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Author	JinXing, Lai
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**‘INFORMAL LEARNING’:
LESSONS FROM THIRD GENERATION COMPOSERS FOR THE WIND
ENSEMBLE IN SINGAPORE**

JinXing, Lai

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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Abstract

The musical practice of the Wind Ensemble in Singapore dates back to at least the 19th century. Dairianathan (2006b: 31) noted how historically "*references to the presence of the Band in Singapore seem to have been caught between apparent absences to relatively little known activity among military bandsmen as professionals*". In recent years, the musical practice witnessed a new breakthrough from its enigmatic past, as Dairianathan (2006a: 313) observed that "*Band Music underwent a transition towards Music for the Band.*"

Within the first decade of the new millennium, works for the wind ensemble have been written by young Singaporeans. Two outstanding names are Wong Kah Chun whose compositions are published by Tierolff Music and Benjamin Yeo, whose compositions are published by C.L Barnhouse and Beriato Music. The notable achievement of Wong and Yeo as third generation Singaporean composers was to have their works published by international publishers.

Wong and Yeo are currently music undergraduates in local universities where rudimentary knowledge of music are formally taught to them. Two interesting points were observed: first, they started their creative endeavors as early as 12 years old and second, their compositions were published prior they entered university. Without any formal education in music composing, how did they manage to write compositions that are internationally recognized?

This paper hopes to shed light on how informal learning (in the perspective of Lucy Green) has enabled Wong and Yeo to produce musical works of excellence. I also hope to elucidate a number of issues which are vital points of drawing a conclusion to this paper: 1) how the works of Wong and Yeo are found suitable for publication as international wind ensemble repertoire 2) The impacts of formal compositional education to the composers; and 3) Wong and Yeo's attitude towards their creative endeavor.

**‘INFORMAL LEARNING’; LESSONS FROM THIRD GENERATION COMPOSERS
FOR THE WIND ENSEMBLE IN SINGAPORE**

The musical practice of the Wind Ensemble in Singapore dates back to at least the 19th century. Dairianathan noted how historically "*references to the presence of the Band in Singapore seem to have been caught between apparent absences to relatively little known activity among military bandsmen as professionals*" (Dairianathan, 2006b, pp. 31). In recent years, the musical practice witnessed a new breakthrough from its enigmatic past, as Dairianathan observed "*Band Music underwent a transition towards Music for the Band.*" (Dairianathan, 2006b, pp. 31).

Within the first decade of the new millennium, young Singaporeans have written works for the wind ensemble. Two outstanding names are Wong Kah Chun whose compositions are published by Tierolff Music and Benjamin Yeo, whose compositions are published by C.L Barnhouse and Beriato Music (Tierolff, 2010) (Barnhouse, 2010). The notable achievements of Wong and Yeo as third generation Singaporean composers were to have their works published by international publishers. Wong and Yeo are currently music undergraduates in local universities but their creative endeavour began as early as twelve years old. Therefore, their compositions were published prior to being admitted to university. Without any formal education in music composing, how did they manage to write compositions that are internationally recognized?

The notable achievements of Wong and Yeo as third generation Singaporean composers may be confusing if one considers that locally composed works for wind ensembles, even by Wong's and Yeo's mentors, only came to prominence after the start of the millennium.

Considering the historical development and ambiguity of reception faced by participants in the musical practice of the wind ensemble in Singapore as well as recentness of writing works for the wind ensemble in Singapore, how has it been possible for Wong and Yeo to have their works gain acceptability by international publishers; considering their somewhat lesser-known identities even locally? How did Wong and Yeo achieve such recognition through their works *before* their formal undergraduate studies in music? Moreover, the international prominence of Wong and Yeo is curious, considering the prominence and qualification already evident among local composers such as Kelly Tang, Zechariah Goh and Robert Casteels. How were compositions of Wong and Yeo “made special” among other local wind ensemble composers?

