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CHAPTER 16

The Development of the General Music Programme in Primary and Secondary Schools

Eric Peter Stead & Lum Chee Hoo

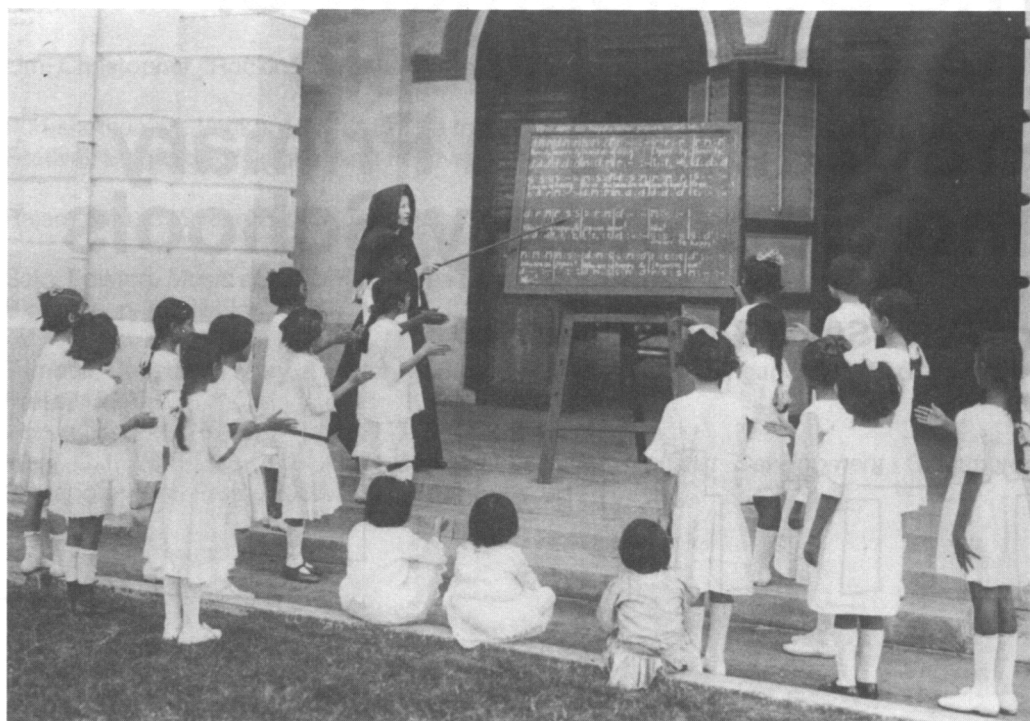


Singapore is a multi-racial society comprising, at the last census in 2000, 76.8 percent Chinese, 13.9 percent Malay, 7.9 percent Indians and 1.4 percent others including the Eurasian population. This resident population consists of about 3.3 million people, but there are about another two million foreign workers in Singapore from all over the world. Singapore became an independent sovereign state in 1965, having been a British crown colony since 1867, so the influences that make up the cultural tapestry of this country are rich and varied. Unsurprisingly, given the diversity of the population and the youth of the country, one of the overriding aims of the education system in general has been to create a sense of national identity, and music has been seen as a very important contributor to this end.

The Colonial Legacy and the Search for an Independent National Identity

The underlying model of the education system was inherited from the British colonial administration and still retains many important links with the United Kingdom (Cambridge exams, emphasis on British English, etc) but, as with many other aspects of Singaporean society, it has shifted from the original model as the society has matured and as other influences have been absorbed. Nevertheless, the inclusion of music as a timetabled classroom activity is one aspect of this education system that has been retained.

