

Musical practice of Jazz in Singapore

It is curious that in the entry on Singapore, jazz is mentioned only once and appears in the column on Malay community, with particular reference to the repertory of the Singapore Malay Orchestra which reportedly includes genres from jazz to *dondang sayang*...¹

Definitions of Jazz

We are told of the word jazz appearing in the San Francisco Times newspapers of 1913 in the United States. The appearance of the word by no means announces its birth although in some cases such an appearance presages or preempts association with a number of previously held practices or narrows the practice by defining it in word. For example, it is recorded that American brass bands played a pivotal role in the development of jazz...the brass bands of New Orleans gave jazz its instrumentation and also lent musical techniques and repertoire to this uniquely American musical idiom²...a 1917 advertising poster suggested that a jazz band was defined simply as “a brass band gone crazy”.³

Closer to home, in the early 1970s, I watched a half-hour special on RTS featuring a celebrated African American organist who was in town doing a special concert. Sharing the stage with him during that programme was a select TV panel audience of no more than eight. Towards the end of the programme, the organist asked if any panelists had requests. One panel member asked for a jazz number. The organist asked if he had any one piece in particular. The panelist requested for “When the Saints go marching in”. The organist quite diplomatically told him that whatever its arrangement, “When the Saints go marching in” was not a jazz number.

Appearances in Chronology

From our explorations, the word jazz was probably prefaced in Singapore by dance bands which featured quite strongly in the UK. It would also be difficult to deny that these dance bands had their origins in brass bands. Dave Russell’s chapter on the Band movement in the UK from the late 19th to the 20th century informs us of the band’s varied life which fell into four activities:

1. Playing for dancing
2. Public ceremonies
3. Concert work and
4. Contesting

Although the dance band function was likely the least important of the four, it may have eventually proved more significant than previously realised. Dancing in a variety of local spaces in the UK was more a form of entertainment for working-class youth from at least 1860 onwards. Some of their contributions

were unintentional; listeners danced to whatever suitable music bands had to offer. By the 1890s public dancing had lost some of its stigma and brass-as-dance-bands became common attractions at pleasure gardens, fetes and a variety of other attractions, including public parks in some areas. Before long, some of these developments would likely have had their impact at the highest possible social level. We learn something of this ‘infiltration’, for instance in an article in the Straits Times 1930:

*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 2nd 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.*⁴

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.⁵

Elsewhere there is found an advertisement on Thursday June 5th:

*The management of the New World Cabaret (Jalan Besar) presented the first fancy dress ball on Monday evening. The Cabaret was prettily decorated and there were special lighting effects. Two jazz bands were in attendance.....Dancing was kept up until the early hours of the morning.*⁶

On Thursday 21 August 1930, a caption appears Dr. Jazz will make his first Singapore appearance at the dinner-dance-Cabaret on August 27.....it goes on to advertise Dick Adamson’s Famous Orchestra playing on the roof garden. Alec Dixon recalls Dick Adamson’s famous orchestra in the gay and bohemian nineteen twenties. *There was no lack of ‘good-looking girls’ in the Singapore of our time, and their dancing partners were certainly not females. Dancing, from the Tango to the Black Bottom, was the order of the day. Singapore’s four major hotels provided tea and dinner dances every week of the year; and the magnificent ballroom of Raffles Hotel was renowned throughout the Far East. There were several good dance bands in the city and others visited the Colony from time to time. The popular tune of the day was Bye-bye-Blackbirds and the Charleston was to be seen in full jiggle on every dance floor. An American, Dick Adamson, came with his band from San Francisco to give us a new song Singin in the Rain.*⁷

We are informed of the arrival of Frank George Shiver, otherwise known as Dr. Jazz, *an American coloured entertainer who made a very happy impression at his first appearance at the Adelphi Hotel last night. He is an expert pianist,*

*sings in a way which appeals and altogether justifies his description. He will appear at all the dances at the Adelphi during the race season.*⁸ We are informed in another caption, *“he has had a very successful tour of Java.”*⁹ The Adelphi Hotel advertisement also carries previous reception of his ability...*If he doesn't give you a thrill no one on this earth can—Vide Press.*

CLOSE HARMONY—Jazz Band featured in Picture at the Capitol by our Film Correspondent¹⁰

*“Close Harmony” now being shown at the Capitol is another of back-stage stories which talking pictures have made so familiar. All the old friends are there—the young man who is determined to get on, the girl who helps him, the Jewish manager and the comedy team. So at home are we all becoming with this ensemble that we are almost learning to speak the language. The picture has two popular artistes in the leading roles—Charles “Buddy” Rogers and Nancy Carroll (who had a hit song from the film, I want to go places and Do Things). Buddy leads a jazz band, so there is plenty of opportunity for “glad noises” to be made on many instruments. It is entertaining enough, but the “Cuckoos” set such a high standard that ordinary fare is a trifle flat by comparison. Excellent features of the programme are the Gaumont Super Graphic and the Paramount news. The newsreels were always popular in the old days, but the addition of sound has heightened their attraction tenfold. Those test match pictures, for example, were a real achievement. Another film “So This is College” a life about American co-eds, is described as a “bright comedy with plenty of jazz” amidst football (American Football), athletics...a special feature here is Cliff Edwards—Ukelele Ike—who “bridges many a gap with his attractive personality and skill in syncopation”.*¹¹

Perhaps one of the most revealing advertisements appear on which feature Odeon electric record releases, called New releases from New York. Called Dance Music with refrains:

My Kind of A Man (Mi Clase de Hombre) from the Motion Picture The Floradora Girl (Fox Trot)

You for Me (Tu Para mi) from “Sunny Skies” (Fox Trot)

Happy Feet from “the King of Jazz”

Under a Texas Moon from the motion picture of the same name—Hawaiian instrumental

It happened in Monterey from “The King of Jazz”—Hawaiian instrumental¹²

It seems from the advertisement that dance music was a craze and available from records and indicative of a source-trendy New York?...popular dances were the fox-trot, with one waltz as well as Hawaiian instrumental music....perhaps the most telling detail was the fact that these pieces with or without special refrains were being marketed out of films....everyone of the

songs featured in the Odeon Electric record releases were from films.....Another film *Words and Music*, features American co-eds....bathing girls....described as humorous, irresponsible in theme and lots of jazzy rhythm. Another programme at the Capitol “*Skinner Steps Out*” is a comedy about how a fool egged on by his wife becomes a success. ...the Brox Sisters...were entertaining in attractive jazz song numbers. Their rhythmic harmony was definitely pleasing.¹³ It is difficult to deny the correlation of the dance band craze which arrived in Singapore via new record releases with attractive jazz songs coming out of new film releases. The Capitol Theatre advertisement for “*Skinner Steps Out*” reveals a significant subtext, *A picture that brings Mirth and Merriment in these days of Depression*.¹⁴