A study of the musical compositions requiring an analytical framework is not the aim of my paper. What I intend to do is to uncover their pathways in composing for the Wind Ensemble to allow for critical reflection. I have interviewed both Wong and Yeo extensively and intend to use their responses from the interviews to see what we can learn from them as well as understand the ways in which composers for the Wind Ensemble musical practice in Singapore emerge. In this paper, I rely on interviews with Wong and Yeo as well as writings on informal learning by Lucy Green to enable my exploratory study.

Applying Lucy Green’s idea of informal learning into Wind Band Context

Alain Corbin’s *‘history and anthropology of the senses’* points to the way that each of the five senses has played a part in the formation of the sensory, discursive, institutional and cultural regimes through which the urban environment is rendered intelligible, distinctive and controlled (Corbin, 1995). Applying Alain Corbin’s assertion to local composers and compositions of wind band music suggests relationships between audiences and

instrumentalists, scripts and performances were mediated by historical and culturally grounded conventions which made composers compose works that came across as intelligible, distinctive and controlled (Corbin, 1995). Yet Wong and Yeo managed to learn conventions of wind band repertoire and had their works published well *before* they started formal education in music and music education respectively at tertiary level in August 2007. Wong's first published composition 'Warrior's Dream' was in 2004. Yeo's 'Highlander Overture' was published in the August 2007; the same year he entered National Institute of Education as a Music Education major. Without the preparation only possible in formal education, how did Wong and Yeo manage to compose repertoire considered worthy of dissemination in international publishing houses?

Since neither Wong nor Yeo were actually formally trained in the practice of composing for the Wind Ensemble, it is difficult for a study of their works to make meaningful connections with formal processes such as their composing methods or their ways of thinking. I will instead be relying on ideas formulated by Lucy Green based on her study on how musicians of popular culture acquire the ability to write their own material. Green identified a number of ways in which popular musicians learn their way through eventually writing their own composition in what she calls "informal learning". Green suggested thirteen ways of informal learning for popular musicians (Green, 2004, pp. 224 - 241):

1. Enculturation
2. Listening and copying
3. Playing with peers
4. Acquiring technique
5. Informal acquisition of knowledge of technicalities
6. Understanding practising

7. Coming to terms with “feel”
8. Encountering friendship and cooperation
9. Articulation of enjoyment
10. Expressions, implicit or otherwise, of self esteem
11. Appreciation and respect for “other music”
12. Notation
13. Enjoyment

Adapting all thirteen points by Green into the context of wind band musical practice would be problematic because of the differences in number of participants, instrumentation and the accessibility of instruments. What is regarded a standard wind band ensemble numbers about 45 to 60 musicians whereas a pop band (assuming standard instrumentation) will only require 5 musicians. Instrumentation is fixed in most wind band repertoire because of the use of music scores whereas instrumentation and orchestration in pop bands repertoires reveal more flexibility. Other than cover bands, musicians are free to include any instruments that give the best sound to enhance the music. Having these considerations in mind, only five points out of thirteen are found relevant. The five points are:

1. Enculturation
2. Playing, Listening and Copying
3. Playing with peers
4. Understand practicing
5. Enjoyment.

The notion of Wong and Yeo having acquired knowledge of composing informally and having produced a composition without considering the process of why audiences came to

accept their compositions is problematic. What made Wong's and Yeo's works attractive to their audiences? How do audiences determine what are good or bad compositions? The ambiguity in the process from writing a work to having it published had made the relationship between informally acquired knowledge and final product questionable. There are 3 points based on Lucy Green's idea of informal learning that I find relevant in Wong's and Yeo's learning such as the enculturation activities such as playing their instruments and listening and copying.

Learning Discursive Practice: Playing their instruments

Green asserted that *"In general, the younger the players were, the more value they explicitly placed upon producing original music... The reason for this arises precisely from the experimental nature of the musicians' early learning practices, oriented around the unconscious assimilation of musical conventions or enculturation."* (Green, 2002, pp. 33 - 34). Wong and Yeo are both in their twenties; they started as trumpeter of their school band. It was in school band where they were exposed to different kinds of wind ensemble repertoires and experience how different composers wrote each instrumental parts. There are possibilities that they listen to recordings to understand how each parts should be played. Vincent and Merrion (1996, pp. 38 - 42) confirmed this notion as they asserted, *"Today's music student typically first encounters music aurally, then learns to transcribe and translate sounds through notes, and finally translates the written pages back into sound."* This suggests the importance of listening and playing their instruments during enculturation process.

