

## Musical practices of Euro-American Art Music in Singapore

### Introduction

Of the musical practices in Singapore, few have the privilege of such rich discourse as the Euro-American art music tradition. Yet very little seems to have become obvious as a starting point. For instance, the most recent article to be written about it appears in JoAnn Hwee Been Koh-Baker, whose starting point is a translation of Leong Yoon Ping's brief survey of the composition as a career in Singapore:

*Two well respected musicians could be considered forerunners in promoting classical music in Singapore. Huang Wan Chen, a well-known singer and vocal instructor, presented two Chinese art songs 'Whai Ren' and 'Hu Bu Qui' in 1946 that captured the hearts of many. Subsequently in 1957, Ting Zu San also presented more than thirty pieces of art songs and sacred pieces...considered pioneering pieces in the music culture of Singapore.*<sup>1</sup>

The brevity of a discussion with pre-independence Singapore does little justice to a long and chequered narrative of music-making activities, known first as 'Western music' till its more recent association in Koh-Baker's article as 'Music culture'. However, Koh-Baker's article justification of the brevity of discourse considers *composition as a career* in Singapore, in contradistinction to Lee's much broader sweep.

### Summary Chronology

Our research through documentary evidence suggests that music from European cultures was practised in Singapore in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Charles Burton Buckley recounts how in 1825, *how very large parties were given in the old times by Dr. d'Almeida, and after him by Mr. Jose and his wife, whose house was always the rendezvous of all social amusement...Dr. d'Almeida and his family were admirable musicians and his musical evening concerts were frequented by all who delighted in listening to the rendering of some of the best composers.* The Cree Journals offer us another such account:

*Went to a musical party at Dr Jose d'Almeida's, a Portuguese merchant who lives on the Campong Glam and has a large family of daughters - and sons too... They are all very musical and get up delightful concerts in their house, twice a week, to which some of us have a general invitation...they sing and play various instruments divinely...Old Jose introduced us...to the Madam...Some of her relations, Malay rajahs, were there and treated us to a hornpipe - one played on a fiddle and the large room open to veranda all round made it cool, so were able to*

*enjoy the quadrilles and waltzes with - a little flirtation.*<sup>2</sup> Dr Jose d'Almeida's house at Beach Road was a meeting centre of all the musical talents of the Colony. Large parties and dances were given, so that his house soon became the social centre of Singapore.<sup>3</sup>

Western music, we presume was also performed at more than just social events. On the occasion of April 23 1827 the birthday of King George IV was celebrated at Government Hill and we are informed that among other things, *after dinner the fair arrivals from Madras and the other ladies of the Settlement had an opportunity of indulging in the most delightful recreation quadrilling, which was kept up with commendable spirit to a very late hour when the party separated much delighted with the entertainment of the evening.*<sup>4</sup> Dancing was to continue on the occasion of the King's Birthday on the 28 April 1828 (and indeed must have subsequent years) and doubtless required the services of a Native Infantry Band, although no specific mention is made of the regiment.<sup>5</sup>

A natural consequence of the presence of music-making repertoire of western art music was the advertisement in The Singapore Chronicle of the sale of a piano: *Also, the property of a Lady about to leave the Settlement, a Broadwood's Square Pianoforte, especially made for India, of peculiar Sweet tone, and a handsome piece of Furniture. For particulars apply to the Editor.*<sup>6</sup>

The presence of pianos is again a mystery as these are very contemporary piano designs. Who would have ordered them and how many arrived in Singapore? Until further research addresses them, all we have is another advertisement:

*Two excellent Fine Toned, Square Pianos, made by Tomkinson to order, expressly for India, they are in perfect condition. Apply to the Editor.*<sup>7</sup>

It is not often we hear of connections between unnatural death and music. On this occasion, however, we are informed *a Coroner's Inquest was held on the body of a Portuguese of the name of Adrien, who was found dead by the Police the night before. It appeared the deceased had been returning home from a house on the cantonment side of the river, where he had been to deliver a harp, his profession, we believe being that of a musician* (emphasis mine). *The Jury returned the verdict of "Died from suffocation from falling in the mud, whilst in a state of drunkenness, and from assistance being prevented being given him by his brother Danchie." His brother Danchie, we understand, is in custody.*<sup>8</sup>

A barrage of questions arrive with the emergence of this one sentence. Who was the recipient of the harp and why? How did the harp fit into the scheme of music-making in Singapore at the time? Was there an ensemble? We were told that Dr. d’Almeida and Mr. Velge’s residences were the centres. Was there an ensemble or was a family newly arrived at Singapore for whom a harp was to be delivered? Was Adrien self-employed? If not, who did he work for? Was this harp purchased after being ordered or was this harp sold in Singapore? If the latter was plausible, how many harps were available for consumption? Was there demand for it? Who was interested in purchasing them? Were harps instruments that were consumed in the home for family occasions in Singapore? Given his identity, that of Portuguese descent, was Adrien able to earn a living by servicing a Eurasian or European or even local community or all of them? Or was he simply a delivery person, whose task that fateful day was a harp? Unfortunately, lack of sufficient clues or information at this stage does not fare any better by his unfortunate demise.

F.S. Marryat who visited Singapore in 1843 and had this to offer of social activities and entertainment on the island:

*Singapore, like all new settlements, is composed of so mixed a community that there is but little hospitality and less gaiety. Everyone is waiting to ascertain what is to be his position in society and till then everybody is too busy making money. The consequence is that a ball is so rare that it becomes the subject of conversation for months.*<sup>9</sup>

It should not surprise us that news of a visiting performer is significant enough to occupy the front page of this issue of the Chronicle in 1830:

*Signor Vicenti Tito Masoni, an Italian, lately arrived from the Courts of South America, Professor of Music, vocal and instrumental, begs to offer his services to the Public, to give lessons on the Violin, or Piano, in Singing and Composition of Music. His terms for instructing in any of the above accomplishments are 12 Spanish dollars per month each pupil to engage for 3 months certain – in which time he promises a speedy progress as his method of instruction is very simple and most comprehensive. In order to be enabled to reside here, he wishes before entering into engagement to (procure) the names of twelve persons as desirous of receiving lessons. The pupils will receive instruction at their own houses at such times as will be most convenient to themselves. Signor Masoni wishes further to have the honour of introducing Philharmonic Concerts in this Settlement, as he has*

*done in Peru, Chile and Buenos Aires, once a month. He further begs those Ladies or Gentlemen who wish to receive Lessons will determine soon as in case sufficient numbers cannot be obtained, he proposes proceeding to Calcutta to practice his profession.*<sup>10</sup>

However, the acid-test of this Signor Masoni is a review of a concert given by him: *Monday evening the 26<sup>th</sup> (26<sup>th</sup> April is presumed since the review appears in the 6<sup>th</sup> May issue), the European portion of the Settlement were in a measure enlivened by the performance at a Concert which was numerous and respectably attended both by “the beauty and the fashion” as well as by most of the Gentlemen of the Settlement. This pleasing innovation on our ennui originated and was conducted by Signor Masoni, whose advertisement appears in our last and Madame Petit de Biller, a French Lady, supported by 3 Amateurs. The Programme of the concert was as follows:*

*1st Part*

*An Overture of Rossini’s on the violin, by Snr. Masoni, accompanied by 2 Amateurs on flutes*

*Duet from Barbero de Sevilla, sung by Snr. Masoni and an Amateur*

*Cavatina in the Opera of Elizabeth, sung by Madame Petit, accompanied on the piano by Snr. Masoni*

*Concertante of Duport’s on the Piano Forte by Snr. Masoni and flute by an Amateur*

*2nd Part*

*Duet composed by Snr. Portagallo, sung by Snr. Masoni and an Amateur*

*Grand Duet of Forvaldo and Doriska, sung by Madame Petit and Mr. Masoni with piano accompaniment*

*Beautiful variations on “Hope told a flattering tale”. Composed by Snr. Masoni and performed on the violin accompanied by two amateurs with flutes*

*We should be acting an ungracious part were we to attempt to criticise any part of the performance, especially as we believe it gave general satisfaction to the auditors—We should rather praise such an effort to arouse the public especially on the part of the Amateurs who willingly came forward. Madame Petit sung her part with great skill and feeling and Signor Masoni’s performance on the violin deserves our highest commendation; in such a masterly manner did he perform on that instrument that every person in the room must have admired his skill and execution. We understand that Sig. Masoni purposes giving more concerts occasionally should be enabled to remain in the Settlement.*<sup>11</sup> We are also informed

that the Performance commenced at 7 o'clock and finished at about 10 in the evening.

Signor Masoni was also to weave his charms on the inhabitants of St. John's Island:

*On the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> (this review appears in the Singapore Chronicle 17 June) Signior Masoni again delighted the lovers of Music in this Settlement, with a display of his capabilities on the Violin, and assisted by the Amateurs, who so kindly lent their aid on a former occasion, produced a Concert of Music, vocal and instrumental, which for some hours beguiled the time of "Life's dull round" and put us in mind of former days. We are and ought to be thankful to any one who will halt and step in, whilst passing St. John's Island, for the purpose of amusing us, and trust the encouragement SNR. MASONI may receive will give him no just reason to repent having, for a time pitched his tent among us. The Evening's entertainment commenced with a **Turkish Overture** composed by SNR. MASONI, who assisted by three Amateurs, two on the flute and one on the violin, performed this novel piece with spirit and effect. We are informed that the young Gentleman who in this piece played the alto violin has not been more than two months under the Professor's instructions; if so, it says much for the Master, as well as the scholar for he sustained his part with much ability and without embarrassment. The selection was wholly **Italian**, consisting of nine parts. The **Cavatina** for the **Opera L'Anese del Celebre Puen** was sung by Madame petit De Biller in an enchanting manner (SNR MASONI presiding at the piano). This lady's voice is not powerful but full of sweetness, harmonising it well with the chords of the instrument. In the second part of the Entertainment this Lady and Signior sang a duet from Rossini's **Gaza Ladra**. The accompaniment on the piano by Masoni was, we hear, of his own composing. But what shall we say of the Professor's variations on **Robin Adair**. It is well known that he has led orchestras not only in Italy, but also in the capital cities in South America and we really think that he might go to London or Paris and meet with few who could surpass him in that most difficult of instruments. The Piece was, rapturously applauded—after which, at the request of the company he played "extempore the variations of **Nel cor piu**. We really feel inadequate to express in sufficient terms...of this finished performance. He produced the tones of a flute, clarinet, flageolet and hautboy, in rapid succession and imitated the notes of various birds. Not a whisper could be heard throughout the room "silence seekest pleasure" At the termination, a spontaneous burst of applause from all parts of the room assured the Professor that his merits were duly appreciated. We conceive the thanks of the Settlement are justly due to the highly gifted Amateur who we know patronised SNR. MASONI's on his first arrival his*



*own exertions have been unceasing and we trust will not now be relaxed as the “life of dullness and monotony” is fairly broken.*<sup>12</sup>

Masoni’s brief excursion gave rise to a visit by a relative of his in 1833:

*The Italian musical performers who so lately delighted the society of Macao have arrived here on the ship **Allalevie** on their way to Calcutta. We understand they propose giving a concert tomorrow evening (Friday 1 November 1833) and that arrangements are in progress to that effect. From the acknowledged talents of the leader, M. Planel, a relative of Snr. Masoni’s and indeed of the other performers, we have no doubt the community will enjoy a musical treat but seldom to be met here.*<sup>13</sup>

Like Masoni, Planel and his musical entourage did not disappoint:

*The concert which we noticed in our last as about to take place was well attended on Friday evening notwithstanding the high price of tickets—3 Dollars. M. Planel, the lion of the evening, performed some most difficult pieces on the violin which were deservedly applauded; he likewise accompanied Mesdames Schieron and Caraveglia on the piano; whilst they sang several fine Italian airs, both singly and in duet. The performances (Vocal) of those ladies were likewise much applauded, some of them being in our poor judgement, of most difficult accomplishment. We have no doubt the debut of this musical corps (And dramatic also at option) will meet in Calcutta, with that substantial patronage which they seek. M. Planel bids fair to emulate Snr. Masoni in talent and skill and if his exertions be crowned with similar success we will term him a fortunate man. We understand Snr. Masoni realised 40 000 Sicca Rupees during his stay in the ‘City of Palaces’.*<sup>14</sup>

As far as the Singapore Chronicle is a source of information, Masoni completely disappears from the discourse but reappears in the news in England in 1834:

*The friends and admirers of Masoni will be delighted to hear that he is making a most favourable impression in the first musical circles in England. The ears of Royalty have been gladdened by his strains, and the chief professors and amateurs have contributed him to notice. The following is from the Brighton Gazette, but we hope to find something in the London papers of a latter date, shewing that so favourable a commencement has had a pleasant sequel. Ought not the European community of Calcutta to blush that they permitted so highly gifted a musician to quit them, and that too in a state of poverty and distress; let them take a lesson from this and learn to appreciate talents which they have at their command. A Florentine named Masoni, about 35 years of age has recently arrived in this country from Calcutta, and we perceive by accounts in the Foreign journals that his musical fame as a violinist, has spread through the eastern world. The Bengal*

*papers which we have seen, speak in rapturous terms of his performance; and give accounts of overflowing houses on his departure from that country. Masoni arrived in Brighton last week; and through the recommendation of the **Earl of Munster** and **Lord Burghersh**, was honoured with the command of their Majesties to perform before them on Friday evening, at the Palace. He commenced with a piece of his own composition, “**Introduzione Polonesa**” and then played an overture of his own “**La Graciosa**” which elicited much applause; but in the variations of Rossini’s celebrated “**Non piu mesta**” in which he was accompanied by Sir George Smart, his talent was more particularly developed. This piece was executed in a style for pathos, precision and brilliancy of execution, has we should say, scarcely been equalled. **Lipinski’s** music, it is well known abounds with difficulties; but it was easily accomplished by Masoni. **Paganini’s** pizzicatos, harmonics, tenths and chromatic double shakes were performances in which he stood pre-eminent; but we question whether Masoni does not surmount such difficulties as triumphantly as **Paganini**; the difference appears so trifling, that we scarcely know to which the distinction should be awarded. Masoni’s arpeggios and rapidity of his staccatos are indeed extraordinary; in these two particulars, he may be said to excel **Paganini**. Sir George Smart, who accompanied him on the piano, was evidently much gratified; and his performances were often interrupted by the approbation of the Royal party. We believe that Masoni will play again before their majesties on Friday evening. We augur from the above that this musician is likely to create a sensation in the musical world and we hope to hear him perform in public previously to his departure from Brighton.<sup>15</sup>*

Much less is heard of M. Paniel.

Another rich source of documentary evidence is to be found in Charles Buckley who records a review of the performance of **She Stoops to Conquer** in the Singapore Chronicle of July 1834:

*Judging from the loud and continued plaudits of a respectable and well-filled house, it afforded universal satisfaction. To say that the amateur performers acted their parts well is only doing them bare justice...to the amateurs who, though few in number, delighted the audience with several **Italian overtures** and some of **Rossini’s** best airs, the community must feel much indebted. Their kindness is the more to be felt, as had they not volunteered their services, the manager must have had recourse to those indefatigable scrapers of cat-gut, commonly known as the **Malacca Fiddlers**, whose exertions, we know well, would have destroyed all the harmony felt on so agreeable an occasion.<sup>16</sup> This is the first we hear of what in all seriousness would have been a strong ensemble. Evidently, their performance left Buckley with a somewhat different reception. On the 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1844, when *Miss in her Teens* or the *Medley of Lovers* and *Fortune’s Frolic* was performed, the*

Singapore Free Press observed how *the pleasures of the evening were much enhanced by the performance of the **Amateur Orchestra**, which played some beautiful overtures with great skill and effect. It is seldom indeed that a small place like Singapore can boast of such a large number of really scientific and accomplished musicians as the gentlemen who so kindly lent their aid on Thursday.*<sup>17</sup>

The Singapore Free Press, in reviewing **The Conquering Game** and **The Mummy** on 27 November 1845, also recalls *the Amateur gentlemen who attended the orchestra deserve the highest praise, the music was exquisite, and perhaps no part of India, of the same limited extent as Singapore, can boast of an equal number of efficient performers. The proprietors of the theatre ought to be...very grateful for the assistance of these gentlemen. It gave us great pleasure to see the house so well filled and graced with the presence of all the beauty and fashion of the Settlement.*<sup>18</sup> A Singapore Free Press review of a performance of the 27 September 1846 of *Damp Beds and My Young Wife and Old Umbrella* makes a small but telling comment that *the excellent music of the 21<sup>st</sup> Regiment's Band added not a little to the evening's entertainment.*<sup>19</sup>

While every opportunity is made to luxuriate in detail with regard to musical activity and performance here in Singapore, it is doubtful that the same observations are made in England. Burton Benedict's article on ethnic identities through visual symbols at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851 informs us *the Malay Archipelago was represented by only three exhibits consisting of Dyak barkcloth, natural products and the model of a pirate boat. (Catalogue II (note 10, 588).*<sup>20</sup> We are not told of the details of the natural products but the nefarious activities of the pirates in their now infamous boat were already well-described and deplored in the early accounts of the Singapore Chronicle.

Of the entries on musical activities in Turnbull's work, there appears in her discussion of social life at the turn of the century, when Singapore "was a cosmopolitan city but largely an Anglo-Chinese preserve." It was a time when "for the affluent, life was becoming more pleasant."<sup>21</sup> Again, Turnbull looks towards the existing clubs and the rise of new ones as an indication of the need for entertainment:

*Liveliest of all was the German Teutonia Club, the centre of European social life and of musical activity, which had a strong following among the Western community at the turn of the century.*<sup>22</sup>

Charles Buckley records how in 1856, *the German Club called the Teutonia Club, was started on the 28<sup>th</sup> June by about seven members and the first committee was*



*composed of Otto Puttfarcken, Arnold, Otto Meye, and Franz Kustermann. It was opened in a house in North Bridge Road behind where Raffles Hotel now is, but a little way further towards Rochore than the end of that building...it was moved to Blanche House which is still standing on Mount Elizabeth, near the present Club building. The first club house was built in 1862 and many entertainments were given in it.*<sup>23</sup>

In 1857, a fund-raising event for the Calcutta Relief Fund included:

*Members of the Teutonia Club [who] gave a vocal and instrumental concert for the benefit of the Calcutta Relief Fund, in the Masonic Hall of the "Lodge Zeitland in the East" which was kindly placed at their disposal by the Brethren for this benevolent occasion...Each of the two parts of the Programme commenced with an overture—the first **Guillaume Tell** by **Rossini** and the second **Stradella** by **Flotow** both well executed by the 38<sup>th</sup> M.N.I which was in attendance by the kind permission of the Officers of the Regiment...the solo on the Violin cell with piano accompaniment, **Fantasie de l'Opera de Lucia de Lammermoore**, arranged by Mr. Laville was excellent and greatly relished...the solo **Das Muehlrad** was splendidly given and we were particularly taken by the charming little duett **Das Maigloeckchen** which was sung beautifully and rapturously encored...and many other pieces. But it was in the **Quarietta** that the power of the club was seen or rather felt to the greatest advantage ...the proceeds of this concert will form no insignificant item in the column of Singapore subscriptions to the Calcutta Relief Fund...*<sup>24</sup>

Evidently the Liedertafel in 1856 boasted amateurs of some considerable talent for their performances, including vocal solos, duets and quartets by the Germans must have been the envy of the non-German audiences as the *Singapore Free Press* states:

*...we are sure that many, besides ourselves, who were delighted listeners last night to the perfect harmony and admirable effects produced by trained vocalists singing together in parts must have envied that portion of the German system of education which adopts music ... as a branch of itself.*<sup>25</sup> The review made a subtle awareness of the difference in national cultures with concluding remarks *Nothing tends to soften national asperities or to strengthen national alliances, as the inter exchange of such benevolent actions.*<sup>26</sup>

In the *Singapore Free Press* editorial on the formation of the Singapore Amateur Musical Society (S.A.M.S) in 1865, competition is sensed between the Liedertafel and S.A.M.S as evident in a writer's exhortation that both societies would soon

appear before the public in the harmless rivalry with the members of the German Club.<sup>27</sup>

We come across another musical organisation in the context of advertisements of the **Savage Club** in the 1862 season presenting **On and Off, Number One Round the Corner**, and **Cool as a Cucumber**. *The Singapore Amateur Instrumental Association will kindly assist on this occasion*. This instrumental ensemble reportedly assisted in the concluding season of the **Savage Club's** performances at Barganny House on Thursday and Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December 1862 in performances of **Plot and Passion**, and the Burlesque of **Fra Diavolo or the Beauty and the Brigands**. We were also told that this would come *with original music and new scenery, dresses and appointments*.<sup>28</sup> The Straits Times review of the last regular performance of 13 December 1862 is interesting in one respect; the glaring omission to mention details of musical assistance of **Plot and Passion**, and the Burlesque of **Fra Diavolo or the Beauty and the Brigands**.

