

SUSTAINABILITY OF MALAY TRADITIONAL MUSIC VIA A GRADED MUSIC EXAMINATION SYSTEM : THE MALAY GAMELAN

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Abstract

As evidenced by current practices, the traditional musics of Malaysia appear to be sidelined in favour of music which is more accessible and readily available to the younger generation. The lack of exposure to traditional music also breeds unfamiliarity of this music and hence is not appreciated or understood by most Malaysians. As music is an integral part of human culture, it is important for this genre of music to be preserved for the future generation.

As compared to the availability of examination systems for western music, there is no mechanism for assessing musical attainment for the local music traditions in Malaysia. A structured system for assessing and awarding certificates based on levels of achievement in the local music traditions is needed which will provide a platform for musicians involved in the local music traditions to benchmark their achievement and obtain the necessary qualifications which can assist them in furthering their studies or gain employment. This paper will discuss how establishing a graded music examination system can help in the sustainability efforts of Malay traditional music in general and the Malay gamelan in particular.

Due to the nature of this study, both field work and desk work were used. Research methods used included observation of performances, being a participant-observer during practices, interview sessions and focus groups with various practitioners from Malaysia and Indonesia and audio/visual documentation.

Introduction

Contemporary Malaysia, shaped by its geographical conditions and its rich history of contact with the outside world, is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. Statistics as of 2006 show the total population of Malaysia to be around 26 million (Government of Malaysia 2006), with Malays making up about half the population. About one fourth of the Malaysian population is Chinese, while Indians make up around 8 percent. The remaining population is made up of an array of indigenous ethnic groups and people of European and Middle Eastern descent. Among the largest indigenous tribes are the *Iban* and *Bidayuh* in Sarawak and the *Kadazan* and *Melanauin* Sabah. The indigenous people in Peninsular Malaysia, called *Orang Asli* or native people, are comprised of several ethnic groups including the *Senoi*, *Mahmeri* and *Jakun*, to name a few. The indigenous people, mostly still live in the thick forests of both the Malay Peninsular and Borneo Island.

Because each ethnic group has its own unique musical tradition, Malaysia's musical heritage is rich and encompasses a wide variety of interesting musical forms, including "theater music form, dance music form, percussion music ensemble, solo instrumental, solo vocal and social popular music and other forms of music ensemble" (Matusky and Tan 1997:viii-ix). It is therefore not surprising that even distinguished ethnomusicologist John Blacking has claimed "his first love" to be the people and music of Peninsular Malaya (Hilarian 2003).

As the society becomes more sophisticated in this new millennium of technology and globalization, Malaysia is facing even greater and obviously different challenges from those of the previous century (Baginda 2002; Yeoh 2002). One such challenge is to preserve the nation's cultural heritage and identity. That is, while government enthusiasm to prepare its people for global competition focuses on science and technology, there is a strong tendency for the arts and culture to be continually brushed to the periphery. As pointed out by Professor Datuk Dzulkipli Abd Razak, Vice-Chancellor of a major Malaysian public university, "Now, [there is] much attention on science and technology and with it the perception that humanities and social sciences are not important" (as quoted in the *New Straits Times* (a), 2006: front page).

Almost three decades ago, Mohd Ghouse Nasaruddin (1979:463) warned that Malaysians were becoming strangers to their own cultural heritage and were ignorant about local traditional and folk music to the extent that "they regard these arts as misfits in the contemporary world of disco dance and soul and rock music. This attitude is particularly noticeable in the urban areas where the western style of life is the norm". Indeed, as Nettl (1985:7) rightly pointed out, "the speed with which western music was added to the indigenous repertory, or replaced it, was indeed amazing". Moreover, a later study by Ang and Yeoh (2005) shows that teenage Malaysian students today not only prefer popular western music but do not like and are unfamiliar with Malaysian ethnic music.

Based on two research projects funded by the Malaysian government, this paper will discuss how establishing a graded music examination system could help in the sustainability efforts of Malay traditional music in general and the Malay gamelan in particular. An overview of the historical development of Malaysia's music traditions is provided at the beginning of this paper which shows the root to some of the current issues and challenges faced by Malaysian traditional music.

