

## WHY MUSIC & WHERE CAN WE TAKE IT?

1. Music is a powerful form of expression that is easily shared across diverse communities in Singapore. Indeed, the sharing of music has rocketed on an unprecedented scale and beyond our borders, thanks to the impact of technology on music creation, production, and distribution; and on the ways we now experience and enjoy music.

### THE MUSIC SCENE TODAY

2. Singapore's diverse music scene today is a reflection of the country's history and multicultural society. Early settlers brought their western and traditional music to the island, with the jazz and swing tea dances of the 50s giving way to the lounge bands of the 60s, and a short-lived rock and roll movement of the 70s. *Xinyao*<sup>1</sup> and community songs in turn gave way to MTV, and now Singapore bands are discovering their own voice. Along the way, Singapore established a national orchestra and a western music conservatory; the over 500 schools each had its own school choir and/or band, and a burgeoning middle-class sent their children for music lessons. Musical literacy has developed in parallel with Singapore's development and may be described as falling very broadly along the following genres<sup>2</sup>:

- a) Classical music: with significant student participation in Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs) and serious amateurs participating in out-of-school music events. There is also substantial education infrastructure by way of institutions and a training framework.
- b) Choral music: augmenting student activity are many amateur groups, including a strong a cappella music following.
- c) Popular and mainstream electronic and rock music: as broadcast on commercial radio stations, performed by international acts.
- d) Niche followings for jazz, and a growing "independent" (or "indie") music scene.

3. Each genre has its respective audience demographic, and is characterised by varying degrees of commercial and industry involvement. So, while the overarching vision -- a music scene all Singaporeans participate in and are proud of -- applies across the board, there needs to be customised strategies for each of the genres.

#### *An increasingly diverse and lively scene*

4. In 2003, there were 73 music societies registered with the Registry of Societies: today, there are nearly twice as many. Music companies, which include commercial music schools and studios, have seen a similar growth. These societies and companies range across genres and include a range of professional ensembles, collectives, amateur and community interest groups. This diversity of talents is reflected in a certain fragmentation of audiences along the "fault lines" of the many varied music genres (for example, classical, pop, rock, indie, alternative, and so on).

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<sup>1</sup> A genre of Mandarin songs unique to Singapore composed and sung by Singaporeans about life in this small island country [source: <http://xinyaoorganisationsingapore.blogspot.sg/p/introduction-to-xinyao.html>]

<sup>2</sup> Traditional Chinese, Malay and Indian music are covered under the Annex on Traditional Arts.

5. The western classical music scene is just as diverse in terms of types of groups and musical offerings. In addition to the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), there are a dozen other orchestras and ensembles, and more than 50 collectives. There is also the Singapore National Youth Orchestra set up by the Ministry of Education. Community centre-based groups, concert bands and school ensembles also form an active base of serious amateur musicians. While these provide for a vibrant calendar of performances and mostly showcase standard western classical repertoire, there are signs of a growing interest to discover the 'Singapore Sound' through creating fresh repertoire.

6. With the large base of school choirs, the choral music scene has a correspondingly large base of conductors and instructors, and includes established groups like the SYC Ensemble Singers. There are new choral works by Singapore composers but these are rarely performed more than once due to the accessibility<sup>3</sup> of the scores. There is also a small but active a cappella music scene comprising professional singers and serious enthusiasts. While the following for opera is small, it is sustained by the regular productions of 1-2 local opera companies.

7. The contemporary music scene ranges from stalwarts like jazz artist Jeremy Monteiro to an increasing pool of pop and indie bands, which are growing their respective followings via online and 'live' platforms. Besides funding support, the vibrancy and diversity of the scene are helped by the emergence of more performance opportunities and platforms. These include venues like the Esplanade's Baybeats, local platforms like the NAC's NOISE movement that provide music mentorship opportunities for young bands, and international events like Laneway and Music Matters.

### *Strong Interest Among Young Singaporeans*

8. What bodes well is the high level of music education and participation among Singapore youths. In schools, music is a part of the core curriculum in Primary and Lower Secondary. Amongst all the arts-related co-curricular activities (CCAs), the largest numbers of students are enrolled in music CCAs - some 55,000 are playing in orchestras, wind or marching bands, percussion groups. Another 20,000 or so participate in choral music groups. This broad reach into mainstream schools, not to mention the prevalence of private music schools, is an opportunity to further demonstrate the positive impact of music, as well as to cultivate future advocates and audiences.