Charles Buckley informs us that *from time to time, in Singapore small parties for practising music had been formed, but had never attained any length of life*. Buckley precedes his discussion on the Amateur Musical Society that appears in the chapter "1865": *in this year the Amateur Musical Society was formed among the English community*. He notes *the Amateur Musical Society was formed among the English community and mustered about thirty to forty members*. *The German Teutonia Club had its Liedertafel for some years before*. *The high tenor voices of Mr. Otto Puttfarcken and another were of invaluable service and the singing of the club was unusually good*. *After they left, they left, the Liedertafel was fortunate in having Mr. Bremer among their number; he had a powerful high tenor voice and used to sing the leading melody clearly, over the voices of the other twelve or fifteen members*. *There has rarely been a singer like Mr. Bremer in Singapore and he was always ready to help*. *On one occasion in the Town Hall he sang Balfe's "Come into the Garden Maud" in a way those who heard it often spoke of afterwards*.<sup>29</sup>

The Amateur Musical Society was conducted at first by the organist of St. Andrew's Cathedral but it was Mr. Neil Macvicar (a book-keeper with Martin, Dryce and Co.) who in 1860 used to play the piano accompaniments and keep musical activity going. According to a Singapore newspaper, Mr. Macvicar was presented with a watch and chain as a *slight memento* by the trustees of St. Andrew's Cathedral for playing the organ for ten months to the congregation at the cathedral. Buckley also elaborates on the presence of a small amateur orchestra.

*The D'Almeida family was the musical nucleus of the place. With the formation of an Amateur Dramatic Society in 1860, the amateurs, which included two of the D'Almeida family, got together a small orchestra for the purpose of playing at the performances. The Dramatic society was called the **Savage Club** and they rented Braganny House which was close to Tank Road, which had a large centre room. Performances were held regularly for several years we are told and good standard plays, including some Shakespeare and modern comedies like "Still waters run deep" in a very capable way. It was a private entertainment for the subscribers only. Given the limited audience capacity, a performance was given twice so that the first part of the alphabetical names were asked the first time and the remaining part to the second performance. Mr. Jose d'Almeida played the viola, Dr. Robertson, Mr. Edward d'Almeida and Mr. G.H. Brown the violins, and Mr Knight, the violincello. There were one or two more; but their names are not remembered.*

We are informed this first Amateur orchestra, which did not consist of more than about six players, played at the first concert of the **Amateur Musical Society** on Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1865. Included among the works performed were the *Overture to the 'Caliph of Bagdad'* and Haydn's first Quintett. Given that the Society comprised only male voices, members sang part songs in a way described: *In these days they seem as rather curious musical efforts, for they were sung from the usual setting for unequal voices, so that the tenors were often, if not usually, singing above the music written for the trebles and the basses above the altos. However, it was thought satisfactory for 'the good old days' as Mr. R.O. Norris always expresses it. The German Club singers on the other hand sang from the music arranged for male voices, and having Mr. Bremer's powerful voice to lead, it was musically correct. There was a quartett; and a duet **The Larboard Watch** well sung by the two brothers Thomas and Charles Crane, who are both now living in England; and the newspaper paid compliment to the singing of one solo, the **Village Blacksmith** in which the compiler of this book made his first appearance and sang the first solo, it is believed, in the Town Hall; but he was soon afterwards eclipsed at the future concerts of the Society, by Mr. William Hole, at the present day in Johore who had a much better voice. A negro melody and Locke's old music to Macbeth, sung in a remarkable manner that has been described, ended this, the first concert in Town Hall...the amateurs were informed in print, by the musical critic of the newspaper that it was a splendid treat.*<sup>30</sup>

Locations for performances are somehow a mystery until clues are provided in some form of documentation. In the newspapers of the period, performance venues

are a glaring omission. Phan Ming Yen's research in 2000 uncovered surprising venues long forgotten. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the site of the Old Hill Street Police Station was also the location of the Assembly Rooms, in a building that was the main public meeting space for the European society between 1845 and 1856:

*Although built as a police station and barracks, the significance of the Old Hill Street Police Station (OHSPS) today as the headquarters of the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) lies in the history of site: a site once associated with entertainment and education. It was here, between 1845 and 1856, the Assembly Rooms, a space for public functions and a building that housed a theatre as well as a school, once stood.<sup>31</sup>*

Phan Ming Yen notes that the details on the Assembly Rooms can be found in Charles Burton Buckley's *Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* which was written in 1902. Buckley mentions a map *lithographed in London in 1854, in a very dilapidated state which is interesting as showing exactly where the old Assembly Rooms were....*<sup>32</sup> A copy of the map is currently available at the National Archives of Singapore and it does indeed indicate the location of the Assembly Rooms as being where the Old Hill Street Police Station stands now.<sup>33</sup> Further research in the course of this work has also revealed that among the performances that took place in the Assembly Rooms include a vocal recital by the then well-known British soprano Catherine Hayes (1825 - 1861)<sup>34</sup> and a violin recital by Martin Simonsen.<sup>35</sup> Eventually, the main performing space for both theatricals and music was to be shifted over to the Town Hall (present day Victoria Theatre) that was completed in 1861 and handed over the Municipal Commissioners in 1864.<sup>36</sup> The Town Hall had been built with funds raised by public subscription supplemented by the government as well as funds raised through amateur theatricals. The venue comprised two halls: the Lower Hall (or Lower Room) which served as a Theatre and the Upper Hall (or Upper Room) which was used for concerts. The Upper Hall must have been a space with good acoustics for even in the 1930s, Edwin Arthur Brown still had fond memories of it, calling it *one of the most perfect rooms, acoustically, that it has ever been of my lot to sing in. It was perfect and I am certain that there were no halls in the East like it.*<sup>37</sup> Rental of the Town Hall for performances was a source of revenue for the Municipality although receipts do not always indicate the frequent use as *for most of the engagements, no charge is made.*<sup>38</sup> The Municipality had used the Town Hall for its offices until 1892, after which it moved to a new building near Finlayson Green, vacating the Town Hall solely for public use.<sup>39</sup>



We learn that an amateur musical society has been organised under the conduct of Mr. Fentum the organist and choir master of St. Andrew's Cathedral with about thirty to forty members. The writer of this latest piece of information also delivers the fledgling ensemble cautionary advice:

*Such musical establishments have been established from time to time but have always failed for want of a good leader; a good desideratum which is now amply supplied. Mr. Fentum has had some practice in conducting such bodies and we understand proves an excellent leader. We wish the enterprise every success. There is more musical talent amongst us than people imagine and it only requires good management to be fully developed. Some of the musical societies previously established failed in consequence of the members being unwilling to sacrifice other past times to music; at first the meetings were regularly attended but gradually they were neglected and in the end had to be abandoned. Eight or nine years ago, when the **Philharmonic Society** sprang into existence it was joined by at least forty members, among whom were many excellent instrumentalists, and with very little practice some excellent music was discoursed, but alas! in a few months, when the novelty wore off, every now and then one or two members absented themselves on a plea of dining out or being otherwise engaged; and finally it not infrequently happened that second fiddle or flute; or first violin or basso met to play Haydn's Symphonies or some grand concerted music. The end under such circumstances was inevitable, and in about twelve months of its birth the society died a natural death. In 1862, the rivalries of the two dramatic corps gave an impulse to the musicians and two musical societies started but soon then to meet the fate of the first. If invitations to dinner were refused persistently on the grounds that they interfered with musical meetings, people would learn to recognise the claims of the Society as paramount and take care to invite the members on off nights. We believe that musical powers are equally distributed among mankind; and that the English in Singapore are likely to be quite as successful as their neighbours, if they will but persevere. We have as journalists placed before the members of the **Amateur Musical Society** the rocks upon which their predecessors split and trust that they may steer clear of them under the skilful guidance of their accomplished helmsman and soon appear before the public in harmless rivalry with the members of the **German club**.<sup>40</sup>*

Whatever harmless rivalry meant, either as musical or cultural competitors, we are witness to the proposal of a concert by the Amateur Musical Society:

*We believe propose giving a vocal and instrumental concert on the 28<sup>th</sup> December. We should like to see at the first concert the members of the German club giving their more inexperienced brethren a helping hand by singing a chorus or two; it would look well to see the young society start under such auspices.<sup>41</sup>*



The **Amateur Musical Society** gave its concert on the 28 December 1865. Excerpts of the concert review are presented below::

*Hail Smiling Morn, Carnivale and Gipsy Chorus were vociferously cheered and the last was encored...the solo was a success for a first appearance of the singer who acquitted himself admirably. We cannot say too much in favour of the piano solo although performed upon not the best of instruments. The quartet was exceedingly well sung and we only regretted that more part songs did not appear on the programme...although the Quintett was well executed, it grew tedious and it was clear that, both musicians and audience were very glad that the last chord was struck. A set of lively waltzes or a polka would have given greater satisfaction. Such severe music as Haydn's quintets, played even by the most skilful musicians, is never popular. Grand old Locke's Macbeth proved the gem of the evening as we anticipated. The tenor solos were splendid...the choruses were given with great precision and had it not been for their length would undoubtedly have been encored. The chief tenor solo deserved repetition and we were surprised that it was not called for. The rest of the pieces went off well. We think a comic song or two would have enlivened the evening. We know that one of the amateurs could have give a smart Irish ditty in that line if he had pleased...we should not forget to mention that the concert room was tastefully decorated and by the introduction of a set scene behind the singers their voices were thrown well forward and could be distinctly heard at the furthest end of the room.*<sup>42</sup>

Events surrounding the 28 December 1865 concert inform us of a new ensemble amidst cautionary warnings of a disciplined need to sustain musical activity and exhortations of redemption of English pride in the face of a rival German Club through musical activity. Events surrounding the concert of the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1866 make startling revelations of attitudes of the British towards the localised Chinese community in Singapore. For Phan Ming Yen, among the earliest instance of the practice of music was an occasion of the assertion of colonial power could be found at the second concert of the Singapore Amateur Musical Society (S.A.M.S) on 1 May 1866 for the benefit of the Chinese Paupers' Hospital.<sup>43</sup> This institution was initiated by the wealthy Chinese merchant Tan Tock Seng who in 1844 had chaired a public meeting appealing to the government to build a pauper hospital.<sup>44</sup> The hospital was opened in 1849 and located on Pearl's Hill built with funds mainly from private charity, a small property assessment, medical assistance, medicines, a financial grant from the government and a donation of \$7,000 from Tan himself. The building fronted a swamp that was used as the town's main rubbish dump and it was a grim place where *paupers where brought in with ulcers, sores and dropsy* and mortality rate was high. As the hospital committee admitted

in 1857: *No-one will enter who can crawl and beg, unless compelled by the police.*<sup>45</sup> At the time of the concert, the hospital was in a state of insolvency. According to the *Singapore Free Press*, although much had been done by the government and individual charities the hospital was still in debt. The newspaper argued that it was the duty of the government to prevent the hospital from closing but while it remained inactive *the evil keeps ever increasing and demands instant steps to relieve it.*<sup>46</sup>

This particular crisis became the motivation for a concert by the Singapore Amateur Musical Society. Much of the discourse surrounding the music and the hospital is made available in a review of the concert:

*The second concert of the **Amateur Musical Society**...was given for the benefit of the Tan Tock Seng's Hospital; an institution which is at present in a suit of insolvency, and unless strongly supported must be abandoned. The example set by our Amateurs...we trust will not be lost on the Chinese who are perhaps more interested in the matter than we are, as nine-tenths of the inmates of the poor house in question are of their country. The Chinese are naturally benevolent and will, we feel certain, respond heartily to the charitable exertions of the Europeans; they merely required a lead and are sure to follow suit. The programme offers all lovers of music a splendid treat...We sincerely trust the effort of our Amateurs to revive one of the most important charities in our midst will be warmly responded to and supported. It would not be a bad idea for our Chinese friends to make a collection during the day, and add it to the proceeds of the concert.*<sup>47</sup> *The public care of the destitute poor is an interest so distinct, so large and so much a matter in which all are concerned that we hail with pleasure any undertaking that is likely to tend towards their relief...But it was to provide fund to grapple with a peculiar form of human misery that the Concert was given by the Members of the **Amateur Musical Society**...namely in aid of the unfortunate wretches for whom Tan Tock Seng's Hospital affords an asylum. This Institution founded years ago by an enlightened Chinaman as a refuge for his diseased and leprous fellow countrymen is somewhat deeply involved in debt and it is with difficulty that the necessary funds are found to carry out this undertaking of such immense local values and one whose object is not only to initiate means for curing the helpless beings to whom we have referred; but also to give them food and shelter, thereby preventing them from lying about and infesting our streets with their loathsome presence. Much has been done by the Government and by individual charity in support of the hospital but a debt of some \$3000 still remains a heavy burden upon its usefulness and we have good reason for thinking that unless the money is found to liquidate this sum, the whole institution must collapse. As we have before indicated, we deem it to be the duty of the Government itself to provide measures against such an event*

occurring...the Chinese inhabitants themselves seeing that it is they who are chiefly benefited by the hospital and probably if the long talked of transfer takes place, something of this kind may be done. But in the meantime while Government is inactive, the evil keeps ever increasing and demands instant steps to relieve it. We were well pleased therefore to perceive last night on entering the Concert Hall such a large assemblage of our fellow residents present, and hope that the Amateurs will be able after paying their own expenses to hand over a considerable sum for the hospital. The Hall itself was decorated with great taste and the groups of evergreens intermixed with the roses all the way down the sides of the room had an exceedingly pretty effect, and does the utmost credit to the designer. Our anticipations of an excellent entertainment were by no means disappointed and we consider that the marked improvement both in music and in singing, since the first public appearance of the Amateurs shows what pains they have been at to acquire a complete knowledge of their parts.

The Overture *Il Barbiero di Seviglia* was excellently played and elicited applause. The Glee *Spring-time* was sung in capital time and with expression, The *Octett*, being an entirely new piece was well-received and we were surprised it was not encored—*All among the Barley* was tastefully rendered and seemed to please the audience. The duet *All's Well* an old favourite of most people, was sung with exquisite taste and we shall be glad to hear the gentlemen another time performing together. The solo *The Birdcatcher*, composed by the conductor of the Society, was sung with good effect, and on an encore being called for the audience, was favoured with the *Last Rose of Summer*. Though we should have preferred to have heard the first one, again, God Bless the Prince of Wales, a solo and chorus, closed the first part of the evening's entertainment and was executed with great taste and feeling. The Second part began according to programme with "Scotch Airs" but unfortunately the instruments being rather flat, the effect was not so good as was anticipated, still in this country it cannot be expected that any thing will remain long in tension and therefore the slight failure in *Pot Pourri* must be attributed to the slipping of the violin pegs, and perhaps an unfortunate turn of the flute in the wrong direction. We were very much pleased with the Songs *Phillis is my only joy*, and the singer acquitted himself well and was deservedly encored. We pass over the Glee, *Winds gently whisper* and make a few remarks upon the Trio, *When shall we three meet again*, and we congratulate the singers upon their success. It was very well performed and we trust to see the same Trio in another piece of the same descriptions. The *Laughing Chorus* was the piece that pleased us the most and it was vociferously encored. After the *Gipsy Chorus* a short speech was made by the Honorary Secretary stating that in compliance with a special request made by the committee of the Agri-Horticultural Society an extra concert

would be given on the 17<sup>th</sup> instant in aid of the Botanical Gardens, by that owing to the time being somewhat short, it would of course be impossible to prepare many new pieces; consequently he begged that the audience would not be disappointed if several which had been produced on a former occasion should again be brought forward. This announcement was received with much applause. The evening concluded with God Save the Queen!

We may add that we do not think that the **S.A.M.S** could have found a better object than the Gardens on which to bestow the proceeds of their next meeting, and we hope that the public will respond as heartily to the second call upon them as they did last night, we may also suggest that the concert be given in the Mess House at Tanglin which we believe possesses a fine hall for that purpose.<sup>48</sup>

The Singapore Free Press of 13 September 1866 reported of a concert held on Tuesday, the **German Liedertafel** and the **Amateur Musical Society** joined together in the Town Hall in a concert of sacred and secular music for the benefit of the Singapore Institution school...the singer (compiler of the book) who sang the bass recitative and air “the people that walked in darkness” from Handel’s *Messiah* reportedly garnered his first encore. Buckley mentions Mr. David Rodger who was judged not a musical man but who probably attended the concert to please Mr. Macvicar who was book-keeper in his firm, who did not think anything of that song, for it sounded like a man groping about in the dark, and there was no tune in it. For Buckley, it was a curious appreciation, quite unintended of the genius of Handel.<sup>49</sup>

The name G.B. Fentum seems to have garnered more than a passing mention: Last night Mr. Fentum gave his Concert of Classical And Secular music at the Town Hall; he was honoured by the presence of Governor and Lady Ord, but we are sorry to say by a very small audience, of whom a large proportion were ladies. The concert opened with a chorus **Rhine Song** by **Mendelssohn**, sung by the members of the **Singapore Amateur Musical Society**. Then came Mendelssohn’s Second Concerto in D minor for the Piano Forte with **Band accompaniment**. A Solo by Kucken “the Maid of Judah” was next well sung by the principal baritone of the German Musical Society. The Trinklied by Marschner, a German drinking song, followed and obtained the first encore of the evening for the members of the **Liedertafel**, who then sang another part song, concluding the first part. Some well-known airs from *Norma*, arranged for band and Piano.<sup>50</sup> We are even offered a brief review of G.B. Fentum’s recital the next week: Among the public amusements in addition to the Races, Mr. Fentum, the talented organist of the Episcopalian Church gave a concert on 30<sup>th</sup> April which was fairly attended and very successful.<sup>51</sup> Mention of Fentum again appears in a review of concert: Mr.



*Fentum's Concert at the Town Hall last evening under the patronage of H.E The Governor and Lady Ord was one of the best given that have been given here for some time past.*<sup>52</sup>

The reorganisation of the Madras Army had immediate consequences for supplying entertainment for the public at large via the medium of the Band. One of the most notable achievements of the **Singapore Amateur Musical Society** was the formation of such a Band. During the 1870s, the Band of the Musical Society gave a number of concerts. We are given some idea of this when it is reported in the Singapore Daily Times on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1874. *The Band of the Singapore Musical Society will give their first public performance weather permitting at 5 o'clock tomorrow, afternoon on the Esplanade.* We learn a little more from the concert preview given on the day itself – 21<sup>st</sup> March 1874:

*A New Band, the members of which style themselves from the Singapore Musical Society, are to make their debut in public this afternoon on the Esplanade, should the weather prove favourable. This establishment of this Band is an enterprise that should be viewed with favour by the community. Some time ago, subscriptions were taken for the support of a Band under the leadership of **Mr. Iburg**, who, after getting together a number of players and making arrangements to procure the necessary instruments, has been prevented by his departure from carrying out his intentions. The present Band is, however, the outcome of Mr. Iburg's scheme; and as we understand they will be entirely dependent upon subscriptions and such employment as they may be able to obtain for their services at evening parties and entertainments, they deserve every encouragement.*<sup>53</sup>

Programme details were made available in the Singapore Free Press where the Band gave performances presumably in the format of the Madras Native Infantry band concerts between 21 March and 25 April 1874. Curiously, we hear nothing of this Band after 1874.