Music traditions in Malaysia

Historically, Malaysian traditional music is believed to have reached its zenith during the Melaka Sultanate (1411–1511) when it was such an integral part of the ritualistic ceremonies and secular entertainment of the royal courts that the various courts in peninsular Malaya maintained their own musicians and dancers (Ang 1998). Classic genres once performed in these royal courts are the *joget gamelan*⁵⁴, the *gamelan* and the *nobat*⁵⁵ (Matusky and Tan 1997).

⁵⁴The *joget gamelan* is a form of Malay traditional dance performed by a group of women dancers accompanied by the music of the gamelan.

⁵⁵The *nobat* is an ensemble comprised of two types of wind instruments, the *serunai* and *nafiri*, a small kettle drum and two barrel drums, played primarily to accompany rites of passage during the sultanate's religious and royal court ceremonies.

Meanwhile, in the villages, the common people developed their own respective forms of folk music, such as the *kudakepang*⁵⁶, the *tarinai*⁵⁷ and the *tumbukkalang*⁵⁸, traditionally performed during festive occasions, wedding events and harvest celebrations, respectively (Matusky and Tan, 1997). Today, the various forms of Malaysian folk music are quite commonly identified by their association with regions or states; for example, *WayangKulit Siam*⁵⁹ with the state of Kelantan, *Dabus*⁶⁰ with Perak and *Ghazal*⁶¹ with the state of Johor.

Foreign influences are also apparent in traditional and folk music, which is not surprising given the Malaysian peoples' long history of continuous interaction with the outside world through trade, migration and colonization. The most notable influences are the Hindu culture, Islamic culture and later the western cultures (Ang 1998) although the influence of Indonesian culture, Thai culture and to a lesser extent Chinese culture are also found in some traditional and folk musical forms (MohdGhouseNasaruddin 1989).

Given the likelihood that cross-cultural exchanges occurred between the various parts of the Malay Archipelago during the period of the ancient Indianised empires of Funan, Sri Vijaya, Majapahit and the Islamic Empire of Melaka (MohdGhouseNasaruddin 1979, Hilarian 2003), it is not surprising to find striking similarities in the musical forms among the South East Asia nations (MohdGhouseNasaruddin 1979). Indeed, it is believed that long before the natives came into contact with the Indian and Arab traders, various types of native music culture already existed, mostly in the form of mantras and incantations used in the animistic religions for ritual purposes (MohdGhouseNasaruddin 1979). Hence, as typified by the *wayangkulitsiam*, some forms of folk and traditional music include a combination of elements from Hinduism, Islam, and animism, as well as from Thai, Indonesian, Indian and Chinese music, all mixed within one musical performance.

Western music culture was first introduced to the local people by the Portuguese during their rule in Melaka in 1511. One of the most significant Portuguese contributions was the introduction of the violin and acoustic guitar, which even until the present day have been the primary instruments in some local music forms. The wave of western influence continued during British rule, among the earliest of which were the church choir introduced by

⁵⁶The *kudakepang* is a form of dance drama accompanied by instrumental music played on indigenous instruments including gongs, tambourines and a set of bamboo-tube instruments named *angklung*. This tradition is found mostly in Johor, the southern state of Peninsular Malaysia.

⁵⁷The *tarinai* is a dance form performed during the wedding ceremony of staining the bride's hands and feet with henna. This dance is accompanied by an instrumental ensemble comprised of the double-reed wind instrument, the *serunai*, a pair of drums called *gendangkeling* and a pair of hanging *gongs*. This tradition is found mostly in Kedah and Perlis, the two northern states of Peninsular Malaysia.

⁵⁸In the *tumbukkalang*, traditionally performed during the celebration of the harvesting season, six to eight woman stamp mortar pestles into wooden troughs in specific rhythms to the singing of Malay folk songs in the Minangkabau dialect.

⁵⁹The *wayangkulitsiam*, performed primarily in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia, is a form of shadow puppet theatre. This shadow play is accompanied by an orchestra consisting primarily of percussion instruments and the double-reed wind instrument, the *serunai*.