The British music examining boards (e.g. ABRSM, Trinity, London, Guildhall) have also played an important role in the musical education of many Singaporeans. The Associate



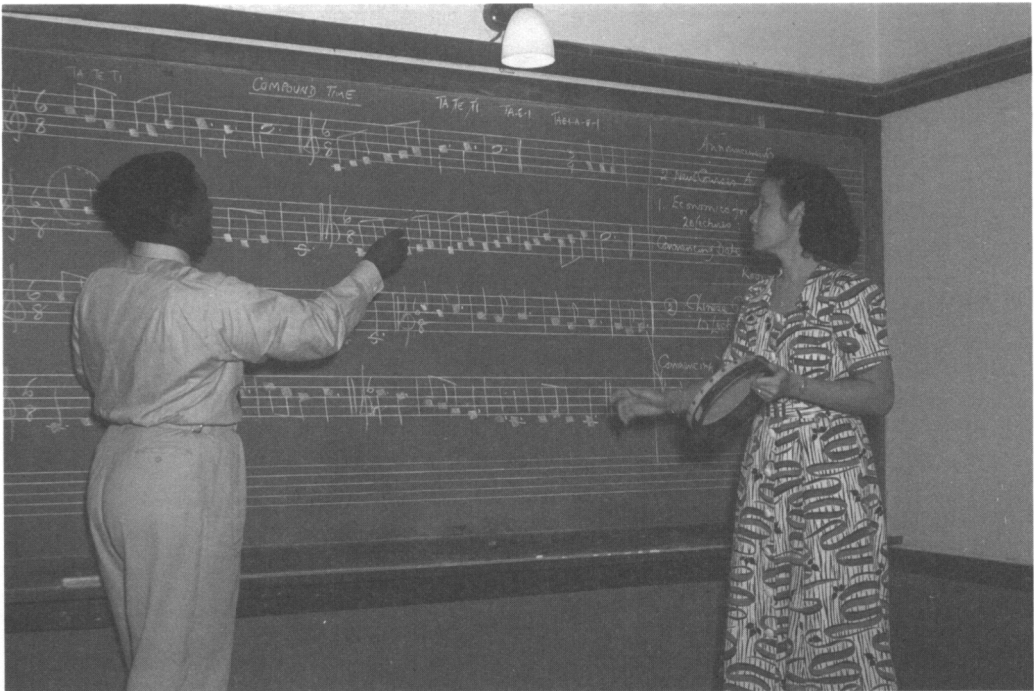
A music class in session at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in 1924. Sisters of the Infant Jesus collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) first introduced their graded music exams into Singapore in 1948 and by 2000 the ABRSM were conducting over 40,000 practical and theory of music exams each year – mostly in piano, violin and theory.

Prior to independence, education had developed separately in the major languages, with English language education being largely provided by missionary organisations such as the Roman Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Echoes of this system remain to this day in the names and ethos of many mission schools. Although mission schools may use music as a means of evangelising through the singing of hymns and religious songs, music education in secular establishments was not given priority before independence (Chong 1995).

By 1950, a general music curriculum had been established based on a British model of teaching music through singing and influenced by the ABRSM. In 1959, the People's Action Party (PAP) sought the building of a unified national system of education that would emphasise the technological and industrial training necessary to build and define a fledgling nation. English was selected as the medium of instruction and emphasis was placed on mathematics, science and technology.

By 1972, the education system had evolved into a system that aimed to develop to the fullest extent the potential of each individual, as well as to ensure the collective welfare of the wider society (MOE 1972). Particular attention was given to the teaching of civics with the intention of inculcating national pride, social consciousness and civic mindedness. Music and singing was seen to have a key role in this respect. The primary school syllabus introduced in 1970 included one hour of music per week for pupils in primary 1–4 and 35 minutes of music for pupils in primary 5 and 6. Although there have been many changes over the intervening years, and schools now have more autonomy in the allocation of time

