

# ‘Music’/al Narratives; some considered reflections

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TRANSFORMING TEACHING  
INSPIRING LEARNING

This presentation revisits the award of a Grant by the National Arts Council in 2002 ‘**A Narrative History of Music from 1819- to the present**’, (Dairianathan and Phan 2005, <https://repository.nie.edu.sg/handle/10497/4539>).

It reflects on the prospects & problems encountered and solutions sought towards the completion of the research grant aims and objectives and considers the resonances and reverberations after the technical report, and invites prospects and challenges into and beyond 2017.

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## Caveat

Views expressed in this presentation are solely those of the authors of the project team and technical report and do not represent views of the grant awarding body, government body or institution.

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# Context

*“Music” is both the observable product of human intentional action and a basic human mode of thought by which any human action may be constituted* (John Music, *Music, Culture & Experience: Selected Papers*. Edited by Reginald Byron, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, pp.224-225).

*Very little has been written about the music of Singapore, the reason for which is sometimes hard to explain or understand* (Joseph Peters, "Singapore" in Santos, Ramon P. ed. *The Musics of ASEAN*. Philippines: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 1995, 93).

Singapore's *largely Asian population in a post-colonial setting* boasts a *mixture of cultural attributes* [that] has resulted in a diversity of musical cultures (Lee Tong Soon, Singapore, volume 23, pp.421-423, p.421, in Sadie, Stanley and Tyrrell, John (eds.), *The New Grove dictionary of music and musicians*, New York, N.Y., 2001, 421).

# Previous Attempt/s

## Abisheganaden (1982, ST)

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

# Research challenges

Challenge posed to research/er of the music scene in Singapore availability and distribution of knowledge about music in Singapore:

- How it is made known that makes it conspicuous;
- What is made known and to whom; and,
- Significance given to music, regardless of genre or practice, and of the place of music in Singapore society.

# Research questions

Where and how does one begin to chronicle music in Singapore?

Whose and which type or genre or tradition of music does one begin with?

What are the ramifications for articulating the diverse practices of culture *within* and *among* communal groups of Singapore?

# Research questions

- What are these musical practices?
- Who are the musicians in these practices?
- How are they conspicuous?
- How are they sustained and by whom?
- What are the relationships between these practices and the communities sustaining them?
- Who are their patrons then and today?

# Research questions

- What is the significance of local music-making for the ways people manage and make sense of modern urban life as pro/active and creative human beings?
- How can we consider such public events a feature of life in Singapore, mainstream or marginal?
- What relevance do they hold for the individuals who participate in these events?
- Do they make a contribution to society? How and in what ways?

# Aim of Research

- Identify and study the musical practices that were found to exist in Singapore from their earliest recorded entry to the present; their functions, how and why did they emerged; and, how they changed over time.
- Present a view of musical practice in Singapore as an activity through which the unique processes of societal formation and practice were identified.
- The work involved towards a comprehensive search remains a challenge and opportunity for further and future research.

## Research outcomes

Through these musical practices,

- Arrive at an understanding of the significance and meaning of music as it happened in societies in Singapore, and,
- How this understanding could assist in the funding, promotion and production of the entire gamut of musical activities ranging from performance through composition to recording in Singapore.

# Methodology

Identify musical practices as the phenomenon in which they appear as, across communal lines and genres.

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

# Methodology

- Data collation and information on activities involving music in newspaper collections. Besides the English medium, every attempt has been made to checking resources in Mandarin, Malay, Jawi and Tamil, where possible.
- Oral interviews conducted with practitioners who contributed by leading, facilitating, creating or participating in music-making activities in the various communities. (Interviewees agree to have published, quotations extrapolated from their interviews).
- Other forms of evidence: posters, photographs, LP, Cassette, CD resources, video performances and any other useful sources.

# Sources/Sourcing

- Written sources, e.g newspapers, historical data in Singapore, reports of societies, trusts, magazines and monthly reviews
- Straits Settlement ordinances/Penal Codes
- Oral History Archives
- Dissertations on studies in Music as practised in Singapore
- Memoirs by those who had lived in Singapore in the past as well as those by private sources
- Payment records for services rendered by musicians
- Collections of photographs, private recordings, concert programmes, pamphlets
- Private collections
- Journals
- Oral interviews with practitioners

# Considerations

- *We ought to be able to learn something about the structure of human interaction...by way of the structures involved in music, and so learn more about the inner nature of man's mind....observation of musical structures may reveal some of the structural principles on which human life is based.*  
*(Blacking; How Musical is Man 1973, 115)*

# Considerations

“Because society can be conceived as something that happens in music, perhaps such a view of music of Singapore reveals the possibility of the emergence of a society that transcends the very same communal and cultural boundaries.”