⁶⁰The *dabus* is a religious trance dance performed by approximately 22 dancers accompanied by singing and musical instruments like the gong and the hand drums called *rebana*.

⁶¹The *ghazal* is a form of slow paced music that promotes poetry. Ghazal singing is usually accompanied by musical instruments like the violin, tabla, harmonium, *gambus*, guitar, maracas and possibly the sitar. In Malaysia, *ghazal* music is usually associated with Johor, although its origin is Persian and it supposedly came to Johor via the Indian sub-continent.

missionary groups and the military bands brought in by the British Army⁶² (JohamiAbdullah 2010).

In contrast, the western classical music tradition was introduced first to the Malay aristocracy and later filtered down to the general public (Ang 1998). During the 1950s and '60s, radios, cinemas and night clubs in major towns on the peninsular's west coast contributed to popularizing western music among the Malaysian public (Matusky and Tan 1997). By then, the Malaysian people were becoming more familiar with western orchestral instruments and musical forms like the string orchestra and wind orchestra. Some of these instruments were adapted and mixed into local musical forms such as in the *bangsawan* theatre (Matusky and Tan 1997). In addition, local composers began to write popular songs based on the western tempered scale and style of arrangements (Ang 1998). In general, the local Malaysian popular music of today is an imitation of the styles and trends of western popular music; its only distinguishing feature is that the lyrics are in Malay, Chinese or Indian or other local ethnic languages. Over the years, the musical preference among Malaysians has changed towards a more contemporary and western musical taste and until today popular western music dominates Malaysian musical culture (Yeoh 1999). As a result, traditional and folk music have lost their popularity and are mostly performed only during special occasions or as cultural shows, particularly for tourists⁶³.

Nettl (1985) stated that "the most significant phenomenon in the global history of music has been the intensive imposition of western music and musical thought upon the rest of the world" (p. 3). In the case of Malaysia, the impact is great due to the long acculturation process that had occurred during the more than 100 years of British rule in the country. It is not a surprise that the music education practice in Malaysia is organized more or less exclusively around the great tradition of Western classical music. This can be observed at all levels of institutionalized music learning, from the design of the curriculum right to the teaching approaches used in the classrooms. Of this is the dependency on predominantly foreign music examination boards of such as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and the Trinity College London International Music Exam Board.

The influence of ABRSM on Malaysian music culture

The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) from England is the most popular and has been in use since 1947 (Mohd. Fadzil & Thia 2005). Since 1948, over one million candidates have enrolled for the ABRSM examinations in Malaysia (Ross 2002). Today, a team of approximately fifty ABRSM examiners visit the various states in Malaysia for three months every year (ABRSM, 2005). The majority of the candidates are pianists. As a result, there are currently no less than 3,000 teachers with ABRSM qualifications in Malaysia who specialized in teaching Western music available for those who are interested to follow a course in learning to play a Western instrument (ABRSM 2005).

The practice of sending children for ABRSM piano and music theory lessons became a trend and had the kind of social and symbolic significance amongst parents in the Malaysian urban

⁶²This observation substantiates Nettl's (1985) theory that the first contact between western influence and other world cultures occurred through church music and the military band.

⁶³Nettl (1985) regards this phenomenon as a form of revival of native traditions undertaken by a large proportion of the world's society in the twentieth century to counter the influence of western music culture. Such revivalism involved the creation of national groups to produce music and dance outside the traditional on-stage context in forms quite unlike the original.

society (Ross 2002). ABRSM (2014) rightly claimed that most of the formal music education which young people receive in Malaysia is through private music schools or through a private teacher. Such is the widespread interest in Western music that many private music schools have become highly successful business enterprises operating from a chain of branches.

Leung (2003) pointed out that in many Asian countries the western classical music traditions endangers the existence of local traditional music. The hegemony of western classical music traditions to much extent, accounts for the slow progress and the lack of success in the efforts of incorporating the various local music traditions in Malaysian schools and to a certain extent its sustainability. Almost three decades ago, Mohd. Ghouse Nasuruddin (1979) warned that Malaysians were becoming strangers to their own cultural heritage and were ignorant about local traditional and folk music. This situation is indeed alarming and if allowed to persist may jeopardize the future survival of Malaysian music traditions. Music is an important part of a nation's identity (Wan, 2008) and as such, emphasis should be given to developing local music traditions. Diverse musical practices in Malaysia exist but without a structured program of training and assessment which is accepted academically.