Two visiting performers made their mark in Singapore in a series of concerts. Phan Ming Yen records that

*The concerts of the virtuoso Hungarian violinist Ede (Eduard) Remenyi (1828 - 1898) who was a friend of Liszt and whose playing was said to influenced Brahms' Hungarian Dances, in Asia in 1886 does not seem to have been recorded elsewhere. Remenyi had performed in India and then subsequently in Singapore, China, Japan, Saigon and Manila in 1886. His first concerts in Singapore on 1, 2, 4, 5 and 8 June 1886 drew much considerable excitement and publicity from the Singapore press and public. See The Straits Times (ST) 16 February 1886, 28 and 31 May 1886 for pre-publicity articles and ST 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9 June 1886 and SFP*



*Vol. IV No. 25 12 June 1886 for reviews of the concerts. Later in the same year, Remenyi had returned to Singapore for three more concerts on his way back to Europe. His season in Manila, according to ST 26 October 1886, was "a great success artistically, but financially it fell short of what was confidently anticipated." Remenyi had scheduled two concerts on 25 and 27 November 1886 with a third that was organised based on the response from subscriptions, on 3 December. See ST 25, 26 and 29 November and 1, 2 and 4 December for pre-publicity and reviews and also SFP Vol. V No. 23, 27 November 1886 and Vol. V No. 24, 4 December 1886.*<sup>54</sup>

Subsequently in 1896 Phan informs us that:

The Polish pianist Antoni Katski's (Antonie de Kontski) recital in Singapore on 20 January 1896 does not seem to have been recorded elsewhere except in the newspapers of the day. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* states that Katski (1817 - 1899) embarked on a world tour of East Asia, Australia and New Zealand in 1897 during which he died but makes no reference to his tour of 1896 during which he played in Singapore (Vol 10, p. 412). A composer and pianist, Katski was decorated by many kings in Europe and his playing was "characterised by great delicacy of touch and brilliance of execution (Singapore Free Press, 16, 18, 20 and 21 January 1896 and ST 21 January 1896 for pre-publicity and review of his recital).<sup>55</sup> In fact, de Kontski's concert of 20 January 1896 featured the *Andante, Scherzo, Presto Agitato of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, Op.27 no.1* must have been inspiring enough to have facilitated a 'second' performance in a different medium. In an advertisement in the Singapore Free Press, 24 January 1896, the Band of the 5<sup>th</sup> Fusilliers, led by Bandmaster, J. Wallace, featured Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> January 1896 in the Botanic Gardens alongside their usual repertoire.<sup>56</sup>

One avenue to discover what significance Western/ Western Art music may have had for a community in Singapore is offered in an advertisement on Items for sale which includes the following:

### NEW MUSIC

Summer Dreams Waltz

Dawning of Love

Inventions by Gautier

Ariadne by May Orlelere

Clytic " "

Caro Fior by Moorat

Bon Tom Polka

Aimee Waltz

South Kensington Galop by Caroline Levithian

Hypatia Waltz

Idalia Waltz

Violin Music Popular Nigger Melodies

Ball Room Treasures, a collection of 60 Waltzes, Polkas, &c,

Bell Violin Music

65 Humurous and Motto Songs in one volume<sup>57</sup>

Just as an unnatural death concerned the life and work of a man of Portuguese descent *his profession, we believe being that of a musician*, becomes the subject of a Court of Law, we read of another incident, where listening to music became the subject of an altercation with the Law.<sup>58</sup> This case was mentioned in the Straits Law Journal, April 1889 of the case of E.P.C. Ralph v H.A. Chopard. This case was tried before Mr. Kershaw on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> March 1889, when the Magistrate dismissed the charge, at the same time, stating his reasons for his decision. Being subsequently asked to state his reasons in writing, he did so as follows; – *The Defendant was charged with causing obstruction contrary to the Police Regulations, with regard to the traffic at the Town Hall at 10.30pm on the 7 March 1889 (sub-section 5 of section 31 of Ordinance I of 1872). The evidence shewed that on the night of the 7<sup>th</sup> March, when there was a performance going on in the Town Hall, the Defendant drove up to the door in a Ricksha and remained sitting in the Ricksha near the door. E.P.C. Ralph requested him to move on. He at first refused to do so but ultimately did move on driving away in the Ricksha outside Town Hall grounds. No other carriages drove up while this was taking place and no actual obstruction was caused and it was clear that the constable would never have arrested the Defendant if the matter had stopped at this stage. But after driving away the Defendant got out of the Ricksha and walked around to the back of the Town Hall and stood there on the road between the Town Hall and the Supreme Court, listening to the performance which was going on in the Town Hall. There was no traffic going on in the road, and the Defendant caused no actual obstruction, either to the public or the road, or to the persons entering and leaving the Town Hall. The constable told the Defendant to move on. The Defendant refused to do so and the constable arrested him. The question was whether the Defendant, by refusing to move on, had committed any offence. So far as regards the General Rules and Police Orders mentioned in sections 32 and 33 of “ The Police Force Ordinance 1872” it appeared to me that no offence had been committed by the Defendant simply standing on the road and not moving on when requested to do so. If he had caused any obstruction or been guilty of any disorderly conduct, the case would have been very different. By stopping the Ricksha at the entrance longer than was necessary, he probably committed an*

*offence under section 19, sub-section 10 of the “The Summary Criminal Jurisdiction Ordinance, 1872,” but he was not charged under this Ordinance, and as, I thought he was wrongly arrested, I did not amend the charge; in my opinion it is an offence for a person to stop a Ricksha on the road longer than is necessary for the purpose of alighting, but no offence merely to stand on the road, provided no obstruction is caused. I therefore dismissed the charge.*<sup>59</sup>

We are informed of the setting up of the Philharmonic Society in 1891. This is some distance from the presence around 1834 of *amateurs who, though few in number, delighted the audience with several **Italian** overtures and some of **Rossini’s** best airs, the community must feel much indebted and* another available ensemble described by Buckley as *those indefatigable scrapers of cat-gut, commonly known as the **Malacca Fiddlers**, whose exertions, we know well, would have destroyed all the harmony felt on so agreeable an occasion.*<sup>60</sup> Mention is made of an Amateur Orchestra in 1844; a Singapore Amateur Instrumental Orchestra in 1862, Teutonia Club’s **Liedertafel** in 1859; a small orchestra, which included two members of the D’Almeida family for the purpose of playing at the performances for the Amateur Dramatic Society in 1860; the emergence of the **Singapore Amateur Musical Society** which for a while had a Band of the Wind band tradition initiated by Mr. Iburg initiatives prior to his departure while the Amateur Musical Society was associated with G. B. Fentum during its western art concerts.

In his thesis *Music in Empire*, Phan Ming Yen uncovers evidence of an **Amateur Orchestral Society** described by E.A.Brown in “Music” *One Hundred Years of Singapore Volume Two* p. 407. Here, Brown states that the *an amateur orchestra was founded in 1884, and in 1888 he [Edward Salzmänn] was made conductor. The orchestra gave a popular promenade concert in 9 May 1887, when an orchestra of twenty-seven played under three conductors, Mr J. E. Light, Mr Salzmänn and Mr Galistan.* The orchestra again is mentioned in reference to Salzmänn becoming its conductor. Possibly the first mention of the orchestra is recorded in the *Straits Times* 8 January 1885 and the *Singapore Free Press*, 10 January 1885 Vol. 11. No.12 while first detailed mention of this ensemble can be found in a letter to the editor of the *Singapore Free Press*, 26 September 1865 Vol. III No. 13 information revealed is *that the Eurasian community had formed a musical society called **The Amateur Orchestra** and they meet every Saturday evening to rehearse.* The orchestra was subsequently affiliated with the Mutual Improvement Society, (*SFP*, 6 March 1886 Vol. IV No. 10) and gave a concert on 3 December 1885 (*SFP*, 2 January 1886, Vol. IV No. 1). At the orchestra's concert on 16 October 1886, the *SFP* had noted Galistan's role in the formation of the

orchestra: *Mr Galistan is at present the conductor of the Society which owes much to him, as one of those who started the orchestra from a small beginning ...* (SFP, 23 October 1886, Vol V No. 17). The Amateur Orchestral Society had initially been formed by members from the Eurasian community. Mr. Galistan was a bandmaster of the Military Department of the Johor government in late 1884. The Amateur Orchestral Society was not listed in the *Singapore and Straits Directory* until 1886. According to the directories for that year and 1887, Galistan was the conductor with Salzmann as sub-conductor. Salzmann became conductor in 1888 until 1890 (*Singapore and Straits Directory* 1888 p. 114, 1889 p. 152, 1890 p. 128). By 1891, the Singapore Philharmonic Society was formed and the Amateur Orchestral Society virtually dormant prior to the formation of the Singapore Philharmonic Society (SFP, 20 March 1891). However, this account is possibly the first time an Amateur Orchestra appeared in the public sphere in a level of coordination and formalisation unprecedented.<sup>61</sup>

Information about another philharmonic society appears albeit indirectly:

*The members of the **Philharmonic Society** of St. Cecelia of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd are being entertained to a picnic at St. Edward's Teluk Koro. Last year the least of the patron saint of the society (St. Cecelia) fell on...\*(print not legible) November and as usual its members should have been entertained to a complimentary dinner, but the idea had to be abandoned owing to the vicar, who is ex-officio President of the society, being suddenly called away to Penang, on business and it was decided instead of a disaster to have a picnic and to have it on the anniversary of Singapore.*<sup>62</sup> We are not sure if there is a continuation of this society for there is information that the Catholic Club put up an *important vocal and instrumental concert* on 8 February 1907 at the Victoria Memorial Hall at 9pm, under the direction of Mr. B. D'Cruz. Programme included the **Gloria** from **Mozart's Twelfth Mass**, some good orchestra pieces and various vocal and instrumental solos. *We are also informed that several of the musicians of the Band of the Royal West Kent Regiment are permitted to assist the orchestra on this occasion.*

According to a report read at the first annual general meeting the Society in 1892, the Philharmonic Society was formed in February 1891 when a group of gentlemen met for its very purpose.<sup>63</sup> Although the identity of the men were not stated in the report, one can assume from a *Straits Times* article on the society's first Musical Evening on 25 May 1891 that they included: St Clair, Salzmann, John Finlayson and John F. Craig.<sup>64</sup> These four were the only personalities mentioned in the article on the formation of the society. Finlayson, a partner in the Boustead and Co and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce,<sup>65</sup> was the first president of the

society. Craig, later a representative of Syme and Co who, according to Walter Makepeace in *One Hundred Years* - was "greatly interested in music and took a large part in the organisation of the Singapore Philharmonic Society" became its secretary.<sup>66</sup> A circular was issued on 18 March and within a month, 184 applications for membership were received.<sup>67</sup> On 11 April, the *Singapore Free Press* had reported that the number of applications had come "quite up to expectations and it is already sufficient to ensure the success of the scheme, and more are coming in everyday."<sup>68</sup> On 16 April, the *Singapore Free Press* announced that a meeting of the General Committee of the society would be held on 17 April, adding that there "has been a very gratifying response ... and the membership of the society is being added to daily."<sup>69</sup>

The first detailed account on the formation of Singapore Philharmonic Society is that of a lengthy leader that appeared in the 20 March 1891 issue of the *Singapore Free Press*.<sup>70</sup> Here, Finlayson was announced as the president of the general committee of the society, while the governor, Cecil Clementi Smith, its patron. St Clair was editor of the *Singapore Free Press* at that time and the assumption can be made here that St Clair wrote the leader, for it has been noted that he held the leading article as the only important feature of a newspaper.<sup>71</sup> Among the musical things he was noted for, first, he was *one of the best-known amateurs in the colony*.<sup>72</sup> Walter Makepeace called St Clair *a skilful musician* in *One Hundred Years of Singapore* and made note of his great power in building up the social and artistic life of Singapore.<sup>73</sup> According to Brown, St Clair made his first appearance in Singapore as a bassist at the 9 May 1887 concert by the Amateur Orchestral Society.<sup>74</sup>

It needs to be emphasised that most of the orchestral ensembles were reliant on an organisation to supply some of its musicians with suitable approbation. It is not surprising that the Amateur Orchestral Society which was succeeded by the Philharmonic Society was brought about by a military bandsman. It seems that the only way in which orchestral or philharmonic forces were able to perform what they did was to be supported or supplemented by musicians from a regimental band. How important this fit is can only be gleaned from a newspaper article about developments in London: *From a home paper we learn that at last the French pitch is to be adopted instead of the unnaturally high one commonly called "Concert pitch". It has been announced that this year the Philharmonic society in London will lower its pitch to the diapason normale or French pitch. Again, by the Queen's regulations, all military bands are required to conform to the Philharmonic pitch. No doubt there is a good case here for a Parliamentary grant in aid, or even counties might handsomely come to the aid of their territorial*



*regiments for it is by no means every regiment whose officers could so substantial an expenditure over and above ordinary band maintenance charges. **Here in Singapore the matter is of great importance in the interest of local music...so as to improve the conditions under which orchestral music has at present to be played...***<sup>75</sup> (emphasis mine)

How important this information serves its local situation can be deduced from preparations for a Popular Orchestral Concert on 8 April 1899, featuring the second and third movements of Mendelssohn's Second Piano Concerto in D minor, besides selections from Wagner's *Tannhauser* and two movements from a Haydn symphony. The orchestral forces employed for the concert numbered at 43 was comparatively large, 27 amateurs and 16 members from the band of the **King's Own Regiment**, the regiment stationed in Singapore then. The band members primarily supplemented the wind section of the orchestra for it was *naturally impossible to find in any musical community in the Far East more than a small number of Amateur players of wind instruments.*<sup>76</sup> This is not the first time for either supplementary regimental support nor the concerto:

*Last night Mr. Fentum gave his concert of classical and secular music at the Town Hall...Mendelssohn's Second Concerto in D minor for the Piano Forte with **Band accompaniment**...Some well-known airs from Norma, arranged for band and Piano.*<sup>77</sup>

This practice continued with the tearing down of the Town Hall into what is known as Victoria Theatre. The Singapore Philharmonic Society led by its president, W.G. St. Clair, was helped by Mr. and Mrs. Salzmann who sang and accompanied songs for children and were later know to organise Children's Concerts.<sup>78</sup> The Eurasian presence, by now already established with the formation of the Singapore Recreation Club, was reinforced. In an advertisement dated 1905, we are informed in the Singapore Free Press in the 1905 Season that the *second of the Series of Childrens' Concerts will be given in the Town hall on Thursday 13 April, at 5.30-6.30pm. Heads of School please note. These concerts are for European and Eurasian children who are admitted free without ticket.*<sup>79</sup> Regimental assistance was also extended to the Children's Concert series where a special "Children's Concert Fund" was set up based on donations of \$1 or more from adults who wished to attend to cover expenditure on gas, bandsmen's fees and transport, printing and incidental expenses.<sup>80</sup> Another example of the Popular Orchestral Concert was one scheduled on 20 June and advertised on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1905. The repertoire included Mendelssohn's Overture to Son and Stranger, the Andante from Tchaikovsky's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony in E minor, La Reine de Saba by Gunoud; Mazuka Hungaroise, La Tzigane by Louis Ganne; Waltz, Geschichten des Wiener Wald by Strauss; and Romance Simple\*\*\* by Ambrose Thome. This concert we are told

also included Instrumental solos and songs. Admission was free for members of the society. Tickets were available with seating plans at Robinsons.<sup>81</sup> By 1913, however, the instruments and other equipment of the orchestra of the Singapore Philharmonic Society were thick with dust in a dark corner of William Graeme St. Clair's *Singapore Free Press* office.<sup>82</sup>

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an increasing number of Straits Chinese<sup>83</sup> who were adopting Western customs, taking on to European sports and past times. In 1885 a Straits Chinese Recreation Club was founded and in 1897, Lim Boon Keng, a third-generation Straits Chinese born in Singapore who was the first Chinese Queen's Scholar and legislative councillor from 1895 to 1902, founded the Philomathic Society.<sup>84</sup> Lim, together with Song Ong Siang, began *The Straits Chinese Magazine* in 1897, published in English, which *aimed to promote intellectual activity amongst the Straits - born people and will afford room for the discussion of useful, interesting and curious matters connected with the customs, social life, folk-lore, history and religion of the varied races who have made their home in this Colony.*<sup>85</sup>

In 1898, Edward Salzmänn wrote an article on Chinese music for the magazine as well as harmonised a Chinese melody. His judgement on Chinese music is startling:

*Now that the Chinese are evidently about to seriously compare their own methods, whether in warfare, Science or Art, with those of the western nations, it is probable that Music will also occupy the attention of the future professors and teachers of that art in China. It is well understood that Chinese music is, as music, in quite a rudimentary state...the European orchestra of the present day...must be allowed to be a most beautiful combination of musical sounds, even if the music played be beyond comprehension. Judged by this standard, Chinese music cannot stand. When we consider the instruments now in use, the want of system, and the discord of untuned notes, it must be admitted that no beauty can be claimed for Chinese music at the present time. It is but seldom that Chinese music has been written down in the western notation; a few attempts have been made chiefly in connection with Mission work...in the opinion of many people competent to judge, there is plenty of talent in music among the Chinese, if they were properly trained. Should they be begin to study the western system, there is little doubt but that before long a very great improvement would be heard.*<sup>86</sup>

Amidst the excitement of organising these concerts, we find an interesting excerpt from the *Straits Chinese Magazine* (Vol.10, Issue 3, 9/1906) has a view on Western music and the Straits Chinese community:

*Whether Western music will be as popular with our Straits-born Chinese as football, e.g., is with Malays is a question of time, and of education. The signs of the times point favourably in this direction. The pianoforte is gradually being introduced into Chinese homes and the number of Chinese children who take lessons on it is gradually increasing. The violin is also becoming a popular musical instrument with our young people. Time was when Malay tunes played without notes was all a Chinese youth aspired to on the violin, but within the last ten years or so, the Straits Chinese have taken kindly to Western music, playing from notes. Singing is also beginning to be considered as an accomplishment. The pity is that no serious attempt has yet been made to organise singing classes for solo and chorus parts.*

*Some years ago, the Chinese Philomatic Society has a music section, and for over two years, Mr. Salzmänn as tutor, the violin class was making good progress when it had to be suddenly abandoned. Quite recently, a similar organisation has sprung up, under the name of the Straits Chinese Amateur Musical Society with a club house very handsomely furnished and with a strong membership for a time at Wallich Street. We would urge upon our people who have any taste for Western music to rally around this Society, which is yet in its infancy, and to give it encouragement by becoming active or subscribing members. For some inexplicable reason, our Chinese boys and girls are denied the privilege of attending the Children's concert which are given from time to time by the Philharmonic Society. They are thus handicapped in their musical education. We ought therefore to do what we can to encourage any movement that has for its object the training and development of the minds of our people in this branch of the Fine Arts.<sup>87</sup>*

In fact, Phan's research reveals that when in 1921 the orchestra of the then defunct Singapore Philharmonic Society was revived, upon St Clair's return to Singapore following his retirement in 1916 from the *Singapore Free Press*, there appeared to have been a shift in attitude.<sup>88</sup> If in 1906 the *Straits Chinese Magazine* felt the Chinese community excluded from the Children's Concerts of the Philharmonic Society, now, in July 1921, there was an announcement that a concert that was *largely in the nature of an experiment* was to be given for the *Asiatics*.<sup>89</sup> *Comprising a pleasant miscellaneous programme of a bright character* the concert was at one level indeed an experiment for it was held in order to discover *how far that will be to the liking of an Asiatic audience, of whom the Chinese will doubtless furnish a large majority*.<sup>90</sup> For the Singapore Philharmonic Orchestra, the concert was a gift from the members of the Orchestra to all those Asiatics who may be able to appreciate the music presented for their entertainment.<sup>91</sup>

However, beyond just an experiment, the Philharmonic Orchestra had hoped that the Asiatics *will come to see that through the medium of such musical entertainments, there is on the part of the European lovers of music, a very real interest in the artistic progress of the non-European community.*<sup>92</sup> In this manner, the orchestra hoped that the concert would create a *genuine good feeling between the different classes of a very mixed community: and that in itself is an aim to be promoted and encouraged in every possible way.*<sup>93</sup>

According to both the *Singapore Free Press* and the *Malaya Tribune* the concert that was held on 22 September 1921 at the Victoria Theatre for the Garden Club and the Straits Chinese Recreation Club was well attended. The reviewer for the *Malaya Tribune*, a daily founded in 1914 by Lim Boon Keng and a group of Eurasians, found the programme *excellently chosen and was of the right educational value.*<sup>94</sup> The *Singapore Free Press* hoped that the success of the concert *should make this effort the forerunner of many more.*<sup>95</sup> A young schoolteacher at St Andrew's School named Tay Lian Teck played a violin solo in the concert. Tay would later become a Municipal Commissioner and Justice of Peace as well as a Legislative Councillor.<sup>96</sup>

Alec Dixon in remembering the early 1920s informs us that *Singapore's most notable achievement in the field of amateur entertainment was, of course, the annual production of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera by the city's **Amateur Operatic Society**. Among those who gave away their time and energies to these productions were Colonel Howard Tyte (Superintendent of Prisons), Captain Geoffrey Freyberg, R.N (Master Attendant), and Chief Inspector F. Minns (Bandmaster, Straits Settlement Police). Captain Freyberg, I remember designed and produced some very convincing scenery and stage furniture for the production of *H.M.S Pinafore*. It is interesting to recall that, when the Society produced the *Mikado*, the Japanese Consul-General and other members of the Japanese community were most helpful in the matter of costumes and stage settings. Every year, after the final performance of the current opera, it was customary for members of the cast, wearing their stage costumes, to join in the dinner dance at Raffles Hotel. And I for one, shall long remember the colourful scene when the whole company of the Yeomen of the Guard marches on to the ballroom floor of Raffles with a flourish of halbers and a clatter of pikes. Apart from much home-produced entertainment, Singapore was regularly visited by professional theatrical companies, both English and American. Then there were the occasional visits of internationally famous artistes, among them Fritz Kreisler, Josef Hoffman, Anna Pavlova, and Clara Butt.*<sup>97</sup>

If Salzman had informed us of the ways in which Chinese music was made available in Western notation...*made chiefly in connection with Mission work.*<sup>98</sup>

Consequently, we are informed that:

*The excellent unaccompanied singing of the little Chinese children of St. Andrew's Medical Mission on their Prize Day on December 13<sup>th</sup> was a good illustration of what careful, patient teaching is able to accomplish. One feels too that a real Christian influence is being brought to bear in that small school of 40 children.*<sup>99</sup>

It should not surprise us to discover the ways in which western notation went quite well alongside Christian missionary zeal. We have noted a Philharmonic Society from the Cathedral of the Good Shephard (Catholic) although very little has been uncovered of its musical activities, repertoire, performances and ways in which it served missionary work. However, it is instructive that the sustained efforts at facilitating western art music (even if sometimes more English and more vocal and choral) seem to stem from personnel attached to St. Andrew's Cathedral throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Cathedral Monthly Paper of St. Andrews in 1928 informs us that:

*The three performances of the Messiah on February 17, 20 and 21 were well patronised and were very well rendered. The soloists were Mrs. Battishill (Soprano), Mrs. Watson (contralto), J.W. Haines (tenor) and Roy Brown (bass). Mr. Thornley Jones was at the organ and the conductor was Mr. E.A. Brown. The chorus of about 100 strong did excellently and the orchestra with the help of members of the Duke of Wellington's Band are to be congratulated on their efforts. Many of those attending must have heard the Messiah sung at home and by famous artists and massive choruses, but all will agree that this local performance was in every way worthy of the traditions connected with this oratorio, and was a real inspiration. We owe a great debt to Mr. Brown and those whom he trained for the patient labour that such an effort represents. We are sure they are amply repaid in knowing that they helped and inspired those who came to listen. The financial result will mean that the Organ Fund will benefit to the extent of about \$400. This is mainly due to the system of programmes, which were sold for the subscription performance on the last night. On the other two occasions the collections came to \$117 and \$175.*<sup>100</sup>

An Advertisement dated Saturday 5 April 1930 (p.7)

RAFFLES HOTEL

Monia Litter and his Orchestra

Programme for Sunday April 6 at 9.30pm

Overture      La Princesse Jaune      c. Saint-Saens



Opera Fantasy      Faust      C. Gnoud\* (spelling in original)  
 INTERVAL  
 Valse Pathetique      M. Baron  
 From the Opera      Goal M. Mussorgsky  
 (The Fair at Sorochinsk)  
 INTERVAL  
 SUITE (From the Opera Ugeno Onegin)      P. Tschaikow (missing the sky)  
 Valtz  
 Introduction and air of Lanski  
 Polonaise  
 GOD SAVE THE KING

Monia Litter and his orchestra were also at the Raffles for a different reason and function. We learn something of this 'infiltration', for instance in an article in the Straits Time *1500 invitations have been sent out by Sir Cecil and Lady Clementi for the dance to be held on 3 June in honour of His Majesty's birthday...the Band of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Welsh Regiment and Monia Litter's orchestra from Raffles Hotel will be present. The first dance will be at 9.45pm after which selections will be played by the regimental band. The second dance will be at 10.20pm. The subsequent items of the evening's entertainment have been arranged with alternate dance music and selections by the regiment band until 12.40.*<sup>101</sup> The presence of Monia Litter and his orchestra need an introduction. Raffles Hotel advertised this group as being recognised as the best and most popular dance band east of the Suez.<sup>102</sup> Quite clearly, Monia Litter was able to operate at two different performance modes when there was occasion to.

