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ART SONGS COMPOSITION INSPIRED BY THE URBANIZATION AND DEFORESTATION PHENOMENON

ALIA FARAHIN ABD WAHAB



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ART SONGS COMPOSITION INSPIRED BY THE URBANIZATION AND
DEFORESTATION PHENOMENON

ALIA FARAHIN ABD WAHAB

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2023



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a write-up about the composition description, approaches and the concept of the composition. The concept of the composition is called 'UrbanForArt'. The word UrbanForArt is created based on the combination of urbanization, art songs, and deforestation which is the central concept of the composition or creative work. There are 11 art song compositions that were presented. These songs were inspired by the soundscape of the nature in the urban area. The dissertation begins with the inspirational factors, the realization, the passion and the drive to start; along with the composition's objectives and statements of problems and limitations. The understanding of art songs, its meaning, the style and the perception comes after. The analysis of the data and the collection of data from the sound recordings, visual interpretation and the extraction of the data were presented in chapter 3. In chapter 4, the dissertation discussed the concept and the main idea of UrbanForArt. The concept was elaborated and becomes the fundamental of the composition for the art songs. Chapter 5 covers the composition description of the entire composition, and the analysis of the songs and the details based on the melody and motives. Finally, the conclusion of the entire concept of music, composition and research was concluded at the final chapter and the reflection of the entire composition, concept and research.



KOMPOSISI LAGU-LAGU SENI YANG DI INSPIRASIKAN OLEH FENOMENA PEMBANDARAN DAN PENEBAANGAN HUTAN

ABSTRAK

Disertasi ini adalah penulisan tentang huraian gubahan, pendekatan dan konsep gubahan. Konsep gubahan dipanggil 'UrbanForArt'. Perkataan UrbanForArt dicipta berdasarkan gabungan urbanisasi, lagu seni, dan penebangan hutan yang merupakan konsep utama gubahan atau karya kreatif. Terdapat 11 gubahan lagu seni yang dipersembahkan. Lagu-lagu ini diilhamkan oleh skap bunyi alam semula jadi di kawasan bandar. Disertasi bermula dengan faktor inspirasi, kesedaran, semangat dan dorongan untuk bermula; bersama dengan objektif gubahan dan pernyataan masalah dan batasan. Pemahaman lagu-lagu seni, maknanya, gaya dan persepsi datang selepas itu. Analisis data dan pengumpulan data daripada rakaman bunyi, tafsiran visual dan pengekstrakan data dibentangkan dalam bab 3. Dalam bab 4, disertasi membincangkan tentang konsep dan idea utama UrbanForArt. Konsep ini telah dihuraikan dan menjadi asas kepada gubahan untuk lagu-lagu seni. Bab 5 merangkumi huraian gubahan keseluruhan gubahan, dan analisis lagu serta butiran berdasarkan melodi dan motif. Akhirnya, kesimpulan keseluruhan konsep muzik, gubahan dan penyelidikan telah disimpulkan pada bab akhir dan refleksi keseluruhan gubahan, konsep dan penyelidikan.



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ANALYTICAL CONVENTIONS

Pitch organization

- I often categorize pitch according to the scale; 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th
- The 1st pitch being the 1st note of the scale, in the key of C major, 1st note=C, 2nd note=D, etc.
- The pitches are categorized as chord tones or non-chord tones according to their order of the pitch. 1ST, 3RD and 5th are chord tones or stable tones, while the 2nd, 4th, 6th and 7th to be non-chord tones or unstable tones
- Non chord tones or unstable tones are expected to resolved with the chord tones and the greater the organization of non-chord tone notes, the more build ups of the delay towards the resolution

Chords

- Consonance : A tone combination that is stable tones
- Dissonance: A tone combination of unstable tones
- Modulation : The change of key

Rhythm

- Beat: The number of pulse based on the bar
- Count: The number of beat based on the note value

Phrase

- Phrase: A few pitches or melodies together without a pause, rest or break



- Call and answer: A few pitches that ends with a non-chord tone almost like a question that need an answer on resolution. Often times, the answer should include a chord tone pitch or stable tones.
- Pick up: A start of melody that does not being in the first beat of the bar
- Motive: A set of melodies that are extracted and tweaked based on the recording

Imitation

- A transcription of the exact melody/pitch/rhythm of the recording



APPENDIX LIST

- A The Erlking
- B Seindah Lautan
- C Dem Schmerz sein Recht

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

The first idea I had for this Ph.D study is to compose more Malaysian art songs. The real question I had was; how do I justify my art song composition to be a ‘Malaysian’ art song? Besides the composition being composed by a Malaysian composer with the usage of a national language, I feel there could be more to it than just the nationality and the language. Hence, the idea of composing art songs based on the Malaysian soundscape came about. The soundscape is a huge topic. One composer will not be able to cover the entire country’s soundscape in just one single sound. It took me a while to experience different soundscapes and environments to finally set my mind to compose music based on the soundscape of nature, deforestation and urbanization.