Mohd. Ghouse Nasuruddin (1979) urged that there is a pressing need for action on the part of "the government and institutes of higher learning to counteract the various forces which can be detrimental to the existence and progress of the traditional performing arts" (p. 464). Many have voiced the need to establish an accredited national body with the purpose of localizing the exam curriculum and materials as well as providing assessments of music students' achievements (Ross 2002; Choo 2003; Mohd. Fadzil & Thia 2005).

The above discussion shows that formal education is the most significant channel to create better appreciation and to promote traditional music amongst the younger generation. In other words, one of the key to the successful efforts of preserving the local music traditions is through a more structured curriculum, instruction and assessment in formal settings. While this may sound simple and straight forward, in reality it is an uphill and complex task to be implemented. This is because Malaysian traditional music encompasses a different philosophy and practice from the western music paradigm (Zaharul & Shahanum 2015):

Overlooking the distinctiveness of the local music tradition will bring implications to the process of teaching, learning and assessment which may include distorting the understanding of the cultural meaning of the music itself. Consequently, any attempt to introduce a standard and structured examination and certification system based on the international music graded examination model might lead to the act of cultural imperialism if those involved in the designing the examination curriculum are unaware of the underlying cultural meanings and concepts of local music traditions. Hence, the nature of each music genre and the cultural context of its performance practice, teaching and learning process including its assessment method need to be taken into account when formulating a structured assessment and certification system. Several other issues and challenges to be taken into considerations were identified through the research projects.

Music examinations have existed for a long while with the purpose of recognizing achievements and standards of performance. Having its beginnings in western classical music, other forms such as popular music and jazz have since been included. In graded examinations of musical performance, the demonstration of progressive levels of mastery differentiates between the novice and a more accomplished musician. The levels are used to

define increasing mastery in skills, techniques and knowledge required of a musician. These examinations require a live performance by the candidates. Within an examination, differentiation is by both content and by outcome whereby content is determined by repertoire selected to represent an appropriate level of difficulty for the grade to be examined while outcome is determined by the demonstration of performance expectations that match or exceed the minimum levels of mastery required (Robbins, 2007).

As the foreign examination boards are mainly for western art and popular music and therefore lack the local music element, it does not help to inculcate appreciation towards local music traditions. Currently, there is no mechanism for assessing musical attainment for the local music traditions of Malaysia. As such, there is an overemphasis on western art and popular music at the expense of promoting local music. A structured system of assessing and awarding certification based on levels of achievement in local music traditions is needed which will provide a platform for musicians involved in the local music traditions to benchmark their achievement and obtain the necessary qualifications which can assist them in furthering their studies or gain employment. Therefore it is timely that a Malaysian Music Examination Board be established in order to not only recognize Malaysian traditional musicians but also to promote the learning of local traditional music genres. As with examination systems that cater for non-western musical instruments such as the Carnatic Examination System and the Taali Foundation Music Examination System for Indian music, or the Beijing University Chinese Music exam, there is a need for some kind of examination system for Malaysian local music traditions. In addition, the current standard grading of professional musicians can be used by the government and the music industry as a benchmark since examinations of performance are a form of qualifying examination for a professional association (Robbins 2007). This will also address the sustainability of local music traditions and the musicians.

Music is an intangible cultural asset included in the United Nation's fourth pillar of sustainability. Music contributes to both cultural heritage and also cultural sustainability. *Music sustainability* has been defined as the ability of a music genre to endure, without implications of either a static tradition or a preservationist bearing (UNESCO 2003, cited under Policy Instruments). The sustainability of music is a reemerging theme in ethnomusicological research. In response to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, researchers and activists are increasingly reengaging with the complex challenges of maintaining and revitalizing threatened music genres, particularly those of indigenous and minority peoples. The purpose of this study was to examine the viability of sustainability of Malay traditional music, in particular the Malay gamelan, via a graded examination syllabus and assessment method.