Learning Discursive Practice: Listening and Copying

Lucy Green defined 'Listening and Copying' as to copy a piece of recording by ear. Learning can occur in isolation, outside any networking or formal structures and without adult guidance (Green, 2004, pp. 224 - 241). Green separated the listening process into three entities; 'Purposive listening', 'Attentive listening' and 'Distracted listening'. According to Green 'Purposive listening' is to listen with particular aim, or purpose, of learning something in order to put it to use in some way after the listening experience is over. 'Attentive listening' involves listening to the same details as 'Purposive listening' but without specific learning agenda. 'Distracted listening' is a direct contrast to 'Purposive and Attentive listening' as it occurs on and off usually for enjoyment (Green, 2002, pp. 33 - 34). Although the three types of listening suggested by Green are defined individually, they are not mutually exclusive because all three types of listening may happen simultaneously at different levels and intensity. Certainly Wong and Yeo are engaged in all three types of listening during the enculturation process that is vital for their creative endeavour.

Listening enabled Yeo to acquire signature styles of his favorite composers such as James Swearingen and Ed Huckleby. He managed to acquire their style of structuring their compositions e.g. ABA (formal musical structure), instrumentation and the use of rhythms. All these elements are obvious in most of his composition. From the write up of his music in Barnhouse catalogue, it is interesting to note that his pieces are also considered valuable educational tools for young bands (Barnhouse, 2010).

Wong, like Yeo, listened to music for the wind ensemble but his listening preferences extended to the Euro-American art-music realm when he offered to study Music at 'O' level at age fifteen. The Cambridge O-level music syllabus provides opportunities to students who are musically talented and academically able to focus on the study of music. It consisted of three main components, listening, performing and composing. O-level music students need to

undergo training for 1) appropriate listening / aural skills to fulfill their musical studies coursework assessment, 2) performance skill of their principal instrument for their recital and program note assessment and 3) skills to compose music for their composition coursework. Students in the O-level music programme are given opportunities to attend concerts by various local musical organizations (Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board, 2011).

Different from their similar pathways, music listened to by Wong's favorite band composer, Jan Van Der Roost contrasts in style to music listened to by Yeo's favorite composers because works by Jan Van Der Roost are targeted for advanced bands while Yeo favours composers whose styles and compositions which target accessibility and immediacy in performance. This goes some way to explain the significant contrast in compositional style of Wong and Yeo.

Attending concerts is another way of acquisition that demands 'Attentive listening'. Wong remembers clearly how he was introduced to music by local composers when he attended the new music forum concert by Singapore Symphony Orchestra. The two composers who stood out for him was Phoon Yew Tien and John Sharpley. Yeo feels that his compositional styles and sound world are influenced by the band repertoires he listens to. It is likely that Yeo's band director selected the music for the band based on his/her musical preferences and the technical ability of the school band. What if Yeo's band directors choose to perform repertoires by composers such as Arnold Schoenberg or Igor Stravinsky for Yeo's school band, would Yeo be composing in his current style? Building onto Yeo's perspective of enculturation through musical exposure, Wong believes that listening to music of Hokkien and Mandarin popular culture and participation in the band musical practice in school had prepared him well for his current composition career. Once the compositional practices of

Wong and Yeo achieved individuality and autonomy, they could be said to have written 'Music for the band'.

Thresholds

At this stage, it is necessary to analyze the contradictions between Wong's and Yeo's ideology and soundscape of 'Music for the band'. The "Kaleidoscopic" enculturation processes have brought Wong and Yeo into their individual perspectives of composing music for wind band. Yeo's style of composing is rather conservative but educational. Elements such as ABA musical form, standard wind band instrumentation (Flutes, Clarinets, Saxophones, French horns, Trumpets, Trombones, Euphoniums, Tubas and Percussion) and the use of simple rhythms are obvious in most of his compositions. On the contrary, Wong's music are technically challenging for school bands. These contrasts between Wong and Yeo give rise to the question, how does one justify a label 'Music for the Band'? Does "Music for the band" comprise only wind band instruments in the instrumentation? Premiered at the 2005 World Association of Symphonic and Band Ensembles (WASBE) conference in Singapore was a work by local composer Zechariah Goh entitled "Sang Nila" with the instrumentation of this work including a full wind ensemble, 10 percussionist (including Javanese gamelan instrumentalists) and chorus (Goh, 2010). How would "Sang Nila" qualify as "Music for the Band"?