(Dairianathan and Phan; 2005, 12)

# Musical practices studied

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

# Oral Interviews with practitioners

1. Ken Chang
2. Liang Wern Fook
3. Jeremy Monteiro
4. Simplicius Cheong
5. Koh Nam Seng
6. Yusnor Ef
7. Sam Gan
8. Horace Wee
9. Mohd. Rafee
10. Mr. S.Sivam
11. Ravi Shanker
12. Singapore Indians Music Party
13. Edmund Appau family
14. Ramli Sarip
15. Burhanudin bin Buang
16. Tony Danker
17. Ranjit Singh
18. Sheikh Haikel
19. A/P Farid Alatas
20. Mahmud Bagushir
21. Dr. Larry Hilarian Francis
22. A/P Ho Hwee Long
23. Dr. Kelly Tang
24. Sarwan Singh
25. Gurcharan Singh
26. Bhaldev Singh
27. Amar Singh
28. Rudra
29. Shatriya
30. Narasimha
31. Vernon Cornelius
32. Recollections by Lawrence Francisco (Latin Six) as recorded by his grandson Jeremiah before Lawrence passed away in October 2002.

# Findings

- Each practice forms and informs the variety of ways and means it enriches an understanding of community in Singapore.
- Practices explored provide clues to music's relationship with the various dimensions and domains of life in Singapore.

# Findings

- *A/ny* study of music in Singapore involves interdisciplinarity;
- Each musical practice to be viewed from its own culturally situated and practice specific context.

# Publications since

Publications acknowledging the NAC Grant funding:

- Dairianathan, Eugene, *Xinyao, some curious questions*, *The Arts Magazine, NUS, Oct/Nov 2003 Issue 12, pp.17-21*.
- Dairianathan, Eugene, *Shuo Chang, the essence of the songs of Liang Wern Fook*, in a publication of the songs of Liang Wern Fook, April 2004.
- **新谣: 文化的定位** by 戴有均、蔡慧琨 – Dairianathan, Eugene and Chia Wei Khuan; *Xinyao; questions of culture*, paper delivered at the International Conference on National Boundaries and Cultural Configurations at NTU, 24 June 2004 at 3.30pm.
- Dairianathan, Eugene: *Cultural dependence in question; an exploration of Musical practices of South Indian film in Singapore*, in Frispel, a Festschrift publication by Goteborg University, Sweden, on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday of Professor Olle Edstrom, 2005.
- Dairianathan, Eugene, *The Band in Singapore: presence and practice*: read at the Brown Bag session of the WASBE International Conference, July 11, 2005 in Singapore.
- Dairianathan, Eugene, and Phan Ming Yen, *A Narrative history of music in Singapore 1819 to the present*; NAC R&D Project Report based on the award of a Research Grant in 2002, accepted in 2005 by the National Arts Council.
- Dairianathan, Eugene, *Pop and Rock popularise Religious Malay Music*, *Business Times*, Friday 4 November 2005.
- Dairianathan, E., (2006). The Wind Band Ensemble in Singapore; Presence and Practice. *WASBE International Journal*, 13, 31-50.
- Dairianathan, Eugene: *Mandarin pop* – entry in *Local Encyclopedia of Singapore Editions Didier Millet*, in conjunction with the National Heritage Board, 2006.
- Dairianathan, Eugene: *Indian classical music* – entry in *Encyclopedia of Singapore Editions Didier Millet*, in conjunction with the National Heritage Board, 2006.

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Publications acknowledging the NAC Grant funding:

- Dairianathan, Eugene, *The Wind Band Ensemble, Music and Education; a perspective from Singapore*, paper accepted for publication in conference proceedings, International Society for Music Educators (ISME) Conference in KL, Malaysia, July 16-21 2006.
- Dairianathan, Eugene *Vedic-Metal and Issues of Affiliation: An Exploration of Extreme Metal Practice in the South Indian Community in Singapore*, to be read at Workshop on Asian Pop Music in Transition: New Economy, New Subjectivities and Inter-Asian Perspective - 3- 4 March 2007, National University of Singapore.
- Dairianathan, E. (2007). Vedic-Metal: Global/Local Identity in Extreme Metal in the South Indian Community in Singapore. In Australian Society for Music Educators (Ed.) *Celebrating Musical Communities* (pp. 81-84). Perth: Australian Music Educators Society.
- Dairianathan, E., (2008). Vedic-Metal as local Extreme Metal; a perspective from Singapore. In to be announced (Ed.) *New Asian Imaginations* (pp. 0). Singapore: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.
- Dairianathan, E. (2009). Vedic Metal; Issues of local practice, popular music and education.. In CRPP NIE (Ed.) *3rd Redesigning Pedagogy International Conference* (pp. 0). Singapore: CRPP, NIE.
- Dairianathan, E. (In-press). Lessons from Extreme metal musicians; a perspective from Singapore. In To be finalised (Ed.) *6th International Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education* Limerick: to be finalised.
- Dairianathan, E. (2009). Vedic metal and the South Indian community in Singapore: problems and prospects of identity. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Volume 10*(4), 585 - 608.
- Dairianathan, E. and Lum, C.H. (2010). Vedic metal: issues of local practice, popular music and education. In Dunbar Hall, P (Ed.) *CDIME10: Tenth International Conference on Cultural Diversity in Music Education, Sydney, 11-13 January 2010* (pp. 32-38) (pp. 32-38). Sydney: CD ROM.
- Dairianathan, E., & Chia, W. K. (2010). Shuo Chang: Giving voice to and through Xinyao, a musical practice in Singapore. *UNESCO Observatory E-journal, 2*(1).

