountered
anecdotally and in oral interviews.

What also emerges from these hidden practices, appears as well in
Finnegan’s preface.¹ If we understand music as John Blacking does, as both
the observable product of human intentional action and a basic human mode
of thought by which any human action may be constituted,² much of the
practices we have explored provide us with clues to music’s relationship
with the various dimensions and domains of life in Singapore. If nothing else
has been discovered, we have gathered sufficient evidence to refute any
claim that Singapore was and is a cultural desert. Each practice informs us of
the variety of ways and means it enriches an understanding of musical
practices in Singapore.

What can we make of these various musical practices in Singapore in
summarizing some of the issues emerging from the studies of each musical
practice?

Bangsawan began as an Indian-influenced practice. When Shaik Othman
wrote his essay in 1898 for the Straits Chinese Magazine, he felt that the
“Bangsawan” or Malay opera...as presented on the stage by the Jawi
Peranakan Theatrical Company in North Bridge Road will be read by some
with interest.³ We are informed that pioneering actors and actresses in Malay
film were recruited first from the Malay and Indonesia troupes who
performed in sandiwara and bangsawan and later from the cabarets of
Singapore.⁴ It is possible to suggest that with the proliferation and popularity
of Malay film and cinema in Singapore, Bangsawan was likely to have been
at the losing end. Peters informs us that one of the strategies employed in its
re-introduction was the infusion of comedy, exemplified in the staging of
Raja Dangdut by Sriwana, created by M. Saffri A. Manaf but by 1986, there
was a consensus to return to more traditional forms largely because the
comedy, which had been inserted to sustain an audience, was reducing the
plot, the use of language and the music. As more recent attempts have been
initiated by Sri Warisan to re-introduce bangsawan into the Singaporean
consciousness, again, there needs to be a socio-historical understanding of
its beginnings, practice, its role in society across a spectrum of participants –
creators, performers and audiences not forgetting its transmission via
teaching and learning as holistic engagement with the practice. If dealt with
successfully, this endeavour by Sri Warisan might well be the appropriate
response to Shaik Othman when he observed in 1898, in the course of this

472
sketch of the Malay opera, I have casually referred to the absence of Straits Chinese drama; but I do not forget that the local Malays themselves have nothing to show in the shape of a local operatic company. If the above remarks should lead my Malay readers to organize themselves into a dramatic company which would in time, win as great a popularity here as the “Bangsawan” has already won, my paper will not have been written in vain.  

In the practice of Bhangra, it has been discovered that the distance between two components, music and dance, is the extent of the distance between Punjab and the UK respectively and with it notions of authenticity and a sense of Punjabi-identity and modernity. The version from Punjab is based on something more textual accompanied by a more rustic version of the dance while the practice as developed in the UK and gained greater international currency has developed Bhangra along disco-dance lines. The Singaporean preference has been the negotiation of the dance-version fast gaining popularity in discos and clubs with practitioners who are DJs and MCs as well as those working with Khalsa and other cultural organizations supporting traditional practice. For the moment, the dance routine and choreography seems to have caught the attention much more than the music largely because of its attractiveness for youth. The fragility of its practice, is to an extent its support systems elsewhere – given that the Punjabi community are a small community will demand greater levels of support by its members.

It is altogether contrasted in the practice of the Chinese orchestra because of a critical mass; there are reportedly over 200 active Chinese orchestras in Singapore spread out among the schools, community centres and civic organizations. In the school system, its practice is sustained by the Singapore Youth Festival – a competition in all but name. It is difficult to deny the practice of the Chinese Orchestra which comes alongside the practice of Chinese traditional musics, specifically those of the Chinese instrumental traditions.

While some take issue with an ever-evolving state that continues to challenge the nature and identity of a Chinese Orchestra as a parallel Western orchestral ensemble, the argument in favour is its means to keep a tradition, albeit newly formed and constructed. Another issue with both practices is a longer association. Questions of authenticity inevitably draw
associations with courtesan practice or as an accompanying ensemble to staged or street-wayang or festivities or ‘sumbahyang’ rituals

Our studies have made it necessary to revisit “deviance” as an existence with its own logic and praxis; in contradistinction to deviance viewed from normative perspectives or canonic discourses. Paul Willis’s work has provided quite startling ways of viewing and coming to terms with marginal or marginalised groups. There is a powerful argument to be developed to explore the value of a practice being translated in cognitive terms. At the sensuous level, the practice of heavy metal and rock invites us to re-assess material/structural situations from the point of view of the viability of playing with different options. The argument that noise in rock music contributes to distortion has an alternative reading for subscribers to Mat Rock culture or heavy metal – a way of multiplying resonances. There are a multiplicity of readings of rock music in site-specific settings which remind us to sensitise ourselves to the community in that contested site. For those who are unable to subscribe to this, the component parts and layers found in rock music act as ring-fences around the community, performing both centripetal and centrifugal forces depending on the levels of receptivity of apprehending the music in its totality. For the Mat Rock community, it may have been used to define a sense of collectivity. The argument that follows on from here is that once a connection has been made between the community and the music of choice, a meaning has been constructed and sustained at the sensuous level. There is clearly a tension here that draws in three social groups with different motivations, yet the musicians, motorcycle-groupies and ‘posers’ who hang out – are identified with the Mat Rock Culture. That these participants are almost always members of the Malay community in Singapore fulfils that communal cohesiveness, despite the less-than-convincing coherence.

Given that many of the musicians subscribed to groups well known in the international circuit of heavy metal and rock, one would have expected a subscription, similar to Willis’ study of the biker community of selecting an authentic source for their agenda.

For instance, mention of Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin would have implied the original cast of members turned icons. Upon closer examination, many of the Mat Rockers refer to these groups at the post-pioneer phase – the succeeding members of the group after personnel change.
What is curious here is a reshaping of form over content – it didn’t matter who comprised these two groups in the third or fourth phase – what was important was that it was a group still called Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. It could be that the Mat Rockers identified with these personnel at their initial point of contact, latching on to notions of Rock when they were growing up; not accepting them at an earlier or embryonic stage.

The influences for Indian heavy metal groups fusing English and Sanskrit as well but identifying their sound as a uniquely Indian sounds, albeit familiar soundscapes in heavy-metal, represent a gap. As they emerge in the public sphere, and that includes singles, internet interviews and reviews during the 1990s, there are gaps in the knowledge of and about such practitioners and the music they create and perform as well as their supporters. Practitioners are in their late twenties who share a subscription to a sense of Indian-ness in their identity. Many of these youth began in homes where the main discourse was music of South Indian film with notions of music that bore affiliation with Hinduism – music of the Carnatic tradition. From their interviews, it is evident that music of South Indian film is one they seem to have reacted most strongly – criticising it for its endless themes of love and love songs and formulaic strategies. What is not revealed is whether it is the formulaic strategies in the films that cause this reaction rather than the music itself. However, when they have performances at pubs, there is a tendency to play the ‘party’ line by adding songs from South Indian film; to please the crowd and persuade them to listen to more creative work. Practitioners have a variety of educational backgrounds ranging from O and A levels to tertiary level diplomas. Many of them have full-time jobs. Heavy metal is a ‘side-line’ which seems, according to their responses, to sustain them in ways their full-time jobs do not. Musicians interviewed did not possess certified skills in instrumental facility – like ABRSM qualifications or local music school certification in pop and jazz studies. In this respect, oral and aural transmission has remained the principle mode of learning and teaching among band members. Interviewees came across as articulate and familiar with the Euro-American heavy metal and rock tradition and in recent years a growing attraction towards heavy metal from Scandinavian countries. It is their emphasis on creative endeavour in music which is significant. Perhaps further scholarship will help shed more light on this little known practice.
If Adam Krims is correct in his argument rap’s propensity of the deep perversity of the economic process by which rap music amplified and emphasized and subsequently deployed as a use value for the production of new capital – especially though not only, record company profits, which are in turn profits of large entertainment conglomerates – that bring us to the new mutation of surplus value...commodity fetish\(^7\)...It would certainly negate Haikel’s pathways, musical and extra-musical into rapping. What Haikel found that so intensely attracted him to rap was the ability to recreate rap with very little effort and with admirable proficiency. More importantly, it gave him what he wanted in identifying with a personal voice through sound:

*I like the ideology of having music and being able to talk over the music and get the message across. ...this is Me!*\(^8\)

This description puts into sharp focus the nature of personal adaptation and appropriation. Almost paradoxically, music opens up human experience to the potentials and potentialities of life but does not necessarily prescribe, proscribe or even describe them. This point is made when practitioners reveal their attraction for the secondary process of music of protest-songs as the primary motivation for appropriating musical structures to suit their literary texts.\(^9\)

Javanese gamelan has been present; implicit in the repertoire of the evening celebrations of the birthday of King George IV and ever present across schools, tertiary institutions, community centres and local groups dedicated to its practice. Yet what do we know of its practice in relation to its ‘source’ – central Java, or perhaps strictly speaking, musical practice in the courts of central Java. As a practice which has survived to become very much a part of the Singaporean landscape, very little is properly understood of its present practice, ideologically, creatively and recreatively – given the length of time it has remained in Singapore. Further scholarship needs to understand how its present practice represents convergence and collision in relation to its source and to critically examine the relevance of recognizing such a source for future reference in terms of cultural capital.
Given that 2002 marked the award of Cultural Medallion to Jeremy Monteiro, one of Singapore’s best known jazz exponents and internationally recognized, it is at least curious that in the entry on Singapore, jazz is mentioned only once and appears in the column on Malay community, with particular reference to the repertory of the Singapore Malay Orchestra which reportedly includes genres from jazz to dondang saying.\textsuperscript{10} The practice of jazz in Singapore seems to have at root many sources, dance band music, Tin Pan Alley, Talkies – as opposed to silent film. The practice of Jazz was the practice of virtually every community in Singapore. It could be said that jazz was a practice where minority communities were over-represented – one only has to remember the Filipino community in this respect. Jazz in its more serious forms, like bebop were less popular to greater audiences than dance-band music, although more popular among performers and avid improvisers, especially because it gave local practitioners to ‘jam’ with internationally-renowned soloists and groups. As a commercial endeavour, it suffered at first as it was hardly, at least according to its practitioners, popular. It became less popular with the arrival of Carnaby Street, Flower Power, Beatles and pop and rock. Its current predicament is in Singapore a practice fast gaining currency as revered form for the educated, economically enabled audience, who find modes of improvisation as well as the acoustic phenomenon of trad-jazz, 12-bar blues, bebop, hard-bop and standards a comfortably nourishing diet; not to mention the cool jazz, fusion and even acid jazz. Less is known of the practice of free jazz practice which gave rise to names such as Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton to name a few. Also, anecdotal evidence points to the existence of a very small group which has long been practising intuitive music or free-improvisation. These are suggested routes for further exploration.