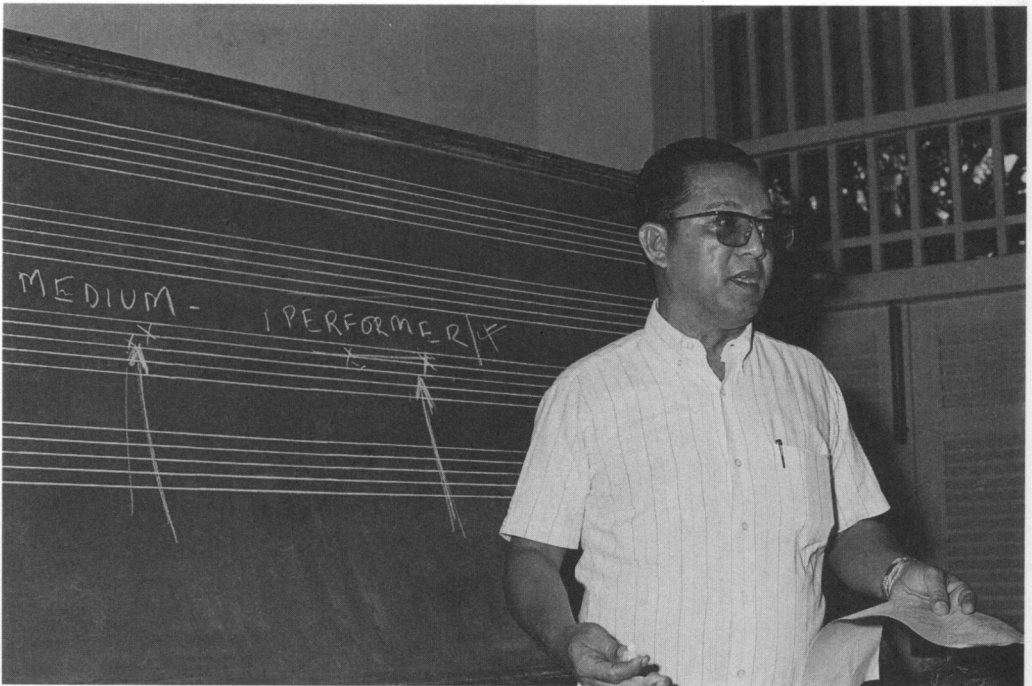


Music lessons during adult education classes in 1952. The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

to subject areas, this model still forms the basis of music provision in the General Music Programme (GMP) in primary schools. In secondary schools, the allocation of 35 minutes per week was continued and the common curriculum introduced in 1969 includes 'provision made for one period of music per week for "Musical appreciation/Singing" in secondary 1-4'. Pupils were divided into 'academic' and 'technical' streams and, although the GMP was intended to be available to all pupils whether 'academic' or 'technical', music was also offered as an elective examination subject for the 'academic' streams. By 1971, 98 secondary schools were including formal music lessons as part of the curriculum.

Not all education systems around the world include a GMP as part of their general curriculum (although almost all would include some form of music as a co- or extra-curricular activity) and it is interesting to consider why Singapore, as a newly emerging nation seeking to emphasise technical and industrial training in its education system, would include a 'soft' subject such as music in its mandatory curriculum. Part of the answer must lie in the British colonial inheritance of teaching Western music through singing, and the influence of the ABRSM in their programme of teaching and assessing Western musical literacy through their music examination system (Peters 1979). Their influence was, and remains, very powerful in the Singapore perception of what constitutes a 'musical education'.

Additionally, within the British education system, music had been included in the curriculum since the advent of mass education in the late 19th century, initially as a means of inculcating strong moral values in pupils through the singing of hymns and other 'worthy' songs. It is clear that in this, as in other aspects of education, when the English language was adopted as the medium of instruction in Singapore education, many practical aspects of British education, such as curriculum structure and standard lesson length, were also adopted. Another probable reason for the inclusion of music into



Charles Lazaroo, the Ministry of Education's specialist educator on music, giving a talk at the University of Singapore in 1971. The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.



A student angklung orchestra playing at the Radio Singapore's variety show, "Suara Ria Singapura", at the Victoria Memorial Hall in 1960. The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

the curriculum is the perceived value of the subject in inculcating a sense of identity, and as a means of gaining understanding and insight into various cultures. Music should be regarded as:

'A strong binding force among children of the various communities so that they can grow up respecting each other's cultural traits.' (MOE 1967: 12)