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- Dairianathan, E., (2011). Lessons from Extreme metal musicians; a perspective from Singapore. In O'Flynn, J., CD-Rom, Dublin: St Patrick's College. (Ed.) *Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education, 5-9 July, 2009*. (pp. 144-168). Limerick, Ireland: St. Patrick's College, Dublin, Republic of Ireland..
- Dairianathan, E. and Lum, C.H (2012). Soundscapes of a nation/alism - a perspective from Singapore. In Hebert, D. G. and Kertz-Welzel, A. (Ed.), Ashgate
- Dairianathan, E., (2012). Urbanity and ethnomusicology: A perspective from Singapore. *THEORY AND METHOD IN URBAN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY*, 14(2), 323-346.
- Dairianathan, E. (2012). Soundscapes in Vedic Metal: a perspective from Singapore. *Perfect Beat Journal*, Volume 12 (2011)(2), 167-189.
- Dairianathan, E (2012). The Burden of Song: Vedic Metal in Singapore. *Journal of Creative Communication*, 7(3), 243-260.
- Dairianathan E. (2014). South Indian Pop Music and Musicians. In Zubillaga-Pow, J. and Ho C.K (Ed.), *Singapore Soundscapes: musical renaissance of a global city* (pp. 155-170). Singapore: National Library Board, Singapore.  
(2014). Classical Indian Music. In Zubillaga-Pow, J. and Ho C.K (Ed.), *Singapore Soundscapes: musical renaissance of a global city* (pp. 115-127). Singapore: National Library Board, Singapore.
- Dairianathan, E. (2012). Vedic Metal and Urban Soundscapes: A Perspective from Singapore. In Koos, L. (Ed.), *Hidden Cities* (pp. 197 -205). Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Dairianathan, E. and Lum, C.H. (2017). Xinyao, Education and continuities of practice in Singapore.. In Bartleet, B-L., Cain, M, Tolmie, D, Power, A., and Shiobara, M. S. (Ed.), *Community Music in the Asia Pacific: Many Voices, One Horizon* (pp. 282-305). Honolulu, Hawai'i: University Of Hawai'i Press.
- Stead and Dairianathan (2008), First Steps to Music and Joy of Music (MOE approved) Music textbooks for Singapore schools.

# Education/al consequents

- Considerations of identity, role and function to connect with accessibility, contemporaneity and relevance with generalist classroom learners in Singapore schools.
- Resources for First Steps to Music - Primary and Joy of Music – Secondary – (Star Publishing) included local and international content.
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- Chapters focus on opportunities for creating, performing and responding such that ‘Music’ is *subsistence to human existence* (Dairianathan 93.8Live interview, 2013).

# Education/al Consequents

International Peer-reviewed conference presentations by  
NIE Undergraduate Music Education students

- Chinese Community Choir in Singapore
- Beatboxing as Lived Curriculum
- Third Generation Wind Ensemble Composers
- Place of Popular Music in School and Beyond
- Nusantara Orchestra Ensemble Concept

NIE Graduate studies (MA by Research)

- **Music in Empire, Western Music in 19th century Singapore through a study of selected texts, 2004.**
- **A proliferation and practice of Chinese orchestral music in singapore from the 1950s to the mid-1980s, 2016.**

# Musings

Where does our study of musical practices lead us?

- *The government's policy was not to "assimilate", but to "integrate" our different communities, in other words, to build up common attributes such as one common working language, same loyalties, similar values and attitudes, so as to make the different communities a more cohesive nation.*

(Koh Tai Ann, Culture and the Arts, pp.710-748, p.711, in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Wheatley, (eds.), Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.)

# Musings

- *There is encouragement ... of the so-called traditional arts to remind the different communities of their cultural roots; to express individually the identity of each community and collectively to express Singapore's multicultural identity; and as a means to create culture in itself.*

(Koh; 1989, 712)

# Musings

- Should/n't music be understood in a larger context? Whose music? Music for whom? Why Music?
- Is/n't our understanding of the arts in Singapore already built on inter/connectivities with art/istic, cultural, economic, education/al, political, religious, social capital?

# Musings

- Curricula dissemination from one remote re/source to another is effortless but do we really know if the recipient understands what is said, how it is said?
- Can we really say we know how this recipient learns or what meaning learning holds in the recipient culture?
- Should/n't there be an understanding of the dimensions of learning to critique knowledge *of* and *about* the arts?

# Musings

- Are resources being developed for the medium to long-term, in terms of artistic materials, trained expertise and curricula that together are able to do justice to an evaluation of these knowledges?
- Are institutions equipped with sufficient depth and breadth of human and technological resources to incorporate such traditional and contemporary local practices in learning programmes through undergraduate and graduate curricula?

# Post-Technical Report

- Since definitions of music and non-music vary with different cultures around the world (let alone Singapore), understanding music is to discover its uniqueness is to incorporate all 'ethnic' perceptions of all available musics and to find out on what points they agree. (Blacking 1981).
- *Uniquely Singapore; questions of blend or brand?*

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# Thank You