A keyword that emerges in cultural practices of the Southeast Asian peninsula would be syncretism. Keronchong, believed to have originated in 16\textsuperscript{th} century Portuguese music of the Portuguese colonies in the Moluccas and Batavia. James Chopyak\textsuperscript{11} informs us it is not so much a musical form as it is a style of performance. From a socio-cultural and historical perspective, we are informed that keroncong orchestras and recordings attracted both Malay and Chinese communities with a sensuous Portuguese-Indonesian musical blend originating in Java while dondang sayang either produced or consumed in some popularity in Melaka and western Johor seemed to bear resemblance to keroncong.
In its heyday, Modern Malay “kronchong” orchestras, playing dreamy music similar to Hawaiian, record commercially in Singapore, and are a big draw with all communities. They specialise in sentimental songs that are firm favourites both in Malaya and over the water in Indonesia. It is anyone’s guess whether the kronchong orchestra is more popular than its rival attraction, the Western style dance band.\textsuperscript{12}

In the present context, what was identified as traditional practice, gained popularity has arrived, again, as traditional practice.\textsuperscript{13} Questions of what is traditional and what is popular become enmeshed in such a way as to problematise traditional and popular as mutually exclusive terms, let alone ownership; since the practice of keronchong has become the purview of either Malay or Peranakan communities in Singapore. The Musical practice of Keroncong is probably in a very fragile present, given that it is popularised by the Peranakan community, more than it is by the Malay community. For the Peranakan community, the practice of Keronchong, like Bangsawan, articulated as musical practice of its own community, better facilitates ownership and possible authority and authorisation of a unique cultural identity. More than understanding its present fragility and its past proliferation and anxieties of ownership, scholarship can help facilitate a deeper cultural and musical understanding of keronchong through an unraveling of its emergence across time, space and communal boundaries.

If there was another application of economic potential in the arts, apropos Adam Krims, the practice of Malay film would certainly qualify. We are informed of the genius of the Shaw Brothers’ venture built out of inspired improvisation in the face of a lack of technical resources,\textsuperscript{14} which grew to claim a unique place in cinematic history in Southeast Asian, making Singapore the centre of Malay popular culture and intellectual life well into the 1960s. What makes this venture all the more interesting is the way such endeavour cut across communal lines:

\textit{Chinese bosses, Malay stars and staff from all over Asia—Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Japanese also—made films together. As S. Ramanathan said, “It was a really cosmopolitan atmosphere.”}\textsuperscript{15}
Tamaki’s research, however, uncovers an alternative reading behind the highly motivated Shaw Brothers endeavour, citing four reasons:

1. A much earlier developed Indian film industry;
2. Much cheaper to employ than Hollywood directors;
3. English as a language well-employed by the Indian directors; and
4. Familiarity with the Malay Peninsula because of the large number of Indian immigrants.

There are at least two areas which further scholarship can be most helpful. The brilliance of the Malay film industry, along with the Jalan Ampas location, remains largely unknown. With the exception of Sheikh Haikel’s more recent rap on *Jangan Tinggalkan Daku* from the film *Ibu Mertua Ku*, creative work responding to the music of Malay film seems to beg the question of its availability, proliferation and permeability for a younger audience. Perhaps, this is one of the more powerful arguments supporting recreative activity in Music – there is an entire community of youth from the Malay conversant community who may not have had exposure to what was in a sense a practice truly ‘asli’.

Many more questions come to light surrounding this practice. Apart from oral accounts by those close to the Malay Film Industry and their star-performers, much of this practice reveals the need for an in-depth analysis of the practice, photographs, films, contracts to produce music for film by the company for the musicians, letters and documents of correspondence, 78-rpm records, live recordings, recording in-situ, scripts, musical scores or whatever iconographical aid towards the musical recordings, to name a few, will no doubt help to uncover and articulate a more comprehensive view of the musical practice of Malay film.

Like Malay film, music in Malay traditional practice is problematic because of a perceived lack of coherence. It is highly unlikely that the *joget* and *ronggeng*, known to law-makers of the Straits settlement in 1895 and *joget* and *ronggeng* in the 1950s that Joseph Peters describes could be the same. And yet their identities between 1895 and 1950s had rendered a change from traditional to popular. James Chopyak makes the point in his article which looks at these musical practices as popular forms in Malaysia yet these are promoted as musics of Malay traditional culture in Singapore. Orkes Melayu, formed in 1991, has been charged with the social and cultural responsibility of sustaining and experimenting with Malay traditional musics via performances, workshops and lecture demonstrations. Further
scholarship is most usefully pursued here in examining the nature, role and identity of Malay traditional musics, as museum curator or as contemporary commentator, confronting the Malay community in a contemporary globalised setting. Much of these practices begin with the notion that they were extremely popular in a very distant past. Worthy of discussion is the notion of these practices as attractors for social cohesion or participation as communities. Another problem raised hinges on the notion of popularity of support and its correlation with popularity of traditional practice. Both seem to work on differing views of cultural praxis either as museum culture or evolving, adapting culture. Future scholarship should be able to revisit these issues, among many other issues.

The fact that it takes about a year to put together a National Day programme with the music is indication of the seriousness of intention towards national commitment. The planning is meticulous; from the ceremonial to the informal, including rock and pop groups and local pop stars providing entertainment and locally composed tunes together with martial music Kong and Yeoh have noted how spectators have become an indelible part of a co-optive process of national loyalty. According to Kong, four messages emerge consistently, even unfailingly, through the years;

1. Multiracialism, Multiculturalism, Multilingualism and Multireligiousity;
2. Youthfulness—as exemplified in the boundless energy, exuberance and vibrance. Participation of the school going population is nearly always a given.
3. Values like social discipline, efficiency and technological rationalism were actively promoted as necessary values for a nation to progress.
4. The importance of education and training as keys to a promising future.

The National Day Parade is therefore seen as one propitious occasion to effectively enthuse and engage communities within a nation an ideological exercise in cohesive, convergent behaviour. Yet much of the analysis has come about from watching the emergent product. Much less is known about the concept building, the planning, the processes of identifying and piecing together of the myriad components that make up the parade. How is the music arrived at? Who arranges and writes the music? Who is responsible for the lyrics? Further scholarship is imperative if we are to come to terms with an event which makes considerable demands on resources.
When P. Ramlee formed **Pancha Sitara** hoping to counteract the influence of the **Platters** and revitalise Malay music by adapting Western influences to suit what he believed to be local needs and expectations, he was not alone in his reservations. Horace Wee and Sam Gan, well-known as jazz practitioners expressed their dismay watching persons identified in concerts as musicians – learning to control, tune and amplify their newly found guitar sounds or percussion sounds. To them this completely reversed the ways in which musicians of their generation were vindicated in their musical practice by searching for excellence in performance standards, understanding its necessarily hierarchical nature. Pop Yeh Yeh, arguably practiced earlier than its English counterparts, foregrounded the amateur in a way best described in a situated performance/concert by Foucault as an event which could be read as a reversal of a relationship of forces...the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it...the entry of a masked ‘other’.

There are at least two others, the amateur, looked upon with disdain and the cultural other – the non-Malays. Many practitioners of Pop Yeh Yeh were also musicians working in the English-speaking equivalent of Western popular culture, as much as their Mandarin-conversant and Tamil-conversant counterparts. Somehow the music-making served at one level to enable practitioners to the point where musical ability as a biological predisposition in every human being would have become difficult to refute, if the level of support was considered. At another level, the levels of support also entailed cross-community exchanges, economic opportunities for those who recorded this practice, which gave rise to the possibilities of national and international careers in music for those who excelled in quality of songs and performance standards.

There is an ease with which Pop Yeh Yeh melded into technology, Vespas and Lambrettas and fashion, which has yet to be explored. If Cliff and the Shadows were sufficient encouragement, why was Pop Yeh Yeh a necessary phase since the practice of the English-version of rock n’ roll was equally enthusiastic in its emulation in Singapore? Not yet discussed is the implication of the dissenting voices from the Malay community with regard to this infiltration. P. Ramlee may have been the most significant voice but his concerns were likely to have shared sentiments from less audible voices. This is an area, among many related issues of religion, culture, sites of contestation, technology, economics and politics, which bodes much potential in further scholarship.
Shiyue’s presence in music of popular folk culture has been somewhat understated and this exploration can only serve as a preliminary view to its understanding. Its historical position, unfortunately, is that of a slightly poorer relation next to the Taiwan college songs – Mingge – which had commercial and more concerted air-space, reaching out to aspiring pre-Xinyao practitioners before Xinyao was identified in 1982. Strangely the strongest defence via its accounting for it exists alongside Xinyao; one view of Shiyue holds it as a predecessor to Xinyao.

However, in the course of our research we are informed that, the 1970s saw the golden period of Taiwanese popular songs among Chinese communities in Asia. Most of these Taiwanese songs were Mandarin covers of Japanese enka (urban nostalgic and emotive songs) or kayokyoku (early Japanese pop). They were very popular among the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Chinese Singaporeans became familiar with Japanese tunes, although few realised that their favourite Mandarin songs were borrowed from Japanese tunes.

Shiyue was being developed and practiced parallel to the Taiwan campus song movement which represented in Taiwan... a sense of awakening. Prior to that, music of this domain from Taiwan was based more or less on Japanese tunes; they had 50 years of Japanese influence. The youth, university undergraduates in Taiwan turned to writing their own material and songs; that’s why they called it College Songs.