### *Capability Development*

9. The pathway for young Singaporeans aspiring to pursue music at the tertiary level has also developed rapidly in the last 10 years, particularly in the classical field. In addition to the Music Elective Programmes offered at GCE 'O' and 'A' levels, there are also more quality tertiary and training options for musicians. These include the Yong Siew Toh Music Conservatory of Music at the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Academy of Fine

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<sup>3</sup> Choirs usually commission works for their own performances; there is little to facilitate these works being distributed or shared with other choirs.

Arts-Royal College of Music, UK partnership, and the LASALLE College of the Arts-Goldsmiths, University of London partnership.

10. In the area of contemporary music, certain sectors of Singapore musicians are making inroads internationally. For example, a number of producer-songwriters have established themselves in China's Mandopop industry, while several indie musicians have been signed up by reputable international producers such as BMBX and Warner Music. There is however, room to grow the local appetite for Singapore music.

While there are local venues and event organisers providing more platforms for performances by Singapore musicians, there is still a shortage of music producers and managers to take on the role of grooming these talents for the music business: sharpening their music-making skills, refining the quality of recordings, raising the profile of Singapore musicians and improving their access to markets.

#### *Need for Greater Collaboration and Leadership*

11. There is also room for stronger leadership and collaboration between artists to nurture artistic capabilities and build audiences collectively.

12. One example is in the area of choral music. In recent years, the Choral Association (an umbrella association for the smaller Chinese choral groups) had organised a number of events, such as the Singapore International Choral Competition that attracted participants from Malaysia, China and Taiwan, as well as large collaborative concerts that involved performances by each of its 18 to 24-member choirs. Such initiatives are helpful for the community to come together to collaborate, and nurture their domestic and international audiences. This could be duplicated across different genres.

#### *Opportunity to take Singapore music scene to the next stage*

13. Singapore's contemporary music scene has a less formal structure for emerging artists to be discovered and developed into full-fledged, mature artists who consistently produce work of good quality. Until the recent setting up of SGMUSO and the Musicians Guild, there has also been no association to help represent the interests of musicians, develop their capabilities and generate awareness of the support and opportunities available within the industry.

14. We have over the years built up a strong pool of young talents in the *classical* field, as well as substantial educational infrastructure (arts institutions such as YST, NAFA and LASALLE, MOE schools as well as private schools; and initiatives such as the Young Artist Programme at YST). In contrast, in the *contemporary* scene, our musicians' artistic training and understanding of the general milieu in which they carve out a career (e.g. in terms of image, marketing, intellectual property etc.) is still very much at the fledgling stage. There is also recognition of our need to develop performance quality and song writing skills.

## A VISION FOR MUSIC

15. Given the increasingly lively music scene in Singapore, wide access to music within and outside of schools and the emergence of more accomplished music groups, we believe that we can look forward to:

- (a) Artistic collaborations and connections between amateurs and professional, among professionals within and across genres;
- (b) An even broader base of aficionados for music made and played by Singapore musicians... in short, a worldwide audience for Singapore music; and
- (c) A league of intermediaries championing the discovery, development, production and promotion of music talents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

16. For there to be a *music scene all Singaporeans are proud to own and participate in*, we need to seed artistic growth, grow the appetite for Singapore music and develop market intermediaries as champions for the sector.

17. In order to provide a focal point and facilitate more holistic efforts to grow the industry, NAC will take on the role of lead coordinator for the music sector from 2015. While the Media Development Authority (MDA) will continue to regulate and oversee music within the media sector (e.g. film and television), MDA's existing grants for music will be subsumed under NAC's support schemes. NAC will also lead in the advocacy and promotion of the overall scene, as well as in all music initiatives that require the involvement of the several government agencies. NAC's priorities for the next few years are as follows.

### (I) Seeding Collaborations & Connections for Artistic Growth

18. Music is integral to how we experience film and other multimedia experiences, and there is scope for Singapore music and musicians to get more involved in this area. We are therefore working with the relevant stakeholders (including MDA) towards curating "pitching sessions" for musicians to connect with producers, broadcasters and the relevant agencies.