It is therefore necessary to look at "Music for the Band" at its most fundamental stages which, in the case of Wong's and Yeo's practices, gives rise to two stages:

Stage 1: Formal learning of rudimentary knowledge

Both Wong and Yeo joined their school band as their Core Curriculum Activity. Joining the school band helped Wong and Yeo in building their knowledge of musical rudiments taught in/formally by their band director and seniors in the band. All these learning processes they had gone through eventually prepared them for the ABRSM theory examination, which they took. The rudimentary knowledge of music they gained from joining the school band and learning the aspects of ABRSM theory examination syllabus had helped Wong and Yeo to improve their fluency in composing. The composers eventually went into separate paths. Wong took up the 'O' Level option for Music where rudimentary knowledge of music were formally taught in greater detail. This benefited Wong as it further improved his fluency in composing. Despite of all these factors of institutionalized music learning Wong and Yeo underwent, Green's suggestion of informal learning through self-discovery trial and error is still valid. Candidates taking grade five ABRSM theory examination need to undergo setting a text to a given melody. This task put candidates' fluency in composing to test. But the instrumentation given for the task (set text to a piano accompaniment) seem not relevant to composers like Wong and Yeo who need to consider instrumentation and orchestration for the entire wind ensemble.

Stage 2: Practising Composing

Practising in this case is different from Green's suggestion of practising 5 to 6 hours a day with the aim to perfect certain technical uncertainty (Green, 2002, pp 33 – 34). For Wong and Yeo, the notion of practising comes in when they are working on new works for publication. Basically, they would spend a few hours at their computer working on their new compositions; it is through these sessions when they decide what are suitable, try new elements and insert what their publishers requested into their music with the aid of composition software. The playback technology of the composition software enables Wong

and Yeo to listen to their composition almost immediately and to do the necessary alterations, thus practise occur even though they were not able to have access to a live wind band.

Wong's relationship with the publisher and client involved a negotiable process. The publisher gave Wong leeway to practise composing with whatever styles he want. He could try out new things that he adopted from recent listening. However, clients are free to suggest feedback (e.g. the need for alternative E^b clarinet parts) via the publisher to Wong. It is possible that Wong got to learn valuable lessons from his clients' feedback which motivated him to compose more effectively. Yeo believes sending his works for publishing not only enable him to practice composing but it is also a form of communication between him and his listeners. In contrast to Wong, Yeo's relationship with his publishers (Barnhouse) is rather different; the main stakeholder is the publisher who *caters* to the American wind band market. The publisher narrowed the compositional strategies of their composers by encouraging them to compose in their 'house styles'. Although there is no quota set by the publisher, Yeo felt the need to send in a composition at least once year to reaffirm his presence as a composer to keep in touch with his publishers and clients.

As undergraduate music students, how did Wong and Yeo manage to compose for their targeted clients? Renowned wind ensemble composer Michael Colgrass recalled his difficulties when asked to compose for an amateur wind ensemble. As a trained composer, Colgrass found it challenging because "*conservatories and universities composition programs simply don't ask their composition majors to write for children. Nor do they train composers in the art of writing for amateurs in general. Composers learn highly sophisticated techniques playable by virtuoso musicians and often perform for highly specialized audiences*" (Colgrass, 2010, pp. 4). I suggest that, contrary to Colgrass'

predicament, Wong's and Yeo's involvement in the wind band musical practice as amateur musicians and informal composers enabled them to understand the criteria of composing for amateur wind ensembles. According to his biography, Colgrass began his music career as a jazz drummer and had not been involved in the musical practice of the wind band ensemble.