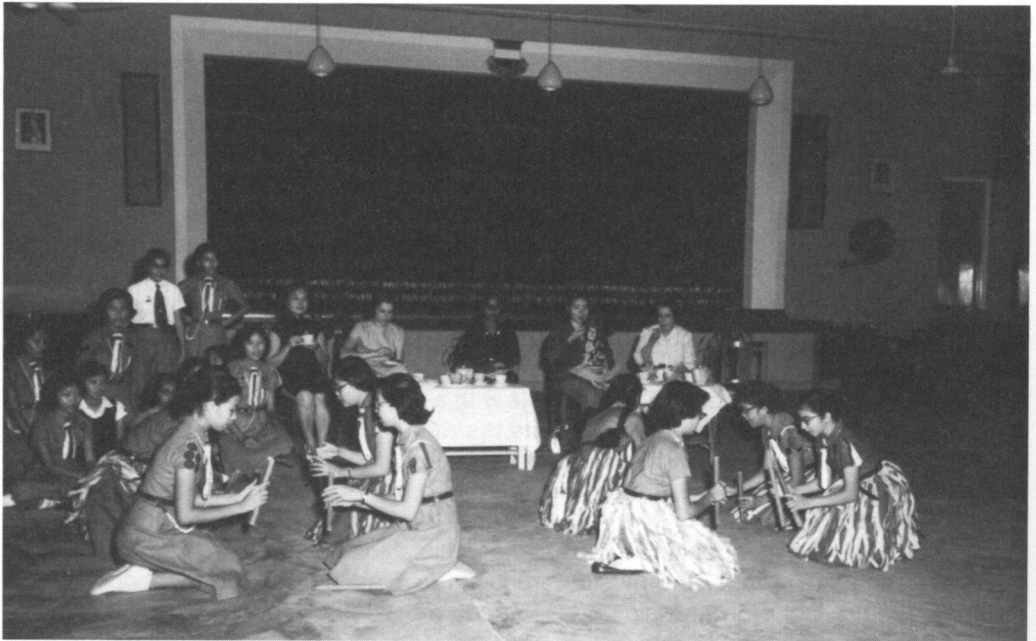
Music was included from the 19th century in the standard British education curriculum and, as in Singapore, the original rationale for the inclusion of music was moral rather than specifically musical. In Britain, the role of music was to raise the moral tone of pupils through singing hymns and other uplifting songs. In Singapore, with an ethnically and culturally diverse community speaking four different languages, it was perceived as vital that all efforts should be made to instill pupils with a sense of Singaporean identity and an understanding of the cultures that constitute the Singapore community. As it was largely the British model of education that formed the model for English language education in Singapore, it was only natural that music should be considered as an important part of that curriculum.

Whilst the pre-independence English-medium education had included traditional British folk and community songs, the music curriculum in Singapore after independence laid emphasis on the inclusion of Malay, Chinese and Indian (Tamil) songs in addition to the standard British repertoire. Some traditional British songs were altered to suit the local context. 'Hot cross buns' was translated into Hokkien as 'Char Kway Teow' and 'Have you seen the muffin man?' redefined as 'Have you seen the satay man?' Songs were

either translated or customised to local understanding. Community songs from the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities were, and still are, prescribed as mandatory in the school music curriculum. Learning the National Anthem, composed in 1958 by Zubir Said, was also an integral part of the school music curriculum. Later developments in the use of music to enhance social cohesion include the commissioning of national songs, such as 'Count on me Singapore', 'Singapura' and 'Home', and the development of the Sing Singapore competition, which encouraged schools and other organisations to create a choir or group of singers to sing National Songs in an annual competitive music festival.

In the early days of independence, a shortage of suitably trained and qualified music teachers was a problem which threatened to stand in the way of further developments in music education. Policies were put in place to address the problem of the shortfall of trained and qualified music teachers, although, as we shall see, the problem of insufficient and inadequately trained music teachers to deliver the best intentions of the Ministry of Education (MOE) would continue to inhibit developments in music education to the end of the century. However, initiatives to train music teachers began in the 1960s: teachers were trained at the teacher training college, and, at the beginning of the second year of the three year course, could opt to study music as one of three subjects. The syllabus for trainee music teachers at the Teacher Training College in the 1960s was a traditional one. For the first term they followed a general course in music. Tonic sol-fa was studied, and was illustrated by a selected musical instrument, such as the recorder. Students learned to sing folk music, in particular Malay songs, and listened to records.

From the second term onwards, after passing a selection test, trainees could specialise in the teaching of music. They had to learn the piano and be able to read music and play accompaniments. They learned the rudiments of harmony up to the dominant seventh. In addition, they were trained in music theory, including the ability to transpose. At the same



Puan Noor Aishah being treated to a musical performance by the Girl Guides of Raffles Girls' School in 1960. Yusof Ishak Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.