Besides music and composition, I enjoy being out in the sun and nature. I love being away from the concrete jungle and being in an actual jungle. Over the past few years, I have developed a love for hiking and jungle trekking. However, due to my location which is near the city centre, the availability of the nature area and the deep forest is limited. The availability though it may not be the deep forest, at least, it serves its purpose; to get connected to nature. Being in nature is very similar to attending a concert. It is a whole new excitement and experience each time. I love to be in nature as it feels like a break, away from people, and I can think and be calm and at peace. The sound of nature, to me, is like an orchestra itself. Day by day, I started exploring new tracks or new “hiking spots” around the Klang Valley. I was hooked on this one place called Bukit Saga. Bukit Saga is situated in Ampang and it is connected to a few other hills near the area. However, Bukit Saga is one of the most popular hiking spots. This is because it is a good training ground for hikers before going to Mount Kinabalu.

The first time I went to Bukit Saga, I felt a wrench of sadness. To enter the entrance of Bukit Saga, one must go through a construction site of a huge highway project. After going through the construction site, there is a path that goes straight to Bukit Saga. After a few minutes of walking, one will see the beauty of this place. Though it is situated in the middle of the city, right next to a highway and a construction site, Bukit Saga appears to be one of those ‘left-overs’ nature areas in the city of Kuala Lumpur. It is filled with these big, beautiful, deep-rooted trees that have been there since the beginning of time. After about 2 hours of hike, one will reach the hidden gem of the place; a refreshing waterfall, right in the middle of the jungle in the centre of an urban area. It is difficult to not fall in love with Bukit Saga as it offers a beautiful natural landscape, a calming sound of nature, a scent of fresh air, and an escape from the hectic





city life filled with traffic, constructions, and buildings. As I sat next to the waterfall, I felt a sense of serenity listening to the sound of the waterfall, accompanied by the sound of the crickets, birds, monkeys and other animals. Though there were times, the sound of the ambulance and helicopter may be heard now and then, due to the location of the forest, but still, it is very peaceful compared to the city soundscape. The natural area of Bukit Saga is almost untouched by humans, laid out in its original, natural form. Then, it hit me; this place will not be around for long. The authorities are planning to remove the forest area to make way for a new highway and new construction in the name of development and urbanization. I then realized, a few years from now, this beautiful nature will vanish, cleared out to make way for the advancement of the country.

What will happen to this place in the future? Will I be able to enjoy the exquisiteness of nature, here? Will I be able to listen to the sound of the forest ever again? How do I preserve this? I am not the authority and I have no say in this matter. The least I could do as a musician and as a composer is to preserve the sound. But, what can I possibly do with the sound? Then it hit me; I should preserve the sound and turn it into a composition. In the future, people will be able to enjoy what I had. Through music, I am able to share some experiences, some of the feelings I felt whilst in this nature.

Day by day, I felt more and more attached to nature. I spent most of my mornings out in some forest in the city. I started exploring all the forest areas in the city; Bukit Saga, Bukit Gasing, Bukit Sapu Tangan, Mirror Lake, Bukit Cerakah, Bukit Wawasan and some other. Some of the areas are slowly being cleared out and some of these places are forbidden now. To preserve the experience, I started recording the





soundscape of each and every place I went. I was able to capture the picture of nature, but if a person looking at a picture, it does not capture the same feelings, atmosphere and the same soundscape of the place. That is why, and how I started to compose art songs based on the soundscape of nature in the urban area. “The story of urbanization gaining pace is a familiar one in many parts of the world. The Southeast Asian region is no different. In 1950, the rate of urbanization was only 15.4 percent. The rate today stands at slightly over 40 percent and is projected to increase to 49.7 percent by 2025.” (Yap and Moe 2012)

In March 2020, the pandemic covid- 19 hit the country and the entire world. Everyone was affected by this pandemic. The entire nation had to isolate and the new norm is being introduced and practiced by everyone. As a composer, I was affected by this experience too. I felt the need to document my experience, hence, my composition’s performance is inspired by this pandemic. As all the universities and schools are closed. The only way to study, teach and learn is by using the online platform. I decided to record one of my compositions using the online platform. Normally, most musicians will want to ensure everything is done in time. To make sure everyone is performing at the same time is to make sure the performance is done at the same place and at the same time. However, due to the pandemic, and the restriction of the isolation given by the government, the idea of performing at the same place seems impossible. Hence, I decided to record the performance of the musicians, at the same time, using the online platform given. The delays and the interruption of the internet connection will be part of the performance.