Vincent and Merrion suggested "*We need an outline or structure for thinking about the ways music will and will not change in future decades. These changes will inevitably occur in the way individuals listen, select and process information, create, perform, teach, and learn music.*" (Vincent & Merrion, 1996, pp 38 – 42). During the composing process, Wong and Yeo needed to understand which musical ideas should be "filed and discarded". They need to be wary of sounds and compositional strategies that are outdated and up to date through listening, as Vincent and Merrion suggest, "*Band directors recognize the change in style of a particular composer and they will be aware of the flexibility of the composer, and will be informed that the composer is also moving along with time and exposure/experience.*" (Vincent & Merrion, 1996, pp. 38 – 42).

The journey towards completing a piece of music for the band isn't a result of sheer coincidence. It takes a great amount of time and effort sitting down in front of their computers doing "trial and error". Despite contradictions in their individual sound preference and harmony used in their music, there are some similarities, which are worth highlighting. First, the use of standard wind band instrumentation in their music, Wong and Yeo has yet to include instruments out the realm of the wind band ensemble such as gamelan in their published works. Second, most of their works comprises of attractive melodies, which according to Wong, connect his audiences to him whereas to Yeo, melodies enable his audiences to understand his music better. Third, both Wong and Yeo composed / arranged a spread of genre (ranging from pop music to classical transcriptions) for wind band

ensembles. Among their published works include a good mix of marches, overtures and tone poems. Last, Wong's and Yeo's works are works of excellence that possess all qualities to be qualified as repertoire for local and international competitions. Wong's "Overture to Vox Stellarum" was selected as the test piece for the Superior Division of the 9th Edition of the Competition International Bandistico of the Friuli-Venice Giulia (Italy) on 28-30 March 2010 (Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, 2010). Yeo's "Phoenix Overture" was commissioned by St. Stephen's School and St. Anthony's Primary School Brass Bands as their choice piece for the Singapore Youth Festival Central Judging of Brass Bands 2010 (Yeo, 2010). From the preceding points, not only do we see Wong's and Yeo's individual definition of "Music for Wind Ensemble" but also their common understanding of "Music for the Band". They seem to be bound more by similarities than differences probably due to the norms and rules governing the wind band musical practice.

Having understood Wong's and Yeo's definition of 'Music for Wind Ensemble', it becomes necessary to verify various forms of informally learnings by Wong and Yeo for "Music for the Band", I suggest three emerging points that are helpful in this process:

1) Informal learning with Peers

Wong began his creative endeavour when he was twelve while Yeo began when he was fifteen. More than the fundamental process of composing - to transcribe composer's musical ideas onto paper - is the necessity to have the work tested or sounded out before performing on stage. This is where peers are involved in the process of corroboration. Green suggested that peer directed learning which involves conscious sharing of knowledge and skills through processes such as giving constructive suggestions (Green, 2004, pp 224 - 241). Wong and Yeo had their band friends tried out their compositions, during the 'try-out' session; peers

were free to give feedback on the piece. The composers consolidated feedback from their peers and altered their pieces accordingly.

Both Wong and Yeo wrote pieces to be performed for and by their peers. These pieces were meant to be performed in the public platform of a school hall for various informal school occasions. These occasions were good testing ground for their music due to the slim chance of having their work performed on a formal platform. These informal school occasions allowed Wong and Yeo to use the school community as the reinforcement to recognize the general sound of a band without engaging in the critic of compositional details that could also lead to enculturation.

2) Technology and “Know How”

From the preceding paragraph, I have discussed how Wong and Yeo were enculturated into the wind band musical practice through listening purposively to repertoires by a few composers and eventually started to compose/arrange some simple wind music for their peers. Both Wong and Yeo were not born to family of musicians, how did they manage to compose without any guidance from an adult or a composition teacher? Does technology play a part in helping Wong and Yeo acquire techniques? According to anthropologist Marcel Mauss *“in order properly to speak about techniques, one has first of all to know something about them. Now there is a science that deals with techniques, called technology”* (Mauss, 1948, pp. 71). ‘Technology’ is defined by Lynn White, Jr as *“Broadly speaking, technology is the way people do things”* (White, 1940, pp. 141). To understand how technology help to create greater efficiency in techniques, one needs to understand that techniques are actually goal oriented processes which involves an action, better described as ‘know how’. In Wong and Yeo’s case, producing a composition worthy of dissemination through a publishing house