One of the most interesting spaces for further discourse is during one of the most traumatic periods of Singapore's history, the Japanese Occupation. Although coverage was given to Western arts music activities during the Japanese Occupation in the *Syonan Shimbun* and although individual memoirs have made passing reference to such activities, little has been made out of these brief accounts. Cultural Medallion recipient Paul Abisheganaden recalled that Beethoven and Bach were the two composers who were revered as gods during the Japanese occupation and *that a lot of music as promoted in the schools*. There was an orchestral ensemble Syonan Kokkaido Orchestra, formed during the Japanese Occupation.<sup>103</sup> But perhaps the single most comprehensive account of Western musical activities of this period to date in recent times and in a public medium comes from Alex Abisheganaden, who lived through the war, in his article 'The Music Score' for *The Straits Times* in 1982. For Abisheganaden, it seemed that

music came as a relief to the period or rather, there was a suggestion that music had the power to triumph over adversity:

*Though one would have expected the grim period of the Japanese occupation to stifle the sound of music in Singapore, this was not the case.*<sup>104</sup>

That which was referred to as "music" by Abisheganaden was essentially Western art music. In fact, Abisheganaden makes a careful distinction as to the type of music that was allowed to be performed during the Japanese occupation. From his account, which one can assume to be from experience, it seems that a certain musical culture and musical taste had evolved which was dictated probably more by politics than by aesthetics:

*European classical music (as opposed to American or British) was not banned. In fact, during the war years, the Victoria Theatre (then named Syonan Kokaido) was the venue for weekly concerts by the Syonan Tokubetusi Orchestra with Walter Rayman as leader-conductor.*<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, despite this form of censorship, from Abisheganaden's account, a lively musical scene seems to emerge in which the ability to perform or the knowledge of music was one held in some esteem by the occupying Japanese forces:

*The orchestra, comprising the best European and local musicians, gave two concerts each Sunday - the first at noon and the other at 3 p.m, at Tokyo Time (It was the practice during the Japanese Occupation to observe Tokyo time which was then 2 1/2 hours ahead of ours). The theatre was always packed for both concerts. In addition to a monthly pay, each player was also received one kati of rice, half a kait of sugar and five packets of Koa cigarettes! The manger of the theatre then was Paul Gerentzer, an excellent percussionist from Hungary who also served as concert arranger.*<sup>106</sup>

Two concert programme leaflets, for a concert on 12 December and a pair of concerts on 25 and 26 December 1943, in Abisheganaden's possession reveal that the printed time of the concerts were from two to four pm and five to seven pm.<sup>107</sup>

While the programme leaflets were no more than a square piece of paper that measured 18.5 cm by 18.5 cm and containing a listing of the programme, information on the concert time and venue, much can be gleaned from these documents.

The Orchestra, as it was known in English, seemed to have been interchangeably called **The Augmented Syonan Orchestra** or the **Syonan Orchestra** or **Syonan Symphony Orchestra**<sup>108</sup> and it was under the patronage of the Syonan Tokubetu-

Si, the Japanese municipal government. Its concerts were billed as a **Popular Concert**. The choice of programme for both concerts bears out Abisheganaden's observations. Both concerts comprised music mainly by Italian, German and Hungarian composers, the only oddity being a Tchaikovsky piece, the Russians during the war being an enemy of the Axis powers. Both concerts inevitably included a Japanese work. With the exception of the overture, works performed were either mainly dances or dance-like in nature or songs, perhaps thus hinting that these concerts had as their aim to entertain or to lighten up the mood of its audiences. More significantly, the concerts were not entirely musical events. Both concerts included dance performances. The concert on 12 December, as printed in the programme leaflet,<sup>109</sup> comprised the following:

|  |                 |              |
|--|-----------------|--------------|
| Overture   | Euranthe        | Weber        |
| Waltz  | Gold and Silver | Lehar        |
| Naga-uta   | Tsuru Kame      |              |
| Fantazie   | Eugin Onegin    | Tchaikvowsky |
| Slow Waltz Danced by Mrs Gerentser & Miss Vicky. |                 |              |

#### Interval

Trio Espana Danced by Mrs Gerentser & S. O. G.

|                 |   |             |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
| Suite           | Dance of the Hours                                | Ponchiellis |
| Saxophone Solo  | Valse Marilyn                                     |             |
| Dance Hongroise | Transcriptions by R Wiedoeff played by Gy. Kontor |             |
| Potpourri       | Gypsy Primas                                      | Kalman      |
| Selection       | "Ryuko Uta"                                       |             |

Despite the musical restrictions, the programming strategy of the orchestra remained sensitive to the mood of the times. The programme<sup>110</sup> for the concerts on 25 and 26 December for instance seemed to have borne in mind the Christmas season as it included Christmas songs and more dances than the earlier 12 December programme:

|                                   |   |                           |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| <i>Overture</i>                   | <i>Wilhelm Tell</i>                             | <i>Rossini</i>            |
| <i>Waltz</i>                      | <i>Voice of Spring</i>                          | <i>Strauss</i>            |
| <i>Ko-uta</i>                     | <i>Haru-same</i>                                |                           |
| <i>Fantazie</i>                   | <i>Inspirations of Beethoven</i>                | <i>Arranged by Urbach</i> |
| <i>(a) Thai Dance</i>             | <i>Danced by Miss Rozi Domingo</i>              |                           |
| <i>(b) Doll Scene at midnight</i> | <i>Danced by Mrs Gerentser &amp; Miss Vicky</i> |                           |

*Interval**Parade of the Tin Soldiers**Danced by Miss Katinka Gerentser & S.**O.G**Selection of Popular Christmas Songs**Arranged by Rhode**Electric Guitar Solo**(a) Ameno Blues**(b) Shina No Yoru**By Special Request<sup>2nd</sup> Hungarian Rhapsody Liszt – Soloist J Dodo Mailinger**"Doyo Syu" Selection of famous children's songs*

The orchestra was conscious of promoting forthcoming concerts hence the advertisements on the single leaflet. On the programme leaflets of the two aforementioned concerts, the orchestra announced a forthcoming **Strauss recital**. The December **Strauss Recital** was held on a Wednesday at 7 pm while the following **Strauss recital** was held on Saturday 1 January 1944 at 7 pm.

Lau Bian Chin, a piano teacher who lived through the Japanese Occupation also makes mention of Western art music activities during this time. In her privately published *A Musician Remembers*, Lau recalls a string orchestra comprising Chinese students and being invited to perform for wounded Japanese soldiers. Like Abisheganaden, Lau recalled that musicians were not allowed to play any works by British or American composers. And like Abisheganaden, Lau's memoirs hint at the power of music to transcend the harsh reality of the time:

*One day we had a lesson on the moon and the teacher asked if anyone could play the **Moonlight Sonata** by Beethoven. My friends and classmates pointed to me. The next day I played the **Moonlight Sonata** to the whole class on the class piano...A small string orchestra made up of Ong Kim Siong, Kathleen Yeo, Ong Kim Keat, me and others were formed...Later on we invited by our Japanese teachers to give a small concert to some wounded Japanese soldiers in the General Hospital...It was an awful sight to see the wounded soldiers some without legs or hands, but they liked our classical [sic] and some even ventured to smile a little and to clap warmly after our performance.<sup>111</sup>*

Lau too refers to the Syonan Orchestra although she refers to David Apel and not to Reimann or Gerentser. Lau however is more specific about the composition and size of the ensemble:

*My friend, Marie Aroozoo's piano teacher Mr David Apel, a Hungarian Jew formed a small orchestra of mainly East European Jews, and they performed every Sunday at the Victoria Theatre. This was free of charge and I used to attend these Sunday afternoon concerts quite often.<sup>112</sup>*



Abisheganaden's recollection of a "packed" hall for the concerts and Lau's recollections of attending Sunday afternoon concerts often contrast with the Japanese side of the story. Shinozaki Mamoru who first served as a press attaché and then was later with the Syonan Tokubetu-Si as Chief Education Officer and Chief Welfare Officer. In his memoirs *Syonan My Story - The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*, he gives an account of a Singapore that is devoid of music. In fact, in the only section in his book in which he talks about entertainment, there is no mention of the Syonan Orchestra. The only time Shinozaki mentions an orchestra in his memoirs is on the occasion of the then Emperor Hirohito's birthday celebrations. Even then, he refers to the ensemble as being a Hungarian orchestra, perhaps because of the composition of its members. Yet, it is curious that he makes no mention of the orchestra being under the patronage of the municipality:

*I expect many Singaporeans can still remember that first Emperor's birthday celebrations. There was a concert at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Japanese music played by the Hungarian orchestra, and a Japanese opera by a troupe from Shanghai.*<sup>113</sup>

What Shinozaki notes, however, in the segment on entertainment, is the exclusion of the local population from the theatres:

*There was very little entertainment of any kind, no enjoyment. All the main theatres were reserved exclusively for Japanese soldiers. Unnecessarily, Singapore people were shut out of most luxurious bars and restaurants. Even had they been open to them few could have afforded to have gone inside; they did not have the money.*<sup>114</sup>

This detail sits poignantly with recollections by Alex Abisheganaden's brother Paul who suggested that there was a greater promotion of music even in restaurants and cafes:

*Every restaurant had at least a pianist, if not a pianist and violinist or a guitarist who could sing. The bigger restaurants could even afford a small group of musicians and every evening there was community singing.*<sup>115</sup>

In fact, the only reference Shinozaki makes to recreation is the formation of a sports association which in contrast to Alex Abisheganaden's account of the Syonan Orchestra and which if Shinozaki's word is taken to be accurate, seems to have been a level-playing field among the population of Singapore then:

*One day, Professor Nakajima of Tokyo University, accompanied by Mr G H Kiat, came into my office and suggested that we form a sports association. I promptly agreed and so the Syonan Sports Association came into being. Lots of youngsters joined; we used the Jalan Besar Stadium. This was in fact the only institution*

where everybody was treated equally, Japanese, Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, Arabs - all were on exactly the same footing.<sup>116</sup>

The *Syonan Sinbun* not only gave ample coverage to the orchestra but also to other performing arts activities providing much detail which informs us of what to expect from reading the papers beginning with a concert for the benefit of the wounded Japanese soldiers occupying central space:

*“If music be the food of love, play on, Says the Love-sick Duke Orsino in the opening lines of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. Last evening, wounded and sick Nipponese soldiers listened with rapt attention for a full three hours, squatted under a threatening sky on a wet quadrangle in the Syonan General Hospital, to a musical concert by the Syonan Orchestra, directed by M.Gaza Gerenster, could well have said, “If music be the healing of all human ailments, then play on and on!” The present reviewer is not a musical critic in the accepted sense of the term. Indeed he cannot tell the difference between a waltz and a serenade but he can appreciate good music: he can be moved by pathetic music: he can rise to the heights of rapture with a piece intended for that very purpose: he can enjoy the youthful rhythm of a swing piece. One of the oft-given pieces of advice to the young reporter by editors is to be reserved in one’s comments to be miserly with superlatives: but last evening, when one saw the reactions of those fighting men who had not so long ago escape a thousand deaths to music of music of the highest order produced by a skeleton orchestra –three violins, a cello, a trumpet, a bass, a piano and last but not least, the drums, the sticks by a master—none other than Gaza Gerenster himself, he cannot but be superlative in his comments. Indeed the significant factors of the concert were not only the high order of the music served out but also the cultured and intelligent appreciation of good music by the singular audience. It is impossible by mere juggling of words describe this phenomenon if it is Syonanese still remember accurately what world famous musicians have said about Singaporeans musical ear. You should have been in the midst of those wounded and sick audience: you should have watched the twinkle in their eyes: you should have watched the ever changing moods produced by those gallant fighting men by the music. Suffice to say that no orchestra has ever before, played to a more appreciative audience in this island. Indeed last night one felt that one had to be really sick in order to fully appreciate this good music. It would be invidious to single out any one member of the orchestra for special comment because it was as a whole that the orchestra succeeded. But it must be said that if M. Gaza Gerenster has a mission in life it must be to make people happy. A magnetic (musical) personality bearing striking resemblance to Paul Whiteman,*

*Gerenster is indeed a past-master in the art of making people joyous. The audience specially enjoyed the Nipponese pieces which were played by request and encored repeatedly. In one instance the audience accompanied the orchestra vocally. The lusty full-throated way in which they sang made one wonder whether they had rehearsed the song before! The Nipponese National Anthem had to be played twice. The orchestra finally left with repeated requests to call again. Raga(s) Ayakinam.*<sup>117</sup>

Programme details of the pieces played were as follows:

1. *Overture: Rakoezy Overture by B. Keler*
2. *Waltz: on the beautiful Danube—J Strauss*
3. *Fantasia: Verdi's Triumph-I Weninger*
4. *Pot-Porri: welcome Vienna-N Dostal*

#### INTERVAL

5. *Pot-Porri: Hungarian Songs- B. Leopold*
6. *Suite: Japanese Suite –Yoshimoto*
7. *2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Rhapsody—F. Listz*
8. *Fou Su Ka*

*EXTRA: Serenade of Drigo*

*And more than ten pieces played by request.*<sup>118</sup>

To the charge that musical activities in the public sphere or public broadcast were not a level playing field, there appears the formation of a young Malay orchestra:

*The Young Malay Orchestra which was formed a fortnight ago will be on air at 10 o'clock (Tokyo time) tonight from the Syonan Broadcasting Station (wavelength 25 metres). This orchestra had its last rehearsal on Friday at the Cathay in the presence of the officers of the Propaganda Section. Selection of Nippon-go and Malay music will be rendered tonight. The programme is as follows:*

*10.00-10.05 Opening announcement*

*10.05-10.15 Talk on Hinomaru (Nippon National Flag) by Mr. Onan Siraj*

*10.15-10.45:*

*The Strength of Asia*

*Young Malays*

*Musalims*

*Koojoo No Tuki*

*Anak Ikan*

*Ikotu Odate*

*Dondang Sayang (Swing)*

*Koko Kusinku Kioku*

*Kimigayo*<sup>119</sup>

Within the first few months of occupying Singapore was the task of uniting its inhabitants in favour of a singular agenda. This was of course best served through Music and none more powerfully politicised than the Kimigayo: National Anthem of Nippon:

*The most important medium through which the people of a nation can express their loyal sentiments to their beloved sovereign and their country is the National Anthem. Therefore on the shoulder of the men who are set the task of selecting the piece and setting it to music rest a responsibility of National importance. It might therefore come as a surprise to many that until the Meiji Era, Nippon did not have a National Anthem. At this time, a body of famous Nippon scholars were assigned to select a piece from the national treasury of poetry and set it to music. In the selection of the music, the scholars were assisted by a Western musician of note, Herr Franck Eckert. Eckert was a German and was Director of the Marine Band from 1879-1898. He also assisted to found the band of the Toyoma Gakko (Army Music Academy). Eckert also did a great deal of establishment of the band of the Imperial Guards. The scholarly body of selectors were indeed faced with no easy task. They had to find a piece that would appeal to the nation as a whole and not only to a few scholars. The piece they selected had to interpret fully the sentiments of the nation. One of the most popular forms of poetry in Nippon consists of the 31 letters. This form of poetry is called Waka in Nippon-go. Recently it has been referred to as Tanka. It consists of five lines of respectively 5,7,5,7,7 letters. Some of the most famous pieces of Nippon poetry have been written in this form. So it is not surprising that after long and assiduous search and study, the present National Anthem, the Kimigayo, was found in the famous Kokinshu Anthology of Waka Pieces. The Kimigayo's quiet dignity and its imposing sentiment appealed to the audience. The selection of the piece has meant that the task was only half done. there was as yet the equally important task of setting it to music. At the time Western music was not widespread in Nippon. But day by day becoming more and more international in her outlook, the music was harmonised and arranged for Western musical instruments. Herr Eckert assisted in this formidable task. In the national anthem is found the secret of Nippon culture, philosophy and thought. The words were written a long time before the world was aware that were the sun rises there was a nation of highly cultured men and women. The music is comparatively modern. Below is given the Romanised version of the Kimigayo and its literal English translation:*

#### THE KIMIGAYO

Kimi ga Yow a

Chiyo ni Yachiyo ni

Suzare Ishi no



*Iwao to narite*

*Koke no musu made*

*(translation)*

*Thousands of years of happy reign be Thine;*

*Rule on my Lord, till what are pebbles now,*

*By age united to mighty rocks shall grow*

*Whose venerable sides the moss doth line*

*The Kimigayo was played for the first time at court of Tentyo-Setu of Neizi-Tenno (Emperor Meizi) in 1880.<sup>120</sup>*

Yet there are ways in which the Japanese agenda engendered a galvanisation of social forces not previously achieved. The late Ruth H.K. Wong informs us that until the Japanese Occupation, the British Government hardly made any attempt to achieve an integrated system of education with common goals and objectives across the various localised immigrants of Chinese, Indians and other communities as well as the Malays, who included those of Indonesian origins. The Japanese in 1942, she relates, introduced a concept of educational purpose and need with far-reaching consequences:

*They compelled all school children to attend a daily flag-raising ceremony, followed by physical fitness exercises. Common youth activities were zealously promoted and teachers of all streams were regarded as belonging to a common service. For the first time, teachers of English schools met with those from Malay, Chinese, and Tamil schools. The Japanese also forced integration through the use of a common language Nippon-go.<sup>121</sup>*

It would be difficult to deny that the flag-raising ceremony would suffice as the most appropriate space to have ensured the proliferation of the Kimigayo and a pro-Japanese agenda. Nor was this specifically a Singaporean predicament. Nazir Naim (born in Selangor 1916), was a teacher when the Japanese 25<sup>th</sup> Army rolled into Malaysia in December 1941. He was assigned to the Kuala Kangsar Malay School and later selected for Shihan Gakko. Mohd. Nazir's arrival at the school was certainly memorable. Each day before class, students were required to undertake gardening. A normal day's work would include Nippon-go, Japanese songs and lectures in Japanese on various aspects of the administration. Nippon-go took up most of their time but they were also required to take up sports, including sumo, judo and kendo. Mohd. Nazir recalled that teachers' responsibilities were rotated on a weekly basis. They had to deliver a daily address in Japanese during the school assembly immediately after the Kimigayo and the flag-raising ceremony. The speech would touch on various aspects, including the need for the trainees to observe rules, punctuality and personal hygiene.<sup>122</sup>