Discussing about the motivation and inspiration, I was also inspired by the words of Felix Mendelsohn. He quoted; “*It's not that music is too imprecise for words, but too precise.* This is what I think art is and what I demand of it: that it pulls everyone in, that it shows one person another's most intimate thoughts and feelings, that it throws open the window of the soul.” This inspires me to create compositions that have a reflection of deforestation. The deforestation phenomenon is reflected in the music, not the words (poetry). To conclude the reflection on deforestation and urbanization, I decided to come up with the concept called Urbanforart. Urbanforart is the foundation of the composition for all 11 songs in the recital. Urbanforart is an artistic model for the composition and the idea is reflected and taken from the soundscape of urbanization and deforestation in the nature of the urban area. Further discussions and elaborations on each song and concept will be discussed in the following chapters.



1.2 The Imagination and The Composer's Idea

The first idea I had was to composed Malaysian art songs based on the Malaysian soundscape in the nature area or the forest area. However, my main concern was the soundscape of the nature or forest in Malaysia will not be reflect a “Malaysian forest” and it may sound similar to any other forest in any other countries. Another issue that I had was, I might not be able to capture the soundscape of the entire forest in Malaysia. Later, the idea of preserving the nature soundscape comes in. I was no longer trying to make it sound like I am in a Malaysian nature or a forest, instead, I was trying to preserve what's left of the nature area in the urban area in Malaysia as these natural areas has a possibility to disappear one day due to urbanization and deforestation.





Hence, my composition direction shifted from creating music to showcase the soundscape of the Malaysian nature, to creating music *inspired by* the soundscape of the nature. The hidden message that I was trying to highlight here is the frustration of the deforestation issue in Malaysia while trying to do a composition inspired by the nature area that has been affected by the deforestation.

1.3 Problem Statement

The main concern I had is the validity of the soundscape data. I was mainly concerned about the soundscape data may not be able to prove the deforestation issue. However, according to the article '*Amazon forest degradation from fire and logging*'; after monitoring the ecosystem structure over time, it was found that the insects were the dominant acoustic markers of degradation, particularly during midday and nighttime hours. It was also found that the nectarivorous birds continue to decline in abundance of time. (D. I. Rappaport, A. Swain, W. F. Fagan and D. C. Morton, 2022) Due to the major deforestation in Brazil, the acoustic sound of insects was found to be the most affected. This proves that, the acoustic sound of a certain forest could be different based on the deforestation activity of one's place.

The study on ecosystem and soundscape without any definitive species identification is not something new. "Most previous efforts to utilize acoustic data for biodiversity monitoring have focused on detecting known vocalizations associated with individual species (17, 18), but there is increasing interest in evaluating the entire





collection of signals in a given soundscape to derive measures of ecosystem intactness that include all sound-generating taxa without definitive species identification” (D. I. Rappaport, A. Swain, W. F. Fagan and D. C. Morton, 2022) Hence, I came up with the idea to extend the data by extracting the soundscape and come up with a motive out of it.

In order to create these compositions inspired by the deforestation, another issue that I had was to showcase the deforestation phenomenon in the songs. In order to handle the issue, I decided to compose sounds based on the simplicity of the soundscape data that I have recorded. The recordings were extracted to see a pattern based on the location. However, the limitation for this research and compositions are there are no specific types of nature (sound of the exact name of a tree, or a type of wind, etc.) or any specific animals listed. The location of the place chosen are also taken out of my own convenience. It is recorded based on my convenience out of interest and love for the nature and the concern of the future, the soundscape in the nature may be different as the country is developing and urbanizing.

1.4 Composition Objective:

- 1) To compose art songs inspired by the soundscape of the forest in the urban area.
- 2) To establish the concept of Urbanforart that can be adapted in music composition or any other art-related work.