within a specified time would be considered 'know how'. For this 'know how' to achieve effectively, Wong and Yeo needed to select the most efficient way to achieve 'know how', or better known in White's definition as technology. Bearing in mind that Wong's and Yeo's very recent initiation into compositional strategies in formal education, both Wong and Yeo learnt various compositional techniques of their favorite composers through a great deal of listening. While listening requires technological aids such as a CD/DVD player, music sheets and a good pair of speakers, wind band ensemble enthusiasts have more recently been able to share their favourite wind band repertoire online with their friends by tagging such repertoire in facebook or share URL of youtube videos while chatting on MSN messenger software. These technological tools and media allow wind band students and fans all over the globe to share and discuss their technology (read know-how) in relation to the musical practice of the wind band ensemble. Both Wong and Yeo own a webpage under a platform called 'ReverbNation' where they upload their photographs and sample clips (ReverbNation, 2010). Composers and renowned musicians who use 'ReverbNation' include Kelly Tang (ReverbNation, 2010) and Singapore's only Cultural Medallion recipient for jazz, Jeremy Monteiro (ReverbNation, 2010).

3) Enjoyment

Wong and Yeo enjoy composing despite the challenges. Yeo keeps his passion for composing strong by churning out new works every year. Yeo feels this is helpful because it helps to keep band directors informed of his works, his compositional development, and of his continued presence in the world of wind band composing but more importantly Yeo's deeper desire to educate young band players through his compositions. Furthermore, his recent success in venturing into European market with Beriato music of Belgium motivated

him further to produce more works for more advanced bands. Similarly, Wong's publisher, Beriato music has given Yeo freedom to express his artistic ambition in his compositions.

Following the success of 'At the Break of Gondawana', two more works by Yeo have been accepted by Beriato to be published in 2011. What was surprising however, was Barnhouse's rejecting of one of Yeo's works 'Playday'; a march inspired by Japanese wind band marches. Unfortunately, it was rejected by Barnhouse because arrangements of marches by John Philip Sousa or similar styles were more sellable in the American market. Despite the long working relationship and effort in promoting Yeo's works, why would Barnhouse want to reject his works? Could it be that Yeo had not fully understood the price of writing to a house style? If so, should Yeo have challenged the status quo or remained subservient to a publishing house 'house style' to maintain a reasonably comfortable composing career?

For Wong, enjoyment doesn't come solely from his passion in composing. Tierolff music not only allows Wong to express freely in his compositions, support is given to Wong promptly whenever he needs their assistance. One instance Wong gave was the agreement to publish his commissioned work "Krakatoa" for Philharmonic Winds even before he began composing. In normal practice, publishers audit a new piece of composition before they determine if they want to get it published. In Wong's case, the publisher agreed to publish the music without even listening to it. Why would Tierolff risk committing to publish a work which wasn't even written? Tierolff's manager enjoyed Wong's compositions while Wong enjoyed Tierolff's support of him which motivated him to produce more compositions for publication without fear or favour.

Why have audiences come to accept Wong's and Yeo's music as "Music for the Band"? It would be risky to speak of "Music for the Band" either as unchallengeable or self-evident fact. How can audiences, band musicians and band directors speak of "Music for the Band" without ambiguity?

"Ear Candies"

In the realm of musical compositions, at one extreme end, there exist works that indulge in musical 'clichés' well-known and loved throughout the historical span of wind band repertoire: familiar sound effects and sound colors that rouse the sentiments of audiences, instrumentalists and band directors. Gershman identified such works as "ear candies" as he asserted, *"the flawed craftsmanship of these works are well hidden behind flashy, movie-inspired orchestration. Behind all the banging percussion and heroic horn rips, behind all the descriptive titles filled with Greek gods and mythical monster, behind all the slick marketing and packaging, what is left is the musical equivalent of a candy bar. All style, no substance. Ear Candy."* (Gershman, 2007, pp. 16 – 23). Such composers aim to cater to potential buyers of such 'ear candies' working on an industrialized platform similar to fast-food chains; they craft their composition according to 'house-style' of their publishers, with "quality control" given by the publishers, composers are assured that their compositions are the "right" ones for their audiences. At the other extreme end, there exist composers who are endlessly looking for new kind of sound for the wind band and avoid using compositional clichés in their music, thus their compositions are at the mercy of audience reception.

