

## Music of Western popular culture in Singapore

Lee Tong Soon's entry on Singapore discusses popular music in Mandarin and English largely in terms of independent song-writing styles that turn out singular names like Dick Lee and what is attributed to him as Singapop. That which is defined as independent creative-based writing is somehow assumed to take place in the 1990s.

The definitions of popular culture are somewhat misleading. If one considers the socio-historical perspective, connotations of the term popular in Singapore stretch back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was reported at a Western art music concert that *such severe music as Haydn's quintets, played even by the most skilful musicians, is never popular... We think a comic song or two would have enlivened the evening. We know that one of the amateurs could have given a smart Irish ditty in that line if he had pleased...*<sup>1</sup>

This concert review in the 19<sup>th</sup> century not only grants us access to the perception and reception of music practiced by the expatriate community in Singapore, it also makes quite clear their preferences. This would have had very different implications for a local audience at the time; assuming there was a local audience.

Another instance of 'popular' appears in an advertisement "Items for sale" which included the following excerpt:

### 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 Humorous and Motto Songs in one volume.<sup>2</sup> (emphasis mine)

The next few terms popular appear in two very different contexts:

A Popular Orchestral Concert scheduled on 20 June is 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; Mazurka 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. Concerts were free for members of the society. Tickets were available with seating plans at Robinsons.<sup>3</sup>

About twenty five years later there appears this 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	Gopak	M. Mussorgsky

(The Fair at Sorochinsk)

INTERVAL

SUITE (From the Opera Ugeno Onegin) P. Tschaikow\* (spelling in original)

1. Valtz
2. Introduction and air of Lanski
3. 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 Times *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>4</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>5</sup> Quite clearly, the Monia Litter ensemble was able to operate at two different performance modes when there was occasion to.

The term popular can also be attributed to the New World Park, one of the entertainment worlds in Singapore, located at the junction of Serangoon Road and Kitchener Road constructed in 1923.<sup>6</sup> Built as the first of the three “Worlds” in Singapore, it thrived from the 1920s to the 1960s, opened and run by Ong Peng Hock and Ong Boon Tat, both sons of Ong Sam Leong. Around 1940, Shaw Organisation came to own 50% of New World.<sup>7</sup> One of the first structures to be erected within New World was a singing stage, a restaurant, and numerous ‘kiosks’ where various entertainment outlets were housed.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> Its greatest feature was that it gathered ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ forms of entertainment in one place. One could find in these “worlds”, ‘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.<sup>10</sup>

The Performing Stage could be described as popular entertainment during the 1950s especially after the Japanese Occupation. Most of the nightlife in Singapore then was to be found in New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night. New World’s dance hall, as one of these many forms of entertainment, drew many young couples before the advent of the cinemas and had a dance floor that once reportedly accommodated 500 couples.<sup>11</sup> The cabaret girls, also called taxi girls, were mostly Chinese and a few Eurasians, Indians and Filipinos, but no Malays at all. Although they were available for dances at just eight cents a dance, 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.<sup>12</sup> The cabaret girls lived within the vicinity of New World. Cabaret hours began at 7 o’clock and went on to 12. There were also tea dances that commenced at 4 in the later afternoon. More

significantly, the band comprised of Goanese and the leader, also a Goanese, was Mr. De Silver.<sup>13</sup>

## Hawaiian Bands

The late Captain Abdullah Ahmad remembers as a 16-year old being part of a “keronchong orchestra Hawaiian band” together with Hamzah Dolmat and Zain Blackout. He recalls *I was involved in bangsawan music and had an opportunity to study many things about the elements of music with my own creative abilities.*<sup>14</sup>

The period in question was the heyday of the Bunga Tanjong cabaret, New World, Great World and The Pagoda and these performing venues were crucial years in his development as a growing and youthful musician. He recalls the demands made on good repertoire and good performance standards with the opportunity to perform in different locations which were significant for his musical development. However, these opportunities did not last long and Captain Abdullah felt hampered by the need for further development. Which is why he took the opportunity in 1946 to travel as a member of the Donyada Latin Quartet Suikuri Review, a Japanese programme, to visit various countries in Asia like Hong Kong, Manila, Taiwan and Bangkok for two months.<sup>15</sup>

The puzzling reference to a “keronchong orchestra Hawaiian band” seems to merge two known performance genres. However, Tony Beamish informs us of their proximity in his description and discussion of Music in Malayan culture in the sixth chapter suitably titled **Music and Letters**:

*Many people are unaware of the great wealth of Malay folk music in the country, because they do not often get a chance to hear it...**Modern Malay “kronchong” orchestras, playing dreamy music similar to Hawaiian, record 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.***<sup>16</sup>(emphasis mine)

The performing venues are corroborated by Joseph Peters in his observation of popular dance forms in 1950s where various dance spots or nightclubs (the most famous of 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 even for other forms like **bangsawan** and people flocked to these clubs every night to dance.<sup>17</sup>

Dennise Tessessohn,<sup>18</sup> writing in a few books about the Eurasian community in Singapore, mentions guitarist Tony Danker who first made a name for himself in

the David Lincoln Orchestra playing music for keronchong and later distinguished himself playing with top-notch Hawaiian Band musicians like Harry Martinez and Barney Morier, at gigs and performances for radio broadcast. Sam Gan recalled that among the many musicians in the performance spaces, *there were these musicians who were working full time and these groups of musicians who were part-time*. Horace clarified part-time musicians as non-union musicians. As Horace pointed out *they did functions...parties, weekend dances...not holding down full-time musician jobs...free-lance... In those days, any family having a wedding or function...would have a band...Tony would be working with Barney Morier and the Hawaiian band players...not mainstream professional musicians...Tony did play with the Hawaiian bands...Harry Martinez (Billy's dad) and Baby Lau...that's the Hawaiian scene...Barney Morier...Hawaiian practitioners did nightclubs...Westpoint...(out Pasir Panjang way)...the Hawaiian guitar ensemble was another valid piece of musical practice...a very big thing...They had their followers...Westpoint was one...Pasir Ris there was another one...old hotel at the old Pasir Ris...Katong...Penang Way...anywhere there was a beach...you know the old Bedok before they reclaimed that land...there would be some of these old houses...there would be a Hawaiian scene and they would play there...amazing thing...that was again a different thing going on...these people had been doing this since before and after the war [Japanese Occupation]...Hawaiian music lovers...these were as Sam said, different kinds of music happening in Singapore, like ethnic music...joget...but Hawaiian was big...Hawaiian was comparable to the cabaret scene...(Sam):You had these night clubs that catered to these and they were usually located along the beach...you looking at the Pasir Panjang Beach and that was ideal...and there was one in East Coast...Pasir Ris...and they'd do parties...I worked when I was off from school...we would go and do all the army bases...Selarang Barracks was for the officers...Changi itself NCO...in the barracks itself...Changi Road...Changi Ferry point was where the Changi yachts were based...weekends is for the officers...Wednesday is pay day...Wednesday is for NCOs and you play for the NCO club...Changi had one, Tengah had another one...one in Seletar...so all the barracks will have bands working...but local bands...and the local bands will be playing music of that day...and the funny thing is that we would go there and its not just the band playing...we would have a show, Hawaiian dances...cabaret, floor shows....<sup>19</sup>*

Tony Danker was one of the many practitioners involved in the musical practice of Hawaiian band music. It was for him more or less a way in which the Eurasian community found a sense of identity in the performance of Hawaiian Band music:

*In [my] day the Hawaiian band was like the pop band of today...Hawaiian bands were very prominent...most of the Hawaiian bands comprised Eurasians...that's how they got in very nicely with Hawaiian band music....<sup>20</sup>*

To the question, why was there the interest for Hawaiian band music, his response was:

*Beautiful melodies and beautiful Hawaiian music....then Hawaii itself was regarded as a paradise in those days....and they [those who appreciated it] said it was paradise music...actually you do get good Hawaiian songs.....I remember I used to do a broadcast with **Barney Morier and his Stardusters** for radio every week...before that I used to do radio broadcasts with **Harry Martinez and his Royal Hawaiians**...Barney has now settled in Western Australia. I used to love Hawaiian music...why not? Because I had a chance in Hawaiian band and in the keronchong band to show off my skills...whereas if you played in the orchestras of old, the guitar always took a back seat, just strumming away...that kind of thing I don't like to do...it was only when we had Benny Goodman and the sextet...after the war...it was they who brought the guitar to the forefront...Charlie Christian...then there was this guy with three fingers called Django Reinhart..and the Stephen Grappeli quintet from France..these were the groups that brought the guitar to the forefront....Django Reinhart was my hero.<sup>21</sup>*