Method

This study is an extension of a project undertaken between the years 2013 and 2015 which aimed to investigate a structured approach for the assessment of musical attainment for musicians involved in Malaysian traditional music. Two main research questions that guided the research undertaking were: (i) "What are the considerations that need to be taken into account in establishing an examination system for Malaysian traditional music?", and "What mechanism can be applied to assess musical attainment of musicians involved in Malaysian traditional music?". The second research project which is still ongoing is aimed at developing graded examination syllabi and assessment methods for selected Malay traditional music ensembles namely the Malay gamelan, caklempong and Malay drums.

The study was conducted in two phases. The initial phase of the study involved desk work where secondary data were gathered. Reference materials on the teaching and learning traditions of traditional music were gathered from libraries, National Archives, Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture, State Arts Department, and the Malaysian Examination Syndicate. In addition, existing music examination systems for both western and non-western music traditions practiced in other countries were analyzed.

Phase two of the research project involved fieldwork and a focus group. The focus of the field work was on gathering data on how the different genres of local music traditions are being taught, learned, and performed. Observations of the teaching and learning practices as well as performances were documented in the form of field notes and audio visual recordings.

The main method of collecting data for this study was through a focus group with a panel that comprised five gamelan practitioners with more than 15 years experience. Their knowledge, experience and direct involvement as practitioners and/or academicians were vital for the purpose of the study and became the main criteria for selecting them as participants for the study. The focus group was conducted to identify the elements within the music examination system such as the syllabi, criteria for assessment, repertoire, contents, and training of examiners.

Results

As traditional music genres encompass a different theory, philosophy, and practice from the western paradigm, and differs markedly in the learning, teaching, knowing and understanding of the music, it is imperative that these differences be taken into consideration when designing the graded exam for the gamelan. Not only are there various types of music in every culture, music differs from culture to culture with its own distinct meaning, values, and musical function. In addition, the music is not generally theorized by performers and music is learned by playing it.

The teaching and learning process

The ways of teaching and learning the Malay gamelan may differ from location to location and from teacher to teacher. These ways of teaching and learning are itself culturally loaded and influenced particularly if taken within the traditional context of the music. With respect to teaching and learning, the practitioners generally stressed the importance of including the psychomotor, cognitive and affective domains. While this is similar to the teaching of Western instruments, the attention given to each of the domains, for example, can be seen in different ways.

All the traditional music practitioners interviewed stated that the teaching of traditional music inadvertently begins with an introduction to the cultural context and background knowledge of the music genre concerned before moving to the practical component. These include the origin and history, ethics during practice and in performance; and introducing students to the anatomy of the instruments and their role in the ensemble as well as the basic care and maintenance. As stated by one practitioner:

“Semua harus tahu dari permulaan..materi dasar...budaya, peranan, fungsi, alat muzik, muzik...” (Translation: “everything needs to be known from the beginning....the basic materials...culture, role, function, music instruments, music...”)

The learning process of the gamelan is typically via the master and apprentice mode. Generally students learn by observing and imitating the master. Playing music is taught and learned through practical activity; relying very much on repetition as the main mode of learning. The skill of playing an instrument is learned as one learns the music. Unlike learning the western music instruments, method books are not used. As such, technical exercises in the western sense is not used in the learning process.

In the Western Classical music tradition, one of the most important aspects in music making and music learning is reading music notation. Consequently, sight-reading skills and playing using notation are important aspects assessed in international graded music examinations. Reading music notation is not the authentic practice as far as most Malaysian traditional music is concerned as the tradition is sound based and non-notated although some form of notation may be used if teaching in an educational setting. While it is appropriate to teach, learn and perform music through music notation in western art music, the teaching, learning and assessment of most Malay traditional music genres using the same method may compromise certain aspects of music learning.