While further research can shed light on exactly what was taught in schools in Singapore, the Malaysian experience was that both Japanese and Malay songs were an integral part of the educational landscape. Teachers were taught these songs, which they later taught their students. Many teachers could remember whole songs like **Tokyo Ondo** (Tokyo Chorus song) and **Haru Ga Kita** (Spring has come) and tunes of songs like **Heitei San Arigato** (Thank you Soldier) and **Fuji San** (Fuji Mountain). The lyrics of **Heitei San Arigato** explicitly exhorted (if not expected) the appreciation of the sacrifices of Japanese Soldiers while children as well as teachers were taught seishin, patriotism and respect for soldiers. Not much attention was paid to correct pronunciation: some semblance of similar sound would suffice. Songs, especially Malay songs, were an important component of the Japanese propaganda machinery targeted at the masses, especially Malays in rural areas. These songs, Japanese or Malay, sought to glorify Japan, to justify the presence of her soldiers in this country and denounce British colonialism. In essence, these songs were praise for the Nippon Jin (Japanese) and denounced the West, especially Malaysia's previous colonial master. In Malacca, most of the songs were patriotic Indonesian songs plus a few Japanese songs. Towards the end of the Occupation, there was a perceptible shift of focus in Japanese propaganda when it ceased to harp on the might of the imperial army or the courage of the Japanese soldiers. In line with the changing military situation, they sought to arouse feelings of love for one's country, notably among the Malay-Muslims. This kind of propaganda team included young Malays who *sincerely believe the Japanese meant good* such as one Hamid who was formerly assistant inspector of Malay schools.<sup>123</sup>

The Japanese Occupation is also significant for the ways in which lesser-known or recognised communities emerge in the public sphere through music-making activities:

*Members of the local Filipino Association will give another musical and variety performance at the Syonan General Hospital today to entertain the sick and wounded Nippon servicemen on the occasion of Tentyo-Setu. The Filipino entertainers made a hit with their initial show last Saturday and will present an entirely new programme specially prepared for the occasion. There will be a musical concert by the Association's Orchestra, which will feature several musical numbers by leading Nippon composers, followed by a variety show consisting of comedy, acrobatics and animal circus. The show will commence at 5pm. The sick*

*and the wounded servicemen at the hospital were full of praise at the hospital for the fine show given by the Filipinos last Saturday and formed the opinion that it was the best performance seen in the hospital so far. Today's show is by special request.*<sup>124</sup>

As would have been expected, Western art music and dance items (while not American or British in derivation) constituted the most powerfully advertised musical activity:

The Syonan Times reports of a SYONAN GEKIZYO: Concert by the Syonan Orchestra on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> May 1942:

*Saturday 16 May: from 3-5pm for civilians, for 6-8: Officials and Civilians*

*Sunday 17 May: from 2-4pm for soldiers: 5-7 pm for civilians*

*M. Sinozaki—Chief Officer of Education*<sup>125</sup>

*Programme for To-day's Concert*

*The following is the programme of music to be played at the Syonan Gekizyo by the Syonan Orchestra to-day and to-morrow. The Orchestra is under the direction of Geza Gerenster and will be conducted by Feri Krempel*

*National March Aikoku Kooshin Kyoky arranged by Aplebaum*

*Overture Tannhauser Wagner*

*Waltz Fryhlings Stimmen Strauss*

*Fantasie Aida Verdi*

*INTERVAL*

*Weiner Waltz Danced by Mrs. Gerenster*

*Saxophone solo, Valse Venite, Wiedoeff played by Kontor*

*Spanish Dance Danced by Mrs. Gerenster*

*INTERVAL*

*Selection, Lilac Time Schubert*

*Rhapsody, 14 Hungarian Rhapsody F. Liszt*

*Potpourri Selection of Nippon Songs, arranged by Aplebaum*<sup>126</sup>

An idea of what was reportedly available on radio broadcast offers a reader the impression of cultural and communal inclusivity:

*Syonan Broadcasting Station – Wavelength 25 m and 225 m, Frequency 12 Mcs and 1.333 Kcs*

*Today (12 June 1942)*

*7pm Nippon-go News relayed from Tokyo*

*7.30 pm Chinese Music-Mandarin song recital from the Studio*

*8.20 Nippon-go lesson no.40*

*8.30 News in Malay*

8.50 News in Tamil  
 9.10 News in Hindustani  
 9.30 News in Cantonese  
 9.50 News in Hokkien  
 10.10 News in English  
 10.30 Close down<sup>127</sup>

Syonan Times, 8 August 1942

#### Comfort Party Provides Rare Entertainment

*A packed house, comprising of officer and civilian member of the Gunseibu, Syonan Tokubetu-Si and Sendenhan, was given a rare treat on Thursday when they were entertained to a delightful programme of Nippon music and dancing presented by the Comfort Artistes Party at the Dai Toa Gekizyo. To those who were fortunate enough to attend the show, it was indeed something new, something different from what they had seen before. For two hours, the audience was kept enthralled by an exhibition of dancing and by a selection of songs by those two well-known Nippon artists, Mr. Kameziro Isli and Miss Aiko Saido. If constant practice and resourcefulness are indispensable to success in dancing, then it must be said that the visiting dancers have taken great pains in order to attain perfection. The keynote of their dancing was simplicity and grace—well in keeping with the culture of Nippon. The programme was divided into two parts—the first consisting of musical scores excellently rendered by an orchestra under the leadership of Mr. Takio Niki coupled with vocal solos by Mr. Isli and Miss Saido. The second half comprised principally of dances. Possessing a well-cultured tenor voice, Mr. Isli sang Getsu-Getsu-Ka-Sui-Moku-Kin-Kin (Monday-Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-Friday) which means there is no holiday in the Navy. This was followed by “Shanghai Dayori”—a soldier’s letter from Shanghai to his mother composed in music and “Akatsuki ni Inoru” (Praying at Dawn) describing the brave determination of soldiers in an expeditionary campaign. If the audience had appreciated Mr. Isli’s singing, they had not long to hear something equally brilliant when that charming songbird of Nippon Miss Aiko Saido stepped on the stage. Possessing a pleasing personality and a sweet voice, Miss Saido immediately made an impression with her first number “Komori Uta”, a lullaby. Her second song was “Minami no Watari dori” (Migratory birds of the South Seas) which she sang in Blues tempo; the third “Osima Busi” the most popular folk song of the Island of Osima off Tokyo Bay.*

*The second part of the programme opened with “Buyo no deki agaru made”—a display of basic forms of movement in the training of dancers. The series of various dances that followed was characterised by the graceful movements of the dancers. Sent to the Southern Regions of the Osaka Mainiti and the Tokyo Niti-Niti Press*



*Companies for the purpose of entertaining men of our Imperial Forces, the Comfort Artistes Party will shortly be leaving Syonan. We wish them the best of luck and look forward to a return visit by them.*<sup>128</sup>

Just as the Fillipino community had made a contribution towards entertaining wounded Japanese soldiers, the Indian community were reported to have provided a similar offering:

*It is very seldom that Syonan has an opportunity of enjoying a high-class programme of Indian music, singing and dancing and the excellent show presented by the Broadcasting section of the Indian Independence league at the Dai Toa Gekizyo (formerly Cathay theatre) on Friday night, therefore, received an enthusiastic reception from a very appreciative audience comprised of Nippon soldiers. The theme of the programme was based upon the cultural development of the nations of East Asia and the programme included Bharatha Nattyam, Kathakali dances and songs of India, dealing with village life among the masses of the Indian people and depicted scenes and incidents which marked the various stages of Indian progress as a result of urbanisation. The whole show was excellently presented and beautiful costumes showing the result of great care and thoughtful planning on the part of the producers, Mrs. E.V. Davies and Captain Jahangir of the Indian National Army, who were responsible for the organisation and production and have to be heartily congratulated for the splendid entertainment they provided. There was a repeat performance last night for the Nippon troops. Tonight there will be another presentation for the Indian troops only, whilst the presentations on Monday and Tuesday will be open to holders of complimentary tickets issued by the promoters.*<sup>129</sup>

A similar form of entertainment was given out on Thursday October 22 1942 at the Dai Toa Gekizyo (Cathay theatre). The subsequent caption read in capitalised text: **RECORD CROWD THRILLED**

*Never was the former Cathay Theatre so tightly packed as it was on Tuesday night when Syonan people were entertained to an excellent programme of Nippon light music, solos and ballet items at the Dai Toa Gekizyo (Cathay theatre?), presented by the talented artistes of the Osaka Mainiti and Tokyo Niti Niti Comfort Party which has just completed a successful tour of the Southern Regions. The performance was held under the auspices of the Syonan Tokubetu-si and the many hundreds who were fortunate enough to see the show went away very impressed with the treat provided. Before the show started Deputy Mayor Toyoda addressing the large throng said:*

*“We have invited you this evening to introduce the Osaka Mainiti and Tokyo Niti Niti newspaper comfort party which under the auspices of Syonan Tokubetu-si will*

*present to you a series of musical items and dances. This party has travelled throughout the South Seas Regions to console our Imperial Forces and is now on its way home. They have kindly consented to spare their valuable hours and have specially arranged this evening for the sake of the people of Syonan. We always have in our mind the welfare of the people and therefore we take this grand opportunity offered by the comfort party and thank all members of the party for their kind hospitality in giving us Nippon music and dances. We are really happy to have this entertainment which I hope all of you will fully appreciate. The dancing team of the party represents a tendency in modern Nippon dancing and we present to you several items for your entertainment. Besides we have a special programme for a Malayan song which everyone presents this evening knows very well, that is "Teran Bulan" which will be sung by one of the noted singers of Malayan Borelo Ballet party and will be danced by Miss Iya, one of the attractive members of the consoling party. Thus we hope to have your full appreciation. I sincerely hope that you will enjoy this programme to the utmost." If the audience was thrilled at the brilliant singing of Mr. Kameziro Isli and and Miss Aiko Saida, in the first part of the programme they showed just as much appreciation after the interval for the ballet numbers presented by Mr. Takaya Eguti and Miss Misaoko Miya and also of Misses Katuko Masumura, Kazue Kuwahara, Hiroko Nihai.*

*Mr. Isli's first number was Aizu Bandai-Zan ( a folk song of North Nippon) followed by Soshu Yakyoku (Suchow Serenade), a Chinese song and Getsu-Getsu-Ka-Sui-Moku-Kin-Kin (Monday-Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-Friday) which means there is no holiday in the Navy. A crescendo of cheers greeted Miss Saida as she stepped on to the stage. Possessing a pleasing voice, this modern Melba sang Hoko-Wo-Osamete (Laying Down Arms), "Minami no Watari dori" (Migratory birds of the South Seas) a song composed during the voyage to the south and lastly "Osima Busi" (A folk song of South Island off Tokyo Bay). It would be invidious to pick out any particular number in the second part of the programme for special mention. Every item was exquisitely performed by supple and talented Nippon ballerinas. A touch of Malayan colour was added to the programmewith the inclusion of a dance to the music of Terang Bulan by Miss Misaoka Miya. Looking exquisite in a Malay sarong and kebaya, she rendered her own interpretation of the dance to the singing of the Malayan Bolero Ballet Party.<sup>130</sup>*

On January 15 1943, The Syonan Shinbun informed its readers of musical censorship, encapsulated in a title, **Enemy Musical Compositions Put on Black List:**

*Domei, Tokyo, Jan 14-The Information Board in collaboration with the Home Office has black-listed approximately 1000 American and British musical*

*compositions which include mostly jazz numbers as inappropriate to the times. The complete list is shortly expected to be made public following which the police will enforce an edict throughout the country. The authorities have indicated that the War of Greater-East Asia is an ideological clash between the Asiatic and Anglo-American nations as well as an armed conflict and therefore, the musical tastes must properly be directed. The ban on public and private playings of the black-listed numbers include jazz pieces such as Dinah as well as light compositions including "Aloha Oe" and numerous folk songs by Stephen Foster.*<sup>131</sup>

Because music wielded considerable influence on the sentiments of a people, the Japanese felt it necessary that in the midst of a war the musical tastes of the public should be properly directed. Accordingly in January 1943, the government imposed a ban on some 1000 American and British 'musical compositions', a list which included not only military or patriotic songs like **Wembley Military Tattoo**, **Anchors Aweigh**, **Colonel Bogey**, but also love songs and jazz. There were notable exceptions; some British-American songs like **Auld Lang Syne**, **Home Sweet Home** and **The Last Rose of Summer**, had already been popularised in Japan and *well-assimilated with Nippon sentiments* and escaped prohibition because they extolled desirable qualities such as comradeship and love of home. Other light music included **Dinah**, **Aloha Oe**, **Kisses in the Dark** and the music of Stephen Foster was deemed unacceptable, while jazz *even before the war was considered undesirable by true lovers of music.*<sup>132</sup> In Singapore, a journalist eloquently condemned Western music in the following terms: *When we retrospect and observe how we were in the past poisoned unknowingly by the demoralising music of our enemies, we discover the most appalling things. America and Britain have utilised the sacred field of music in order to corrupt the minds and souls of the people of Greater East Asia, and thereby, aid in the achievement of their sinister designs to seize control of and dominate East Asia. Our enemies, in an attempt to destroy the peoples of East Asia and as an anaesthetic agent to aid in the accomplishment of their world domination, had mixed a deadly potion into their hideous music. With various noisy and debased musical instruments, they created music without any great depth of feeling or artistic value and with the devilish utilisation of it, they schemed to steal into our souls and poison us slowly and unknowingly from within.*<sup>133</sup>

To replace Western music, there was a movement to popularise the ancient music of East Asia. Several months later, a recital of Nippon gramophone records which demonstrated the *charm and beauty of Nippon Songs and of Nippon interpretation of music*, the Penang Shinbun put the agenda forward with a good measure of enthusiasm:

*With these examples of typical Nippon music to assist them local orchestra leaders will have no trouble in giving their public really good music. The going of Western tunes will indeed prove no great loss to the world of music when by comparison Nippon rhythm and harmony expresses so much more aptly the emotions and ideas of the peoples of East Asia.*<sup>134</sup> In British Singapore, the Syonan Shinbun announced that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1943 there had been plans made to popularise East Asian Music:

*Domei, Tokyo January 20 – An exhaustive investigation into the music of all races in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is being planned by the Nippon Musical Culture Society with the assistance of the Board of Information, the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai Society for International Cultural Relations and the Broadcasting Corporation of Nippon. Several Nippon musicians will be dispatched to various regions for the work this year according to the plan. It is understood this investigation is to promote and popularise purely Co-Prosperity Sphere music. In addition, the Nippon Musical Culture Society will compile a list of recognised classics for the benefit of the peoples of the Southern Regions. At the same time, members of the Society will compose new lyrics and tunes based on Greater East Asiatic melodies. In Nippon, a series of concerts and lectures will be given to popularise the music of the Southern Regions beginning with a concert by the Yashiye Fujiwara Opera Company at the Hibiva Public Hall on March 8. Meanwhile, Nippon musicians will be sent to various areas in the Co-Prosperity Sphere to introduce music of a high quality.*<sup>135</sup>

In line with the agenda of producing and making available music of high quality, the first of February 1943 brought about news of a Beethoven concert:

*LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN—the poet, the musicians often speaks to us in a language that transcends the writings of the scientist and the philosopher in the expression of the fundamental mystery of life so says the writer. How true it is! Those who attended Saturday night's Beethoven concert—and what an appreciative audience it was to say the least, must have felt that they had a musical treat of the highest order. For one who is not a musical critic it would be invidious to particularise on any item, especially as all of them were executed in the spirit of the great composer. The orchestra as a whole displayed perfect technique and understanding and the soloists too were in brilliant form. All played with feeling under the inspired leadership of conductor Krempel. It is to be hoped that similar concerts of such great masters as Schubert, Bach, Brahms and Chopin—to mention only a few—will following in due course. Musical talent is not lacking in Syonan and it seems that the future of classical music in Syonan-to is a very bright one. If yesterday's audience can be taken as a criterion, then support will not be found wanting.*<sup>136</sup>



The very careful selection of music from European traditions (excluding British) is couched in more benevolent terms in the *Syonan Times* of the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1943. By suggesting that such European selections (not British or American) answered the need for good music, here at Syonan, the orchestra was seen to make such a valuable contribution:

*Exactly a year ago today (April 9), the Syonan Orchestra, composed of eight instruments only, gave their first concert to hundreds of wounded Nippon soldiers and sailors at a hospital somewhere in Syonan. This marked the birth of the musical side of cultural development in this island and since then considerable progress has been achieved by the presentation of good music to the people of this city. To celebrate the first anniversary of their inauguration, the Syonan Orchestra, considerably augmented will present a special concert at the Syonan Kokaido on Sunday, April 11. Highlighting the programme will be a special arrangement of Nippon martial music, from the Meiji to the Syowa era, by Mr. Aplebaum, the orchestra's pianist. Reviewing the past year, Mr. Paul Gerentser, the Hungarian founder of the Syonan Orchestra stated that "if appreciation of good music is an indication of cultural development, then the people of Syonan are moving in the right direction. One has only to visit the Syonan Kokaido during a Sunday concert to realise the number of people representative of every community in the city who appreciate good music, he said.<sup>137</sup> The following is the program for the First Year Anniversary Concert by the Augmented Syonan Orchestra at the Syonan Kokaido (Former Victoria Theatre) on Sunday from 2-4pm and 5-7pm:--*

*Overture, the Caliph of Baghdad (Boldieu);*

*Waltz Acceleration (Strauss);*

*Fantasia, Pique Dame (Tchaikowsky);*

*Bolero, danced by Mrs., Gerentser and Mrs. Bain;*

*INTERVAL;*

*Parade of the Tin Soldiers, danced by Miss Katinka Gerentser and the Syonan Orchestra Girls;*

*Suite Rhapsody Andalouse;*

*a) Zapateado*

*b) Curruly Solea;*

*c) Dondang Gitana (Ross);*

*d) Potpourri<sup>138</sup>*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1943, we are informed of a Symphony Concert which drew reportedly drew a full house:

*Music of a high standard was provided to a large and appreciative audience at the Syonan Kokaido last night during the grand symphony concert by the augmented*

*Syonan Symphonic Orchestra featuring the works of Mozart and Haydn. The orchestra, almost 40 strong under the baton of D. Aplebaum gave an inspiring interpretation of the variable moods of the two masters whose choice works were featured for the first time in the history of the island. The manner in which both last night's concert and the recent Beethoven concert were received by the public was, by itself, a tribute to the orchestra. The works of masters like Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn and others if they are interpreted as beautifully and faithfully as in the last two concerts are bound to have a great influence on the musical trend in Syonan, an influence that could only be for the better. The selection was a most happy one and the rounds of applause which greeted the completion of every item showed that the audience fully appreciated it. The Military Symphony by Haydn was a most fitting finale. The instrumentalists are to be congratulated on their excellent performance and they can take pride in the fact that the hard work they have put in has been crowned with success. Syonan should indeed, be proud to have such a fine orchestra, and it augurs well for the future of classical music in Malai.*<sup>139</sup>

In 1948, the Education Department arranged for the holding of the grade examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. This was added to the presence of the Trinity College of Music which had support of a private Music School in Singapore. In an article in the *Straits Times* dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 1982, on Western art music activities in Singapore since 1900, Alex Abisheganaden informs us that:

*In the late 1920's, Mr. Anciano, a Filipino resident, opened (our first) Far Eastern Music School and in the 1930s, this school presented candidates for the Trinity College of Music local examinations.*<sup>140</sup> The newspapers in Singapore then were already publishing results of the Trinity College exams. For instance, the Singapore Free Press, on June 2, 1926 reported the following:

*The Inspector of Schools, Singapore and Labuan, informs us the following pupils were examined in Singapore by Professor C.E. Lowe, FTCL of the Trinity College of Music and were successful... Miss Iris Ess is the first candidate to obtain her Associate Diploma in Singapore.*<sup>141</sup>

The Singapore Chamber Ensemble which was founded in 1950 consolidated and the performances of Western chamber music in their 'household concerts'. The Musical Society arranged concerts and recitals by visiting artistes from time to time. The Junior Symphony Orchestra, sponsored by the Department of Education provided the opportunities for the younger school-going musicians to perform 'serious music' and this was further enhanced by the formation of numerous choirs. Victor Doggett, a clarinettist in the British Army who later became one of the most sought after piano and theory teachers, initiated the **Singapore Music Teachers Association**. Tony Beamish Music in Malaya

1950s observed how *in the past few years, Western classical music has gained a firm foothold in Malaya and it is extending its influence steadily, with a growing number of young Malaysians studying the piano and string instruments, both here and overseas. The man in the street does not appreciate this classical music and probably he never will to any great extent, but it is of more than passing interest that its circle of adherents is widening every year. Much credit for this must go to the Singapore Musical Society and to other societies in the Federation, which not only organised concerts and recitals by artists of world renown, but which have gradually built up from scratch groups of performers of considerable ability and promise. Of these the Singapore Chamber Ensemble, the Music Society Symphony Orchestra and the Junior Symphony Orchestra, as well as a number of choral societies, have earned well-deserved praise in the post-war years. The fact that Bach's St. Matthew Passion could be performed in Singapore in 1954 in such a manner that internationally famous soloists taking part did not feel out of their element, speaks volumes for the progress classical music has recently made. The appreciative Malayan audience for it is growing, a fact that is clearly reflected in the concert box office and in the support that classical music programmes now receive from the radio-listening public.*<sup>142</sup> An equally telling moment also arrived for the performance of the Coronation Concerto by W.A. Mozart at the Victoria Memorial Hall, in 1953 (presumably in celebration of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II that year). The pianist on that occasion was Walter Susskind supported by the Singapore Musical Society Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Gordon van Hien.<sup>143</sup> Tan Shzr Ee recounts how Benjamin Khoo conducted newly-formed amateur group known as the Singapore Musical Society (SMS), sharing the podium with Singapore conductor Aisha Akbar, baritone/conductor Choo Hwee Lim and European musician pioneers Gordon Van Hien and Ken Palmer. While many members initially were expatriates, a growing number of Asians and Eurasians, along with Khoo, began to join the group. Strength in numbers fluctuated from 60-100 through the 1950s and 1960s. The society gave at least one choral concert each year, putting on works from Mendelssohn's Elijah (1957) to opera choruses (1960) to a choral version of Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue (1963), with its accompanying orchestra. A choral section of the Singapore Chamber Ensemble led by Paul Abisheganaden provided occasional vocal-music events slotted into an orchestral series. No mention was made of the St. Matthew's Passion which was given in 1954.