There were a number of levels at which Shiyue shared the same aversion to songs of Taiwanese popular culture. First it was identified as unrefined. Secondly, music of Taiwanese popular culture or Taiwanese popular songs were fundamentally Japanese transplants – hence the ideological aversion. Third, there was an American model in the musical protest – the music of Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, Don Maclean among a host of others, for whom the guitar became a symbol of camaraderie, a portable music-machine and a social symbol where there was virtually no gap between performer and audience – aiding the sense of intimacy. There was also a symbiotic relationship between audience and performer – the performer was not charged with the authority to emote while an audience participated passively – here the performer was authorized by the audience to turn the “I” into “We”.

482
In the face of an ideological rejection, it is now possible to understand the reaction against sounds of music of Chinese popular culture (Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien dialects), and an emulation of Taiwan campus songs, whose style was described as more refined and fit in well with Shiyue practitioners in the Singapore context. This of course was to impact Xinyao practitioners a little later. Until further research explores this musical practice in greater depth, shiyue seems destined to remain an enigmatic practice with allegedly apparent links to Xinyao.

Members of the Indian community in Singapore articulated a different sort of cultural and ideological negotiation and practice with ‘home’ in India. In an article on the Anglo-Indian community and western ballroom music in Lucknow, Bradley Shope, citing Erasmus, suggests ways people produce their own identities within the context of their relationships to contrasting groups between which they are considered situated. For Shope, there is an emphasis on the production of identity that is marked simultaneously by continuity and change and the power of individual agency in its construction. What appears in Shope’s argument is the notion of performance as identity; “this is what we do” lays claim to “this is what we are”. Because of their choice of repertoire, which consisted of western ballroom music, the Anglo-Indian community in Lucknow arguably created a distinct identity for themselves. What emerges from Shope’s argument is first the choice of repertoire; Indian musicians in Singapore performed music of South Indian film which was familiar to all those who consumed South Indian cinema. By performing what they performed, musicians of south Indian film musical practice could be said to be affiliated to a sense of being Indian – not only as individuals but as part of a diverse community in Singapore. The affiliation to the practice of music of south Indian classical tradition and south Indian film expressed an affiliation to the South Indian classical tradition and south Indian film respectively. By extension, these performances which acknowledge their respective identities and traditions acknowledge of India as a source of such cultural sustenance.

This subscription to Indian identity in the Singaporean context leads to the second aspect which concerns transmission. Indira Arumugam draws on V.S. Naipaul’s observations of Indian immigrants out of India: It was astonishing what they [the indentured labourers] did bring; but they were going to the end of the world and they came prepared for the wilderness; they brought holy books and astrological almanacs, images, sandalwood, all the paraphernalia of the religious shrines, musical
instruments, string beds, plates and jars, even querns, even grinding stones...as it was, they carried India with them and were able to recreate something like their world.23

Naipaul’s observations have ramifications for the ways in which affiliation to India, being Indian, and notions of Indian-ness was and is carried and recreated in an immigrant Indian community in Singapore. Gayatri Spivak articulates the concept of burden of the teaching of English in India but has special relevance in this context: I use the word ‘burden’ in at least its two chief senses. First as the content of a song or account (...) second, as a singular load to carry, in a special way.24

Material possessions taken from home would have been most helpful in re-creating or even re-placing home in an overseas context. This material re-possession in Singapore, drawn along political lines, vis-à-vis the Tamil language and literature, may have helped but there is a cultural line here which was to become more powerful, particularly in the 20th century: south Indian classical music traditions and South Indian film. In any case, the experience from oral interviews is that early films, particularly the mythological films affirmed their audiences in Singapore in relation to their religious and spiritual identity.

At the same time, Sara Dickey’s exploration of the significance of Tamil cinema for its urban poor viewers in Tamil Nadu reveals their consumption as an escape constituted through utopian fantasy and a form of soothing of social and psychological stresses of real-life through melodramatic resolution of these crises. While films themselves are remembered for and with varying levels of intensity and interpretation, I argue that engagement of this consumption of film culture is most effectively sublimated through film music, particularly songs in the film. Not surprisingly, Dickey’s observations of everyday practice in Tamil Nadu include the way movie songs blare from horn speakers and cassette players at weddings, puberty rites, and temple and shrine festivals.25

It is my view that under these circumstances, musical practices of south Indian film in Singapore have remained for its community of supporters, more a re-creative gift and less a marketable commodity. In re-creating a sense of home, these musicians were able to gift an Indian community in Singapore through music of South Indian film. This goes some way in explaining the presence of at least twenty-five music parties not long after
the formation of the Tamils Representative Council and the linking of the Festival of Tamilians with Pongal (Harvest) festival.

One has only to recall the various Fine Arts organisations set up in Singapore to cultivate and sustain the practice of south Indian classical traditions, including those in music for a community that felt it of the utmost importance. In relation to the Indian classical tradition, there was a decided reliance on cultural sustenance from ‘home’. Till this day, the tutors engaged in the Indian practice at SIFAS, one of the many cultural organisations promoting Indian cultural practice, the one from India has been ‘certified and graded’ according to All-India-Radio audition criteria. That traffic has increased significantly in the last ten to fifteen years and there are indications that it will continue to grow.

Consumption of South Indian cinema by a demographically larger South Indian immigrant audience in Singapore conveys a sense of immediacy and affirmation of home, imagined or otherwise. Additionally, consumption of songs of South Indian film allows for the song to impact a subscribing community in a special and meaningful way. Ron Eyerman26 draws attention to the fact that songs are more than texts (...) they are also performances, a form of ritualised practice in and through which meaning and significance is embedded. This gives more force to music as a carrier of collective memory, tradition, in that music is pregnant with meaning at more than the cognitive, literal level. Music embodies tradition through the ritual of performance. It can empower, help create collective identity, a sense of movement, in an emotional and almost physical sense.

Songs, like the films that contain them, acquire iconic value, transcending the iconicity of the film itself, transformed into sacrosanct spaces in time, even transcending time. Songs fulfil the two chief senses of the word “burden” used by Spivak and have relevance for the perception and reception not only of the music of South Indian film within the Indian community in Singapore but also among the diverse communities in Singapore.

What emerges from the oral interviews is the way these musicians of south Indian film practice were able to venture beyond the practice of south Indian film into the musics of north Indian, popular culture of the Euro-American practice as well as musics of the various communities in Singapore. From the sense of an enthusiastic and heady beginning to the fragile present, music
of South Indian film was not the only repertoire these musicians had come to learn and perform. Dance-band music was already being performed by local and international musicians in Singapore from the late 1920s in major hotels as well as cabarets and was sufficiently popular to be advertised in local newspapers. Singapore was a centre for a blossoming Malay film industry, financed by Ho Ah Loke, Loke Wan Tho and the Shaw Brothers. Tamaki Kanda informed us that the cultural exchange between India and Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s was most prominently articulated through film: Chinese bosses, Malay stars and staff from all over Asia—Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Japanese also—made films together. The same diverse Asian collaboration is true of music-making.

Given this situation, the attractive forces of ‘western’ pop, jazz and musics of the various communities in Singapore may be seen to feed back into their musical practice of south Indian film in Singapore. The Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir is one ensemble that continues to challenge the notion of Indian-ness while being involved in Indian classical traditions. The strategies for emulating practices in India still continues to this day, divided between a penchant for past and present. It has pervaded much of the traditional and contemporary performing spaces, in terms of personnel, musical resources and musical instruments and has more recently included the technological convenience of sequenced music.

On the other hand this subscription and participation beyond the specificity of practice also acted as a catalyst for what some might consider an erosion of its site- and practice-specific context and sets the cultural dependence in question. Reviews of the Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir have described their efforts in adding to their concert repertoire excerpts from Mozart’s G minor symphony K550, alongside Vivaldi and jazz selections, as ‘embryonic’. Interviews with practitioners indicate participation in this musical practice of South Indian popular film by members of the Chinese, Malay, Eurasian, Caucasian, Singhalese, and Goan communities in Singapore, whose repertoire would not have been solely music of Tamil or Hindustani film. Moreover, among practitioners of Indian film were a group who, in performing musics of western popular culture, jazz and rock, rediscovered western sounds (as they would have been played in practices of western popular culture). This re-discovery enabled them to re-assert and re-place authenticity in sound in south Indian soundscapes in Singapore.
This crossing of soundscapes also made musical practice of south Indian film susceptible to secretions from other spheres. For some, the issues of authenticity in an Indian sound, imagined or solidified through convention, had already taken root and were treated as sacrosanct. This solidification of notions of authenticity had negative consequences for those who sought to re-place authentic ways of playing non-Indian instruments in both south Indian practices. Apropos south Indian film, in my view, the conflict in issues of authenticity lies in the transmission lag; not of the latest fashion, cinema and music, but of a mindset. Such a mindset was convinced that creative and performance standards in Singapore could not hope to compare qualitatively with that in India. On the other hand, when the latest fashion of rock, rap and techno sounds in the latest South Indian film soundtracks by A. R. Rahman found favour among local South Indian youth, it was criticised for a lack of authenticity. The comparison here was made with songs by established South Indian film music directors like M. S. Viswanathan and Ilayaraja. With regard to the Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir, perhaps only time and experience will indicate the level of success attained – depending on how one defines success in such experimental endeavour.