However, another clue to the proliferation of dance bands was the fact that dance halls with big band were also consumed by passive participants. Gerry Mulligan’s big band for instance was considered more of a dance band to be listened to.¹⁵ This was helped immensely by the proliferation of the gramophone and sound systems. Most interestingly, the power of the gramophone and its related modes of amplification were evident in a legal case around the same period. Under Section 89 of the Criminal Procedure Code 1926 Part XIV, Section 4, under Public Nuisance, the only Power of a First Class Magistrate, when he considers that any trade is injurious to health or physical comfort, is to require the person carrying on the trade to suppress or remove that trade or occupation. In the case of a dealer in gramophones, **a First Class Magistrate has no power to make an order against him prohibiting him from making a noise by means of loud speakers and gramophones**, in the course of his trade in selling such instruments.—*LOKE KUI THONG v. PUBLIC PROSECUTOR* (1932) 2 F.M.S.L.R 337.¹⁶ (emphasis mine)

Tony Danker recalls his father’s listening collection which contrasted with his. *Those days...he used to buy a particular brand...Brunswick records¹⁷...they were more or less orchestrations...it didn’t appeal to me at all...he loved to listen music which featured the trumpet, saxophone...Artie Shaw...Harry Roy and his orchestra...Artie Shaw is one of the few musicians who did justice to “Begin the beguine” and I picked up some of Artie Shaw’s phrases for the guitar...listening is very important...particularly in my family where there is no one to teach...the individuals who played in big band...I was interested in their solos, lift a few ideas and transfer it to the guitar...¹⁸*

The Front page of the *Syonan Times* 1943 reported a song blacklist because of an ideological clash between Asia and Anglo-American nations. As such musical tastes had to be properly directed. **Dinah**, a jazz number and **Aloha Oe** as well as numerous songs by Stephen Foster, among others, were banned from public and private playing. Tokyo reported the banning of about 1000 American

and British musical compositions. The police were expected to enforce this new band throughout the country.¹⁹

Despite these musical restrictions, the programme²⁰ for the concerts on 25 and 26 December 1943, for instance seemed to let slip an electric guitar solo entitled Ameno Blues. The Syonan Times, 8 August 1942 tells us of truly rare entertainment by a “comfort party”:

*A packed house...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...that charming songbird of Nippon, Miss Aiko Saida...possessing a pleasing personality and a sweet voice...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.*²¹ (emphasis mine)

In the light of the Japanese authorities’ determination to properly direct musical tastes and styles by implication, was this an error? Was it a Freudian slip to indicate that it was a Japanese songbird who delivered the Blues tempo and with it an assumption of proper directing? Or was the blues tempo irrelevant because it was rendered in a Japanese traditional song, the **Migratory birds of the South Seas**?

Paul and Alex Abisheganaden’s accounts refer to the Japanese Occupation and the fact that the Syonan orchestra was very well maintained and many of these musicians playing in the Syonan Orchestra would have become feeder stock for big band or dance band or even respectable music ensembles in hotels. Slava Tairoff, Ferry Kreml, Dan Hopkins, some Filipinos, Lee Boon Liew and even a few Chinese musicians.... Pianists adept in jazz, besides Sam Gan, Jose Daroya, Albert’s uncle Lionel Buenaventura, pianist Dodo Malinger a white Russian who played both classical and jazz very well. The band in the 1950s in Singapore consisted either of “chamber ensembles” quartets, trios or the vestiges of a much older dance band which had probably more use as a dance band. Repertoire consisted of what would be known in jazz practice today as Standards, Broadway, Tin-pan Alley, Cole Porter, George Gershwin and included popular music of the swing era, music of the 1930s and 1940s made popular like All the Things you are, Blue Moon, He’s got the Sun. The cabarets were hotspots especially after WWII. There were very good big bands like big bands...like Cecil Wilson...Gerry Soliano’s big band, H.H. Tan and Peggy Tan, Sid Gomez and Fred Libio, just to name a few. Alfredo (Fred) Libio and his all-star Filipino Swing Band was a hit in late 1930s and 1940 at the New World Cabaret.²² Fred Libio, it seems, went on to become the music director of Shaw Brothers films.²³

Classification of Musicians

Among the musicians themselves, there emerged a perception of two groups of musicians; those who played for the 5-star hotels, the European Western hotels; and the other group that played for the cabarets which had names like New World, Great World and Happy World, and Gay World. These were amusement parks built from the 1920s based on a model, which seemed to have great success in Shanghai earlier.

The telling difference between the two groups of musicians was down to having certifiable performance skills and demonstrable musicianship skills, being able to read musical notation. With such qualifications, one could become a member of the Musicians Union but it was possible to straddle both fields. Being a member of the Musicians' Union earned a musician the badge of respect not unlike a lawyer or doctor. There was entertainment at different levels. At the first level one had the musicians employed at Raffles Hotel, Seaview Hotel level. Horace Wee recalls Gerry Soliano was in that league. Sam added in those days they had the big bands...*and they all catered to different social classes...ballroom dancing was big...so the higher class citizens of Singapore, the whites...would go to the Raffles to the big band sound, while the locals would go to the cabarets...Happy World, New World, Great World, West Point...*²⁴

Here again, one does need to consider the sphere of consumption. The extent to which dance bands were available for consumption was largely the extent to which disposable income would have made visits to these exclusive Hotels possible, and here again whether or not these “dance halls” or ballrooms were open to the public at large. Simplicius recalls his father playing in an orchestra and in Singapore that would indicate a level of proficiency and therefore passage to exclusive spaces. For one not likely to have had that pathway, the alternative route would have been by default, records, films and affordable venues to dance to. The New World Cabaret was at least one such place. In the 1930s, it had acquired a formidable reputation over others in terms of drawing crowds to dance bands, one of whom was Fred Libio who was from the Philippines. The concept of the three “worlds”, New World, Great World and Happy (Gay) World, originated from Shanghai, rather akin to the modern day theme parks, or perhaps the occasional fun fairs and carnivals that are set up on a semi-permanent basis.²⁵ Its greatest feature was that it gathered eastern and western forms of entertainment in one place. In the “worlds”, one would find ‘getais’, cinemas, dance halls, entertainment parks, ball courts, restaurants, shops, stage performances, cabarets, skating rinks, and retail shops. They had many gambling stalls and a Ronggeng too. It was also accessible to most people because it was centralized.²⁶ Most of the nightlife in Singapore then was to be found in New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night.²⁷ New World's dance hall drew many young couples before the advent of the cinemas

and had a dance floor that once packed 500 couples. Later, the dance hall was shut down to make way for an amusement park. Now the only things that remain are the dates and its yellowing frontage.²⁸ The cabaret girls, also called taxi girls, were mostly Chinese with a sprinkling of Eurasians, Indians and Filipinos, but no Malays at all. Though they were available for dances at just eight cents a dance, they were quite educated. Most of them spoke good English and a few had even completed their Senior Cambridge exam (equivalent to the current 'O' levels). People from all walks of life visited the cabaret; there was the Chinese towkay, the British soldiers, navy personnel, managing directors of firms and even the former Sultan Ibrahim of Johore would visit occasionally, along with a large entourage.²⁹ The cabaret girls lived within the vicinity of New World. The cabaret commenced at 7 o'clock and went on to 12. There were tea dances that commenced at 4 in the later afternoon. The band comprised of Goanese and the leader was a Mr. De Silver, also a Goanese.³⁰