Shzr Ee informs us choral concerts were also presented by other groups affiliated with institutions such as the **Trinity Theological College**, the **Wesley Methodist Church**, the **Presbyterian Youth Fellowship**, the **Chinese Methodist Church**, the **Tamil Methodist Church**, the **Singapore Guard Regiment Society Of**

**Musical Friends**, the **Alliance Francaise Mixed Choir**, the **Serangoon District Boy's Choir**, the **Singapore Vienna Choir**, Aisha Akbar's **Suara Singapore Singers** and Goh Say Meng's **Chorale Musicale**. This is in stark contrast to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when St. Andrew's Cathedral was known for providing most of the musical delectation. Alongside the growth of serious choral music, barber-shop quartets (like Khoo's Benny Singers and Harry Tan's The Gospel Melody Makers) and musical groups (like YMCA's The Sceneshifters) thrived in semi-classical genres that were developing in Singapore.<sup>144</sup> We are also made aware that in the days preceding the National Theatre Trust, there were two well-known musical impresarios, Donald Moore (Donald Moore Entertainments Limited) and Goh Soon Tjoe, who were able to bring in a number of international performers and performances.

From an instrumental and orchestral point of view, the only established musical institution was the Singapore Musical Society, known previously as the Singapore Philharmonic. The Society's concerts consisted of both choral and orchestral and sometimes included appearances by visiting musicians. Additionally, there was an annual music contest and an annual performance of Handel's *Messiah*. Not many compositions were known. **Lucien Wang Maan Seng**, a piano teacher, (born Guangzhou, China), studied with a Russian pianist in Beijing and later spent five years at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, studying with Cocteau. After settling in Singapore, Lucien Wang had a collection of her songs published in 1946, most of which were written for the Mandarin-speaking musical community. Leong Yoon Ping's brief survey of the composition as a career in Singapore also notes that *two well respected musicians could be considered forerunners in promoting classical music in Singapore. Huang Wan Chen, a well-known singer and vocal instructor, presented two Chinese art songs 'Whai Ren' and 'Hu Bu Qui' in 1946 that captured the hearts of many. Subsequently in 1957, Ting Zu San also presented more than thirty pieces of art songs and sacred pieces...considered pioneering pieces in the music culture of Singapore.*<sup>145</sup> Shi Yu Yi, a former music teacher in Zhong Zheng high School published his *Military Songs* and hearing the *Flute at the Frontier* which provided early models of writing in the style of marches. There were three who concentrated on writing for children; Huang Kuen Yuan, Aisha Akbar and Zubir Said, writing in Chinese, English and Malay respectively. They were later joined by Lim Lee and Lin Xue Jiau. Opportunities for further studies in Music were unavailable in Singapore at this time and the fortunate ones either had the means to study abroad or were awarded scholarships. Leong Yoon Ping studied piano, composition and conducting at the Guildhall School (London, UK) while Ng Sai Ming studied conducting, composition and music education at the Westminster Choir College (US) and Soh Kay Cheng

studied orchestration and composition in the Singapore School of Education. Other composers included Kam Kee Yong, Lim Tiap Guan and Lee Yuk Chuan.<sup>146</sup>

There was an increase in amateur organisations, particularly choirs, supported mainly by the Mandarin-speaking population. One of Shze Ee's account of choral music during the 1930s and 1960s, has been the nature and identity of the Chinese choirs. Demographically this would not be surprising but it is revealing that in a pre-dominantly colonial framework the Mandarin speaking population made their presence and impact. Tan informs us that:

*This period coincides with "modernising reforms" were held throughout all aspects of culture in China. Western art and popular music and film thrived in Shanghai and Beijing, even Christianity and the attendant choral music activities. Following the May 4<sup>th</sup> modernisation movement of 1919, group singing activity took on a new function. Music, and especially the mass-oriented genre of choral music, was to reflect the "advancing" spirit of the times. (This idea was crystallised into the agenda of Socialist Realism at Mao Zedong's Yan'an forums of 1938.) Close links between Chinese communities in Singapore and the Mainland meant that versions of Chinese music activity here took the form of anti-Japanese sentiments already prevalent in a China, a country whose outer reaches were beginning to be occupied by Japan. Given this sense of wholesomeness already present as a Chinese tradition, choirs, spread, each identified by its own conductor and style. Rehearsing weekly and putting on concerts every year, they sang Chinese folksongs re-arranged for four-part choruses, as well as arias or excerpts from Italian opera. These choirs, accompanied by a piano, were characterised by their spirited, heavy and high-vibrato styles.*<sup>147</sup>

Our research also notes the presence of Mo Zexi, (b.1935), who settled in Singapore at the age of five. He is reportedly the founder of a Mandarin-based orchestra and choral conductor and composer. For him, musical arts in China begin with courtesans. It gradually replaced by other form of musical genre such as **xi qu**, **suo chang**, **ping tan**, which involved instrumental accompaniment and action. During the 1920s and 1930s, overseas Chinese graduates introduced the idea of solo and chorus singing into the Chinese culture. Such a culture was soon blooming in institutions and cultural troops. According to Mo, music often time mirrored the life of the people of a particular time when Malaysians were abused and ill treated by both the British and Japanese Imperialists. Thus Malayan composers turned to writing anti-colonial and anti-Japanese songs. The periods can be divided into pre-war, Japanese occupation, and post-war till 1960s. The Japanese Occupation marked the most terrifying and painful era. Such a harsh treatment had caused much unhappiness amongst the people. After the WWII, the British



imperialist returned but the terms in the white and blue paper only help to benefit the colonists. The Malayans, according to Mo, gathered together to fight against the colonists and imperialists. One of the songs sung by them carries the following text:

**Victory, victory, victory belongs to the people.**

This period of uncertainty allegedly marks the birth of several Malayan composers such as **Chang Hong, Hong Chang, Li Qiu**, ... etc and several other unknown composers who came from either from China or were local composers. The most outstanding local composer was Ye Li Tian. Together with Ren Kwang, they founded “Tong Luo” and Ye served as the president of the society. His musical style is greatly influenced by the early Russian revolution music. Mo listed some of the compositions which unfortunately most of the manuscripts were missing. Amongst the compositions, the song “Singapore River” was once a popular song about life during the Japanese Occupation. Music composers during 1960s were Li Hua and Qiu Jiu whose lyrics were concerned mainly with the social environment of their time. The fact that it was not widely broadcast correlated with the intense pressure from authorities translated into exercises of censorship and forcing societies, associations and alumni organizations to dissolve. On the other hand, Mo tells us that unscrupulous businesses and some immoral intellect (refers to those who had no sense of social responsibility) encouraged the development of **popular music** of that time. According to Mo, these pieces focused on trivial issues and bad tastes in music. Performers would be both dancing and rocking insanely or they would put their heads low (understood to mean that the performers looked down, with very little or no fighting spirits, soulless). These performers made use of music to convey “unhealthy” emotions and such compositions, in his view, had negative influences on impressionable and innocent youth, adversely affecting the development of the country; articulating essentially a Platonic or Confucian view. Mo observed that during the 1950s, societies or associations encouraged the singing of “art songs”, folk songs, foreign language songs, and “popular” music. Among these songs, most of them (the lyrics) lacked the life and energy, nor did it have the value in its use for revolution or fighting for independence.<sup>148</sup>

This purpose could range from making a political stand against the Japanese, to creating “good art” in the face of sentiments of “unsavoury” **Yellow musics** generated through the Shanghai film industry. Usually not reflected but worthy of question is the reception of the Chinese who were performers in the Western art tradition by their larger community. Chinese choirs in Singapore went underground during the Japanese Occupation (1942-45), but resumed activity later. The number of choral groups and member grew during the 1950s and 1960s. Leong Yoon Pin and the Rediffusion Youth Choir (later formed as the Metro Philharmonic Society

in 1959 as a chamber String ensemble), Madam Lee Howe and the Lee Howe Choral Society, composer Samuel Ting (founder and first president of the Composers' Association) and his Herald's Choral Society, and composer Lee Yuk Chuan, with his Melo Art Choir and later NTUC Choir. In the 1960s, Lee Howe and 10 other groups began the tradition of organising joint annual concerts. Around the same time, the then-Ministry of Culture also started its own festival for choral music (though this did not survive into the '70s). Many choral groups which had sung their way through the 1960s - the Sing Sheng Philharmonic Chorus, the Melo Art Choir - are still active today, if on a smaller scale.<sup>149</sup>

It can be observed that the attitude towards singing in a choral or vocal group in the Mandarin-conversant community required far more than interest. Joining a choir was less an avocation but more the means towards a larger, noble purpose in life; what Chua Soo Pong identified a group and prominent characteristic in the Chinese dance traditions as 'wholesome cultural associations' and its participants were *committed art workers...animated by the idea of creating dances which reflect social reality and their aim has been to pass their message to the people...adopting a kind of social commitment clearly different from that of women's clubs leisure classes...critical of the present social system arguing that their art should reflect the hard facts of life and encourage people to reform society...disapproved of individualism and advocated collective creation. They believed strongly that theatre dance must be created for the people and tried hard to establish a close relationship with the audience*"<sup>150</sup>

What was true for dance somehow had similar sentiments in the Mandarin-speaking community for choral activity. Their zealous colleagues elsewhere in China had become a cause for concern in the 1960s. A long standing tension between Chinese community in Singapore and its relations in China escalated during the Cultural Revolution, which raised fears of the communist insurgence and its effect on Chinese Singaporeans, particularly those with sympathies with China. The following release issued by the Ministry of Culture in 1967 implicated music's role in a way here as to suggest guilt by association:

*A Chinese songbook entitled "Revolutionary Songs" has been proscribed by the Singapore Government. Any person selling, distributing or possessing this publication is liable to prosecution. This publication consisting of 104 pages has red covers of which the front cover carries a picture of four armed men killing their enemy. Most of the songs are quotations from Mao-Tse-tung. The publication has been banned principally because it is intended for use by local pro-Communist elements as paraphernalia for organising riots and destruction of public and private property in Singapore. These songs call on people to resort to violence in*

*order to establish a Communist regime and there is little of musical worth in them. This publication will therefore serve as a stimulus to get teenaged children to go on the rampage at the behest of adult pro-Communists, who plan these disorders in the safety of their homes and offices.*<sup>151</sup>

Given the particular situation in Singapore, there was considerable difficulty in obtaining appropriate music for these choirs, hence an immediate demand for works to be written for these new ensembles. One of the most prominent of them was the Li Howe Choir, founded in 1952 by an outstanding vocalist Miss Li Howe, who was, not surprisingly, a composer of various operas and vocal works. Much of the music written during this period helped in supplying the choral groups with as much material as possible, extended to transcriptions, arrangements, translations besides original compositions. Also active was the Choir of Singapore City, founded in 1959 and the Good News Singers, founded in 1961. These and a number of others provided opportunities for composers to present their works and were significant in the 50s and 60s. The Singapore Peoples Association founded in 1960 was quite active in promoting cultural, especially musical activities. Like the National Theatre, the Peoples Association organised its own choir, Chinese Orchestra and String orchestra as well as a marching band and bagpipe band.

The establishment of the National Theatre in August 1963 was a milestone. More directly cultural in its concern with the arts is the National Theatre Trust, which was also established as a statutory body in 1960.<sup>152</sup> Its first task was the construction of a national theatre *as a permanent memorial to the attainment of self-government by the people of Singapore and also for the promotion of a Malayan culture*. Financed partly by funds raised directly by and from the people, the National Theatre was completed in 1963 and, to signal an emphasis on Singapore's cultural place in the region, commemorated its opening with an island-wide, 8-day Southeast Asian Festival. The then Minister of Culture, S. Rajaratnam in a foreword to the programme, wrote, *This festival would no have been possible when the countries of Southeast Asia languished under colonial domination*. He went on to add that the heritage common to the countries in this region *should not merely be a nostalgic reminder of a glorious but rather dim golden age that is no more*.<sup>153</sup> The National Theatre Trust activities served, *to bring about greater understanding among the different cultures and assist the government in its primary task...to create a unified nation out of the many racial and cultural groups*.<sup>154</sup> The National Theatre and Peoples Association concentrated on general cultural activities with a view to performances. Creative musical work was not on their agenda. Besides the Chinese musical organisations, there was a Malaya Musical Club, founded and headed by Zubir Said, who was to write the national

anthem of Singapore. The three main sections of the National Theatre comprised the Singapore National Orchestra, The National Theatre Chinese Orchestra, The National Theatre Choir and Dance Company.

Upon independence in 1965, the main objective was to transform the new republic economically from an entrepot centre to an industrialised economy. The immediate problems of unemployment, the need for internal defence, training for the workforce, housing, foreign capital investment, took precedence, if not priority. The performing arts manifest in concerts, broadcasts of folk and art music of the Chinese, Indian and Malay traditions, as well as repertoire of European art-music tradition (largely 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) continued to be the fare offered. The number of choral groups increased to more than 30 in the 70s and there were more taking part in musical activities. The National Theatre Choir was formed in 1968, in 1970, the *Good News Choir* visited Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and the Singapore Youth Choir participated in a music camp in England and won a prize. School choirs were widely established within nearly every primary and secondary school. Many young musicians performed in the annual concerts of the Youth Festival. The Society for the Promotion of Sacred Music in Singapore was only one of a number of religious musical organisations active in the 70s with an annual sacred music contest. With regard to education, the Music Department of the Singapore School of Education trained many musicians including a number of young composers. There was a sharp increase in students taking the graded examination systems (Associated Board, Trinity College...). Among the private music institutions, Yamaha School of Music was the most active.

From the 1970s, there seemed to be a decided shift in focus. In a speech to commemorate the opening of the recently completed Japanese Gardens or SEIWAEN, the appreciation of constructing such a garden as an art-form made him devote a substantial portion to the effects of music and its role in Singapore society. *It strikes me as something of a minor scandal that Singapore does not have a symphony orchestra.*<sup>155</sup> He compared Singapore as a sea-port to places in the UK, like Liverpool, which had the Liverpool Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Bournemouth, a holiday resort by his estimation, which had a symphony orchestra and a well-known Festival Orchestra in Bath. *I trust something will soon be done to establish a symphony orchestra in Singapore. Perhaps we can do it in two stages, starting with a chamber ensemble, expanding eventually to a full size symphony orchestra. But it is important that the members are full-time professionals. It costs money to maintain an orchestra—the labourer is worthy of his hire and this applies to musicians, no less than to others, that is to say, good musicians.*<sup>156</sup> He defended the matter of a full involvement in classical music by insisting that such a

pursuit was not about *keeping with the Joneses* or *being snobbish and snooty*. He was well aware of those in the classical music community who, *tend to adopt superior airs. This is a mistake. They are not superior, they are just lucky...that they have one source of enjoyment and delight unknown to their less fortunate low-browed brethren*. He went on to talk of the benefits of a taste for the arts as making for a cultivated and rounded personality, desirable not only in itself but of further value beyond the arts. He spoke of a self-made millionaire who, without the sense of cultivation or a taste for the arts, is eventually unable to, *bring up their children properly. So we see numerous instances of squandering of family fortunes by wrongly-brought up children. Being generally crude and uncouth types, these dissipate their family estate through foolish extravagance.*<sup>157</sup>

The entire discourse of this famous speech is best dealt with in a separate paper. Energies are reserved particularly for two musical practices of which the symphony orchestra occupies considerable exhortation and persuasion on the part of Dr. Goh. If one considered the Singapore National Orchestra, there was already a symphony orchestra. The National Theatre Trust offers us some detail:

*In April 1970, Norman del Mar visited Singapore with an additional task; to present his views and suggestions on the establishment of a full-fledged philharmonic orchestra. This was a follow-up from an ad-hoc planning committee formed by Dr. Goh Poh Seng, Chairman of the National Theatre Trust to determine the status of the Singapore National Orchestra and consider the feasibility of establishing a full-fledged philharmonic orchestra, taking into account the administration and finances involved. A report resulted from a series of meetings, prepared and submitted to the relevant authorities for further consideration.*<sup>158</sup>

Since there were already plans to consider the formation of a symphony orchestra, why was there a need to consider the absence of a symphony orchestra in Singapore *something of a minor scandal?*<sup>159</sup>

If, however, one considers the events leading up to this speech in 1973, there is an undercurrent of a reversal of fortunes for the symphonic orchestra which can only be understood first in the balance sheets of the National Theatre Company's Accounts. In December 1970, there was a net surplus of \$6 035.71. A year later, this surplus had turned into a \$59, 663.53 loss. Somewhere between that period came the announcement of a suspension of all concerts following a shortage of funds. In fact what does become evident is also present in the company accounts. Expenditure for the three main sections, National Orchestra, Chinese Orchestra and Choir are recorded in 1970 as 38, 422.48; 18, 979.59; and 28, 801.00 respectively, are now seen in a different light in 1971. Expenditure for the Choir came to \$24,



796.75, the Chinese Orchestra accounted for \$20, 209.75 but there was no expenditure on the National Orchestra. This is all the more startling considering that despite no honoraria for the National Orchestra in 1971, the National Theatre Company turned up a loss. Financially speaking, the western orchestral tradition was probably seen to be a financial liability of an apparently fathomless nature.

Creatively, however, 1971 marks yet another milestone. The National Theatre Trust annual report of 1979 gives us a brief summary of a concert entitled, Concertos concert by Four soloists accompanied by the Singapore Chamber Orchestra (in aid of the Singapore Cultural Foundation) which was given at the Singapore Conference Hall on 26 August 1979:

*It is sometimes heartening to see amateurs joining forces with professionals to share the challenges of a performance. This was the case of the concertos concert in which four soloists performed to the accompaniment of the Singapura Chamber Ensemble. This orchestra was incepted by Kam Kee Yong in 1971 and it comprised his most talented students who were of a very young age.*<sup>160</sup>

The 1970s were regarded as a period noted for the emergence of patriotic songs. Tien Ming En (Singapore, How Youthful You are), Goh Say Meng (Singapore River) Samuel Liew (Sing a Song of Singapore), Charles Maddox (Land of Our Birth) Oon Siew Lan (Fair Shore of Singapore), Rudy Mosbergen (Selamat Datang) Tan Ik Koon (Merlion) and Chuang Heng Shiong, writer of a collection of Praise Songs for the Nation. In 1974, the National Theatre and Radio Singapore jointly organised “Our Songs” a song contest covering both music and lyrics. In the 1977 presentation, over 100 pieces were submitted, using Chinese, English, Malay and other languages as text. Some of the composers were also responsible for the setting up of the ensembles. Leong Yoon Ping—The Singapore City String Orchestra; Kam Kee Yong—Singapore String Orchestra. The Cultural Division of the Singapore government, responsible for the National Theatre, followed on with the establishment of several concert halls, the Singapore City Hall, Victoria Theatre and Victoria Memorial Hall and sponsored a variety of public concerts and festivals including a Youth Festival, Singapore Arts Festival, Singapore Drama Festival and the Singapore Chinese Music Festival.