Gayatri Spivak informs us certain practices of...arts in the broadest sense are said to inhabit the private sector. But institutions of...art, as well as the criticism of art, belong to the public... Multiplicity of artistic endeavour has distinguished participants of the Band in Singapore throughout its presence visually and sonically. Throughout the 19th century, musicians of the Band entertained not only at official functions but also at external functions, fund-raising concerts, amateur orchestral concertising, children’s concerts, and even at one stage a Town band. The performance of Handel’s Messiah organised by St. Andrew’s Cathedral was in no small way assisted by musical forces of a regimental band. Dance-band music was already available in Singapore from the late 1920s in major hotels as well as cabarets and sufficiently popular to be advertised in local newspapers. Diversity of collaboration and participation notwithstanding, musicians like the Punjabi bandsmen of the Straits Settlement Police Band were able to play for funerals and other such activities among the various communities in Singapore. Singapore was a centre for a film industry, financed by Ho Ah Loke, Loke Wan Tho and the Shaw Brothers during the 1950s and 1960s. We are informed that the first Band of the Armed Forces set up in 1958 comprised musicians whose prior musical experience was in cabarets, keronchong or Hawaiian bands or in musical practices of popular culture.
Alec Dixon’s amusing account of Punjabi Police Bandsmen playing selections from Gilbert and Sullivan’s H.M.S. Pinafore and ‘Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes’ at funerals for some extra earnings take us beyond suggestions of adaptation. Here is where one locates the inversion of form over content but no less an indication of a symbiotic relationship between music and social settings. In Karl Mannheim’s words, 

*Each idea acquires a new meaning when it is applied to a new life situation. When new strata take over systems of ideas from another strata, it can always be shown that the same words mean something different to the new sponsors, because these latter think in terms of different aspirations and existential configurations. This social change of function, then, is ... also a change of meaning.*

Here it is not the words but the sounds that are the subject of this transformation. By performing what they performed, these musicians, the Band they were affiliated to, and by extension, the Band movement, in whatever state of being, all acquired a distinct nature and identity, transcending their cultural identity.

In a sense, from its reported presence in 19th century Singapore, via Indian Native Regimental or Royal Regimental or even visiting bands in the 19th century, the Straits Settlement Police Band (Punjabi in all but name), the Syonan Police Band, Band of the Singapore Police Force and later the Band Project, brainchild of the Ministry of Education, is that the Band was and is, to most intents and purposes, an institution which transformed its participants, albeit varying degrees of adaptation. Its chosen medium of expression, in this case, music, rendered it the authority of an artistic institution which historically found favour with political and military institutions. This is significant, given the variety of communities, variety of participatory strategies throughout the processes of colonisation in Singapore. Despite the changes in adapting to political, social and cultural realities, the Band in Singapore seems to have survived, if not thrived towards its prominence. I believe this is because the Band as a political and artistic institution was accorded, has been accorded and on balance deserved its spatial prominence, pervading and permeating much of the traditional and contemporary performing spaces, in terms of personnel, musical resources and musical instruments.
It would too hasty and simplistic, if not erroneous, to draw direct link between the early bands of the infantry and the band today. There is no clear line of influence although if one does trace the history of the presence of Bands in Singapore, there emerges a "concept" or "notion" of a band, how it functioned and functions in society in site-specific ways.

What was the nature, role and identity of the band – a political phenomenon mediated through music or was it an artistic phenomenon mediated through a political esprit des corps? The gaps left behind especially between the Madras Native Infantry, Straits Settlement Police Band with all its evolution till one suspects 1958 and the Band Project inform us of the necessity of robust patronage for sustainability of the Band. Given the relative success of such patronage – was the Band a colonial gift so powerful that the only strategy to sustain its practice would have been to render it a political commodity in contemporary history?

There is so much more that needs to be articulated with the acknowledgement of a presence. What was the repertoire, how was it sustained, how did teaching and learning take place? What was the repertoire representative of? An analysis of the repertoire, the arrangements and transcriptions of the pieces would begin to address a correlation between the nature of such arrangements and transcriptions and the depth of available resources, instrumental and musical resources as well as skill levels of musicians, bandmasters, and possibly creative work. This research continues to redress the scarcity of photographs, concert programmes, taped recordings of concerts, financial records, letters of correspondence, among the few. Presence begs, even more questions, require far more explanation and another barrage of questions but provides the motivation for future and further scholarship.

Like the practice of the Band, a vast array of themes become evident in the discourse on music of the European art-music tradition, which began more British at first, then Japanese constructions of a Euro-centric (excluding practices in Allied European countries) for a brief period and presently to a global outlook in the present. What is evident is also the way Euro-American art music has permeated the social fabric of those who lived in Singapore.
It is not enough to discuss the impact of Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian communities throughout almost two centuries when we learn of contributions, both social and musical by German, Filipino, Japanese, English, Armenian Portuguese, Arab and Indonesian communities towards a Singaporean social and historical fabric.

If nothing else, Dixon’s comments on the 1920s are worth a repeat for the gaps created:

*Singapore’s most notable achievement in the field of amateur entertainment was, of course, the annual production of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera by the city’s Amateur Operatic Society. It is interesting to recall that, when the Society produced the Mikado, the Japanese Consul-General and other members of the Japanese community were most helpful in the matter of costumes and stage settings.*

Yet, From a musical perspective, the *Amateur Operatic Society* in the 1920s seems to have little or no information about the society, members, instruments, modus operandi, support systems, repertoire, leaders, to name a few. Moreover, the chasm between the Amateur Operatic Society, the Scene-Shifters who permeated public space during the 1960s and 1970s and the Singapore Lyric Opera warrants research into a specific genre such as this.

Like the Filipino community who rose to prominence in the public sphere, paradoxically, during the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese community is one which there is considerable lack of information. There are some issues which emerge from a study of these musical practices which lead the way to further scholarship. Benjamin Wai-ming Ng informs us that “Japanese popular music has a relatively long history in the Singapore. It was introduced in the late 19th century following the influx of Japanese karayukisan (Japanese prostitutes) and traders. However, it was only performed in “Little Japan” (now Bugis Junction and its surrounding areas in downtown in Singapore) and was not popular among the locals. The earliest Japanese community has been defined as a community of prostitutes. Japanese songs, such as the national anthem, military songs and traditional folk songs, became popular in Singapore and Southeast Asia during the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945) and were actively used by the Japanese for political purposes. Many remembered the tunes “Aikoku Kyoshin Kyoku: (Patriotic March) and “Sakura”. Some interesting issues turn up in this instance. The location of the karayukisan around Bugis Street, Malabar, Hylam and Malay Street is probably accurate but Kevin Blackburn’s research into what is known as Little Japan in pre-war Singapore (adapted
from Gubler 1972) comprised a Miyako Hotel along Beach Road, and a substantial portion of Middle Road which included a school along Waterloo Street, department stores at the intersection of Waterloo Street and Middle Road, two temples on either side of Bencoolen Street, a hospital between Prinsep and Short Street and even a Japanese Club near the intersection of Middle, Wilkie and Selegie Road. It is disputable as to whether Japanese popular music found favour with locals, since Ng does not inform us who locals consisted of. However the department stores were known. Tony Danker remembers his father purchasing musical instruments from the Japanese store, he [my father] started me off with a Japanese instrument which I don’t see nowadays...its like a piano...a long thing...and there are keys and strings across and for every number that you press there is a different tone coming out...and you play sounds on this thing and you rattle the strings with your right hand....and you play songs like that....now that’s how I picked up music...I used to learn this Japanese instrument....we used to call it the lang-ting-tang...don’t ask me why but that was what it was known as...you play it horizontally across your lap and then you press the keys, you get the notes and you get songs going and that’s what started me off....then you have of course what you call the ukelele...He bought these instruments from shops...my first guitar was a three dollar guitar which he bought along Middle Road...along the 10-cents stores along Middle Road...they had a lot of those Japanese shops...they were very cheap...they [the shop-owners] were very polite

Ng’s accounts of a Japanese community of Karayukisan do not tally with a Japanese community found in Alec Dixon’s recounting the early 1920s.

The emergence of a relatively silenced community in Singapore is particularly startling and poignant when we are not only given details of how music emerges in the public sphere but communities, in of all moments, the Japanese Occupation:

Members of the local Filipino Association will give another musical and variety performance at the Syonan General Hospital today to entertain the sick and wounded Nippon servicemen on the occasion of Tentyo-Setu. The Filipino entertainers made a hit with their initial show last Saturday and will present an entirely new programme specially prepared for the occasion. There will be a musical concert by the Association’s Orchestra, which will feature several musical numbers by leading Nippon composers, followed by a variety show consisting of comedy, acrobatics and animal circus. The show will commence at 5pm. The sick and the wounded servicemen at the
hospital were full of praise at the hospital for the fine show given by the Filipinos last Saturday and formed the opinion that it was the best performance seen in the hospital so far. Today’s show is by special request.\textsuperscript{34}

Alfredo (Fred) Libio and his all-star Filipino Swing Band was a hit in late 1930s and 1940 at the New World Cabaret.\textsuperscript{35} Fred Libio, it seems, went on to become the music director of Shaw Brothers films.\textsuperscript{36} Sam Gan and Horace Wee remember their impact in the musical practice of dance-band music/jazz in Singapore:

\textit{In those days the Filipinos and those of Filipino heritage were kingpins because they could read music and basically the Filipino trait was the ability to copy exactly, the notes, the feel and whatever else. The first generation of Filipinos....they were supposed to be the studied ones...many of them had classical training...they were multi-instrumentalists. in the Singapore context, I would say that pianists here in those days that could play jazz, were me, Jose Darroya, Albert’s uncle Lionel Ventura, in that period...we had in those days very good soil...when I joined the band...with the Filipino musicians...[there were] Malay musicians...we had Johari Salleh’s father playing first trumpet...Johari was fresh from school playing third trumpet... but the best exponent of jazz music, to my mind, at the time in Singapore was Ernesto Daroya...he had this uncanny ability to listen while washing his car...he would listen to a track and by night he could play the damn thing...\textsuperscript{37}

Many more musicians from a variety of communities remain single entries and or silenced in the entire narrative. Oral interviews relate to the presence of Goanese, Indonesian Dutch, East European communities in addition to the Japanese and Filipinos and German and French communities in the previous century. Further and future scholarship will go some way in redressing the assumption of the population of Singapore emphasising Chinese Indian, Malay, and Eurasian communities more than the other communities who are equally deserving of mention for their contributions.

Very little is known of the recording industry when it would help locate and redress the long held silence of many practices that written and oral discourse would benefit much from. Tony Danker’s experiences with the David Lincoln Orchestra are only remembered in photographs and recordings noted by Tan Sooi Beng in her article on 78 RPM recordings in Malaya in the pre-Japanese Occupation. Much of her article corroborates a
very commercially vibrant recording industry in Singapore in the inter-war years. 38

At another level, musical cultures are also seen to interact and influence musical practice. It is not possible to deny the correlation of regimental bands and the orchestral tradition in Singapore. Similarly, it is not possible to deny a correlation between the role of Christian missionary work and western art music, as much as contemporary composition has become more sensitive of an Eastern if not more Southeast Asian context.