Composers like Wong and Yeo are neither of the extremes. Wong's music is moving towards sounds that are progressively complex and more difficult given his exposed to increasingly complex compositional styles and theories, but his aim of creating bond between his music and audiences using melodies does not hold him back from taking such risks because the

publishing house Tierolff seems not to interfere with the artistic quality of Wong's works. In Yeo's case, despite his obligation to compose in the 'house-style' of Barnhouse, he managed to strike a balance by composing works for advanced band published by Beriato music.

If Wong and Yeo are requisite examples of composers capable of producing works of either extreme, what are the bases of Gershman accusations of complicity between composers writing to publishing house tastes allegedly because this is 'what the public wants'? Gershman's concerns are undeniably real. Although some of the catered wind ensemble repertoire may be constructed with questionable craftsmanship, they serve as *informal* starting points towards appreciating and understanding music for wind ensembles. As a wind ensemble enthusiast myself, an introduction to an advanced work for wind ensemble may be more intimidating than inviting for me to want to listen to more wind ensemble repertoire. From the interviews, Wong and Yeo started off by playing, listening, copying simple band works by James Swearingen, Ed Hucceby. Without experiencing works that are easily understood, how could they proceed on to listening to works of higher complexity such as *Spartacus* by Jan Van der Roost? Without the help of these "ear candies", will music for the wind ensemble be as receptive by audiences and musicians? I suggest these "ear candies" have their place in wind ensemble repertoire through their contribution as "appetizers" of the wind band musical practice. However, it would be necessary to strive a balance between "candies" and "substance" because there must be a good mix of music to keep band musicians motivated. Eventually, it really boils down to the audiences, musicians and band directors to their individual definition of "Ear Candies" and "substances".

A musical composition or any form of art work must be there as subjects to govern a person's thoughts and emotions and it also enlighten how people receive the material products of composing. With an intimate insider's knowledge of wind band repertoire, Wong and Yeo

were enabled to compose in a "sonically acceptable" way to the audiences of the wind ensemble musical practice rather than something out of the world or away from clichéd soundscapes for wind ensemble. The frequent listening and playing music for the wind ensemble enabled Wong and Yeo and their audiences to know what are acceptable. Wong and Yeo could be said to be "tracing" acceptability in their compositions. Yeo and Wong may have their differences but insofar as the Wind Ensemble is concerned, neither have suggested challenging the status quo.

Conclusion

Wong and Yeo are like many others active participants of the local wind ensemble musical practice. Wong and Yeo, like many others, underwent the same enculturation process; they learnt to play their wind instruments as beginners, then, proceeded to play and perform in the wind band ensembles of their primary schools, then secondary schools and junior colleges. Many of these participants embraced an enculturation cycle of listening, copying and playing. Wong and Yeo, on the other hand, outshone their peers, or at least were determined or motivated to, as they took this process a step further by composing music for the wind ensemble. The norm of undergoing formal composition education before being recognized as a composer did not apply to Wong and Yeo. In fact, formal education in composition began only after their works were published by international wind ensemble publishing houses. This realization raises questions on the place of formal education in composition; does it make formal education in composing for the wind ensemble a redundant endeavor? Accounts by Michael Colgrass indicate a rather embarrassing encounter with a school wind ensemble in getting them to learn and play wind ensemble repertoire. Does Michael Colgrass' accounts, as a well-minted graduate in music composition, affirm ability or even guarantee the capacity to compose works for the wind ensemble? And if so, who are their models? Michael

Colgrass' example acts as a 'reality check' for university graduates in music composition that writing for *a wind ensemble*, amateur or advanced, is not a simple task.