The establishment of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in 1979 was the most important event since the formation of the Philharmonic Society in 1891. Well-known conductors and soloists were responsible for numerous concerts every season. The choral society newly formed under the symphony orchestra managed to introduce an entire opera and cantata to the public. The Singapore Composers’ Association further promoted the writing of songs in languages other than

Mandarin, as well as instrumental music, making a significant contribution to the national characteristics of multicultural Singaporean culture. The National Theatre Trust Annual Report of 1980 informs us of an initiative **A Presentation of Chinese Songs by Singapore Poets and Composers** (In association with the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and The Singapore Association of Writers- at the Singapore Conference Hall on 15 March 1980)

*To encourage more compositions of local songs, seven composers and six poets were asked to collaborate and pool their creative talents together. Their efforts were heard in the concert, admission to which was free. The composers were Goh Say Meng, Kam Kee Yong, Lee Tack Fah, Leong Yoon Ping, Lim Tiap Guan, Shen Ping Kwang and Samuel Ting, and the poets included Tan Ying, Du Gong, Miao Mang, Tang Hua Sok, Wong Yoon Wah and Zhou C'an.*<sup>161</sup> The second presentation of Our Songs, a presentation of Chinese Songs by Singapore Poets and Composers in association with the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and Singapore Association of Writers in the Singapore Conference Hall in June 1980 offers us this brief:

*Local audiences were treated to yet another concert of songs written and composed by our own talented songwriters in the presentation of 'Our Songs'. A total of 12 Chinese songs were presented, performed by well-known soloists as well as choirs of the Heralds Choral Society, the Young Voices Choir and Mellow Art Choir. The project, started in 1979, was aimed at generating greater interest among Singaporeans in locally composed songs.*<sup>162</sup>

The Third presentation was at Victoria Concert Hall on 22 February 1981:

*This concert, the third in a series, was one of the many steps taken to encourage local composers to present their works. Seventeen new Chinese songs, both classical and contemporary in style were featured at the third presentation of 'Our Songs'. Of the participants were some first-timers, consisting of five new composers and six new lyricists. Veteran composers like Samuel Ting, Lee Tack Fah, Leong Yoon Ping and Shen Ping Kwang were also featured together with veteran lyricists Zhou C'an, Chen Hua Su, Hwang Lung Hua and Tan Yin.*<sup>163</sup>

The setting up of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra marked a decided strategy in affirming a western art music tradition that had seen its rise in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his book **From Handel to Hendrix**, Michael Chanan tells us that Karl Marx was: *One contemporary observer who perceived the relationship between the musical life and the organisation of capitalist production...Marx saw the orchestra conductor as a representative of capitalist interests. The capitalist mode of production, he wrote:*

*“has brought matters to a point where the work of supervision, entirely divorced from the ownership of capital, is always readily obtainable...An orchestra conductor need not own the instruments of his orchestra, nor is it within the scope of his duties as conductor to have anything to do with the ‘wages’ of the other musicians.”*<sup>164</sup>

Elsewhere in his three-volume *Das Capital*, Marx argued that:

*All combined labour on a large scale requires, more or less, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious working of the individual activities, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the action of the combined organism, as distinguished from the action of its separate organs. A single violin player is his own conductor; an orchestra requires a separate one. The work of directing, superintending, and adjusting, becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under the control of capital, becomes co-operative. Once a function of capital, it acquires special characteristics.*<sup>165</sup>

This transformation may be regarded an economic anomaly in a capitalist production perspective. Yet its identity as a state-supported ensemble marked a break in the almost predictable cycle of the failures of many amateur orchestral ensembles before it since 1834. As a fully professional orchestra, it enjoyed support from the government and the public. The orchestra’s first director, Choo Huey, announced a policy of playing compositions by at least one Singaporean every season. This period was also marked by an increase in the number of concerts presented by the then **Ministry of Culture** and **National Theatre Trust** in a “Music for Everyone series”. Two or more concerts were scheduled on the same night; a situation unthinkable not just ten years ago. Despite these strides, the concert-going public seemed to have voted in favour of performances with attendance. For those of whom composing was much desired, a milestone was achieved with formation of the **Composers Circle** in August 1980, which effectively became the national body for Singapore composers and came under the National Theatre Trust. The National Theatre Trust provided the Composers Circle with the relevant forum for the composers themselves. Bernard Tan gave a talk on composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, composer Hsu Tsang Houei on his own works in 1981, a talk by John Cage specialist Margaret Leng Tan (based in New York) on new possibilities for the piano, Leong Yoon Ping on some 20th century musical phenomena and included an elaboration of his 23 settings of a Folk theme and performance of Hsu Tsang Houei’s **Burial of the Flowers**. The Circle helped to organise “**Our Songs**” concerts which were now extended to include instrumental and orchestral music. In 1983, a concert was presented at the Asian Composers

Conference in Singapore with a string orchestra, Chinese instrumental ensembles participating and the premier of five new works.

There was consensus in the view that composers in Singapore face a problem not unlike their counterparts from societies around the world. Despite having unmitigated support of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, National Theatre Trust and Ministry of Culture (today, the National Arts Council under the Ministry of the Information and the Arts) in terms of commissions and performances, it concerned them that the support had not translated into well-known Singaporean performers or performing groups forming a queue to engage composers to write for them. Neither has it translated to an increase in the general concert-going public or attracting a new supportive audience in significant numbers.<sup>166</sup> The view was still that the composer was done a favour when his/her work was performed rather than a concert felt incomplete without one Singaporean work within the programme, putting the role of the composer in Singapore society in this way:

*The Singaporean composer thus has every right to feel his lot is a difficult one.....however the musical community as a whole and society at large also have a perfect right to ask why the composer would be given a hearing. It is inevitable, perhaps even more so in a fast-developing and pragmatic country like Singapore, that the question of relevance will be an important one.....if he, as a creative artist, is to demand attention from society, he must come at least halfway to convincing society that his work is vital to the cultural and social ethos of Singapore. Generally speaking there is scarcely a composer in Singapore who depends on composition as a main source of income....at the present time, publishing and performance of new music in Singapore are not commercial propositions.*<sup>167</sup>

Recognition for composers came in 1982. Leong Yoon Ping was the first composer to be awarded the prestigious Cultural Medallion for his contributions; coming in the face of other Cultural Medallion recipients, this represented for the first time affirmation of creative work. That prophetic struggle between composer and society seems to have continued, added to the biblical prophecy that composers are probably not fully recognised within their own society.

One of the most tenuous arguments put forward is the future role of the composer in society:

*Perhaps we can think of the role of Singapore composers in society as an ever-expanding series of concentric circles. The innermost circle is that embracing the composers only....the next circle represents the musical community...the next circle represents the artistic community... the last and biggest circle stands for the whole of Singapore society. The composer in Singapore must eventually realise*

*that he is part of the social and cultural life of Singapore and that his inspiration is eventually to be drawn from his largest circle. If he is convinced of this, then he will surely make a real contribution to the cultural legacy, which is left for the future generations. When society fully realises that it has a duty to ensure that such a cultural heritage is built up, then it, in turn, will surely realise that the composer is a vital part of its lifeblood.*<sup>168</sup>

Many more composers have, since, gone abroad to further their musical studies. Leong Yoon Ping, Phoon Yew Tian, Bernard Tan, Joseph Peters still continue to make their contribution via their compositions or performances of previous works, a younger generation of local composers have distinguished themselves with performances not only by Singaporean ensembles but also by international ensembles. Additionally, composers from abroad who have spent a considerable amount of their time and energies here in Singapore have started to make their contributions felt. John Sharpley, John Howard, Eric Watson, Robert Casteels are some names who have arguably enriched the repertoire of Singaporean works in a very unique way—these persons have been granted permanent residence in Singapore. Moreover, composers like John Howard and Eric Watson have made their compositional contributions to the National Day celebrations.

For Tan Shzr Ee, choral music in the late 1960s signalled the revamping of the image of choral music in Singapore. This initiative took place in schools. Throughout the 1950s, these teachers, formerly of the Singapore Musical Society, brought choral singing into the school system with identifying an elite group of a **cappella** singers selected from a body of already-existing school choirs in Singapore. When the Singapore Youth Choir was established in 1964, Benjamin Khoo led the ensemble in its formative years to be succeeded in 1969 by conductor-teacher David Lim to form a Young Musicians' Society while still receiving support from MOE. Musicians from the Society performed at official functions and pageants and also represented Singapore at overseas festivals and competitions. The Singapore Youth Choir was not the only youth group active. Other choirs were established through MOE initiatives through the 1970s and 1980s, each with a distinctive portfolio of a cappella works. These choirs met up and sang together at the annual Singapore Youth Festival, launched in 1966. Like the Band Movement, the event, involving preparations lasting several months, became equally well known for histrionic displays of highly charged emotions at competitions alongside the performances. In 1987, the late Education Minister Tay Eng Soon conceived a project known as the Choral Excellence Programme; a group of and from school choirs were handpicked, groomed musically. This project grew into a biennial singing competition proper a few years later, and was



incorporated into a separate segment within the Singapore Youth Festival. The contest was held to promote the development of singing as well as a composition. Each year that it ran, a "set piece" by a Singaporean writer was commissioned. Today, the Choral Excellence Programme and SYF Competition still enjoy their successful runs, still supported by the Ministry Of Education.

Some groups, such as the Anglo-Chinese Junior College Choir and the Victoria Junior College Choir, as well as the SYC, have ventured overseas and won prizes at international competitions. School groups were not the only new ensembles of the 1970s to early 1990s. A number of institution-based organizations have also emerged, including the Civil Service Choir, the SAF Men's Choir, the University Madrigal Singers, the United World College Choir and the Singapore Symphony Chorus (choral arm of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra). In 1994, the Philharmonic Chorus, an independent, semi-professional a cappella outfit emerged into the public sphere led by Cultural Medallion recipient Lim Yau.

Throughout its process, music-making seemed to have witnessed a number of phases: singing as leisure, as "art", in support of "religion", and even the articulation of a social cause and in the case of the biennial Sing Singapore campaign, launched in 1988, expression of national pride and fervour. As is likely to take place, given the proliferation of Christianity, albeit the number of denominations, singing in churches continues although they form only one dimension of greater church-music activity, even with decided emphasis on solo pop-style worship-leading; reminiscent of the charismatic movements of the 1960s. If anything, hymns appear to have been best preserved in the Chinese churches, deemed a more conservative group than English congregations. The Mandarin choirs themselves are still active, and hold yearly concerts. But without a social "cause", and faced with alternative distractions in an English-educated society, they suffer the problem of an ageing population. English-speaking school/youth choirs, on the other hand, have become the "phase" of the moment. Schools continue to outdo each other annually at competitions. Yet, as members of Chinese choirs also rightly point out: Without the framework of the school or competition mechanism, these groups cannot survive. Members leave the choir when they graduate. Some may form alumni choirs or return to sing "back-up"; most simply stop singing. A possible solution of this stalemate, as composer Leong Yoon Pin sees it, is to encourage greater dialogue between English-speaking and Chinese choirs. This, he has done with his own Chinese-dominated Metro Philharmonic Society, through setting up a youth arm specialising in new repertoire.

A recent development is the spin-off phenomenon headlined by acappella ensembles and lighter groups such as Budak Pantai, In Accord, Vocaluptuous and Octmented. Their members, who once trained under the framework of school choral singing, are pushing themselves into new pockets of music-making. Malay dikir barat troupes exist within the context of school groups and appear in SYF presentations. This has already moved on to incorporate Mandarin acappella groups. There are other choral groups that continue to "survive" without the change and adaptation to new environments, fuelled on the belief that what they have been doing is still the right thing.

In the arena of Indian musical activity, we find traditional solo singing occurring alongside a "made-in-Singapore" phenomenon: The Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir, choral extension of the Singapore Indian Orchestra, led by Lalitha Vaidyanathan and formed in 1985. For many Indian music lovers, the imposition of harmony on traditional fare is sacrilegious to the concept of individual improvisation in Indian music. But as far as this group is concerned, its existence is justified, if only out of the sake of finding a new form of vocal expression contemporary to traditions in the West. As for the so-called Western traditions that are the mainstay of choral music in Singapore, we find, ironically, the gradual harking back towards an "Asian" slant, if not, a "Singaporean" identity. A little has been said about the so-called "Singapore" choral sound, characterised by the "tangy" blend of youthful voices. Every two years, at the Singapore Youth Festival, as part of the Choral Excellence Programme, a new set piece is always commissioned from a Singapore composer. The SYC itself also premieres a new Singaporean work every year.<sup>169</sup>

Do Singapore composers write consciously in a "Singaporean" manner? Exactly what is identifiable with a Singaporean manner? In his presentations to schools as a composer, Kelly Tang has discussed this construction of a sense of identity for identity's sake with an apocryphal **Singaporean Seventh Chord**, to match French, Italian and German sixth-chords which have made their claim in fame in music compositions and music theory books.

Ting et.al., inform us of the ways in which the composers of the 1960s and 1970s created an atmosphere of patriotic compositions – creating the perception (rightly or wrongly) of an agenda or innate function of a composer within a socio-political environment and of a rather precarious relationship between composer and society, specifically society in Singapore:

*The Singaporean composer thus has every right to feel his lot is a difficult one.....however.....a creative artist...to demand attention from society...must come*

*at least halfway to convincing society that his/her work is vital to the cultural and social ethos of Singapore. Generally speaking there is scarcely a composer in Singapore who depends on composition as a main source of income...publishing and performance of new music in Singapore are not commercial propositions.*<sup>170</sup>

Do composers feel the burden of being patriotic or nationalistic in their creative attempts? Will this interpretation of creativity have made them more accessible to a larger audience? Kelly Tang, a composer familiar with writing music in art-music, pop, jazz and Christian gospel, offers his views on relationships between creative effort and society:

*The assimilation of western art music and its attendant cultural heritage makes me feel like a cultural beggar. First generation composers felt they needed to inscribe an Asian-ness within the dominant aesthetic—in so doing they liberated the subsequent generation of Singaporean composers. Today our composition students feel “If I wrote/composed with a folk-tune—it would be so superficial and an insult to my country”.*<sup>171</sup>

Asked about how it feels to compose in the present acknowledging the eclectic influences of initial training, one composer had this to offer:

*The spirit of the individual is there despite the borrowing of habits, attitudes and conventions. The composer does not create a style to be copied but to do something that is unique that can be explained. The utterance of the individual is more than the sum of the borrowed parts.*<sup>172</sup>

Societal preferences, pressures and prejudices notwithstanding, composers have become more comfortable with the articulation of their individual voices. By creating what they create, they identify themselves with their training, their cultural and musical backgrounds and eventually, their creative work reveals as much as it reflects, personal experiences of the multitude of selves. Compositions are as diverse in character as the composers and their strategies.

The National Arts Council has been more focused in their support of local composers by offering them grants and opportunities to establish themselves in the global market. Reception of these composers has been mixed between empathy and disdain and support is encouraging at one level for the initiated but it remains to be seen how much more support in audience terms, such endeavour will be able to attract and sustain. If the example in popular culture is to be applied here, then creative work is not seen to satisfy consumption since much of the repertoire was built around tradition and re-creation. It was recorded that in the view of the customer in popular culture, *the more closely they replicated the recorded hits, the*

*better. As a result, most groups take pride in accurately 'covering' Western pop hits.*<sup>173</sup> The fact that a disproportionate amount of the music performed by the SSO each year consists of performances of well-known repertoire from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries makes the problem equally vulnerable in the symphonic orchestra tradition.

One of the main events in the 1990s was the focussed formation of the National Arts Council in 1991 from having had the Ministry of Culture. Its stated mission was to:

Develop the local arts and culture,

Cultivate artistic talents, and,

Aid the growth of arts organisations and artists by rendering support morally as well as in terms of resources.

*The NAC is also working diligently to create an environment in Singapore conducive to the development of the arts. It aims to raise the awareness and appreciation for the arts among Singaporeans, thus moving Singapore closer to its goal of being an oasis for the arts. To achieve these, it regularly organises various events such as the Arts Festivals, the Chinese Cultural festival etc. It also collaborates with the local arts circle to promote all manner of artistic programs. It has expended tremendous efforts in training and education too.*<sup>174</sup>

The National Theatre that opened in 1963 to serve, *to bring about greater understanding among the different cultures and assist the government in its primary task...to create a unified nation out of the many racial and cultural groups*,<sup>175</sup> was by 1984, declared unsafe on structural grounds and that it had "outgrown its usefulness" and demolition work carried out in 1986.<sup>176</sup> Construction work on Esplanade was begun in the mid-1990s. Throughout this time, the centre that was built at a cost of \$600 million from public funds became a focus of debate and discussion among the arts community, converging on October 2002.

On Friday evening, 11 October 2002, a day before the official opening of Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay,<sup>177</sup> Singapore's new national performing arts centre, a concert was held to commemorate the national inauguration of Esplanade's 1,600-seat state-of-the-art Concert Hall.<sup>178</sup> Called the National Inauguration of the Concert Hall, the event featured the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) in three works under the baton of music director Lan Shui. The first half comprised the world premiere of Singaporean composer Er Yenn Chwen's *Fete* and Bach's Concerto for Two Violins in D minor BWV 1043. The second was solely that of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 op.125, *Choral*. The artistic philosophy behind the

programming aimed to highlight the acoustics of the hall as well as the range and "colour" of the orchestra, as SSO music director Shui explained:

*The first piece highlights the brass and percussion. The second piece is scored mainly for strings. And in the Beethoven, the first three movements involves the full orchestra while the last movement has chorus with soloists.*<sup>179</sup>

The concert was solely for invited guests, mainly sponsors who funded the building of the arts centre, members of the arts community and former staff of Esplanade, with the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong, as guest of honour. In his message for the programme book for the event, Lee had called it *a significant milestone in our nation's artistic history*.<sup>180</sup> To date, this Concert Hall remains possibly the first such purpose built venue in Singapore's history. As Michael Wong Pakshong, chairman of The Esplanade Company that manages the arts centre noted in his address in the programme book for the concert:

*It has been articulated at various junctures in Singapore's history that the absence of a good concert hall for music performances has impeded the development of musical activities. Now, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay's Concert Hall will change all that.*<sup>181</sup>

While comparisons are odious, there were nevertheless significant differences between both arts centres. Where the National Theatre comprised a single auditorium seating over 3,000, Esplanade comprised two large purpose built venues, the Concert Hall and a 2,000-seat Theatre, the smaller Recital Studio and Theatre Studio and outdoor performing venues. At the time of its opening in October 2002, Esplanade was equipped with state-of-art theatre technology. In fact, its very facilities had enabled Singapore to be the only Asian stop for Cameron Mackintosh's musical *Oliver!* with its intricate and complex set design in March 2003.