At the epistemological level, there is a problem in identifying musical works that articulate the difference between western music and western art music as well as the Euro-American tradition. The nature, role and identity of this musical practice help raise questions about it in a way that an examination of capitalist modes of production, division of labour, among others can provide explanations to justifying cultural capital alongside financial health and wellness. At the heart of this practice, there is an aspect of this study which Phan Ming Yen has simply identified with silence, in fact many forms of silences. 39 There was at one level, silences in narratives and silencing in narratives; events brought to light that had never been discussed since their taking place and since their being recorded for the first time in the newspapers. Another level of silence emerged as a prerequisite of the performance and enjoyment of music and the practice of music as a necessity to silence. Perhaps the most subtle and telling act of silencing is the way in which the Esplanade was built to justify scientifically and technologically that, good acoustics for Western music are good acoustics for other genres. 40 In encountering and breaking through these levels of silences, it was and still is difficult to refute a view that the remembering and practice of Western music represents a means for the European community to recreate a sense of their home in a colony of the Empire. This process was seen as necessary because it worked alongside the assertion of power and superiority by one culture (the coloniser) over another (the colonised) in the face of the fear of the loss of the self-respect, pride and identity of the coloniser.

Does an equal-tempered tuning system, set with A=440 Hz as the universal marker for all musical traditions around the world as well, make an unchallenged assumption that musical practice of the Euro-American tradition can now be justified economically and politically as a universal? This question of spatial imperialism, like other questions raised are useful
when they invite future and further scholarship in understanding what appears before us as a rich, diverse and diffuse narrative in this musical practice in Singapore.

There are problems in considering Song Ong Siang’s efforts towards the Straits Chinese Magazine in Singapore around the turn of the 19th century to provide sufficient impetus for a later group to appropriate the activities of the Minstrel party. The Peranakan community was reported to be so well versed with keronchong, asli, pantun and dondang sayang. Why was there a need to engage in activities of a Minstrel party when keronchong, asli, pantun and dondang sayang would seem so much second nature? Or by engaging in the Minstrel party, were practictioners revealing something of their Chinese-speaking audience? Is it possible that a Minstrel Party was considered prestigious enough for a non-English conversant community as “Western music”? Or perhaps was it such that no non-Chinese participant in the Minstrel party would have access (or choose not to have access) to a Chinese-conversant community?

In the present context, the Minstrel party might be frowned upon for its potentially racist and demeaning content. Its use in practice by the Peranakan or Straits Chinese society functioned as a ‘gift’ to the non-English conversant Chinese community as well as fund-raising and charity events.

In his work *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Jurgen Osterhammel identified three basic elements of colonialist thought: the construction of inferior "otherness"; the belief in mission and guardianship and the utopia of non-politics.41 Charitable aims and acts notwithstanding, activities presented by the Peranakan community would have to consider that these music making activities first lent their services, upon invitation, towards fund-raising activities for the non-Anglicised Chinese community and assistance towards a home called China; secondly, marked the line quite clearly between Anglicised and non-Anglicised Chinese communities; and thirdly, all too easily lent the impressions of utopian non-political motivation, considering that for services rendered, appreciation could arrive in the form of trophies, momentos, food and transportation. The extent to which benevolent colonialism was being practiced will need a more critical examination in relation to the innocuous practice of musicians of the Minstrel parties. Insufficient material at this stage makes this once most popular practice among many communities in Singapore the subject of future research and scholarship.
Just as the Band and Euro-American art-music practices indicate a long-standing history in discourse on music in Singapore, the wayang, both street and staged, represent religious and cultural sustenance which was hard-fought and tenaciously maintained. Much of the discourse provided by Lee Tong Soon is built on an understanding of street opera/wayang and a view that ‘amateur’ performing groups are somehow seen as a privileged group, certainly over those ‘professionals’ whose opportunities do not extend beyond the temple grounds. That is not to suggest Lee does not appreciate the amateur presence. While accepting not to disagreeing over the commendable standards of performance of amateur groups, the imputed judgment of parity, inequitable funding and support of both groups only serve to mark a divide between the two instead of reaping a dividend from their joint presence.

Further scholarship will have to critically examine, the nature, role and identity of professionals and amateurs as well as the nature, role and identity of street and staged wayang. An interesting corollary of this process will also have to consider tactics and strategies of mark wayang troupes, cultural associations in the convergences and collisions of tradition and modernity. There also needs to be a critical examination of the ways in which the performances by these ensembles, as creative and re-creative endeavours, identify and indemnify them; both within the discourse of tradition and modernity as well as the formation of a Singaporean identity, constructed or evolved out of necessity, within local and international settings.

If there is a way to come to terms with Music of Western popular culture in the English-soundscape, it was always surrounded by controversy, fights, stabbings and occasional deaths. If that was not enough, there was always the problem of drugs and the association with pop music. From a wonderfully enthusiastic beginning with support from the British forces stationed here to its resurgence in the late 1970s after the Singapore government intervened in certain types of live performances, much of its practice went from a mixture of creative and re-creative to primarily re-creative work – to the extent that playing covers became a full-time profession with specific instructions from pub and club management.

Herein lies some clues of the range in public reception of him; from considerable support from university and polytechnic students who appreciated the novelty of his hybrid pop-jazz to critics’ scathing reviews and an English speaking middle class who think Dick is not serious enough
to a Chinese speaking population who feel he is using their culture inauthentically. It is in appropriating and reinterpreting cultural practices which had acquired boundaries, that has resulted in this mixed reception of Dick Lee’s creative work.

One can add to the discourse speculation of a shrewd sense of economic potential to be garnered from what Karl Marx defines as the mistaking of an object for a social relation, or vice versa - commodity fetish. Adam Krims explains the process in hip-hop, particularly the ghetto as source of despair and economic potential:

*The commodified image of the ghetto forms a libidinal object...leads...to a surplus value generated from the commodification of a lack of value...the music industry has found a way to refold some of the most abject results of world economic production, through a direct transformation...to multibillion-dollar wealth...this refolding...that constitutes hip-hop’s own mutation in the workings of surplus value...without...materially changing the living conditions at either end.*

Chua Beng Huat’s recent chapter discusses ways in which the Singlish-Singaporean is identified more specifically in the realms of the Hokkien-speaking community and connotes the positioning of Hokkien speakers as low life...in a country where forty years of continuous economic growth has engendered a substantial middle class...dependent on academic and professional achievements. Therefore, in the view of an educated middle-class Singaporean, Hokkien is being thus positioned, in representation and social reality as the language...laughably low-class ...not a serious language for the civil community.

At the same time, Chua also notes attempts in popular culture in Singapore to glorify the essence of Singlish Singaporean Ah Beng and his feminine counterpart Ah Lian, through the lens of middle-class educated Singaporean consumers, *for whom switching code from Standard English to Singlish is a marker of ‘authentic’ Singaporean identity.* Nowhere else is more amplified than in a recent and hugely popular sitcom series Phua Chu Kang, which makes the everyday existence of a poorly educated but economically successful renovation contractor (a phrase -nouvo riche – comes to mind here).
Applying the arguments of Trudgill and Kritms, Singlish ‘emerges’, in the process of economic growth and prosperity, as a ghetto-language with its authentic users forming its cultural ghettos. As a cultural commodity in televised theatre, it has become since the 1990s, something hugely popular within Singapore, to the extent of becoming an internationally marketable asset. The fact it is frowned upon in the recent Speak Good English Movement campaigns has only increased its value.

Applied now to Music, Dick Lee’s creative works arguably contain, together with the use of hybrid pop-jazz musical elements, the use of Singlish (in contradistinction to Singapore English) as a lower-prestige mode of communication. When capitalized upon as a commodity fetish – the notion, which according to Marx,46 both results from and reinforces the more general tendency in capitalist societies to mystify social origins – such strategies become successful in marketing a Singaporean identity. It is difficult to deny the success of Dick Lee in the Japanese markets, made particularly so when the use of Singlish in music. One also needs to consider that much of Lee’s success preempts the successes in theatre-spaces of local film and television in Singapore.

More recent scholarship on Dick Lee is likely to generate further interest and research not only on his music but also of the socio-cultural circumstances of what might best be read as one of the many independent and successful routes taken in the narratives of music of Western popular culture in Singapore. Additionally, there has been very little done in terms of an analysis of the music as well as its complicity or conformity with the textual considerations, whether it is the main, meta- or sub-texts.