Simplicius Cheong recalls his father's dance band...*the **Rhythm Revellers** in the 50s...occasionally played for the Cricket Club and social clubs...but weekend bands...we played arrangements by Glen Miller...big band stuff...he had two saxophones, two trumpets, I used to thump the piano, sometimes solo...In my teens, I learnt piano... my father had a dance band...although I couldn't play, I heard so many things...lots of aural/oral experience...he was playing cha-cha, house...we rehearsed in Tank Road...and every Friday night...people stopped working...they'd bring their instrument...my father would bring out an arrangement by Glen Miller and so on. My father was playing dance music...Latin American cha-cha, rhumba and samba...but he wasn't playing hard bebop.*³¹

Sam Gan and Horace Wee offer their own lived experiences, particularly how the same repertoire catered to different groups: *Gerry Soliano might be playing a big band version of One o'clock jump. You go to the Cabaret and they have the foxtrot...the sign would go up for foxtrot and they will be playing the One o'clock Jump. The only difference will be the quality and the standard of the musicians. Working in the 1950s, if you can't read, you can't be a member of the union...reading qualifies you as a union member. A member of the union was looked upon with respect that was status because a musician was regarded as a professional person...the level of a doctor...if you can't read music and you could just play, you are at a different level. The better jobs were for those who could read, it paid better and there was this big difference where you played. Then again, some of them could just pick up a piece and read and play a piece...but when it comes to solo or improvising, they had no idea how to go about to do this...in the 1950s that was the situation but strangely the popularly requested repertoire in the early 1950s was very common...no matter which*

*part of the scale (social and type of gig) you're in...you'd play the same type of music...*³²

Tony Beamish's observations (around 1954) seem to bear out some poignancy in the popularity of the Dance bands. Unfortunately, it emerges at the expense of something much older: *The greatest competitor of this old Malay folk music is in fact the **Western dance band** (emphasis mine). One has only to listen to the radio to note that this type of musical entertainment is now by far the most popular among all races and not only with the younger generation. The samba rules the air-waves as far as most listeners are concerned. Modern dance tunes are not only universal favourites in their imported form, but they now cloak much of the local Malay, Chinese and Indian music as well as in dance-band arrangements. In the villages, old music, some of whose inspiration can be traced back to India, remains popular in spite of canned substitutes, but in the towns it has already given way to the "modern joget" type of band, child of Western jazz. These can be heard disporting themselves in most of the urban amusement parks, which are known in Malaya as "worlds" (Great World /New World/Gay World...). More will be told of this recent arrival on the musical scene in the chapter dealing with the dance and stage entertainment. Modern Malay "kronchong" orchestras, playing dreamy music similar to Hawaiian music, recorded commercially in Singapore, and are a big draw with all communities. They specialise in sentimental songs that are firm favourites both in Malaya and over the water in Indonesia. It is anyone's guess whether the kronchong orchestra is more popular than its rival attraction, the Western style dance band.*³³

A similar point is made by Joseph Peters in his observation of a current practice in Malay tradition. Joget (modern Malay dance) and Ronggeng (traditional dance) were popular dance forms in 1950s. Various dance spots or nightclubs, the most famous which was Bunga Tanjong, at the New World Amusement Park, were the venues for their proliferation. The nightlife in Singapore revolved around amusement parks and these parks helped form hubs for other forms like bangsawan and Chinese opera before World War II (New World opened in 1923, Great World in 1931 and Happy World in 1936). Their significance cannot be discounted largely because people flocked to these clubs every night to dance joget, ronggeng as well as contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, tango to name a few.³⁴

Media influences

The introduction of bebop and hard bop seems to have coloured the jazz scene of the 1950s. If practitioners Sam Gan, Horace Wee and Simplicius Cheong arrived at working on its practice, where were the influences? Sam recalls he got into music...*largely through records...I used to listen to the Voice of America...and it had a good jazz programme...and you tune into VOA on short wave...12 am.....and you hear **Duke Ellington's Take the A Train**...and the voice of **Willis Conover** will come over and say "this is jazz from America". I was so keen to hear about who was going to be featured...I was introduced to **Bill Evans** through this programme...every week in the series and they would feature him playing something...it was so hard to accept him...now I can play like this guy and that guy and shit here he comes along...*³⁵

Horace Wee saw the impact of this new fad. *Bill Evans got people following here from the early stages...and how he eventually got his act together...and he embodies the totality of his development...and you could actually hear people develop along with him...and actually when Evens played in the early days...you could hear what it was leading up to...Horace offered a clue to the way in which jazz as a more serious and intense artform was learnt. He (Ernesto) lived music...after we finished our gig...we would go and have our coffee and supper and sit a lot of times at the Esplanade...along the waterfront...Clifford Pier...where all the stalls were and just sit there till the morning carrying his three inch reel recorder...and listen to something over and over again...I suppose you listen till it plays in your mind...you live in that atmosphere...but what happens is when its time to play, he plays and he was actually a bass player.*³⁶

Simplicius Cheong was active as a jazz musician from about 1958 to January 1965 in Singapore. Pianist Ernesto Darroya left an indelible impression on him. *Ernesto used to buy LPs (331/3—by middle 1950s, 78s were a thing of the past and 45 RPM and hi-fi had now become a current fad) of George Shearing...he used to say, "Sim lets try and transcribe this"...we listened to Shearing, Oscar Peterson and Dizzy Gillespie and we used to listen until the grooves wore out...an LP in those days cost \$4-5...relatively expensive...in relation to cost of living...a movie ticket would cost about \$2 to 3...we had to save to buy an LP...but my father was very generous with me...the main point was that I didn't play music for a living...we played gigs during weekends, at the Masonic Club, Rotary Club whatever...even the Teachers' College...I was already interested in jazz...but I saw how the real artists like (Ernesto) doing it...later on when I was 17, I had a chance to go to night clubs, the Golden Venus about 1958-1960...I was already playing jazz and Ernesto knew that...occasionally he would ask me to take over for half-an-hour...so I played...I jammed with those guys...then at midnight. Occasionally he would say, "there's a guy from America...trumpet player...saxophone player...he would ring up all his friends...Louis Soliano, his*