To the question of how that music had become part of the community and who was responsible for its proliferation, Danker's response was:

*We got the things from the records...they were selling a hell of a lot of Hawaiian records recorded by a guy called...Saul Hoopie [spelling may vary\*] and his Hawaiians...now he had two recordings and we learnt a lot of his songs through his recordings... we had records...this travelled by word-of-mouth and someone in the community bought into it...because the guys would hear what we learnt from the records...they would be interested to know how you learnt this...who is that (composer, performer)...where you got it from and all that...word gets around....chaps are playing good music by so-and-so...you can buy it from the record stores...and it goes on...and there are other Hawaiian guitarists and so on...Ronnie Macintyre [spelling may vary\*] was another one...great Hawaiian players...<sup>22</sup>*

*After the war (Japanese Occupation) I was playing Hawaiian band music with Harry Martinez and the Royal Hawaiians at the Café Hansen as well as military bases... I ran a group, had a saxophonist, drummer, pianist and bass player...we used to be known as the **Combo a la carte**...we got around to a lot of military bases...we did quite well...we were playing to [personnel in the] Sergeants Mess...we could play the music which was popular with these people when they*

were young...in their 40s and 50s...you could tell they loved this music which we were familiar with...when we played **My Old Man**, they loved it, **The Berlita Waltz...St. Bernard's Waltz, the Gay Gordons** where you had them dancing...we used to play every Saturday...there was a night when we played in one place until midnight and went off to play at another place after midnight...we would begin at about 8pm...people would come in need some time to warm up and slowly start dancing...round about 11pm or so, we'd take a 15-20 minute interval and after that it depends...if they wanted to go on until 1 am...it all depended but we would oblige...there never seldom a time we finished at 12...at least one or two in the morning...and beyond the time, it was additional charge...double rate...on a good night there were two gigs...the places we were travelling...we would get transported from one place to another...our drummer...he was the guy...people who play the tom-tom...real tom-toms...he'd never use it to play music...he'd used it for a beer table...at the end of the night we'd look at the empty glasses, they were big glasses....he used to look at me and I used to look at him and he used to ask me where did all that beer go to...and I said I didn't know. I learnt a lot from the military...catered to their tastes...until the pullout came...in the late 1960s...then our tenure was gone...<sup>23</sup>

## Rock n'Roll

Horace Wee and Sam Gan point to the fact that prior to the meteoric rise to fame of *Bill Haley and the Comets* and *Elvis Presley* in music of popular culture in the Euro-American tradition...the pops of the day were rooted still in the tradition of *Tin Pan Alley*...<sup>24</sup> The change they believe came about in the late 1950s... and the big culture shock to the musicians of the day...especially for those of us who became established...was when the *Beatles*, the *Shadows* came...*Cliff Richard* and the *Shadows*, came to Singapore.....and all of a sudden you have a bass guitar...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 in its infancy...the recording technician had not gotten in yet...in fact it wasn't even [mediated by] a recording technician...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 [in our view] they didn't tune their instruments properly...it became a big shock to the professional musicians [like us] 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...they [the professional musicians] were rather dismissive of them...and 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 ...like a bunch of amateurs... [or] something really damning...<sup>25</sup>*

An alternative reading appears in Joseph Pereira's recollection of popular culture beginning with the example of Cliff Richard and the Shadows playing at a concert at the former Happy World Stadium in 1961 influenced duos, trios and quartets to quick changes in their instrumental configurations with a lead singer; three guitars, drummer and lead singer (occasionally a keyboardist).<sup>26</sup> According to Pereira, the proliferation of pop bands through the mid-1960s enabled the **Quests**, **Checkmates**, **Easybeats** to find steady work in clubs and shows were mainly possible through the Sunday tea dance—a socio-cultural institution of which 95% of the audience was British from about 1963.<sup>27</sup> Before that conventional bands played the cha-cha. In such settings veteran bands always allowed for guest slots for newcomers. It seemed there was no lack of these in hotel lounges, country clubs and dance halls. The British military camps provided the other main outlets not only as opportunities for the local bands but also to listen to imported R&B releases from the UK. Given this impetus, local bands took the cue by playing covers from **Rolling Stones**, **The YardBirds** and **Alexis Korner** with full encouragement from the service men. Blues records were not as yet distributed in Singapore.<sup>28</sup>