Yusnor Ef’s observations summarise the position that Singapore was the centre of the Malay peninsula form the early 1960s to the late 1970s. Today he laments that popular and promising artistes in Singapore are eclipsed by their Malaysian counterparts. Ramli Sarip is the only representative in the rock and popular culture domain alongside a handful of others. Anita Sarawak is known not only in the Malay community but internationally in music of popular culture in the English speaking world. Iskandar Ismail, who began his life as Hangloose Iskandar in the jazz world, is today demanded as an arranger. The list is small but growing and he claims pride in the Malay community for them: Indra Shahril, Jan Johari, Reduan Ali, Nora Ismail, Bong Shaaban, Ismail Marzuki, Nazim and others.47
Many practitioners have emerged since but remain known to their audiences and contemporaries within the Malay community. What will be most helpful here is to widen the circle of scholarship beyond the Malay community. Besides the inimitable Najib Ali, who seems to have straddled across a number of musical practices, a number of performers in the Malay community in pop, jazz, heavy metal and hip-hop circles remain anonymous largely because they perform in spaces which do not resonate with the Malay-conversant communities. One notable example is the late Bani Faruk [sic] guitarist who played with Jive Talking at the Hard Rock Café. Contemporaries nicknamed him the George Benson of Singapore. Other examples include Sheikh Haikel, formerly of Construction Sight, arguably Singapore’s first rapper, Triple Noize, the youngest rap group after Construction Sight and Urban X’change, and many heavy metal musicians who prefer their practice in the English conversant domain. Yet there are those who suggest that in the domain of the Malay music industry, Singaporean artists pale in comparison to their Malaysian and even Indonesian counterparts. Yusnor laments the divide between Malaysian and Singaporean artists in Music of popular culture in Malay has now grown beyond geographical distance to reach the point of stratification, with a cry echoed in the English music industry with respect to creative work: 

*Musicians claimed that Singaporean audiences were not supportive of local talent.*

The influence of popular film and cabaret from Shanghai and transported to the different Worlds found greater support among the Chinese community who were not much more resistant to dance music and popular songs than the other communities in Singapore. Of the popular form of music-making and dance in cabarets and dance bands, arguably the most popular entertainment during the 1950s in Singapore was to be found in the New World, with *getais* enjoying the best business. There was the Man Jiang Hong Getai, Shangri-La, New Nightclub, Feng Feng Song and Dance Troupe, and Broadway. The Man Jiang Hong Getai was used by the famous Zhang Lai Lai Song and Dance Troupe, which met with enthusiastic crowd response. Part of the show included the performance of a series of love ballads between Zhang Lai Lai and the male lead, which was a crowd-pleaser. Zhang eventually moved to the Hong Kong motion picture scene. Despite her considerable success and fame as a singer locally, the troupe was subsequently dismantled. The Man Jiang Hong Getai was then
replaced by the Dong Fang Getai. Audience fascination for love ballads made famous names such as Huang Qing Yuan and Qin Huai because of their vocal timbre and rendition of ballads. Eventually they lost their popularity to younger 'pop idols' like Sakura Ting, whose gift was to be able to entertain audiences with wit, humour and a lot of dancing; a trait seriously lacking in Huang and Qin. Sakura Ting made a big appearance in the Agogo era, was well known for yodelling in some of her 'country' style, western songs which set her apart from the rest of the singers at that time including Pang Xiu Qiong. Sakura was a known entity in Hong Kong and Indonesia. Unlike Sakura, Zhang Xiao Ying focussed more towards ballads and other slower tempo songs. She appeared very much prim and proper, unlike the dynamic Sakura but Zhang was more popular in the late 70s and early 80s. Sisters Deng Xue Hua, Miao Hua, and Gui Hua were popular from the late 70s to the mid 80s. Deng Miao Hua is the most popular of the trio, but she started off as a solo act. She sang the theme song of the TV drama serial Xiao Fei Yu (Little flying Fish) and acted in it as well. Deng Miao Hua was, also one of the products of singing classes organised by SBC at that time. It also produced a handful of singers who performed regularly on the Mandarin variety shows such as Xing, Xing, Xing and Bin Fen Ba San Series.

What raised Xinyao to a level of prominence never before achieved in the Mandarin-speaking world was the creative energy which I believe spilled over into the recreative Mandarin-speaking community. It should not surprise us that from the late 1980s towards the beginning of the 1990s, the world of Mandarin pop seems to have had either collisions or mergers with Xinyao. At one level, Xinyao lyricists and songwriters were preparing their material for Hong Kong singing sensations, while at another level, certain names seemed to appear at Xinyao festivals, linked with Xinyao events yet were not considered bona fide Xinyao practitioners. While the separation is made clear, it wouldn’t be difficult to envision an identity crisis with the entertainment industry. One observer noted how much the songs of Liang Wern Fook, Eric Moo and Loi Fei Huay had created the impression that Xinyao had really gone pop largely because the musical arrangements seem to be ready to compete in the Mandarin pop market. Here is where opinions differed as to Xinyao’s directions. Looking at CCA school activities from 1993 -1997, Xinyao had virtually disappeared. Coincident with this was the emergence of Kit Chan, who was discovered and groomed by Ocean Butterflies. Stephanie Sun, pop or otherwise, came from the Li Wei Song School and yet again was confused with the practice of Xinyao. Doubtless
there will continue to be the greying of domains long regarded as sacrosanct between the various musical practices.

However, it cannot be denied that the recreative world of Mandarin pop finally reached a different plateau through a uniquely Singaporean expression, Xinyao. When exactly this meeting of recreative and creative energy took place (if it ever did meet)? How did the two activities seem to converge into a Mandarin pop scene?

According to composer/singer Liang Wern Fook, in an article *Xinyao - The Catalyst that brought about Singapore Mandarin Pop*, Liang suggests that *people became conscious of local music after Xinyao started*.\(^5\)

Paradoxically, what we do know about Xinyao is more of what it does much less what it is. What was the role played by Xinyao in its community of believers? Was the music the easiest vehicle for transmission of Mandarin youth concerns? Moreover, while Xinyao provided opportunities for school garden song amateurs with undreamed of professional recording contracts, focussing on the power of exquisite Mandarin poetry riding on the directness and immediacy of musical material, it was to become by the 1990s an entrepreneurial package and commercial endeavour. By 1994, *the term ‘Xinyao’ no longer means the raw, folksy and school-like songs that guitar strumming students sang in the past. It has now come to encompass a varied and sometimes more sophisticated range of songs that even Taiwanese and Hongkong stars are crooning to.*\(^4\) Much of the nostalgia for the past both in spirit and sound can only be recovered in select Music lounges. On the other hand music of present popular culture in Mandarin cannot deny the influence of nor avoid reference to Xinyao. At the same time, Xinyao seems to have had two more directions; a desire to take on a frame more amenable in popular culture as well as a desire for nostalgia for those involved when they were growing up; one which has two sides, those who wish to partake of raw, folksy, school-like songs by curating them in lounges and other reunion concerts, while another side wishes to use the creative spirit behind the raw and folksy ballads for more creative activity. This is perhaps worth its time and effort in future scholarship.

One of the most telling observations about Xinyao was that it was supported by a very niche group of young people – not very big, but definitely very enthusiastic and committed students from about 16-20 years of age, mainly JC and tertiary...The youngsters today have no idea what Xinyao is. The use of the old term *Xinyao* is the work of former members of Xinyao and their nostalgia for the past.\(^5\)
This loss of spatial practice has created opportunities for those who wish to revisit their ideals in representational space. Henri Lefebvre tells us that every society and mode of production produces its own space.\textsuperscript{56} Social practice draws to attention use of the body, its sensory organs, gestures, and representations of the body which link the body’s relations with its milieu. Bodily lived experience…filtered through cultural intervention ensure and insure mobility of the individual member/s of a given social group, without confusion…constituting a coherent whole by establishing a common language, a consensus and a code.\textsuperscript{57}

In this respect Lefebvre’s triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational space become instructive not only by what solidifies into a convention in a practice but also what is dynamic and fluid, given the nature of change within the community. What will emerge as most fruitful will be the research into the Hadrahmi community in Singapore that makes detailed observation of the processes of the nature of change and how that change correlates with a changing and dynamic social, cultural and political situation. To quote Bradley Shope \textsuperscript{58} and Erasmus,\textsuperscript{59} suggesting ways people produce their own identities within the context of their relationships to contrasting groups between which they are considered situated. For Shope, \textit{there is an emphasis on the production of identity that is marked simultaneously by continuity and change and the power of individual agency in its construction}.\textsuperscript{60} What appears in Shope’s argument is the notion of performance as identity; “this is what we do” lays claim to “this is what we are”. Because of their choice of repertoire, which consisted of devotional hymns in the Sufi tradition and practice, the Hadrami of Yemen distinguished themselves, as distinct from the Malay community who subscribed to Islam with slightly different value- and belief- systems, no doubt the outcome of their own cultural negotiation with Islam, and distinguished themselves among the myriad diversity of immigrant communities in Singapore.

What emerges from the oral interviews is very rich data that only succeeds in provoking more questions. Between 2004 and the records of the formation of the Arab club in 1896 and the Arab school in 1898, there are massive gaps that have not been accounted for. How was this community sustained? If these were traders, what was the role music and culture played in their lives and those of their families? Who was responsible for the dissemination, teaching and learning of this practice? What was the perception and
reception of Arabs living in the Southeast Asian region, quite far away from Yemen and what was their view of home?

We are informed that the repertory in the Arab community in Singapore is based on devotional text supported by the music. What is considered different is the use of musical rhythm in creating a physiological and therefore spiritual rhythm in an effort to achieve communion with God. The devotional lyrics hardly fit the context of performance at samras; to all intents and purposes, secular spaces. Notions of acculturation notwithstanding, Philip Bohlman’s study of the role of chamber music in the lives of the Yekkes, German-speaking Jews in Israel, observes how the music, in this case absolute music, becomes ethically (even ethnically) binding:

*Viewed from a performative perspective...practice reflects different attitudes towards both the repertoire and the communities that lend the music its distinctive functions and form its different histories.*

One way to understanding musical performances of devotional texts in secular spaces is the way it serves to reach out to the Yemeni community in Singapore. By performing what they perform, the Hadrami community whose repertoire of devotional songs at a Samra act as a fishing net for its members:

*There is a samra...and for the Arab community, everyone in there knows this...it’s a code of behaviour that invites them into the process...this is what I mean by formalisation...By and large in the Arab community, there is a tendency...a tacit agreement that samra...if someone is getting married, basically the whole village will get involved...that notion was brought here when they migrated here...[the samra]...is not extended to everyone but only the Arab community.*

While it may be true that the motivation is to reach out to the Arab community, its derivations are a little more surprising:...*For those who experienced living in a Malay kampong from young have this sense of an open house. The question is whether was it also the contribution to the Malay culture that the Arabs had engaged in that sense of continuity...It is possible at one level to think that the Arabs have adopted the Malay way...the berinai...only the samra is separate...actually its most of the music.*
Quite a number of the songs in the repertory seem to originate from Indonesia (or sometimes Malaysia) rather than Yemen. Here is a significant point: while the distance in both chronology and geography is an issue that further research requires in terms of cultural sustenance, Indonesia, particularly Java, has been identified as the closest default setting for cultural sustenance for Arab immigrants like Bagushair. The location of Indonesia as the next most feasible centre for cultural sustenance by the Arab Community in Singapore is telling in the ways the distance from home is replaced by a satellite centre.