The interest shown by the public in the centre was immense. The two-day Open House that aimed to give the public a preview of the centre a fortnight before its official opening drew nearly half a million visitors. Expectations heaped on Esplanade were immense. The Esplanade Company that manages the centre had set for itself the vision of *being a performing arts centre for everyone*.<sup>182</sup> The President of Singapore, S. R. Nathan, who officiated the opening of the centre, expressed similar hopes: *I hope Esplanade will be a common space that will inspire and awaken the creativity in each of us.*<sup>183</sup>



At the centre of such optimism is the Concert Hall, a venue regarded as *Esplanade's Jewel*.<sup>184</sup> Designed by renowned acoustician Russell Johnson of Artec Consultants, the Hall is equipped with the trademarks of Artec designed venues: adjustable canopy, reverberation chambers and acoustic curtains, features which allow the hall to be made suitable for any acoustical requirement. The importance of the Concert Hall was such that it had necessitated a separate inauguration from the official opening of the arts centre. As Benson Puah, Chief Executive Officer of The Esplanade Company explained in an interview the three reasons for the event: *It is such a special hall that I felt it needed pride of place to be inaugurated separately. Also, we wanted to specially thank our two sponsors, Singapore Pools and Singapore Totalisator Board. And we wanted to provide an opportunity for the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO). We created the platform for the SSO and invited them to do the honours.*<sup>185</sup>

Expectations on the impact of the space on the development of the arts scene were indeed high, especially from those within the SSO. In 2003, the Concert Hall would become the orchestra's performing home, the venue where it would hold its annual season: previously, the orchestra performed mainly at the Victoria Concert Hall (VCH), a building that dates from 1905, originally constructed as a public hall to commemorate the reign of Queen Victoria. For the SSO's music director, Shui, the new Concert Hall would allow the orchestra to further explore repertoire it had previously seldom performed, such as Bruckner symphonies:

*VCH is not a hall for Bruckner. For Bruckner you need space, you need air, you need much more resonance and this new Concert Hall, it has more space and we are not just talking about physical space.*<sup>186</sup>

Cham Tao Soon, chairman of the board of directors of the Singapore Symphonia Co Ltd that manages the orchestra was equally hopefully of the heights which the Concert Hall could elevate the orchestra to as well as further introducing "fine music" to a wider audience:

*The acoustics at Esplanade will also bring out the best in performances of the classical repertoire...it gives the SSO an opportunity to make a quantum leap. Esplanade offers specifically designed concert space for all musical genres, including symphony music. I look forward with great enthusiasm to working with Esplanade to enhance the national appetite for fine music, to the establishment of Esplanade as the focal point for the arts in Singapore, and to the continuing artistic development of the SSO into a world-class orchestra.*<sup>187</sup>

The Concert Hall certainly impressed two other orchestras who performed there during Esplanade's Opening Festival. Wrote Lorin Maazel, music director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, of the orchestra's Asian tour in his official website: *The new concert hall (one of the Esplanade theatres) is a feast for the eye, a joy to the ear. Powerful reverberant acoustics with accent on high frequencies.*<sup>188</sup> For Serge Dorny, artistic director of the London Philharmonic, the Concert Hall was a prime attraction and it would be *eventually instrumental to pitching Singapore long term into the international arts spotlight.*<sup>189</sup> He told *The Straits Times*, the nation's leading English daily, that *All orchestras around the world touring Asia and the Pacific rim will want to play in it.*<sup>190</sup>

Phan records the reception of *some among the community who felt...the programming of the SSO and the SDT...in terms of cultural imperialism. A reader had written to the press, questioning the selection of the Singapore Dance Theatre and Symphony Orchestra in inaugurating both venues, lamenting the lack of "Chinese-ness at the Esplanade's opening ceremony...The SSO and SDT are hardly what you will call performers of indigenous cultures, are they? You need to stretch your credibility to breaking point to call these two organisations champions of arts of our cultural roots. So we have ominous disappointment here. A more appropriate alternative to the SSO would have been the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, resplendent in their Chinese tunics, and performing the rousing Dagger Society (Xiao Dau Huei). That would have been an aural, visual and emotional high.*<sup>191</sup>

For this reader, the "cultural roots" of the people of Singapore are determined by the present population profile of the country and its geographical location in Southeast Asia. This being, an island at the tip of the Malay peninsular with a population of over four million of which 76.7% are Chinese, 13.9% Malays, 7.9% Indians and 1.5% other races.<sup>192</sup> There were also others in the public who viewed Western performing arts as being foreign and who expressed concerns on the dangers of constant publicity of and exposure to media promotion of Western performing arts. Thus wrote Chia Buk Chua, who had 15 years of formal education in English but who nevertheless had "an affinity for Chinese opera and Chinese classical music and very little interest in Western opera and Western 'classical music' in a letter to the press:

*If the media continues to promote Western performing arts, as it has been doing for the last 25 years, then I am afraid only Western fare will find an audience in Singapore and, for it to remain commercially viable, the Esplanade would have no choice but to look West. We will then get trapped in a vicious circle and the Esplanade will become our \$600-million edifice to alien performing arts.*<sup>193</sup>

There is no denying that for the acoustician, the Concert Hall was built primarily as a space for a Western symphony orchestra. Said Russell Johnson, who had also designed the Morton H Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas and the Kimmel Center, home of the Philadelphia Orchestra, when asked in an interview if Artec considered the specific cultural situation and needs of the community where a hall is built:

*When one of the goals is to provide a place for symphony orchestras to make music, to build one of the four or six best concert halls in the world, there are basic requirements which must be fulfilled. Good acoustics for Western music are good acoustics for other genres.*<sup>194</sup>

Wong in his message for the programme book of the National Inauguration of the Concert Hall however, was careful to stress that the range of performances scheduled at the Concert Hall for Esplanade's Opening Festival demonstrated variety and the adaptability of the hall:

*... from the intimacy of a song recital in Jessye Norman's concert to a tribute to Singapore Chinese pop in Xingpop ... to the haunting rhythms of the music of Cape Verde ... from a Malay concert ... to the concerts of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra ... This diversity of musical events ... is a demonstration that the Concert Hall can serve as a common space where boundaries are crossed and where cultures meet.*<sup>195</sup>

Despite the fact that the Concert Hall was built upon the construction principles of the best of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century concert halls in the West such as the Concertgebouw, Carnegie Hall and Musikvereinssaal,<sup>196</sup> despite the fact that the SSO would be a major user of the Concert Hall and despite the fact that the hall was designed by an acoustician who primarily saw the use of the space for performances of music from other cultures vis-à-vis that of Western symphonic music, there is thus a conscious attempt on the part of the arts centre to stress that the Concert Hall is for *music of all cultures and for all people*.<sup>197</sup> Or was it because of all these factors, that there was a need to stress that it was "only when music of all traditions can play and feel at home in this Concert Hall that its role in Singapore society will be fulfilled?"<sup>198</sup>

This stress for diversity from the managers of the venue and from the public is revealing of two mindsets. First, in a multicultural society such as Singapore, no one culture or art form should be allowed to dominate a particular space, especially one that was built from public funds. This need for diversity in Esplanade's programming strategy in its mission to meet the needs of a multicultural audience

was highlighted in a leader for *The Straits Times* written during the course of Esplanade's three-week Opening Festival:

*... management should also be taking in comments on the Durian's artistic mission made by world-weary performers who play there and ponder the meaning of the periodic sniping on the assumed dichotomy between Eastern culture and Western art forms ... Still those who are not fans of Western genre do not care to see a \$600 - million*

*complex get saddled with an image they cannot relate to. The festival offerings have not been overtly Western, but programmers need to keep cultural eclecticism in focus at all times.*<sup>199</sup>

While considered democratic in its emphasis for diversity, Phan observes *the language nevertheless belies an initial fear of Western performing arts form dominating the programming philosophy of a national performing arts centre. Such fears thus reveal another mindset: an attitude towards Western classical music that views its presence as still being a cultural element foreign to Singapore. In fact, even more than half - a -year after its opening, there seems no escaping the perception of Esplanade as a space having been created for Western aesthetics. And the responses to such remain combative.*<sup>200</sup>

At the launch of the first Asian congress of the International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA) on 18 June 2003 held at Esplanade, Graham Sheffield, artistic director of Britain's Barbican Centre asked: *For all the sincerity behind building Asia's premier arts venue, and the trend of Asian arts gaining in the West, was not the Esplanade ironically, still tailor made to the sonic and aesthetic ideals of Western arts?* Singapore's Ambassador at Large, the first and former chairman of Singapore's National Arts Council and a director on the board of Esplanade, Professor Tommy Koh replied: *We did not ask to be colonised by the British for 150 years.*<sup>201</sup>

For Phan, *the answer is laden: barbed with a sense of acceptance and irony. It is at once an acknowledgement of the legacy of Singapore's colonial heritage. It is also a critique of that heritage, if not reflecting the continuing struggle to reassess and perhaps ultimately reject that heritage. To say "We did not ask to be colonised by the British..." is also to mean, "If we could, we would not want to have been colonised for 150 years, if, at all."*<sup>202</sup>

## Discussion

A vast array of themes become evident in the discourse as rich as it is enigmatic. It is clear that much of the music had been Euro-centric; British at first, Japanese

constructions of a Euro-centric practice for a brief period to a global outlook in the present.

What is evident is also the way Euro-American art music has permeated the social fabric of those who lived in Singapore. It is not enough to discuss the impact of Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian communities throughout almost two centuries when we learn of contributions, both social and musical by German, Filipino, Japanese, English, Portuguese, Arab and Indonesian communities towards a Singaporean social and historical fabric. If nothing else, Dixon's comments on the 1920s are worth a repeat for the gaps created:

*Singapore's most notable achievement in the field of amateur entertainment was, of course, the annual production of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera by the city's **Amateur Operatic Society**. It is interesting to recall that, when the Society produced the *Mikado*, the Japanese Consul-General and other members of the **Japanese community** were most helpful in the matter of costumes and stage settings.*<sup>203</sup>

From a musical perspective, the **Amateur Operatic Society** in the 1920s seems to have little or no information about the society, members, instruments, modus operandi, support systems, repertoire, leaders, to name a few.

Like the Filipino community who rose to prominence in the public sphere during the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese community is one which there is considerable lack of information. Scholarship in this area would certainly be helpful in coming to terms with a community whose presence in Singapore was only associated with war atrocities during the occupation of Singapore.

At another level, musical cultures are also seen to interact and influence musical practice. For instance, it is not possible to deny a correlation between the role of Christian mission work and western art music, as much as contemporary composition has become more sensitive of an Eastern if not more Southeast Asian context. It is also not possible to deny the correlation of regimental bands and the orchestral tradition in Singapore.

At the epistemological level, there is a problem in identifying musical works that articulate the difference between western music and western art music as well as the Euro-American tradition. The nature, role and identity of this musical practice help raise questions about it in a way that an examination of capitalist modes of production, division of labour, among others can provide explanations to justifying cultural capital alongside financial health and wellness. At the heart of this



practice, there is an aspect of this study which Phan Ming Yen has simply identified with silence, in fact many forms of silences.<sup>204</sup> There was at one level, silences in narratives and silencing in narratives; events brought to light that had never been discussed since their taking place and since their being recorded for the first time in the newspapers. Another level of silence emerged as a prerequisite of the performance and enjoyment of music and the practice of music as a necessity to silence. Perhaps the most subtle and telling act of silencing is the way in which the Esplanade was built to justify scientifically and technologically that, *good acoustics for Western music are good acoustics for other genres*.<sup>205</sup> In encountering and breaking through these levels of silences, it was and still is difficult to refute a view that the remembering and practice of Western music represents a means for the European community to recreate a sense of their home in a colony of the Empire. This process was seen as necessary because it worked alongside the assertion of power and superiority by one culture (the coloniser) over another (the colonised) in the face of the fear of the loss of the self-respect, pride and identity of the coloniser.

Does an equal-tempered tuning system, set with A=440 Hz as the universal marker for all musical traditions around the world as well, make an unchallenged assumption that musical practice of the Euro-American tradition can now be justified economically and politically as a universal? This question of spatial imperialism, like other questions raised are useful when they invite future and further scholarship in understanding what appears before us as a rich, diverse and diffuse narrative in this musical practice in Singapore.

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136 Syonan Times, 1 February 1943, Beethoven Recital attracts big crowd.

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141 Singapore Free Press, June 2, 1926.

142 Beamish, Tony, *The Arts of Malaya*, pp.45-46, in Chapter Six, Music and Letters.

143 Ibid., text supporting the photograph after p.32.

144 Tan Shzr Ee: [http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story\\_choirs/history1.html](http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story_choirs/history1.html)

145 Leong Yoon Ping, 'A brief survey of the composition career in Singapore' translated to English in Koh-Baker, JoAnn Hwee Been, *Singapore; Music Culture in Singapore*, pp.285-295, p.285 in *Asian Composers in the 20th Century*, edited by the Japan Federation of Composers.

146. Ting Chu San, Leong Yoon Ping, Tan Tiong Gee, Bernard: *Singapore, from New Music in the Orient*, edited by Harrison Ryker, Frits Knuf Publishers, Buren, The Netherlands, 1991, pp.97-114. A proliferation of ensembles and activities is best summarised below:

The Singapore Chamber Ensemble; The Children's Orchestra; Singapore Philharmonic Orchestra; Singapore Musical Society, reportedly formed in 1935, organised many orchestral and choral concerts, competitions and outreach programmes; Singapore Music Teachers' Society formed in 1952; Small orchestra of Radio Singapore; Singapore Symphony Orchestra 1961 (Amateur); Goh Soon Tioe String Orchestra; Kam Kee Yong String Orchestra founded in 1965; National Theatre Company 1968 setting up a quasi-professional orchestra. In 1968, it conducted auditions for National Symphony Orchestra; National Choir and Chinese, Malay and Indian Orchestras. This was to help generate the first Singapore Festival of Performing Arts in July or September 1968; Shalom Ronly-Riklis helped trained the Singapore National Orchestra in 1969 for the 150th Anniversary and National Day. Also trained the Singapore Youth Symphony Orchestra said to have been in existence since the pre-war period; NTUC Choir (1970 conducted by Lee Yuk Chuan); Singapore Children's Orchestra started in 1970—60 children were selected from from Catholic High, St. Nicholas, Serangoon South Primary and Hua Yi primary school ranging 7-12. The Young Musicians Society which was formed in 1969 and continues to this day in its own space in town.

147 Tan Shzr Ee: [http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story\\_choirs/history1.html](http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story_choirs/history1.html)

148 Mo, Zexi. *The Malayan song composers and their works*, YanHuang Journal. Singapore: Yan Huang Researching Association, 2: 18-20, translations by Wong Joon Hwang, June 2004.

149 Tan Shzr Ee: [http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story\\_choirs/history1.html](http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story_choirs/history1.html)

150 Chua Soo Pong: Creative Process of Chinese theatre dance in Singapore 1946-1976, *Journal of the South Seas Society* Volumes 39, Parts 1 & 2, 1984, pp.89-99, pp.89-90.

151 Ministry of Culture press-released: SONG BOOK BANNED JUNE 9 1967 MC.JUN.16/67 (CUL) Issued at 1700 hrs.

152 Koh Tai Ann, Culture and the Arts, in *The Management of Success*, ed. Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1989, pp.719-720.

153 Straits Times 8 May 1963.

154 Straits Times 8 May 1963.

155 Singapore Government Press Statement: Speech by Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Minister of Defence, at the opening of the SEIWAEN (Japanese Garden) on Friday, 16 February 1973 at 6pm, MC: FEB/5/73 (DEFENCE), pp.1-4, p. 2. He went on to describe music in popular culture as barbarous music, while admitting to its widespread popularity.

156 Ibid., p.2

157 Ibid., p.2.

158 National Theatre Trust annual Report 1970, p.5.

159 Singapore Government Press Statement: Speech by Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Minister of Defence, at the opening of the SEIWAEN (Japanese Garden) on Friday, 16 February 1973 at 6pm, MC: FEB/5/73 (DEFENCE), pp.1-4, p. 2. He went on to describe music in popular culture as barbarous music, while admitting to its widespread popularity.

160 National Theatre Trust annual Report 1980, p.8.

161 National Theatre Trust annual Report 1980, p.15.

162 National Theatre Trust annual Report 1980/1, p.8.

163 National Theatre Trust annual Report 1980/1, p.15.

164 Marx, Karl, *Capital*, vol. III, Lawrence & Wishart, 1972, pp.386-387, cited in Chanan, Michael, *From Handel to Hendrix*, Verso Press 1999, p.177.

165 Marx, Karl, *Capital*, vol. I, Lawrence & Wishart, 1972, p. 330-331 under Chapter XIII – Co-operation.

166 Ting Chu San, Leong Yoon Ping, Tan Tiong Gee, and Bernard: Singapore, op.cit., pp.112-114.

167 Ibid., pp112-113.

168 Ibid., pp.113-114.

169 Tan Shzr Ee: [http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story\\_choirs/history1.html](http://www.nac.gov.sg/choraldirectory/story_choirs/history1.html)

170 Ibid., pp112-113.

171 Interview with Kelly Tang, May 2004.

172 Interview with Kelly Tang, May 2004.

173 Well, Alan and Lee Chun Wah, *Music Culture in Singapore: Record companies, Retailers and performers*, pp.29-42, p. 37, in Lent, John A. (ed.), *Asian Popular Culture*, Westview Press, USA, 1995

174 <http://www.singaporeartsculture.com/english/engnac.html>.

175 *Straits Times* 8 May 1963.

176 For a quick overview of the history of the National Theatre there is a website: [http://www.getforme.com/whatsgone\\_places\\_NationalTheatre.htm](http://www.getforme.com/whatsgone_places_NationalTheatre.htm). For history of the National Theatre Trust within the context of the present day Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, see <http://www.mita.gov.sg/abtmis.htm>. See "Chairman's Review." and "Overview to Cultural Promotion Section.", National Theatre Trust Annual Report 1984/1985 pp. 4 & 5 with regards to the impact of the closure of the National Theatre in January 1984. For the closure of the National Theatre Trust, see "Review.", National Theatre Trust Annual Report 1990/1991 p.4. The staff and assets of the National Theatre Trust were absorbed by the present day National Arts Council which was formed in 1991. However, the history of Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay dates back to the 1970s when the idea for an arts centre was first raised.

177 By the time it opened on 12 October 2002, Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay was one of the most anticipated arts projects in both the Singapore and international arts scene. Comprising a 1,600-seat Concert Hall, 2,000-seat Theatre, three studio spaces and outdoor performance spaces, Esplanade was also a centre controversy among both the architecture and arts communities in Singapore from 1992 when The Esplanade Co Ltd (then known as Singapore Arts Centre Co Ltd) was formed to manage the project until its completion in 2002. For a quick history of the project, see Tan, Hannah and Phan Ming Yen, eds. *Opening. Singapore: The Esplanade Co Ltd, 2002*, a limited edition book published in commemoration of Esplanade's opening. For international media coverage of Esplanade, see Ken Smith's "Eastern Promise." and Eva Johansson's "Only Time will Tell." *International Arts Manager*, UK: Alain Charles Arts Publishing Ltd, December 2002/January 2003. See also Wayne Arnold. "Singapore Offers and Architectural Symbol for the Arts." *The New York Times*, 3 December 2002. For early discussions on the project, see Janadas Devan "Is Art Necessary" and Koh Tai Ann and T. Sasitharan, "Commentary" in *Art vs Art: Conflict and Convergence* Singapore: The Substation, 1995, pp.50 - 71. For Singapore media, see Tan Shyr Ee "Its showtime at the Esplanade" *The Straits Times* (ST), 13 October 2002 and "Esplanade helped S'pore draw more visitors", *The Straits Times*, 5 December 2002. I was involved with Esplanade from 1996 - 2000 as editor, *The Arts Magazine* and subsequently programming officer and was writer, editorial consultant and artistic director for Esplanade's MusicBox from September 2002 - April 2003.

178 For the attention given to Esplanade's Concert Hall by the international music scene, see Michael Quinn. "Russell Johnson: The designer behind Singapore's new concert hall on the challenge of creating performing space today" in *Gramophone*, January 2003, p.19.

179 "The Space of Sound: An Interview with Lan Shui." Phan Ming Yen and Tan, Hannah, eds. *National Inauguration of the Concert Hall*. Singapore: The Esplanade Co. Ltd. 2002, p.17. This 36-page programme book contains details on the event, including an interview with Benson Puah, Chief Executive Officer of The Esplanade Co, the acousticians of Esplanade, Artec Consultants and Lan Shui, music director of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

180 *Ibid.*, p.3.

181 *Ibid.*, p.5.

182 The Vision statement of Esplanade reads: "Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay is a performing arts centre for everyone."



183 Phan Ming Yen and Tan, Hannah eds. *Opening Day* 12 October 2002 Singapore: The Esplanade Co. Ltd, 2002 p.3. This 40-page publication was a souvenir programme book for the invited guests at the official opening of Esplanade -Theatres on the Bay.

184 "Multiplicity in One Space: An Inauguration, An Opening, Programming Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay." Phan Ming Yen and Tan, Hannah eds. *National Inauguration of the Concert Hall* Singapore: The Esplanade Co. Ltd 2002, p. 8.

185 Ibid., p. 8.

186 Ibid., p.17.

187 Ibid., p.21.

188 See The Official Website of the Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, <http://www.maestromaazel.com/asia5.html>. The New York Philharmonic performed at Esplanade's Opening Festival on 28 and 29 October 2002.

189 Tan Shzr Ee. "Will Durians turn the arts around?" ST, 16 October 2002. The London Philharmonic Orchestra performed at Esplanade's Opening Festival on 14 and 15 October. Because of its architectural features that results it in resembling the local fruit the durian, Esplanade is commonly and affectionately referred to as such by Singaporeans. See Tan and Phan eds. *Opening*. Singapore: The Esplanade Co Ltd, 2002.

190 Ibid.

191 This comes from an unpublished letter to The Straits Times cited in Ong Soh Chin, "The Art of Living Dangerously." ST, 2 November 2002.

192 Foo Siang Luan, Shika Roy, Ng Wei Kok, eds. *Singapore 2002* Singapore: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, p. 45.

193 Chua Buk Chua. "'Durian of all tastes' a spiky problem." ST, 31 October 2002.

194 Phan and Tan, eds. *National Inauguration of the Concert Hall*. p. 14.

195 Ibid., p.5.

196 Ibid., p.13.

197 Ibid., p.5.

198 Ibid., p.5.

199 "Durian of all Tastes." ST, 27 October, 2002.

200 Phan Ming Yen, *Music in Empire*, op.cit., p.17.

201 Tan Shzr Ee. "Is Asian arts still kowtowing to the West?" ST, 21 June 2003.

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203 Ibid., pp.3-5.

204 Phan Ming Yen, op.cit., pp.196-197.

205 Phan and Tan, eds. National Inauguration of the Concert Hall. p. 14.