Horace and Sam remember the names of these earlier-mentioned bands in a very different way. Their emergence is by no means fortuitous: *three people came into the scene...Jimmy Lee, Watson Tay, Jack Lim...out of these three, the guy who was the driving force behind the scene was Jimmy Lee...and he went to study in Perth and they formed a band of local undergraduates; one of them was killed in a car accident recently (Herbert Beng-one of the members of the Bambinos)...and two*



*other Australians...he came back and thought of this as potential...he had [probably started up] this organisation called **Quill Organisation**...he told these musicians, the ones we said can't play can't read, " I will get you the jobs...I am your managing agent...and he said I will guarantee you so much (money) if you are not getting a job but you must come down and practice...I give you the studios to practice everyday". Jimmy Lee formed little groups...there were those who wanted to join them...he had their support...he made money out of them...he got a lot of young ones...like the **Quests...Western Union Band**...a number of them who appeared in the 60s...**Heather and the Thunderbirds...Silverstrings**...the pop scene...the entertainment side of things...<sup>29</sup>*

Pereira also believes the Vietnam War escalation in the mid-1960s brought American GIs into Singapore for R&R and with them soul, R&B, Motown and Chicago blues, making substantial influences on the repertoire and performance modes. Popular GI venues like **Serene House, Newton Towers, Shelford Club** and **Ria Country Club** helped both ways; special USO tours helped to bring local groups like **Sonny Bala & the Moonglows** to appearances in South Vietnam. The period leading up to 1968 saw the rise of many groups and opportunities that meant performances at the National Theatre and Stadium Negara in KL. The British military forces began to withdraw from Singapore beginning in 1968 through the 1970s. The military camps and mess halls, sources of gigs for Singaporean bands disappeared slowly.<sup>30</sup>

### **Popular Culture and Bad Press**

Pereira informs us that the tea dances came to an abrupt halt in the early 1970s, largely out of social disorder—continual stream of fights and brawls that unfortunately accompanied the music. The 1970s brought about changes in the reception of rock n'roll musicians in ways not conceived before. This reception was in reality more of anxiety, evident in the then Defence Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee's speech in 1973:

*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.*<sup>31</sup>

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 and the invocation to Plato and Confucius to predicate music and appropriate citizenry. 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 like Horace Wee and Sam Gan who had worked in respectable circumstances, playing Dance Band music, which became synonymous with Jazz, as well as cabarets and hotels, 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. First one of the most famous jazz performance outlets known as the Golden Venus, slowly gave way to another social institution called the tea-dance parties. The Tea-dance parties were the socio-cultural infrastructure that supported Rhythm and Blues, Carnaby Street, Psychedelic Pop and Rock and Roll, to name a few. Eventually, it meant that dance band and jazz musicians were either compelled into or adapted to become conversant with these more popular practices to maintain their livelihood.

Therefore when rock n' roll became associated with drugs and sometimes violent behaviour, it acquired the status of a legal and political menace – an enemy of the state. Rock n' 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 and the consequences of such a connection. Chris 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. It would seem that the 1970s and 1980s saw local bands playing music of western popular culture having a hard time establishing themselves, let alone their own music. Something of the period drew on a buzz in musicians' circles. Cultural Medallion recipient Jeremy Monteiro recalls...*you know there was a time when the*

*government banned live music....People like Roland Sandosham and Louis Soliano would remember this more clearly....when I came into the scene, they had started live music for 2 or 3 years already.....I think the government was confused by the long hair, music, drugs, violence, alcoholism and all sorts of stuff...that's when anything in relation to the whole phenomena not only received bad press but also first reactions....when I started working, things were quite alright.*<sup>32</sup>

What is puzzling was the possibility that drugs was not the only factor in considering a government ban. It seems that there was more than one mitigating factor for the government ban. Joseph Pereira offers an explanation: *in December 1969 the government banned tea dances*<sup>33</sup>*...the implication being that the institution of tea dances was responsible for decadent behaviour over the weekend by our young...up and coming bands lost one avenue where they could gig and get exposure. The second ban came about in 1972. There was a fight and stabbing at the Boiler Room which was in Mandarin Hotel...implication again to do with music inflaming violent tendencies in the young. The government imposed a ban on live performing bands at night clubs and discos...permitting only a disc jockey to spin discs at discos.*<sup>34</sup>

The closest evidence of government enforcement comes with Burhannudin bin Buang's Honours Year project on Pop Yeh Yeh where he notes that the Public entertainment license was introduced in 1969.<sup>35</sup> Apart from Dr. Goh Keng Swee's speech and much speculation about the ban on live entertainment and its concomitant ills of drugs, alcoholism and violence, much of this period surrounding the "ban" will require more careful and separate research.