*cousin Rufino[Soliano], Olympio [Galaura] on trumpet...we would all jam till 2 in the morning...the boss didn't mind...the boss loved jazz...kept the business going till late... We had no way to learn jazz...so we bought records...*³⁷

Performing Venues/Repertoire

Ernesto became for these practitioners, an attractive force that centred around The Golden Venus which was a very cosy night club operated by the Orchard Hotel, with the Ernesto Daroya Trio resident there from the late fifties to 1966 till his tragic death. Across other local jazz musicians who came to jam with Ernesto were Billy Martinez (bass), Louis Soliano (drums) Tony Castillo (trumpet), Winston Filmer (bass), Renaldo Lachica (alto saxophone) Ahmad Jaffar (guitar, tenor sax and flute) Horace Wee (bass clarinet). *The crowd at the weekends was sizeable at the Golden Venus which had a capacity of around 100 seats. The weekends were always packed out, if I recall. Golden Venus was operated by a medium size hotel (Orchard Hotel) and I cannot recall exactly how much a musician was paid per gig then at the Golden Venus.*³⁸

Simplicius remembers meeting many officers and soldiers from the British Army stationed at Changi, and also members of the various foreign delegations, American, French, German, etc. *Some even brought their instruments to jam. About a third of the audience were locals, mainly teachers, some academics, public servants etc. One could say the middle class Singaporean had the time and money to pursue jazz either by purchasing jazz records or attending live performances.*³⁹

The jazz scene was mainly patronized by members of the foreign delegations, and expatriates. *There were few jazz concerts mainly small bands playing at the various big hotels. I cannot remember the Victoria Memorial Hall ever staging jazz concerts between 1958 and 1964! I have no idea how big the jazz community was in Singapore but it was an enthusiastic following who patronised the various clubs. The repertoire consisted mainly of standards by Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Charlie Parker, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers. Bill Evans, Errol Garner and Oscar Peterson were the reigning keyboard giants if I recall. Some local jazz musicians like Ernesto Daroya and myself tried to play our own jazz pieces, but I am afraid they have not survived the test of time! Audiences then and today still prefer the old standards to contemporary works by jazz musicians. As someone active as a jazz musician, I may be deluded into thinking that the perception and reception of jazz by the local jazz community was a sizeable one.*⁴⁰

Horace Wee remembered *There was a band that played in the **American Club** on weekends where Mike Tseng's cousin Jimmy played bass...the group was called the **Metronomes**...jam session at Golden Venus started at 3 in the*

afternoon finished at 6pm then they would go to the **Princess Garni** at Orchard Road [Crown Prince Hotel today], drive down there and finish the Sunday afternoon jam there even if it meant one hour only...after that some of us had to work Sunday night...weekend...if we finish early...go to the American Club...watch Mike Tseng play there They had a good saxophone player there from the USIS Library...then go to Clifford Pier...and listen to Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, or Cannonball Adderley...then sometimes we would go Penang Way (near Siglap)...to listen to singer Barbara...the sister of the pop group guitarist Dickie Tan (think that's his surname)...anyway Ernesto liked to hear her singing...and sometimes there would be two tables there. After hours we would drive down to JB and check out the scene there. We used to pick fights with the customs there because they wouldn't let me bring my saxophone (without paying duty).⁴¹

Participants from Diverse communities

In those days the Filipinos and those of Filipino heritage were kingpins because they could read music and basically the Filipino trait was the ability to copy exactly, the notes, the feel and whatever else. The first generation of Filipinos...they were supposed to be the studied ones...many of them had classical training...they were multi-instrumentalists. in the Singapore context, I would say that pianists here in those days that could play jazz, were me, Jose Darroya, Albert's uncle Lionel Ventura, in that period...we had in those days very good soil...Dodo Malinger...a white Russian....and he played very very well....that guy was well-versed in classical and jazz...Paul Abisheganaden's accounts refer to the Japanese Occupation and the fact that the orchestra was very well maintained...Simplicius says his dad said the only way the family stayed alive was his involvement with music...just after the Occupation...how many of these musicians playing in the Syonan Orchestra would have become feeder stock...Slava Tairoff, trumpet player and violin, Ferry Krempl, Dan Hopkins. But when I joined the band...with the Filipino musicians...[there were] Malay musicians...we had Johari Salleh's father playing first trumpet...Johari was fresh from school playing third trumpet... but the best exponent of jazz music, to my mind, at the time in Singapore was Ernesto Darroya...he had this uncanny ability to listen while washing his car...he would listen to a track and by night he could play the damn thing...⁴²

There were two kinds of participation, formal and informal. In the formal, the gigs properly and professionally speaking, only the groups contracted would participate. However, when that was over, the informal jam session would commence and when that happened, anyone who had the confidence and desire to participate did. Horace Wee noted with the Golden Venus, there was a British band, that were part of the military band...but their pastime was jazz...and a lot of them came up to the jam sessions....but when they came to these gigs, you

wouldn't see these guys there, it was the local bands...but the British guys wouldn't be playing these gigs...military band...of the two Americans who visited...one of them was Buddy Rich...Mike Manieri ...the vibraphone player...but it was so scarce in those days...foreign players.....Ronnie Scott...I played with Tony Scott...the clarinet player...and he was a riot...he reminded me so much of Tony Castilo...completely unpredictable. But it is jazz, the spirit, the spontaneity, able to work with...catch up with people...Satchmo in Singapore in December 1964 and Michael Tseng who was actually a decent piano player, still is and lives in Sydney. He returned to fulfil his Colombo Plan obligations; he was an engineer.⁴³

Charles Lazaroo was remembered as a conductor, arranger and educator, ECA person...but he was a jazz pianist nonetheless. Another person called Benjie Kleinman used to be playing at the Princess Garnie along Orchard Road where the Crown Prince Hotel is today. There used to be a fixture there...Sid Gomez...these are what you call the better pianists with Lawrence Francisco...a multi-instrumentalist...played clarinet...as well...as someone growing up in the 40s and 50s...he would have to be multi, especially wind instrument...he said I play tenor sax....but you should be able to blow the clarinet and that's basic and later on they learnt how to play flute...horn players took up the flute....they all learnt to play the clarinet... Ah Poon (Val Ortega) took up the flute in the 60s... John (Lee) and all these other horn players took up the flute. They had all learnt to play the clarinet first.⁴⁴

The Waning of Jazz

Sam and Horace describe their experience of events that altered their continued relationship with jazz as well as the general reception of jazz from then on: For Sam Gan, *in the 1960s I started to write for the orchestra (RTS)...I went more into the other scene....although my first love was still jazz and I liked playing in a trio....I didn't like guitar players because we couldn't agree on chords....we used to fight about it...I got involved in more commercial things....I went into night clubs...there was more money in it...everybody in Singapore did that...I won't say I lost contact with that but not necessarily what one could make a living out of...Jazz was dead by the 70s. The mid-60s was an exciting era because jazz did exist...jazz died when the pop revolution of the 1960s hit the live band spots...you know the Carnaby Street thing became the biggest thing....Beatles and Carnaby Street...it wasn't flower power...it was actually the miniskirt and pop revolution... Marian Faithfull, Lulu, Petula Clark...when Ernesto died this was where this whole pop culture was beginning to develop. At the peak, even in the 1964 period at the advent of the Beatles, that was where all the heavy jam sessions would go on at the Golden Venus.....at the tail-end came the Tea-Dance pop bands which started to take over...in fact the*