Sight-reading skills and playing using notation are not important aspects in the Malay traditional music making and learning as it is in the teaching of Western music instruments. Traditionally, music learning is by memory and all practitioners expressed the importance of playing by memory so that players could play with the right ‘soul and feel’ and develop aural sensitivity. However, nowadays some practitioners use notation including western music notation to speed up the learning process especially in educational settings. Notation is used as a guide to assist in the process of learning the music. The following excerpt shows an example of a practitioner’s views regarding the use of notation in music learning and making:

“Muzik barat beza dengan muzik etnik di mana muzik barat ada notasi tetapi muzik etnik tidak ada. Kalau menggunakan notasi dalam gamelan, hanya sebagai kerangka, bukan untuk dimainkan”(Translation: Western music is different from ethnic music as notation is used in western music but not for ethnic music. With the gamelan, notation is used as a framework, not for playing)

In graded exams, the knowledge, understanding and skills required at each grade, are made explicit through the repertoire selected to be taught and examined (Robbins, 2007). The selection of repertoire needs to take into consideration the relative level of knowledge and skills a musician has to have reached for a particular grade. Factors such as the interactions of techniques, skills, knowledge, appropriateness of content, levels of expectation and what is to be taught needs to be taken into account.

With traditional music, music is not created according to the learner, i.e., that for children and for adults. There does not appear to be a division between repertoire for children to learn and those for adults. In terms of levels of difficulty though, there was general consensus among the practitioners that the teaching of repertoire advances according to levels of difficulty. Although practitioners were in agreement that repertoire progresses from simple to difficult, some had varying opinions in what they felt constituted simple or difficult repertoire. Some looked at it in terms of the length, form, complexity of rhythm in the melody, complexity of the gendang parts, or improvisation. In addition, the nature of the art

form and the semi-improvisatory style of traditional music would require the inclusion of this aspect as criteria of assessment.

The possibility of having various interpretations of a repertoire performed including improvisation depending on the location and performance practice of the group is another point of consideration.

Affective Component

As an oral tradition, music is generally in the mind of the musician and controls the musician. Music is expressed differently for everyone. As such, expression is an important component of teaching traditional music. All the practitioners interviewed were in consensus on the importance of ‘*rasa*’ and ‘*jiwa*’ (feel and soul), that is to feel the soul of the music. In their opinion ‘*rasa* and *jiwa*’ can only be achieved through good understanding of the music tradition as well as through appropriate techniques of playing in order to get the right touch. In addition, all the subjects interviewed stressed on the playing by ear as crucial in achieving the ‘*rasa*’ and ‘*jiwa*’.

Traditional music playing is a collaborative activity, relying on musical interdependency in close physical proximity. Being an oral tradition there is somewhat limited verbal interaction involved in the learning process. Non-verbal forms of musical communication, such as eye signals and hand gestures, are used to facilitate the learning process. A community is created bonded by the musical necessity of listening to each other. And as the gamelan is taught in a group situation, all group members are equally responsible for translating musical knowledge into musical sound. Gamelan playing is also communal in the sense that if one player is not available, another can take over. Therein lies another reason why gamelan players should know how to play all the instruments. Attitude, expression, cooperation, mutual understanding, unity, interaction of players and dexterity are key words used by the practitioners when discussing traditional music.

“Afektif merupakan komponen yang penting dalam penilaian di setiap tahap...pola fikir, sikap, perilaku, etika, penjiwaan, pengolahan rasa... Silibus perlu merangkumi semua ini dalam konteks budaya” (Translation: The affective component is important at every level...pattern of thought, attitude, ethics, feel...The syllabus needs to encompass all these in its cultural context)

“Teknik orang dan teknik kerjasama...wiraga (hafal struktur muzik), wirama (tempo dan dinamik), wirasa (perasaan, mud dan ekspresi)” (Translation: People technique and technique of cooperating...wiraga (memorizing the music’s structure), wirama (tempo and dynamics), wirasa (feeling, mood and expression))

“Konsep gamelan adalah berpegang kepada satu rasa, kesepakatan,kebersamaan kunci kepada gamelan”. (Translation: Gamelan holds to the concept of oneness, unity, togetherness is the key to the gamelan)

Types of ensemble and context of teaching

A recurring issue that was raised by all practitioners was the consideration of the type of ensemble and the context of teaching traditional music and hence, the assessment of traditional music. In the case of the gamelan, all practitioners interviewed are of the opinion that students have to learn all instruments within the ensemble.