### **Music of Popular Culture as a Livelihood**

Both written and oral accounts refer to their endeavour in musical terms. What does not seem to emerge, nor is it made explicit is the financial predicament of musicians. Sam Gan and Horace Wee remember how they began as unionized members. Because they possessed musical certification, could sight read and requisite musicianship skills suitable for the profession, their membership in the Musicians Union during the 1950s affirmed them as professionals, with codes of practice and proper conduct. That respect was manifest in remuneration packages commensurate with professional practice. By the late-1960s into the 1970s, changes in these financial arrangements affected them musically. The connection with drugs had an adverse effect on musicians lives and living and performing in Singapore. Sam and Horace recall how *during the early 1970s 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. 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].<sup>36</sup>*

In my e-correspondence with Joseph Pereira, *Our working bands were in a quandary because many of them were professional musicians and depended on it [live gigs] for their livelihood. Many bands went overseas to places like Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Europe and elsewhere. Others became lounge musicians which escaped the ban because there was no dancing allowed in lounges...this lasted till 1977 when the government lifted the ban.<sup>37</sup>* Pereira informs us that after the American GIs, the “American oil men” came in and this influenced the development of country and western among local musicians. Those active at the time informed me that country and western was practiced and well supported by musicians and members of the Eurasian community; the “Spooner Road Boys” who were located around the Tanjong Pagar area and were apparently a household name before Matthew and the Mandarins made the country and western style their trademark.<sup>38</sup> It has also been suggested that Country and Western offered no threat of violent or rowdy behaviour from either side, performers or audience and its general tone and tempo was one that was seen to be permitted in live performances.<sup>39</sup>

Horace and Sam point out that *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 1977 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.<sup>40</sup>*

There was of course far more at stake in rock n' roll and gigging than simply wanting to be heard and become famous in this setting. Horace and Sam recall *since the late 60's a lot 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.* Horace Wee explains that during the early 1960's (1961-1964 probably), *the then President of the Musicians Union Mr. Slava Taiorff*

*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.<sup>41</sup>*

*On balance though 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.<sup>42</sup>*

The problem was that by the time the ban on live acts had allegedly been lifted in 1977, Joseph Pereira recalls, *agents discovered Filipino bands. They came cheap, were more versatile, talented and had very finely honed stage acts. By contrast our bands were still sloppy on stage. So they came in their hordes driving our musicians once more out of work. By the mid Eighties more and more of these Filipino bands were working in Singapore and more and more Singapore musicians were quietly quitting the profession.<sup>43</sup>*

One of the most revealing aspects of the support of popular culture (or perhaps its return) 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.*<sup>44</sup>

What is also noteworthy here is recorded in the performances by the National Theatre Symphonic Band Concert at the Victoria Theatre on the 20 September 1978:

*The band performed with a guest conductor, Mr. Mitsuo Nonami, who was also the Chief Band Director in Yamaha Foundation, Japan. A popular local musician, Mr. Hillary Francis also made his appearance with the band as a guest vocalist.*<sup>45</sup> Hillary Francis (also known among his contemporaries as Raymond Hillary Francis), was known as the singer of a band called the Sandboys, one of the first few local bands to be formed in Singapore.<sup>46</sup>

However, Horace Wee and Sam Gan pointed to an even more devastating phenomenon in the mid-1980s: *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.*<sup>47</sup>

## Discussion

With specific reference to musicians in performing careers, Alan Wells' and Lee Chun Wah's survey on music culture in Singapore through record companies, retailers and performers discovered that all of the musicians in their sample had a high turnover rate as groups. Much of their repertoire was built around rock and pop, "top 40" material and 'any or everything'. Both club and pub bands played 'covers' and it was recorded that in the view of their customers, *the more closely they replicated the recorded hits, the better*. As a result, *most groups take pride in accurately 'covering' Western pop hits.*<sup>48</sup>