*jam sessions got cancelled because the pop sessions got more popular...jazz had taken a backseat...in terms of the commercial world, the public and the media...The only avenue in those days was up to the late 1970s when we had the Sunday tea dance jam sessions...1960s into 1975...But they started clamping down because they said it was the drug problem....You'd have the tea time jam sessions on Sunday afternoons at the Apollo hotel...That was the tail end of all the jam sessions...*⁴⁵

In reality, the thriving dance band scene which served its community with dances were supplanted first by a change in the late 1950s...with Bill Haley and the Comets.....and Elvis Presley...change, and the big culture shock to the musicians of the day especially for those of us who became established as respectable musicians playing Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and established numbers. When the Beatles, Cliff Richard and the Shadows, came to Singapore, all of a sudden you had a bass guitar....It was a very loud...amplified sound...not a smooth, well-rounded and refined sound...very raw...if you describe it now, it did sound very raw....when it first came on...it was the players....the people who played it were from a different school....they weren't qualified musicians....they couldn't read...they just played...Half the time they couldn't even play the instrument...sometimes its good that way because that's how a new artform or practice evolves....when someone goes in blindly innocent...you don't now what's impossible...so that's why in those days it was loud...discordant...mainly because they didn't tune their instruments properly...it became a big shock to the professional musicians of the previous twenty/thirty years....and of course it was greeted with great resentment...you remember when Sam talked about how in the heydays of the big band scene, there were always the quality musicians who could read music...and those who could not...this actually became the other way around....but then the professional musicians looked at these pop-up stars...and say they only play three chords....hardly in tune (because they could hardly tune properly) and they couldn't even read a damn note...so the professional musicians were rather dismissive of them...there was a lot of tension between both parties...the rock n' roll musicians looked at the professionals with disdain...old men...and the professionals looked at these people and said something like a bunch of amateurs...and they weren't even amateurs....⁴⁶

Music and the Law

Carnaby Street fashion in the form of Petula Clark, Lulu the Beatles, gave way towards the late 1960s to the sounds of Santana, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix, Woodstock, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath. From a musical point of view, one saw the movement of a very light and rhythmically vibrant sound emanating from three guitars, a drummer and voices articulating love and sentimentality to lyrics expressing anger, bitterness, angst, to calls to

political action and later the intensification of amplified sound which some observers in the UK referred to as industrial noise while its adverse influence was not far from security concerns. According to Joseph Pereira, the closure of the tea dances were enforced by a government decree in January 1970 (Channel News Asia puts it at December 1969).⁴⁷ Brawling at tea-dance fights, a killing at the Mandarin Hotel boiler room as well as deaths caused by fights over choice of songs like Carl Douglas' **Kung Fu Fighting** in nightclubs in Singapore around 1970s basically gave pop and rock sufficiently bad press to warrant law enforcement in musical establishments. In the nature of these incidents, there emerged the perception that "music was inflaming these passions."⁴⁸

The extent to which music was implicated in this anxiety was evident in an excerpt of a speech at the opening of the Japanese Gardens by the then Defence Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee:

*Let us not consider the subject of music as a trifling matter, of no import in the state of affairs. The ancients knew better. Both Plato and Confucius correctly recognised which music as an instrument of state policy could play in producing the desirable type of citizen. Neglect in Singapore on this subject has given rise to serious problems. I refer to the widespread popularity of the barbarous form of music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification. Voice accompaniment takes the form of inane tasteless wailing. It is barbarous music of this kind that is mainly responsible for attracting the mindless young of Singapore to the cult of permissiveness of the western world. It is hardly a coincidence that the problem of drug-addiction has become serious where performers and audience foregather. I trust the Ministry of Home Affairs will take stern action against this menace.*⁴⁹

What is most unfortunate here is when the Ministry of Home Affairs was called upon to take stern action by the Defence Minister, it was not made clear whether the menace was the **music** or the **drugs**. What was clear from the message was the correlation between music and type of citizen. In any case, both drugs and *barbarous music produced by the steel guitar linked to an ear shattering system of sound amplification* became targets in an effort to deal with the menace. For many trained musicians who had worked in respectable circumstances the emergence of Rock n'Roll, Carnaby Street, Pop (including psychedelic pop) and Rock/Heavy Metal had considerable impact on altering their perspectives, if not their livelihood. For the sake of a livelihood, Jazz musicians in Singapore were compelled, from the Bill Haley days onwards, to cater to changing demands of a clientele which also had different expectations from the musicians. Dave Buenaventura who played with the late Lawrence Francisco's band admitted to playing more dance music than jazz at gigs alone because one would find it "hard to make a living" out of playing jazz.⁵⁰ Rock and roll musicians had to adapt to playing opportunities at private parties, music festivals and concerts.

During the 1970s, private sponsorships allowed for a number of rock-revival shows at the National Theatre with acts by Sweet Charity, Humble Origin, Unwanted, Fragile and Heritage; eventually not sustainable enough both in terms of finance and musicians. This environment was not helped by the interconnection of the music, musicians and drugs. Ho (1999) refers to the period as the **Great Concern about Drugs**. Clubs housing local bands began to close, TV stations refused to feature male performers with long hair, a prohibition of rock concerts and rock songs restricted from airplay and even the restriction or prohibition of rock music and musicians eventually reached the National Theatre. Therefore, the 1970s and 1980s saw local bands in English language having a hard time establishing themselves.