On the other hand, are we able to assert that informal learning in and through the wind ensemble is the most viable pathway without the undertaking of a formal music education? Achievements by Wong and Yeo are neither luck nor sheer coincidence; my interviews with them indicate that it took several years of perseverance and the endless effort of enculturation to reach their current level of compositional skill. Of a community of several thousand, it seems only Wong and Yeo have emerged at the present and of the two, only Yeo may have been considered a bona fide wind bandsman. Judging from their creative endeavor as a whole, it seemed that majority of their musical knowing through composing for the wind ensemble came from informal learning. Formal learning in music such as taking ABRSM music examination and opting music as an 'O' level subject only helped with equipping them with rudimentary knowledge of music to increase their fluency in composing in a format suitable for publication and performance. Undertaking undergraduate studies in composition deepened their rudimentary knowledge of music further. I want to suggest that it is precisely because of Wong's and Yeo's different musical experiences and musical diets in their undergraduate programme that have enabled them to write differently and more effectively than if they had simply spent their lives writing for the wind ensemble without considering furthering their musical studies at undergraduate level. Attending formal education in composition may be compared to attending a cooking course where students are taught the recipes, techniques and conventional cooking instructions for writing for a wind ensemble. The effectiveness of this programme eventually depends on the skills and abilities of each student to write *for* and *to* a wind ensemble. Knowledge acquired from or through formal

learning also depends on how learners would apply such knowledge effectively and creatively to achieve most effective results in the field of writing for wind music ensembles.

I am not suggesting that informal and formal learning are exclusive; they are inter-related. Informal learning enables learners to learn based on the real experiences while formal learning equip learners with the necessary theories and statements in the field. Proficiency would depend then on striving for a balance between the two learning modes to mediate formative knowledge and live situations.

Considering that the rudimentary knowledge of music taught during formal music education emphasises teaching and learning of harmony and counterpoint of the 18th century excludes the possibility of learning composition styles of earlier centuries. Why focus on 18th century practices? If musical practices were seen across time to suit each society in each period in time (Merriam, 1964: pp. 162), should formal curricula be permitted to universalize the practice of one period? Should schools and universities confront or succumb to such normative processes in formal education? What is the impact of succumbing to such norms for future generations of composers?

Informal learning is a “reality check” for composers as it links reality to their compositional techniques. Colgrass realized the need to experience the reality to write more appropriately for amateur ensemble, he mentioned that “*And learn I did. The knowledge I had gained about how children approach playing instruments made it possible for me to write a piece that met my standards as a professional and theirs as beginners.*” (Colgrass, 2010, pp. 4). Informal and formal learning must work *together* for holistic learning to occur. Informal learning helps student to build their prior knowledge through experiences and prepare them for the formal

training in music. For example, students apply their enculturated skills through their compositions. On the other hand, university curricula such as musicology helps students link knowledge they enculturated in academic studies thus giving them a better understanding of their chosen musical arts.

Informal learning in the wind ensemble has provided Wong and Yeo with merit to transcend beyond the boundary of the musical practice. Although they have yet to obtain their first tertiary qualification in music, they have already been “certified” as composers by their publishers. This invisible “certification” by the publishers seems more meaningful to these composers than a graduate certificate because a compositional certificate does not guarantee composition graduates with commissions or publication. Hoping to close the gap between reality and rudimental knowledge, Colgrass suggested that *“universities should require each student composer to write at least one piece for a young chorus, orchestra or band as part of his/her creative musical education. But first, student composers should carefully research the needs and requirements involved in writing a good piece for that level, they should make visit to the school and meet the ensemble they want to write for. They can bring a sketch for try out”* (Colgrass, 2010, pp. 4).

There is something similar in both Wong and Yeo that contributes towards their current status as successful composers. Through the compositions of Wong and Yeo, we are able to notice their views of the world. Not only do these implicit philosophies in their works that makes them special out of the ordinary. It also surface their enthusiasms to experiment with new sounds and possibilities and their open mindedness to criticism. All these factors that had served them well in the past, are seen to continue into present and possibly the future.

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