Nevertheless, it will be observed that practices of the Arab community here, from performing music with devotional texts beyond samras, outside of the usually established comfort zones of houses into cafés, performances at secular functions among others arguably serve the dual function of establishing their identity and using these events as fishing nets to draw in the Hadrami community members towards a sense and experience of the collective.

Much of this exploration is still at the initial stage. Despite this aural interview, the period spanning 1896 and the present is virtually devoid of written accounts, documentary evidence or documentation. Perhaps it is this absence and silence which will provide the motivation for further research into the musical practices and by extension the sociocultural practices of Zafin.
What can we make of these various musical practices in Singapore? In the preface to his novel Nanjing 1937: A love story, Chinese writer Ye Zhaoyan states how his gaze had been caught on that particular era of the past but, as a writer, found himself unable to truly understand that history that historians call history. All Ye could see was the shattered pieces, broken fragments, and a handful of melancholic stories destined to come to naught, all quietly playing out upon the grand stage of history.

Closer to home, Horace Wee and Sam Gan articulate a similar line: *Singapore’s history is actually rich but ragged...because there has been no focus.*

This research has only begun to scratch the surface of a rich history – it will remain ragged for some time not because of a lack of focus but rather that the danger focus tends to bring with it – an account of practice which may be flawed in its construction of foundations.

Perhaps the most amenable way to come to terms with musical practices in Singapore is to begin with the outcome of musical practice – music. That may seem blindingly obvious to all. Yet our research has uncovered ways in which some musics were blatantly discriminated against, derided in local magazines. While W. G. St.Clair he felt that there was "fairly general taste for music" among the European community, there were only a few who "take a very high place, either vocally or instrumentally." This, St Clair reasoned was:

... no doubt partly due to constant subjection of the young people to the constant hideous noises made by Asiatics, from the Malay, Chinese, or Madrasi ayah of infancy upwards on to public wayangs, cacophonous street cries of hawkers, and private musical orgies of Chinese servants. To counteract that there is often a certain amount of home music, good, bad or indifferent; there is the music, if nay, and such as it may be, picked up at school; there are the weekly Church and Sunday school services: and the rare opportunities of hearing the military band, this itself perhaps hardly ever accessible to the younger folk of Singapore.

Writing in the Straits Chinese Magazine in 1898, Edward Salzmann had written an article on Chinese music for the magazine as well as made no apology in attempting to harmonise a Chinese melody: *It is well understood that Chinese music is, as music, in quite a rudimentary state...the European orchestra of the present day...must be allowed to be a most beautiful*
combination of musical sounds, even if the music played be beyond comprehension. Judged by this standard, Chinese music cannot stand...it must be admitted that no beauty can be claimed for Chinese music at the present time...in the opinion of many people competent to judge, there is plenty of talent in music among the Chinese, if they were properly trained. Should they be begin to study the western system, there is little doubt but that before long a very great improvement would be heard. ⁶⁹

Yet if one reads his sources of inspiration for composing, Leong Yoon Pin includes in his personal journey a range of possibilities: A strong desire to be our own masters after World War II...instill a sense of pride through singing songs of a non-decadent nature in the advent of self-government and eventual independence to an expression of my country’s environmental and historical sounds...in my first symphony, I looked at the early days when the Indian labourers were working in the streets. I was fascinated by their labouring chant and I put that into the final movement. Later on, Dayong Sampan for instance referred to our Malay heritage, and so does Lenggang Kangkong.⁷⁰

Leong’s compositions are striking because they are at one level outcomes of composition, a technique Leong acquired as a musician, training, some of which was local and some when he was abroad when he studied with Nadia Boulanger. Yet, for Leong, describing his musical works does not mention influences of the ‘great’ composers or some of the works studied that would become points of homage and departure. Rather it becomes the means and medium for which Leong would remember a considerably diverse communities living in Singapore. His compositions, at another level, reflect the sound-worlds created by the various communities.

Leong’s notions of musical worlds in his personal musical practice resonate with the suggestions of John Blacking who admitted to a deliberate use of inverted commas with the term “music”: Although every known human society has what trained musicologists might recognise as music, there are some that have no word for music or whose concept of music has a significance quite different from that generally associated with the word music...“Music” is both the observable product of human intentional action and a basic human mode of thought by which any human action may be constituted. The most characteristic and effective embodiment of this mode of thought is what we would call music.⁷¹
Blacking reasoned that if music was understood from such a perspective, we ought to be able to learn something about the structure of human interaction...by way of the structures involved in music, and so learn more about the inner nature of man’s mind....observation of musical structures may reveal some of the structural principles on which human life is based.  

In Leong’s descriptions comes something more profound: *Expression of my country’s environmental and historical sounds...*  

When one begins researching the diversity of musical practices in the diverse communities in Singapore, where or how does one begin with an understanding of sounds? For Bruce Smith, it begins from the psycho-acoustic entities: *Sound is at one the most forceful stimulus that human beings experience and the most evanescent. Periodic waves of air molecules strike against the listener’s eardrums and set up vibrations inside the body...for an historian, interested in sounds of the past, there would seem to be nothing there to study, at least until the advent of electromagnetic recording devices in the early 20th century.*

Yet the impossibility of having access to these sounds can be recovered and re-constructed. While the possibility of reconstructing spaces dedicated or amenable to performance remains another issue for another time involving far greater resource, both of architectural and engineering expertise, let along financial resource, there are allusions to sound as Bruce Smith suggests, implied by fictional texts, if not represented in those texts. It is descriptions about practices of each community – judgments of musical/unmusical notwithstanding- that provide us with the best possible opportunities of uncovering their presence and practice. Scholarship can be meaningful and relevant when used to identify what has been written, implicitly and explicitly, about the sounds of these diverse musical practices – to facilitate a reasonably and historically informed performance of a musical practice no longer available in the present context.

An understanding of musical practices as practices involving sounds also helps to understand behavioural patterns of those who created, performed and attended to them. As with those who were at the periphery of such practices, a range of receptions ranging from centrifugal to centripetal responses would have engendered commensurate behavioural decisions.
This goes some way in understanding why ‘music’ and its participants may be found in a plethora of situations in every aspect of life and living in Singapore. Michael Bull and Les Back inform us that the experience of everyday life is increasingly mediated by a multitude of mechanically produced sounds. Waking, walking, driving, working and even falling asleep are all done to music or some other acoustic accompaniment...Sound thus has both utopian and dystopian associations: it enables individuals to create intimate, manageable and aestheticised spaces to inhabit but it can also become an unwanted and deafening roar threatening the body politic of the subject.74

Together, Bull and Back invite a mode of apprehension they refer to as deep listening. Four modes of experience are suggested:75

- Sound makes us re-think the meaning, nature and significance of our social experience
- Sound makes us re-think our relation to community
- Sound makes us re-think our relational experiences, how we relate to others, ourselves, and the spaces and places we inhabit
- Sound makes us re-think our relationship to power

The argument is that those in the process of making music, whether individually or together, are involved in the fundamentally social process of human being itself, that they are:
"Tuned-in to one another, are living together in the same flux, are growing older together while the musical process lasts...not only...the...measurable outer time required for the performance...but the coperformance in simultaneity of the polthetic steps by which the musical content articulates itself in inner time."76

For Schutz, this relation between inner and outer time ‘pluridimensional time’ which is simultaneously lived through when two or more individuals are making music together. As he notes:
"Making music together occurs in a true face-to-face relationship – inasmuch as the participants are sharing not only a section of time but also a sector of space."77

The sharing of time and space is a crucial factor for it identifies participants in a variety of ways from the die-hards to “wannabes” - those who want to be associated with that contested space. Shirleen Noordin identified three
groups associated with the Mat-Rock practice - music, motorcycles (Mat Motor) and DXLN – the posers who simply hang out to be part of the crowd. Nor should it surprise us. Not all who attend ‘classical music’ concerts do so with the intention of appreciating the music performed.

What is striking is the way in which our research yielded diverse musical practices and the way these practices cut across communal lines in music-making activity. On the other hand, only a few of these practices are known. Our study of the various musical practices in Singapore uncovers a silence. As a noun, silence we found ranges from ignorance to intolerance. As a verb, silence involves the behaviour of selection by criteria and operation unknown. Again, we need to examine the behaviour in relation to the role of a silencing individual, first as individual, then as part of a series of collectives which build on levels of authority. Even in the best interests, in the making of his-stories, her-stories and other-stories, there is a range of representation, from exclusion to saturation, from factual to almost fictive. On balance, Trouillot argues that silences are necessary for the burden of fully comprehensive facts would be incomprehensible.  

Silence can also emerge as a form of obtuseness. Praxis was obvious to its participants and practitioners but not much made of in terms of transferring activity from the domestic to the public sphere. One possible justification would have been the notion of what is referred to as gifting a community. Secondly, very little was retained or documented in terms of written or reproducible media, hence the very ephemeral nature of the practice. Thirdly, the notions of practice themselves might have articulated tensions within the practice; that of Bourdieu’s identification of tradition versus heresy. Fourth, each practice, as part of a collective of many musical practices in diverse communities, become subject to a process of selection/exclusion depending on a more unified agenda of representation. Fifth, if there is an institution, private or public, there is the question of ideology of the institution, its socio-cultural, political and financial resources, its patrons, its practices; all implicated, directly or indirectly in articulations as well as silences. This is also true not only of diverse practices but also of a tension between amateur and professional factions within each practice. Consequently a silencing, intentional or otherwise, of any musical practice, size of community notwithstanding, makes painfully evident not only a dominant discourse but its authorization as well.
A number of organizations appear as footnotes in the oral interviews as well as musical practices. Much of our work reveals further scholarship in addressing these gaps. A study of the musical activities of the Peoples Association alone reveals their hand in virtually all the known musical practices in Singapore. A study of the role the Peoples Association has played in promoting music in the late 1950s up to the present will be significant for a cultural and historical perspective that is crucial to understanding its role in supporting many of these musical practices between the domestic and public sphere. The same too is observed in organizations like the Music and Drama Company of the Singapore Armed Forces, The Singapore National Youth Orchestra (Ministry of Education), Singapore Wind Symphony, Philharmonic Winds, Metro Philharmonic Chorus and many other groups who are not classified as professional but have performed in the public sphere and have acquired a reputation for performances of creditable quality. The same too may be applied for a number of ‘cultural’ groups like SIFAS, Sri Warisan, Siong Leng, The Eurasian Association to name just a few.