If that was not bad enough, consider the position inherited by professional musicians whose livelihoods were not tainted with the same brush. According to Horace Wee, *during the early 70's there was the ban on long hair, the current western music, rock etc...associated with drugs...a "yellow culture" as it was termed and that Western influences were decadent. This policy was implemented quite heavy handedly. As a result it became difficult to engage bands. A lot of club owners turned to the now growing Disco movement...less overheads, hassles and they did not pay for any copyright fees then. So the first nail in the coffin for LIVE music. During the "yellow culture" days, musicians with long hair were not allowed to sit with the customers of the club and generally regarded by even waiters as second class citizens. eg., musicians were sneered at and called "band boy" [a form of insult]. Since also the late 60's a lot of musicians failed to have any CPF contributions because of the way establishments engaged them to cut costs. eg. a 3-month lumpsum contract with an extendable 3 which was a far cry from the musician that was a highly regarded professional in the 50's. The regulation employing foreign musicians that has also remained intact from the original one in the 60's is that they have to leave the country after a maximum of one year performing in Singapore. After Disco came Karaoke, which the government first disallowed as it violated the regulation that customers were not allowed on stage or perform. They changed their minds later and this unleashed a whole lot of bathroom/amateur singers into public establishments as well as the use of backing music tracks. So there went another source of live music. Also the "live" music began to shift to Hotel Lounges as a result of this situation. There was still some live music going on. Matthew and the Mandarins were still playing at the Shangrilla bar. I was playing in Richard Ortega's Band for live cabaret shows at the Shangri La Supper Club around 197 and the Lost Horizon Club in the basement of Shangrilla was still using live bands like Western Union and if I'm correct the Xperiments, Flybaits (or New Faces). We would go and play the supper club shows sometimes also at the Lost Horizon. Some happened to be more in the pop vein, eg. Elvis type shows etc.*⁵¹

Another reason for the waning of jazz was the presence of a new form of competition. Horace Wee explains that during the early 1960's (1961-1964 probably), *the then President of the Musicians Union Mr. Slava Tairoff was very active in trying to preserve the rights of the local professional musician. One of the things he negotiated with the government authorities was the implementing of the one for one regulation when it came to allowing foreign musicians/bands to perform in Singapore. For every foreigner the club has to engage a local musician or at least a local band. Sometimes the foreign band may have been a ten-piece ensemble so to be flexible the club engages a local five-piece ensemble. This enabled some form of protection and the reason for allowing foreign musicians was to elevate the local standards; the overseas band should also be of a higher standard than the locals. This was negotiated with the help of a certain Mr. Devan Nair who was then president of the AUPE and a labour organisation leader as well as Mr. Roy Daniels from the Ministry of Labour.*⁵²

Perhaps another more significant point was raised by the late Lawrence Francisco:

*The jazz scene was very small and limited. Not many people liked jazz. Most did not understand jazz largely because of the improvisation. Jazz and jam sessions took place during after-hours and on Sunday—quite a number of locals were interested in jazz but jazz was not big compared to mainstream. The repertoire was wide, there was no official jazz club, musicians played what they liked, audiences were mixed, clever and wealthy. It [playing jazz] was not lucrative but quite well paid compared to various other professions.*⁵³

It is what a professional could do in a jazz ensemble that enabled Lawrence Francisco to be able to support his family financially. He played at the American Embassy regularly where the patrons were mainly Americans. This also enabled him to have a jam session, after hours, with Buddy Rich's sextet. Met Lionel Hampton and Louis Armstrong from a distance but it was too packed because of the big crowd. Francisco remembered playing with Mike Manieri. There were no places to learn jazz, rock and pop. Lawrence picked it up through analysing, listening and experimenting...resources available were scores and radio. Instruments were expensive and hard to come by. Goodwood Group was the main group to get all the foreign artists in. Gigs were through word-of-mouth or head-hunt. Had to negotiate contracts, auditions and only the good one were taken in.⁵⁴

On balance however, the overseas bands saw good groups coming in as pop groups, not only players but also performers...*first one being the Maori High Fives...and we had from the Philippines, Brown Boys, D'Starlights. I put them*

*as being responsible for this revolution. This was an eye-opener in the entertainment scene. Here was something more than good musicians sitting on the stand playing very well...they were also entertaining and they were playing today's music and requests. They couldn't read music but that wasn't the point...the customer gets music and he gets more...he's paid for entertainment.*⁵⁵

This is not a new phenomenon. Before the regulation and negotiations of the 1960s, an earlier generation of Filipino musicians, *Romy Kartindig Bands*, who were more in the traditional Filipino bands of the jazz genre, played pop and they did this very well...*Romy Posadas bands*...*Romy's playing reminds me of Bill Evans but he played more forcefully. With his wife Rita, they came as a whole band to Singapore...played at the old Hotel Singapura where the Forum Galleria now is. In the band were Ernie Mendoza on tenor sax/flute, Fernando Cortez on double bass and played all the jazz concerts with me.....so when I played with my group, I used Fernando. Being a guitar player and saxophone player, I used to play without a pianist in the group. My drummer was Terry Tay, who also tragically died in a car accident just before the Merdeka Bridge, not long after Ernesto.*⁵⁶

But musically one could not deny the supplanting of bebop and hardbop by what Sam and Horace call avant garde artists. As Horace recalled, *I still kept in touch with my beloved Coltrane. Sam felt different vibrations: the funny thing with me was with Coltrane...when I listened I thought it was great but I couldn't really understand...what's behind that...besides that it was great and I could never play like that...I could hear but I couldn't understand and when you don't understand, how can you play...when you get to jazz of that kind of advanced stage...you cannot copy...except if you want to solo exactly as you heard...It became an expressive tool by that time, George Shearing you can copy...but when you get to that stage it was true self-expression...copying [copying note for note] was out of the question...one needed to be educated to know the vocabulary....*⁵⁷

Alternative Pathways

Musicians like Sam Gan and Horace Wee sought alternative avenues with the changes. Their paths crossed at Rediffusion Radio as part of a session band in 1963, worked in different lines but then met again, doing recordings for Radio and TV: *in the 1970s we got back together again...I was writing for Radio and TV, writing shows and sometimes Sam would too, and sometimes, there would be too much work in one programme so we'd be sharing our chores. So here we go again, music but in a different time and we're doing different things. We're writing music. Sometimes, he would play my stuff, then I would play his stuff. Some of the other musicians would get a commercial (jingle)...and we'd all go*

*to the recording studio, play and stick our hands out for some money after that...*⁵⁸

Sam recalls doing quite a lot of R. Ramlee's recording⁵⁹ while Yusnor Ef recalls his recourse to more specialised skill given his own shortcomings:

*I didn't learn any musical instrument only percussion...a little bit piano...not pianist material...I'm involved in song writing...I only composed a few songs...but even in these compositions that few songs I cannot read notes, so I la-la-la into the cassette and gave it to somebody to write notes and tell them to notate my song...my songs were written by Sam Gan last time...those days we were together in recording and I said this is my song and he played and arranged the songs...but mostly I wrote lyrics.*⁶⁰

That is not to suggest that Jazz simply became an activity reminisced by those who enjoyed its proliferation and privileges. The National Theatre Trust records that it brought in Duke Ellington & his Orchestra for a one time performance at the National Theatre on 2 February 1972; The Charlie Byrd Trio at the Singapore Conference Hall on 29 and 30 July 1975; the Gil Evans Orchestra on the 20 and 21 June 1976 at the Singapore Conference Hall (this was in association with the American Embassy); A Jazz guitar Concert by Barney Kessell in association, again, with the American Embassy, at the DBS auditorium, and even included two local performers, Rufino Soliano (drummer) and Winston Filmer (bass guitar); Jazz of Japan by Nobuo & His Sharps and Flats, jointly presented with the Japan Foundation and the Embassy of Japan at Victoria Theatre 21 and 22 January 1977, to name a few.⁶¹