Looking at the gamelan, it can be seen that there are many differences in characteristics when it comes to the gamelan ensemble as opposed to western ensembles. The practitioners interviewed agree with Supanggih (2008) that some of these differences include: 1. the emphasis on togetherness with no individual instrument dominating; 2. a high level of sensitivity and depth of feeling are important as opposed to personal virtuosity; 3. technique can be studied at the same time as studying the repertoire; 4. aural sensitivity is very important in playing the gamelan where musical dialogue occurs through listening; and 5. musical changes are marked or led by the gendang through aural signals.

In essence, there are three categories of instruments in the gamelan ensemble:

1. Form-defining (punctuating) instruments

Instruments demarcate the time cycles of the composition. They delineate the boundaries and map the internal contours of each type of time cycle. The large gong producing the lowest, most resonant sound of the ensemble, plays once per cycle to mark its end (its most important metric point). Such a cycle is called a gong-cycle (gongan). The major subunits of a gongan are phrases ending with a stroke on the kenong.

2. Instruments that bear melodic skeleton or framework.

Instruments that bear the melodic skeleton are homogenous; for the most part carry a single melodic line, though in different registers. The saron family (slenthem, demung, barung) play the same melody (balungan) in different octaves.

3. “Elaborating” parts

Texture produced mainly by instruments comprising the “elaborating” parts. These are “elaborate” in that they are more rhythmically active than the balungan. Instruments need to coordinate with one another in relatively loose ways (individual liberty, may vary parts) and not play in unison with one another. In the Malay gamelan, instruments that play the elaborating parts are the bonang and the gambang.

4. The gendang

Given that the gamelan is an ensemble tradition, teaching occurs in a group and is highly repetitive. The practitioners interviewed generally agreed that as a part of the training of a gamelan musician, it is important to learn all instruments within the ensemble, at least the basic in all instruments. Individual skills, the ability to cooperate within the ensemble and creativity within the context of the ensemble are also aspects assessed.

Discussion

As aforementioned, many types of Malay traditional music are ensemble based. The nature of the ensemble may demand different approaches to assessment. The assessment of the gamelan will require the student to rotate until a sampling of instruments from the various groups or all instruments have been assessed. In addition, the assessment criteria for the different instruments within the ensemble need to be considered, which may differ in certain aspects. Differentiating and equating the contributions of the different instruments within the ensemble will therefore also need to be accounted for.

As evidenced through observations and field notes during the data collection process, one aspect to be considered in determining the framework of an examination board for Malaysian traditional music genres is establishing a mechanism to assess the different nature

of ensembles and instruments within the ensemble. In order to determine the assessment mechanism, curricular issues in terms of the knowledge, skills, repertoire, and performance practice needs to be identified and outlined for each music tradition and subsequently the designing of the curriculum will need to consider the structuring and the distribution of the contents according to levels/grades. The curriculum designers will need to comprise a combination of practitioners and curriculum design experts.

As indicated by McPherson and Thompson (1998), the selection of evaluative criteria and evaluative instruments strongly shape the evaluation process. Following the curriculum design, the assessment aspects for the traditional music genres need to be determined and as with any music instrument, must include among other aspects, the technical and musical competence, interpretative understanding and stylistic awareness. In Malaysian traditional music, playing from memory, playing by ear and improvising are additional aspects that need to be considered. The criterion has to be ascertained for the performance of each instrument within an ensemble and as an ensemble. For ensembles such as the gamelan where musicians are expected to play all the instruments or one instrument from each group, the allocation of marks has to consider the nature and function of the instrument.

In terms of repertoire, the number of pieces to be assessed and the criteria for selecting repertoire such as being easy to listen to, likeable, popular, or standard pieces need to be determined. In addition, if an instrument is used in different types of ensembles, consideration has to be given if assessment should be based on repertoire from a selected form of traditional music genre or repertoire from the various genres in which the instrument is used. Performance on different musical instruments may also be assessed differently because they involve different technical skills and are associated with different repertoire.