Music class at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus. The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

time, they followed a course in the history of music. Their pedagogic training included a study of singing techniques and methods of teaching tonic sol-fa. This professional training continues until the end of the third year.

At the end of this course, the teachers could teach in a primary school. They taught in several schools and remained in each for one academic year. Some students could win scholarships that allowed them to continue their studies in Britain, Australia or the United States. Upon return, these teachers generally taught in secondary schools and set up children's choirs and orchestras (Mialaret 1970: 61–62).

After the bilingual policy was adopted in 1966, second language teachers were encouraged to teach music, although many of them were untrained and under-qualified. Despite these initiatives, there still remained a considerable shortfall in the number of teachers properly equipped to teach music in both primary and secondary schools.

The Primary Music Curriculum

An account of school music education in Singapore before the 1970s noted that 'the syllabus is similar to those taught in Europe ... the basis of instruction is singing: in the early years of primary education, mimed songs are taught. Some attempt [sic] to learn Malay songs are made, but English songs are the most frequently taught' (Mialaret 1970: 61). Mialaret further remarked that 'the desired cultural co-existence is not, as yet, reflected in the teaching of music, as Western music, in particular English music, predominates' (1970: 61).

Music was made a compulsory non-examination subject within the primary and secondary curriculum in the Singapore education system from 1968 (Yeo 1990). In his

general overview of music education in Singapore, Leong (1984: 48) noted efforts since 1981 by the Ministry of Education to take 'measures to upgrade the standard of teaching general music' with the creation of new music syllabi, the inclusion of music within extra-curricular activities, the setting up of music elective programmes along with the introduction of concerts and competitions through the Singapore Youth Festival, national music competitions and music camps.

Chong's (1991) tracing of the Singapore primary music education programmes from 1959 to 1990 noted how general music education during this period was geared primarily towards singing rather than instrumental playing or instrumental performance. While there were attempts to represent the four local language streams (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English) in terms of singing repertoire because of the cultural and historical significance of each, music education was subsumed into the Euro-American art music tradition and practice with specific focus on repertoire from the 18th and 19th centuries. Chong's study highlights the lack of trained primary music teachers to implement and expedite lessons based on specified music



Students from Thomson Shin Min Public School perform during their school's sports day in 1979. Shin Min Public School collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.



Students from Raffles Girls' Primary School practising their violin recital in 1975. The primary four pupils are part of a 30-strong group called Fiddlers on the Loose, comprising students from various schools. The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

syllabi, pointing to more intensive music teacher education to bridge the gap between theory, practice and pedagogy in the teaching and learning of school-going students in a general music programme.

A *Straits Times* article from 1980 indicated an interest in Orff methodology, with 60 teachers being sent by the government to the Philippines to study basic Orff-Schulwerk, and Leong Yoon Pin, then lecturer in the music department of the Institute of Education, Singapore, presenting the 'ideas of Carl Orff on music education and their application in the Singapore context' (Tan 1980). By 1982, however, a primary school GPM developed by music curriculum specialists within the Ministry of Education, titled 'The Active Approach to Music Making' (AAMM), described as 'Kodaly-based' (probably deduced from the consistent use of movable-doh solfège, Curwen hand-signs, rhythmic syllables, a child-developmental approach and the use of folk materials alongside 'good-quality' albeit Euro-American music was implemented in all Singapore primary schools with an aim to 'provide music literacy to students' (Yeo 1990: 4). The programme was devised in consultation with Deanna Hoermann from Australia – an expert in, and passionate advocate of, the Kodaly method. While the approach was praised for being sequential and systematic in raising levels of music skills, its 'tendency to over-emphasise the psychomotor and cognitive domains in music education ... have to a certain extent stifled the creativity of music teachers and students alike' (Yeo 1990: 4).

Tan (1997) in his investigation into the AAMM, focused on teacher perceptions and pupil achievement using the programme and found that there was general acceptance and favourable responses about the AAMM programme by the teachers. In terms of developing skills in pitch and rhythm, there were no comparable differences between using the AAMM programme and traditional approaches. This is not surprising, since what was over-emphasised were the performative (read re-creative) tasks rather than the creative tasks.