Perhaps one of the most revealing aspects of the support of popular culture became evident in the Annual Report of 1977 under Improvements to the Theatre, more specifically under Sound Reinforcement System:

As the sound system of the theatre was more than 10 years old a committee was set up to study and plan for the improvement of the acoustic system of the theatre. This resulted in the award of tender for the new sound reinforcement system costing \$235, 000. The main features of improvement to the sound system are as follows:

- a. A 16 channel (expandable to 20 channels) mixing console with individual equalisation replacing the 8 channel mixer to improve the input facilities;*
- b. Installation of higher frequency horns and base speakers in low frequency enclosures to ensure even sound pressure level at all times throughout the auditorium;*
- c. Installation of 2 sets of high-powered high frequency loudspeakers for "rock and pop concerts";*
- d. A wireless microphone system with 6 transmitters and 4 receivers to give drift-free reception. This would clear reception problems encountered by*

opera and drama performances in which free movement of artistes is of prime importance.

- e. Good quality transcription turntable cassette tape decks and open reel tape decks to improve tape and record reproductions.*

*The sound reinforcement system when commissioned is expected to upgrade the acoustic effects of the theatre. It will make the theatre suitable for varied classes of performances.*⁶²

One of the beneficiaries of this new system included the James Last Orchestra on 3 December 1980 and Sadao Watanabe Jazz Sextet – in association with the Japan Foundation and the Embassy of Japan, National Theatre on the 24 February 1981.⁶³

If Jazz was being brought in drips and drabs, while struggling to make a prominent face, the introduction of a Singapore International Jazz Festival Fringe comes as a surprise. Records of the Jazz festival begin in 1982. Not much is available at this point in time although a programme flyer for the 2nd Singapore International Jazz Festival (16-25 September 1983 at the Singapore Conference Hall – concerts at 7.30pm) informs us that it was organised by the Ministry of Culture and the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, sponsored by the Singapore Cultural Foundation and co-sponsored by Hotel Royal while the sound system and instruments were provided by Yamaha Music Asia Pte. Ltd. In the First concert, the SBC Orchestra and Guest Artistes provided the local component while the international component was filled by Joe Lee Wilson (USA), Jazz all Stars (Korea), Errol Buddle Band (Australia) and Takeshi Inomata and His Force (Japan). By 1983, the SBC Orchestra combined with a Junior Orchestra and a Richard Ortega Quintet, Tony Castillo & the Castillians, Louis Tan, Iskandar Ismail and Friends, Stardust with Sydney Tan and Friends, Singapore 17, Singapore Jazz Artistes provided the local component which saw an international field comprising Australia, Belgium, Japan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Phillipines, Sweden and USA. The 1984 Festival saw the arrival of France, New Zealand as international additions to some familiar names like the SBC Orchestra and Singapore All-Stars. In 1985, Chile, Hong Kong and Hungary were new international representatives here while among the local contingent included Sadli Ali and his Friends, SBC Jazz Combo and Jeramzee and Friends. 1985 is also the first time a Jazz Fringe Festival is introduced as part of the Jazz Festival. The SBC Junior Orchestra, NUS Stage Band and National Theatre Stage Band formed part of the fringe by performing at Peranakan Place, NUS, Century Park Sheraton and the Singapore Conference Hall. 1986 witnessed groups from the Soviet Union, Greece and the UK. Local fringe performances were Century Park Sheraton Hotel, the Botanic Gardens, NUS, Singapore Conference Hall, and some schools.⁶⁴ The National Theatre Annual Report of the 4th such festival fringe proudly proclaims that:

A few local groups performed at the Peranakan Place as part of the fringe events leading up to the 1985 Jazz Festival. One of them was none other than our own full complement 17-piece NTSB stage band. Its emphasis was on ensemble playing. The musicians acquitted themselves well, producing lush, creamy sounds. Except for a couple of numbers, such as a highly energised reading of the “Fame” theme song, the pace was by and large jaunty but relaxed, blending well with the Saturday shopping crowd ambience.⁶⁵

According to Horace Wee and Sam Gan:

*[During] the 1980s...Tony Castillo was the president of the [Musicians] union and if I'm correct, he organised the first jazz festival/concert...1985/6. It was after the visit, about 1986 that he (Tony) got some money from the Ministry to sponsor the artists. The first two jazz concerts were at St. Joseph's field...Bras Basah. It was the in-between period when they did not know what to do with that place. At the jazz festival, Jeremy Monteiro's group (**Jeramzee**) was there...Eldee Young's trio...and there was also a Swedish jazz fusion group (**Mynta**) that came...and there was Mah Joon Hong (Two names are possible here – Sadli Ali and Friends or SBC Jazz Combo)...⁶⁶*

Beyond 1986, no records are available on the Singapore International Jazz Festival.

There were other developments which local musicians doing gigs, commercially in popular culture, jazz or other styles, have not recovered from since a watershed decision:

In 1985, Singapore's first recession, hotels appealed to the government to help as they could not afford to hire both foreign and local musicians. Somehow the whole ruling (from the negotiations between Roy Daniels, Mr. Devan Nair and Slava Tairoff of the Musicians Union) got dropped and it opened the floodgates...anybody who could be categorised as a musician even if they were not...was allowed to come in. That spelt the death of the local music scene. They brought in a whole lot of cheap Filipino bands who were not musicians...but entertainers. Basically that was money flowing out of the country because they would be sending foreign bucks earned, back to their home country. This floodgate of poor grade or even non-musicians coming in undermined a whole job market of Singaporean musicians. No decent job could be had by a local musician...unless he/she wanted to come down to that level of a very low pay almost equal to these foreign performers. And that is the current position of the local musician to this day. This sent the whole industry into a downward spiral.⁶⁷

The late 1970s was Jeremy's introduction to the jazz world as a working professional at the Club 392. *I was looking for a job as a musician...at the time*