Much of the musical repertoire itself, aurally and orally transmitted, was transcribed out of practical necessity. An analysis of oral performances may provide clues to practice in Singapore. Just as obvious is the absence of a discussion of the music in each practice; something analytical studies can redress in further and future scholarship.

Where does our study of musical practices lead us?
One more keyword emerges from Leong: that Lenggang Kangkong and Dayong Sampan were referred to as our heritage. We begin with some fundamental tenets that lie at the heart of a Singaporean identity. Koh Tai Ann makes this point in a discussion of cultural identity – that more often than not, we identify with our ethnic heritage first before identifying our Singaporean heritage. The ideal of a national culture in Singapore was envisaged as one that transcends the respective ethnic cultures that constitute the population. Koh drew on a statement from the Prime Minister’s Office in 1986:

_The government’s policy was not to “assimilate”, but to “integrate” our different communities, in other words, to build up common attributes such as one common working language, same loyalties, similar values and attitudes, so as to make the different communities a more cohesive nation._

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We are informed that even up to 1987, there were four distinct educational systems even past independence, each using the official languages (English, Malay, Chinese, Tamil) as the major medium of instruction. English was instituted as the sole medium of instruction in 1987 to ensure national cohesiveness through the use of “one common working language”. At the same time, a second language that is the ethnic tongue, was retained and made compulsory for students for the purposes of retaining ethnic identity through language. More importantly, there was a gradual emphasis on ethnic traditions, in terms of language, religion, customs and other expressive forms:

There is encouragement not only of traditional religion but also of the so-called traditional arts to remind the different communities of their cultural roots; to express individually the identity of each community and collectively to express Singapore's multicultural identity; and as a means to create culture in itself.82

The notion of a Singaporean identity brings us back to the whole notion of not so much a Singaporean identity but identifying a Singaporean identity. The 2002 population census reminds us that one in every four persons living in Singapore is not a Singaporean. To understanding the ‘distance’ of twenty-five years, between a community in Singapore in 1987 and 2002, is to come to terms with a diverse, changing community, not only in national and international configurations but also in ways in which these have had an impact on a Singaporean identity. Arjun Appadurai refers to a variety of dimensions of global cultural flows which he uses a suffix, -scape.83 He identifies five:

1. ethnoscapes
2. mediascapes
3. technoscapes
4. financescapes
5. ideoscapes

Larry Hilarian points out that globalization and international trade is much older than its much talked about present. In his research on the Gambus Melayu, he suggests that the barbat, quanbus and ūd could have been introduced as early as with Persian and Arab trading in the Malay Archipelago as early as the 9th century AD.84 In his study, Hilarian points out that musical instruments have always journeyed along the grain of politics, conquest and economic exploits amongst the communities so linked to trade, mercantilism, adventure and their source of entertainment. The
study of musical instruments brings us to the intersection of globalization and diaspora, not in the commercial sense but to the close affinity of intercultural aggrandizement and adaptation. What is true of musical instruments is also true of musical practices.

What are the prospects and challenges in encountering cultures, global and local in a historically immigrant and cosmopolitan Singapore? Our concerns surround a potentially unidirectional pathway in the arts via the same panoptic mechanisms or what John Blacking refers to as one system of symbols applied universally. Universalized systems of symbols potentially impute particularized expectations and value judgments on ways of knowing and learning in the multitude of cultures around the world. Silence or silencing is only one of those consequences.

Is it enough, therefore, to suggest that a solution lies by articulating discontent? Can a potentially hegemonic discourse be ‘subverted’ for positive gain? Are there alternatives other than competition to dominant forces? Bourdieu cites Max Weber’s reminder that in the art of warfare, the greatest progress originated not in technical inventions but in transformations of the social organization of the warriors.

First there are ways in which understanding the form and content of discontent needs to be challenged. An excerpt by Sir Stamford Raffles is particularly instructive for us as a lesson:

Our civil institutions and political influence are calculated to increase the population and wealth of these countries and cultivation of mind seems alone wanting to raise them to such a rank among the nations of the world as their geographical situation and climate may admit. And shall we who have been so favoured among other nations refuse to encourage the growth of intellectual improvement or rather shall we not consider it one of our first duties to afford the means of education to surrounding countries and thus render our stations not only the seats of commerce but of literature and the arts? Will not our best inclinations and feelings be thus gratified at the same time that we are contributing to raise millions in the scale of civilisation. It may be observed that in proportion as the people are civilised, our intercourse with islands will become more general, more secure and more advantageous; that the native riches of the countries which they inhabit seem inexhaustible, and that the eventual extent of our commerce with them must consequently depend on the growth of intellectual improvement and the extension of moral principles. A knowledge of the language of these
countries considered on the most extensive scale, is essential to all investigation, and may no the acquisition of these be pursued with most advantage in connexion with some defined plan for educating the higher orders of the inhabitants? May not one object mutually aid the other, and interests of philantrophy and literature be best consulted by making the advantages reciprocal?\textsuperscript{88}

While a paragraph of this length is worthy of much more detailed analysis, we would like to briefly discuss this in the context of our study. Like all other authorial discourses, this is superb in its exhortation to use literature and the arts to contribute to the civilization of millions. It is instructive for us that the notion of civilization as an act is derived from being civil; civilization is a process by which one becomes civil. It is difficult to deny Raffles’ understanding of civilization as a unilateral and unidirectional process. Not one reference is made to learn from the millions about their state of civility. Raffles’ exhortation makes clear that commerce is not the answer to civility, hence the recourse to Imperial literature and the arts. But the full scale of irony appears in the implication that when these millions have been civilized through literature and the arts, so too the commercial intercourse, forming loops of greater prosperity presaging Keynesian economic thinking.

Can we actually believe that a widely-practiced culture of business that valorizes English and modes of thinking from a society that has many business practices in English can engender a utopian global village in a cultural field? Is our understanding of administration and governance in the arts one built on financial or cultural capital? How is music understood in a larger context? Whose music? Music for whom? Why Music?

None of these short questions will elicit short answers. But the questions themselves have fuelled our study of musical practices as scholarship. Like all scholarship, the knowledge gained of and about these musical practices go some way in beginning to address these issues. We may save ourselves the embarrassment of ignorance of musical practices within our own environment but not by ignoring them. Curricula may be disseminated from one remote source to another but do we really know if the recipient understands what is said, how it is said? Can we really say we know how this recipient learns or what meaning learning holds in the recipient culture? There needs to be an understanding of the dimensions of learning to critique knowledge of and about the arts. Education in the arts needs to consider
issues of content and context (not to mention sub-text and super-text) more critically.

How is a multicultural strategy in education in an environment of assimilation similar to that in an environment of integration? Just as Blacking suggests the problems of a system of symbols applied universally, it needs to be understand that a variety of cultures and practices around the world do not understand or appreciate such value systems in the same way that businesses do. Although new media enables immediacy with sound worlds or visual worlds which bypass issues of physical engagement and has gained currency not all cultures around the world are understood in this way and not all cultures are able to transcribe or translate their learning activities and experiences in the arts onto new media. The discourse that attends universalisation in artistic worlds potentially creates asymmetrical mechanisms for teaching and learning and compounds, in its wake, opportunistic strategies that priviledge some cultures more than others. There is nothing more debilitating for multicultural education than the combination of ignorance, intolerance and arrogance supported by the greatest ease of dissemination.

Just as Blacking suggests the problems of a system of symbols applied universally, the notion of being informed needs to understand a variety of cultures and practices around the world that do not understand or appreciate such value systems in the same way that businesses do. Blacking suggests a method which is fundamentally anthropological. Since definitions of music and non-music vary with different cultures around the world, he suggests the surest way to understand music, for instance, and discover its uniqueness is to incorporate all ‘ethnic’ perceptions of all available musics and to find out on what points they agree.89

A few organisations have, by virtue of their leadership, occupied a dominant position in the local arts environment. Would this dominant leadership take on projects that involve Southeast Asian traditional practices/narratives in the arts, for instance, not for the sake of profitability and established track record but as a matter of addressing a social responsibility which is at the very fabric of understanding the diversity and heterogeneity of the arts?

Our explorations have convinced us that a study of music would be interdisciplinary in nature, it was guided by a fundamental assumption that each musical practice was to be viewed from its own culturally situated and
practice specific context. Teaching and learning would gravitate towards being informed of any of these musical practices. A worldview of music practices supported by a philosophy of music education would resonate well with an overview of musical practices.

Any musical experience in any musical practice or tradition is worthy of reflection, analysis and the teaching and learning of concepts within that particular context. The lack of literacy and/or verbalisation about music in other practices is not simply the result of a less sophisticated or civilised tradition. Are resources being developed for the medium to long-term, in terms of artistic materials, trained expertise and curricula that together are able to do justice to an evaluation of these knowledges? Are institutions equipped with sufficient depth and breadth of human and technological resources to incorporate such traditional and contemporary world practices in learning programmes through undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum?

Edward Said points out beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows from them. But as Said reminds us, without at least a sense of a beginning, nothing can really be done, much less ended…and the more crowded and confused a field appears, the more a beginning, fictional or not, seems imperative. A beginning gives us a chance to do the work that compensates us for the tumbling disorder…

Our discovery of musical practices and a wealth of data can only prompt us to admit to a beginning. It is a position we have not been disappointed by; only overwhelmed by. A beginning…is a problem to be studied, as well as a position taken…as a problem beginnings seem to have a sort of detachable abstraction, but a beginning is already a project under way. If nothing else has been achieved, knowledge of and about musical practices in Singapore creates open sites for awareness, documentation and discussion. As with Foucault in The Order of Things, our strongest motivation remains for: ...this work to be read as an open site. Many questions are laid out on it that have not yet found answers; and many of the gaps refer to earlier works or to others that have not yet been completed, or even begun.

Ma fin est mon commencement—Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)
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