That is not to suggest that a lack of ability. A considerably large proportion of the respondent musicians acknowledged having written or performed original material, having made demos, and even records. Their feedback was quite resounding with respect to creative work:

*Several who had composed work reported resistance by club owners and managers to unfamiliar performances...musicians claimed that Singaporean audiences were not supportive of local talent.*<sup>49</sup>

In the area of threatened livelihood, a common concern expressed was the employment of bands imported from the Philippines. Although these Filipino musicians were respected for their musical prowess and entertainment ability, the concern expressed by Singaporean musicians was the comparatively much lower wages. Filipino musicians and ensembles accepted (rumoured to be as low as \$2000 a month including food and lodging for an entire group).<sup>50</sup> The fact that a number of local bands had already been displaced in clubs and hotel lounges was sufficient validation of their fears. Several of the interviewed musicians expressed the view that they had no union to defend their interests.<sup>51</sup>

What does emerge in the study is the sum total of the proliferation of foreign bands, in some cases much cheaper wages and a perception of more superior musical prowess. What emerges as a recurring theme is the local musicians perceptions of the local audiences as not being supportive of local talent.<sup>52</sup> What also appears puzzling, until further research is undertaken, is a perceived absence of a union. Oral interviews mention the presence of a Musician's Union well into the 1980s.

However, Wells and Lee also note that it is in this particular field *Malays and Eurasians were highly overrepresented in the bands...to a degree 'outsiders' in the predominantly Chinese Singaporean society and...find creative opportunities in popular music.*<sup>53</sup> Considering this predominant demographics, the considerable presence of Eurasian and Malay communities in creative opportunities in popular music is seen not only as a good thing because of the inversion of demographic versus real representation but also that structural practice by musicians of Western popular culture is not constructed out of rules of majority or massaged communal representation through political tactics and strategies.

What is worthy of further study of these styles against the listening preferences of local groups here in Singapore merit fieldwork studies in their LP, Cassette and BASF Cartridge collections to come to terms with what groups and music was considered worthy of a personal library or at a creative level, what influenced the next group of musicians. Suffice to say, the 1970s were overshadowed more by the association of hippie lifestyles and attitudes to living and being productive more so than their musical preferences.

To what extent were National Campaigns reflected at the microscopic level or rather did National Campaigns identify deviant groups as “enemies of the state”? The earlier emphases of the 1960’s and up to the mid-1970’s had been political consolidation and economic development, with national survival as the main goal and “the rugged society” its inspiring catch phrase. The next national campaign was environmental, summed up in the slogans, “A Clean and Green City” and “Singapore the Garden City”. This marked the transition from preoccupations with the basically material or physical bases of life to the more aesthetic, summed up in the next catch phrase “gracious-living”. The metaphor of cleanliness permeated throughout the 1970s with an eye on unclean habits, behaviour or manner of dress. What was to follow has become an annual event – a National Courtesy Campaign centred on the slogan “Make Courtesy Our way of Life”.<sup>54</sup>

## Indie

The beginnings of an independent style of writing in music of Western popular culture – indie pop – are a little difficult to gather until further research is underway to examine these aspects. On the political front, the official signal that the 1980’s would see more emphasis on the development of the arts as a community activity to encourage individual creativity, and as part of a growing entertainment and leisure activity, came with the establishment of a Cultural Development Committee in 1980 by the Ministry of Culture. Not surprisingly,



when the People's Action Party (PAP) issued its election manifesto in 1984 called Agenda for Action.... A Vision of Singapore by 1999, the catch-phrase was a "a cultured society" and the target "Singapore – City of Excellence". The Agenda's notable feature was to take Singapore beyond being a developed society in the economic sense; it is also to be "a society culturally vibrant", "a cultured people finding fulfillment in non-material pursuits". Excellence in all fields was to be achieved through the encouragement of creative ideas and talent such that Singapore would become "a cultural centre of good international standing". In contrast to the earnest tone of the past, the aim now was "to make living in Singapore fun". The emerging concern of the younger leaders with culture not only in terms of creating a national cultural identity as such, but also (and perhaps, more so) in its sense of a pursuit of "the higher goals and the individual's self-fulfillment" has arisen from a perception that people were no longer satisfied with the merely material, and that the growing number of younger, better-educated, relatively sophisticated and affluent Singaporeans wanted more say in matters affecting their way of life.<sup>55</sup>