The Bukit Panjang Government School's musical band in 1952. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.



Students from Peicai Secondary School during their music lesson in 1987. MITA collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

Interestingly, the stated objectives of the AAMM were pupil oriented, emphasising in every lesson that the child learns through active participation and that 'learning through enjoyment should be uppermost in the teacher's mind during a lesson' (MOE 1987). By 1992, these objectives were concretely spelt out in the primary music syllabus, which aimed at 'developing pupils' musical skills, music literacy, understanding and creativity through direct experience in singing, moving, reading and notating, instrumental playing, listening, improvising and composing' (MOE 1992). The syllabus was intended also to provide pupils with the basic knowledge of Singapore's rich and diverse cultural heritage as a means to nurture pupils' interest, attitude and sensitivity towards an appreciation and understanding of local ethnic music.

The syllabus is organised into three basic areas: performing, listening and creating. The central emphasis on performing includes singing as well as opportunities for pupils to use a wide variety of percussion and melodic instruments. Listening is targeted at developing pupils' aural imagination, so that they can hear in their minds the sounds they will be using in performing and creating activities. This is achieved through listening materials to observe simple structures in music from rhythmic and melodic patterns and phrases. Pupils also learn to follow music notations leading to music appreciation. The 'creating' component is specifically spelt out as, 'pupils need to have the opportunity to create and compose. They sing, play, listen, and learn to organise and notate the sounds they hear. From improvising simple answers to questions, both rhythmic and melodic, they will progress to creating their own little phrases and melody' (MOE 1992). Supplementary teaching aids, like the AAMM modules and music textbooks, such as 'My Music Book' developed by the Curriculum Planning & Development Division in 1998, aim to guide teachers systematically in achieving the objectives set out in the music syllabus.



Anglo-Chinese School students proudly presenting their home-made instruments in 1984. The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

In 1986, an evaluation took place. In an attempt to bring objectivity to the evaluation, a standardised test was employed. The instrument used was the 'Bentley Measures of Musical Abilities'. Although this is a rigorous and highly discriminating measure, it tests only a limited range of perceptual skills, it tests atomistically, and the tests are devoid of any genuine musical context. It would certainly test the rather mechanical auditory discrimination skills that some aspects of the AAMM address, and it is no surprise to find pupils who had followed the AAMM gaining superior scores on the Bentley test than pupils who had not. However, the Bentley tests examine only what is easily measurable, not what is musical or, arguably, important in the primary school music classroom, and they certainly do not address issues of creativity, performing ability, attitude to music, understanding of the structure of music, or any aspect of non-Western styles. So, whilst the Bentley tests could be used to show an improvement in a limited range of perceptual skills associated with auditory discrimination and psycho-motor skills, they address very few of the stated aims of the AAMM.

The Secondary School Curriculum

Throughout the 1960s, the role and place of music in children's education was becoming better understood and more important in the educational system. A 'Report on the Development of Music in the University of Singapore' was commissioned in 1971 and made the following recommendations:

'At all educational levels music should be regarded as an important ingredient in general education as well as a pursuit for those with special musical aptitude

and inclination. The musical life of any community will always tend to reflect the status given music by its educational authorities who must recognise that the function of music teaching is to build on the spontaneous response of all young children to music and to provide for its continuous development as a means of expression and source of enjoyment throughout life.' (Callaway & Kasilag 1971: 7)

By 1969, music had been formally included in the curriculum of secondary schools and by the 1970s music was increasingly recognised for its intrinsic value, as well as a means of promoting social cohesion. The Ministry of Education acknowledged the importance of music in 'elevating aesthetic sentiments, cultivating creative ability and instilling social discipline in the development of a well-rounded individual' (MOE 1979). Secondary schools were required to provide facilities for the teaching of music both within the curriculum (as an extension to the GMP being delivered in primary schools) and as an extra-curricular activity. An outline of the GMP for secondary schools was sent to all schools on 29 December 1969. The programme was divided into two stages. Stage 1 was for pupils of Secondary 1 and 2 and Stage 2 for pupils of Secondary 3 and 4.

