

Preface

It is not too difficult for an outsider, whether one who is not a Singaporean or one who is not a musician from Singapore, to obtain a concise overview of the country. By this, one means getting a general sense of the types of music that are performed and a sense of their beginnings. A look at the highly regarded New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians would suffice.¹

Because of the richness it offers, the sheer diversity of musical culture that is the reflection a largely Asian population in a post-colonial setting that boasts a mixture of cultural attributes is an intimidating prospect for any writer on music in Singapore music. Yet for Lee's creditworthy list and descriptions, his entries on music in Singapore can safely thus to be said to represent the tip of the iceberg. In fact, much of the research undertaken by this current work has revealed that much which is practised is 'hidden' or not as readily available to us as knowledge of or about musical practices in Singapore.

Given that any discussion of music in Singapore needs to be prefaced by definitions of music, both denotative and connotative, our view of music in this work is based on that of educator David Elliott's who sees music being, "...at root...a human activity...something that people do.....a diverse human practice."² This study of musical practices in Singapore as such then is interpreted as human generated practices, understood in relation to meanings and values evidenced in actual music making and music listening in specific cultural contexts.

Elliott's views are shared with that of ethnomusicologist John Blacking: Although every known human society has what trained musicologists might recognise as music, there are some that have no word for music or whose concept of music has a significance quite different from that generally associated with the word music..."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. The most characteristic and effective embodiment of this mode of thought is what we would call music.³

The challenge posed to any researcher looking at the music scene of Singapore has to address at the onset: that of the availability and distribution of knowledge about music in Singapore. Beyond just being an issue of methodology, knowledge about music - how it is made known and what is made known to a wider public - is telling about the significance which is given to music,

regardless of genre or practice, and perhaps equally telling of the place of music in Singapore society.

As such, this study proposes to 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.

By relying on Elliott's suggestion of a musical practice, this study hope to presents a view of musical practice in Singapore as an activity through which the unique processes of societal formation and practice are identified. The work involved in making out an even more comprehensive search is a challenge and an opportunity for further and future research. The resulting musical practices which this research identifies are:

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

It is hoped that through these musical practices, we would be able to understand the significance and meaning of music as it happened in societies in Singapore and how this understanding can assist in the funding, promotion and production of the entire gamut of musical activities ranging from performance through composition to recording.

REFERENCES

1 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.: Grove's Dictionaries, 2000. 2001 edition.

2 David Elliott, op.cit., chapter two, particularly pp.39-42.

3 Blacking, Music, Culture & Experience: Selected Papers. Edited by Reginald Byron, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, pp.224-225.