Traditional music is, by nature, an oral tradition in which learning was by non-formal education, i.e., by listening, observing and playing. Aural sensitivity is very important where musical dialogue occurs through listening. In these genres examined, musical changes are marked or led by the *gendang* (drum) through aural signals. Emphasis is placed on cooperation and togetherness in the ensemble with no individual instrument dominating and in which a high level of sensitivity and depth of feeling are important as opposed to personal virtuosity (Supanggih, 2008). This leads to the implication that the affective component or *jiwa*(expression) is an important criteria of assessment.

As an oral tradition, music is expressed differently for everyone. As such, expression is an important component of teaching traditional music. The possibility of having various interpretations of a repertoire performed including improvisation depending on the location and performance practice of the group has to be considered during assessment. The three domains of learning, i.e., the cognitive, psychomotor and affective, have to be cumulatively assessed. As stressed by the practitioners, there has to be a balance between performance skills, knowledge, thought patterns, attitude, conduct/behaviour, and ethics that collectively make up the culture of the music tradition.

Graded examination for the Malay gamelan

Taking into consideration the data from the interview with practitioners during fieldwork and the focus group, the graded examination for the gamelan is set out as below:

1. The syllabus will be divided into three levels: beginner (Level 1), intermediate (Level 2) and advance (Level 3). Each level is further subdivided with beginner's level

having 3 grades (Grades 1-3), three grades in the intermediate level (Grades 4-6), and two grades in the advanced level (Grades 7-8).

2. All instruments will be examined. Level 1 begins with the saron and colotomic instruments. As the level progresses, the improvisatory instruments (boning and gambang) and the gendang are included.
3. Techniques specific to the gamelan will be assessed such as damping, *cincang*, *bunga*.
4. Repertoire will progress according to level of difficulty and length of *lagu*.
5. Sight reading will not be examined.
6. The aspects of a performance for assessing Malaysian traditional music include the practical and theoretical aspect. The practical aspect relates to aspects assessed during the performance part of the exam and is further subdivided into two components which are musical and non-musical factors. The musical factor includes the technical dimension, musical dimension and presentation. The technical dimension refers to technical competence on an instrument in terms of tone production, intonation and the ability to perform a range of techniques with control and fluency; and the accuracy of musical elements, which involves the accuracy of pitch, rhythm, tempo, articulation, and text articulation. The musical dimension refers to the understanding of musical, stylistic and expressive issues. This involves musical awareness and interpretative understanding of the music performed including aspects such as phrasing, dynamics, and ensemble awareness. Ensemble awareness refers to individual contribution to the cohesive sound of the group including awareness of intonation, blend and balance, tempo and style and unity of feeling. As traditional music is, by nature, an oral tradition in which learning was by non-formal education, i.e., by listening, observing and playing, aural sensitivity is very important where musical dialogue occurs through listening. This leads to the implication that the affective component or *jiwa*(expression) is an important aspect to be assessed. In these genres examined, musical changes are marked or led by the *gendang* (drum) through aural signals. Emphasis is placed on cooperation, togetherness and the interaction of players in the ensemble with no individual instrument dominating and in which a high level of sensitivity and depth of feeling are important as opposed to personal virtuosity (Supanggah, 2008).

The non-musical factor of the performance section refers to elements such as attitude of the musicians when functioning in an ensemble, the ethics of performing a particular genre, cooperation, rapport with the music and instrument, and mutual understanding.

The assessment will also include a Viva Voce component which concerns the knowledge of the music being assessed in terms of the history, background, instruments, repertoire and performance practice. It is suggested that this component includes questions on the comprehension of music elements, terms, techniques, instrumental functions, repertoire, musical style and an understanding of the aesthetics of the particular genre/ensemble being assessed.

Conclusion

The establishment of an assessment and certification system based on international graded music examination systems for local traditional music is crucial for the future survival and sustainability of Malaysian musical heritage. If the aforementioned suggestions are taken into consideration when designing the graded examination syllabus, the music and

performance practice of this genre will be sustained. However, the effort towards the establishment of a system and standard is evidently quite challenging. Issues like authenticity and cultural imperialism need to be taken into considerations and addressed appropriately in order to ensure acceptance and success of the assessment and certification system to be developed.

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