19. Cultivating connections within the classical music scene is another priority. Given the current healthy level of amateur and professional involvement, we are keen for this momentum to continue and for interest to be sustained. This is where our larger, more established music groups can come in, as they serve to benchmark standards and inspire younger talents. We will work with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra on establishing a closer synergy with the Singapore National Youth Orchestra; and in providing capability development opportunities via the National Piano & Violin Competition (NPVC). And, even as we leverage existing platforms (e.g. the biennial NPVC) to commission original works by Singaporean composers to be used as competition set pieces, we will be seeking partners who share our vision of having more unique Singapore music across all genres for everyone to experience. To this end, we will work with presenting venues such as the Esplanade in featuring fresh work. Music societies and associations also play an important role in galvanising the scene, raising standards of their respective memberships for continuous

artistic growth. We will work with them in rolling out capability development initiatives, in the areas of composition, performance and conducting.

## **(II) Developing Appetite for Singapore Music**

20. A key priority is to build the appetite for Singapore music among Singapore audiences. In order to cultivate a taste for music performed and/or created by Singapore musicians, we need to ensure relevant touch points for the diverse audience demographics of the respective music genres. Hence, enhancing access for audiences via broadcast, 'live' and online platforms is paramount.

### *Greater presence and visibility of local music in the media*

21. We will work with media partners to increase the profile of Singapore musicians over the next 3 years via a Singapore Music Movement (working title). This includes featuring classical, jazz and contemporary music by Singapore musicians on Singapore radio.

### *Fresh Performance Platforms*

22. Performing in front of a 'live' audience is essential in honing a musician's craft and building their stage confidence. We will work with platforms (for example, Music Matters and the Esplanade) to enhance opportunities for Singapore musicians. We will also work on "alternative" performance venues for genres like classical and choral music, to pique the interest of unreached audiences.

### *Tapping Online Platforms*

23. Digital models of production, presentation and distribution, and associated changes in audience behaviour have had huge implications for artists in reaching their audiences. Today, almost anyone accessing music uses online channels, such as YouTube or internet radio sites, as their first port of call. We will be enhancing support for Singapore musicians to improve the quality of their video / visual productions to enhance their online presence and audience base.

### *Greater Internationalisation and Exchange*

24. Enhancing local musicians' global connectivity will help them grow their audience base and sharpen their skills in the process. Over the next five years, we will ramp up our music internationalisation and exchange efforts through the following ways:

- a) We will establish more exchanges with regional partners, where our musicians can participate in various platforms and collaborate with artists in performances or to create new works. Such opportunities for exposure and exchange will sharpen our musicians artistically, grow their networks and serve as stepping stones to break into regional/international markets to grow a larger audience for Singapore music. We will also continue to support residencies that enable musicians to work with and learn from their international counterparts.

- b) Given Singapore's small domestic music market, our artists and companies need to venture out to the larger regional and international marketplace. We will work with associations, other government agencies and sponsors to ensure our musicians get to participate and/or are profiled at the relevant and significant international platforms. A biennial compilation of Singapore works would also be useful; these works can then be distributed at international arts markets, for example.

### **(III) Develop and Empower Intermediaries**

25. Intermediaries such as music societies, associations, agents and producers also play an important role in spotting music talents, developing their skills, and connecting them to global audiences.

26. The establishment of The Music Society (Singapore) (SGMUSO) would address some of the gaps in the scene, with the Society playing the role of an aggregator for the contemporary music scene. The NAC will support such intermediaries to beef up programmes for musicians to improve artistic and performance skills, quality of recordings and management capabilities. This is especially important as musicians need to appeal to audiences who are already spoilt for choice when it comes to quality music – recorded and otherwise.

27. A key strength of Singapore's classical music is the sheer quantity of classically-trained musicians. These range from hobbyists and serious amateurs to semi-professional and professionals who perform (non-exclusively) with the increasing number of orchestras / groups. There is an opportunity for intermediaries and/or performance venues to aggregate this "supply" of musicians and music groups, to ensure there is enough demand to sustain them. We hope to identify and empower more intermediaries to better promote our classical musicians both locally and internationally.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Music sector's next stage of development is contingent on the cultivation of music aficionados for Singapore music, for its practitioners to collaborate and create fresh content, and for intermediaries to connect our Singapore music and musicians to local and international audiences. While NAC's support remains broad-ranging as in the past, NAC will be embarking on initiatives that will provide greater exposure and performance opportunities for local music and performers, and that go upstream in the training and mentoring of talents for the creation of local works of high artistry.