The aim of Stage 1 was to provide opportunities for pupils to learn the basics of musical notation and rudiments of music through active participation in class singing or learning to play a simple musical instrument. The aim of Stage 2 was to arouse and develop an interest in music appreciation. The courses of study included a general outline of the history of Western music, a study of the instruments of the orchestra, both Western and Eastern, and form (structure) in music. At a review of the syllabus conducted in 1979, it was found that 94 out of 99 schools surveyed were implementing Stage 1 of the music curriculum. Most chose singing as the means of participation in music activities, but also supplemented their activities with some instrumental teaching and music appreciation. Stage 2 of the GMP was found to be too ambitious for the Secondary 3 and 4 pupils and the programme was either modified or not delivered.

The 1969 general music syllabus helped many secondary schools to implement a course of music study for 'non-specialist' pupils. However, a shortage of suitably qualified and trained music teachers continued to be an obstacle to a comprehensive implementation. The review of 1979 also reflects teachers' concerns at the difficulties in coping with a wide range of musical abilities in one class. The review also pointed to the severe lack of music teaching materials at this time.

The syllabus was revised in the 1970s and it is clear that the initial values of promoting a sense of identity through music education were still strongly represented and were reflected in a return to a singing-based programme including community songs. Music is described as a means to 'promote group consciousness and patriotic feelings through participation in musical activities' (Singapore 1977). The objectives of the revised syllabus were 'to develop further an interest in music through singing and listening', 'to build a repertoire of songs for community singing for leisure and general appreciation' and 'to cultivate a better understanding and appreciation of music in our multi-cultural society' (Singapore 1980). A lack of music teachers and poor resourcing for music lessons continued to prevent the wholesale implementation of this programme and it was recognised that most schools would not extend the GMP provision into Secondary 3 and 4. Additionally, the 1979 syllabus reverted to the more realistic aim of placing emphasis on singing rather than musical literacy and instrumental playing, which were part of the 1969 syllabus.

By the 1980s, the general aims of the education system had shifted from the perceived need simply to emphasise the technological and industrial training necessary to build and define the nation to more qualitative aims, including the need 'to develop a creative,

thinking and innovative Singapore society through a broad-based education aimed at the development of the whole person' (Chong 1995: 101). Music in secondary schools also had to take into account the implementation, from 1982, of the Kodaly-based Active Approach to Music Making (AAMM) syllabus in primary schools. In light of the innovations of the AAMM syllabus, a new music syllabus for secondary schools was devised in 1993 (MOE 1993).

As before, the syllabus was structured in two stages and was intended to take into account the skills and knowledge primary school pupils would have gained from their music lessons under AAMM. The objectives were: (i) to develop in pupils a perceptive, sensitive appreciation of music; (ii) to develop the ability to express ideas and feelings through the medium of sound; (iii) to develop practical skills in music-making – both singing as well as playing musical instruments; (iv) to develop the desire to participate in music making for self-expression, satisfaction and enjoyment; (v) to develop social skills and discipline through making music together; and (vi) to develop an awareness of the variety of traditions in different cultures and countries (MOE 1993: 9). To meet these objectives, five activities were recommended in the revised syllabus. They were singing, listening, instrumental playing, music reading and writing, creative music-making and a 'music project'.

It can be seen from the objectives and activities that this revised syllabus was much more ambitious than its predecessors. The role of singing was much reduced and there was an attempt to place a balanced emphasis on performing, listening and creative music-making, which was in line with curriculum thinking in music education internationally (Swanwick, 1979). Additionally, a broader perspective was adopted in understanding music beyond that of the indigenous cultures of Singapore. Music from Eastern and Western traditions was included, both as songs to sing and, for the upper secondary levels, music projects that involved selected folk music from around the world.

By the end of the 20th century, the value of including music study as part of a secondary school pupil's development had become established and music was offered in most secondary schools in Secondary 1 and Secondary 2. The syllabus had also evolved to include world music in education and creative work. Initiatives to include IT in schools were also under way, and brought about a sea change in the style of education in all subjects, including music, in the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century. Nevertheless, there remained a shortage of teachers to staff music lessons, and initiatives to staff each secondary school with adequately trained and qualified teachers would have to wait until the next decade.