Roland Sandosham was on drums...Yusoff on guitar, Louis Mendoza on bass...Michael Isaac (Mr. Isaac's son) on piano...because he didn't want to play all night...every night...so I went, I auditioned...and he gave the job as band leader...here I was at 16, leader of musicians who were in the 30s and 40s...Singers were Rahim Hamid and Rahimah Rahim...and it was wonderful...Rahimah was doing all the female jazz classics...she was singing more jazz than pop numbers in that jazz club...Rahim did the whole Nat King Cole song book...I had a chance to play all that great music...Tony Castillo at that time...came out of confinement...I had a trumpet which I wasn't using and he bought that off me and he started playing a couple of nights a week... after my NS in 1981, Richard Ortega invited me to join the Ortegos...that was another wonderful opportunity because I got to play with Matt Munro and New Seekers, Platters, Inkspots...I played outside gigs because I was one of the few reading pop pianists...I had a chance to play with the original Four Aces...Love is a Many Splendoured thing...but after we played, they started dying one by one all in a period of 6 years...playing with the Ortegos, they changed shows every two weeks and we had to pull out different charts. I remember one chart that made me wet my pants was the Irving Berlin musical. It was a review of his music and for the first time I had to read...Broadway style charts...all written out left and right hand...this was great because I could see all the shape of the harmonic structure and managed my way...by the second week I was playing what was written...at the time Polygram studios opened...so I went to do some work at Polygram...it was pretty much playing jazz at night and pop by day...1983 I played at Bistro Toulouse Lutrec, which was at Tanglin Shopping Centre...I had a chance to play with Joe E. Wilson...he was in exile in Brighton...actually from New York...he was notorious in the late 1970s and early 1980s for having dug out Duke Ellington's seldom performed songs...and spirituals and gospel tunes and performed them...he was on Downbeat magazine...readers polled him as the best male vocalist of his time....for some strange reason, he ran away to the UK...to play at the Bistro Toulouse Lutrec which Dr. Goh Poh Seng owned at the time...Cassandra Wilson who had a recent Grammy Nominated album...it was very hard for Cassandra Wilson to work with me in 1983/4....at that time I still didn't swing...it was only in 1986 when Eldee Young first appeared on the scene here playing at the Somerset Bar...I was first exposed to Eldee Young, Red Holt...playing jam sessions with them was when the first seeds of Swing were planted in me...Eldee Young and Red Holt were very patient swinging with this non-swinging bugger...Bistro Toulouse-Lutrec... I played at the Ship restaurant in 1985, then the Saxophone bar opened, I played there in 1986...I had just recorded my first album Back to Basics...Claude Knobs Montreux Festival director came to the Saxophone and I passed him this cassette...wrote about how much he enjoyed my playing and he also discovered that two musicians he lost track with and enjoyed listening to were here...Eldee Young and Red Holt...I was invited with them to perform at

the main stage at the Festival...I could only swing 50-60% at the time of the Montreux jazz festival...so when I listen to the recording now...People love the album, and I can pick out all the parts where I didn't swing...and all that...never mind it was considered by the Festival directors as one of the classic concerts of the first 25 years of the Festival and it was on the video disc—the best of the Montreux Jazz Festival, sandwiched between George Benson and Spyro Gyra...then doing the Montreux thing...and me getting an opportunity like that even when I was not 100% ready....but you cannot say no to an opportunity like that...it may never happen again...so I rose to the occasion by using it as the band...the presentation went well. On that night we played in the same programme with Chick Corea...then I listened to Keith, I got blown away...so I tried to play like Keith and wanted to sound so like Keith in the 1990s that when I played in Hong Kong, the reviewer said “you should catch Jeremy Monteiro...he is a poor man’s Keith Jarrett”...the sick thing was I took it as a compliment...Jazz is still played in smoke-filled rooms in Swing...and dodgy...its good to play there to get a sense of the smoke-filled atmosphere and the dodgy-ness of the environment the early jazz practitioners had to contend with...jazz is amazing...you work from playing in a hole-in-a-wall to a 7000-a-night concert hall in Shanghai...and all points in between...jazz musicians do all that...an established rock or pop musician wouldn't do it...very rarely...⁶⁸

Support systems

One of the reasons that the practice of jazz began to gain currency was the levels of support which led right back to governmental organisations, alongside other initiatives. Jeremy began to immerse himself in a community not many would have thought likely or conducive; a jazz programme for schools and tertiary institutions:

When I went into schools, I did 80 concert cum seminars....across primary, secondary, and junior colleges...polytechnics and one in NTU...I tell these people that I'm not coming here to teach you what music you should listen to...this is to increase your musical palette and one day when you come home from work...put on Duke Ellington one day and Elton John or Debussy the next.⁶⁹

When Simplicius Cheong worked in the jazz scene, he described the audience as one-third local comprising middle to high-ranking civil servants, while the rest were visibly expatriate, some from the British forces stationed here, Americans, among others.⁷⁰ Jeremy's experiences described a similar situation in 1976 when he embarked on a musical career:

The audience at Club 392 consisted of oil riggers who either loved country and western or jazz and blues...Maori soldiers...fair share of local people...interesting blend...mostly mid 30s to about 50s...middle income

group...When I got into the act at Club 392 in 1976, dance band music had somehow given way to jazz as a listening experience...the dance band culture may have been on through the 60s, late 60s and maybe even later until rock and pop and later disco came along...in 1976 when I began, you listened to jazz while having you drinks or when Gil Evans came to the Conference Hall, there was music for a listening audience...in the earlier days when people used to come out and dance, I used to get pissed off...now its great.⁷¹

The other important factor was the composition of the audience:

Until 1995 my audience was 80% expatriate and 20% local...and not only that...but the composition of the Singapore audience...50% below 25 and 50% older people. Around 1995/6 the local to expatriate ratio was almost equal and enjoying jazz...two thirds of my audience at Harry's today are below 30...when I play swing I see University students....they appreciate straight ahead jazz...acoustic jazz and mainstream jazz as much as the latin and funky things we do...and that is encouraging...its become more local...I think what also helps...sometimes you don't think of the exponential growth potential of little things...and if you think, in all of these 80 schools, I never had audiences of less than 500 per concert...and if you take 5-7% of that listening audience some years ago, maybe that's the number of people who may be my audience at jazz gigs and concerts today...and in the audiences of the Thomson band.⁷²

Since the 1990s, the Thomson Jazz Band has grown to emerge as one of the largest and most recent support systems for Jazz and big band. It is managed by Eddy Chan (nephew of the late Lawrence Francisco) and owner of Jazz at Southbridge. The Thomson Jazz Band is resident at the Thomson Community Club and continues to hold regular sessions, with workshops by local and international proponents who encourage members to exceed themselves and appear in local and international concerts.

Jeremy has gone on to become an icon for the musical practice of Jazz in Singapore with the award of the Cultural Medallion in 2002. The current batch of jazz musicians in Singapore can claim to having been trained in US jazz institutions and some fortunate ones have been supported through NAC

Scholarships. The Music Department of NIE, NTU conducts Studies in Pop and Jazz for teacher training programmes as well as an elective for NTU undergraduates. LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts are currently advertising programmes in Jazz Studies at Diploma and Degree level. The National Arts Council continues to provide assistance for those doing tertiary studies in jazz performance overseas and the Thomson Jazz Band, housed and supported by Thomson CC (under the auspices of the Peoples Association), has grown from amateur activity to include overseas performances.

A jazz musician today may be said to have regained some measure of respect in his/her gigs as is its practice. Respect and credibility notwithstanding, the remuneration for such dedication and skill is somewhat tenuous and many of them still supplement their earnings with other sidelines in pop, rock or other genres.

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Ask your distributor for list
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