The Music Elective Programme (MEP) in Secondary Schools

With the increasing realisation of the value of music in education, the emergence of pupils who wished to pursue their studies in music to a high level, and with a view to the longer term of recruiting highly-trained and skilled musicians as performers, teachers or future academics, the MOE expanded music education in the early 1980s with the introduction of the Music Elective Programme (MEP). The MEP was initially introduced in three secondary schools: Tanjong Katong Girls' School, Methodist Girls' School and the Anglo-Chinese School. These schools offered a dedicated four-year course in music from Secondary 1, leading to a GCE 'O' level at the end of Secondary 4. The schools were equipped with the facilities to teach music, including instruments and sound reproduction equipment.

Potential elective students were selected on the basis of their musical aptitude and academic achievement. Students had to sit for two musical aptitude tests. Later, a prerequisite of the ABRSM grade 3 practical examinations was implemented. The MEP

course was allocated three teaching periods per week and MEP students were exempted from the GMP music programme. Each MEP school was staffed with two music graduates who would develop pupils' musical skills as well as their understanding and appreciation of music (Chong 1995). It was expected that a proportion of the MEP students would progress to 'A' level music and some would choose to pursue music in higher education at prestigious establishments abroad. Scholarships were made available for the most talented. By 1997, as numbers increased and the value of music education was increasingly recognised, the MEP had been extended to St. Nicholas Secondary School and Raffles Girls' School.

From its inception in 1980 until the end of the century, the MEP followed a traditional syllabus, comprising: (i) unprepared and prepared analysis of set works chosen from the Western classical tradition; (ii) aural tests; (iii) harmony; (iv) general musical knowledge; and (v) a practical test. MEP students also sat for a 'higher music' paper for which they had to answer short questions based on four extracts of music. The exam aimed to test students' aural perception abilities as well as their application of musical skills. The 'O' level course and the 'higher music' paper during the 1980s and 1990s was based on the Western classical tradition and was designed to prepare pupils who wished to continue their music studies at a higher level for further study in Western music at 'A' level, and then at Western (i.e. British, Australian or North American) universities.

Conclusion

In summary, the development of music education via the GMP in primary and secondary schools from independence to 2000 saw a shift in emphasis from a perceived use of music simply as a means of enhancing national identity and creating social cohesion to one where music is additionally recognised for its intrinsic worth, and as a subject which plays an important role in the education of all young people. Although the music of the indigenous cultures of Singapore (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Western) have constituted an important part in the music syllabus throughout this period, we can notice a shift towards a more global view of music, with less focus on the traditional canon of Western classical music and more focus on 'world music in education' and the music of popular culture. The advent of keyboards, computers and information technology during this period in educational history has also had a profound effect on music lessons, both in terms of what is taught and how it is taught, and Singapore has embraced these innovations enthusiastically.

The encouragement of a more creative approach to teaching and learning is also reflected in the development of music syllabi through this period, with 'creating music' playing an increasingly important role. We can also ascertain the important influence of the 'Kodaly-based' programme of the AAMM syllabus, which was introduced in the 1980s in primary schools and which continued to be a major influence on classroom practice to the end of the century and beyond. The major influences that have persisted from this initiative are an emphasis on singing, sight-singing and note reading with the aid of sol-fa and hand signs and recorder playing. The shortage of suitably qualified and trained teachers was a problem throughout this period.

Several major initiatives in the development of music education have taken place since 2000, including increasing emphasis on world musics in education, further developments in the use of IT, the introduction of an 'N' level syllabus for Secondary 3 and 4 NT (Normal Technical) pupils, with an emphasis on popular music and music technology and a shift in secondary music education from a traditional course based on theory and history to a more contemporary approach emphasising the role of music in society. With more autonomy, many more secondary schools are now offering music as an 'O' level and/or an 'N' level subject, and the number of candidates for 'O' level and 'N' level music continues to rise.

Teachers are also encouraged to actively participate in educational research as a body of local music education scholarship is slowly being developed. Music has an important role to play in the development of an education system appropriate for the needs of the 21st century, both in terms of training pupils who seek to make music as a career, and also for those who simply wish to gain the lifelong, life-enhancing benefits of involvement in musical activities.

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