This appeared, confirmed by the PAP's drop in popularity during the December 1984 general election. The Agenda for Action with its glowing emphases on culture and excellence notwithstanding, perceptions of over-regulation by the government of people's personal lives and correspondingly of the economy seem to have led on the one hand to a drop in its electoral popularity and on the other to blame being placed on the government for the economic recession, the effects of which were felt soon after. This has stimulated the government to attempt a self-correction and to announce policies, which will encourage individual enterprise and initiative in both the economic and the cultural spheres. For instance, a major reorganisation led to the dissolution of the Ministry of Culture, its portfolios of Information and Cultural Affairs being split between the two newly constructed Ministries of Communications and Information and Community Development as from January 1985. The People's Association and the Community Centres which formerly came under the Prime Minister's Office, together with the Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture, was now subsumed in the Ministry for Community Development. At the same time the government announced a first ever five-year plan for 'cultural promotion' doubling the budget for cultural affairs from \$5.5 million to almost \$11 million. Many community centres scattered throughout the island would be used to popularise the arts for the many. S. Dhanabalan, Minister for Community development noted, "Cultural promotion cannot be confined to high-brow culture for the select few" but would include "folk dancing, singing, arts and crafts, guitar groups, Malay, Chinese musical groups, even pop bands."<sup>56</sup> The apparent change of heart came in 1984 when the Singapore Police

Force organized a ‘Police and Friends’ concert featuring a growing number of high-profile local rock and pop bands who just a decade ago would have been clamped down.<sup>57</sup>

The 1980s were largely described as the DIY/Indies period in Singapore. Piracy ensured greater dissemination. Pirated cassettes were available for S\$2 and for a teenage music fan with not much money, this was too good to be true. Ex-writers from the Sunday Monitor which folded in 1985 decided to write a fanzine called BigO (Before I Get Old) in the same year. This fanzine was different because it was said to encourage writing original music in Western popular culture in the local context. This period also coincides with the advent of new technologies, an increasing affluence and level of education, greater urbanisation, the sense of globalisation taking place and a changing political landscape. The period witnessed the rise of punk and new wave bands, particularly from the UK. Interestingly, Susan Pearce’s exploration of the interaction between objects and people drew on an example of punk in England which as she points out looks back to a subculture diction in the seventeenth century, where the word ‘punk’ meant ‘ruffian’ or even ‘goblin’. She identifies its emergence in the attention of the public in 1976 and has been described by Wilson and Taylor as:

*A classic case of avant-garde shock tactics. An assault on all received notions of taste, it is significant in being almost the only one of the post-war youth/culture/music movements fully to have integrated women...Punks created an alienated space between self and appearance...fit wear for the urban dispossessed...constructed out of the refuse of the material world...*<sup>58</sup>

Not surprisingly, some of the names of groups seem to bear out this sentiment: **The Oddfellows, Force Vomit, Rotten Germs, Band of Slaves, Corporate Toil, Pug Jelly, Opposition Party, Concave Scream**, to name a few among them.

The 1980s in Singapore also witnessed the concomitant rise of DIY production of musical recordings via cassettes and fairly competent domestic recording systems. This period is also coincident with the advent of new and accessible technologies (hence the dissemination of demo tapes of fairly reasonable quality), an increasing affluence, a higher level of education among the population, greater urbanisation, the sense of globalisation taking place and a changing political landscape. Demo tapes found their way to BIGO publications and eventually the transition from cassette tapes to CDs much later into the 1990s until it folded recently. BigO started to ask for a forthcoming compilation. In 1987, The Anywhere lounge was the venue for ‘alternative concerts’ called No Surrender organised by BigO, a first showcase of a different breed of performers in ‘popular culture’. This was followed by another concert at the Marine Parade National Library in December 1987 called

the Xmas Underground Gig. The event was covered by the then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, which seemed to mock the effort. The Festivals of Arts 1988 at the Botanic Gardens provided further opportunities. In December 1988, Chris Ho organised ten years of punk at the old Rediffusion Auditorium off Clemenceau Avenue (currently Paradigm). In the process, toilet mirrors were smashed and the auditorium floor was covered with fluids including blood. 1989 moved on with a release of Rough Cuts from Home 1 and 2 which was actually taped off a programme hosted by Chris Ho on Rediffusion radio. Another fanzine *The Exploding Cat* came out but lasted only two issues, covering a broad range of issues. More releases followed in 1990 and the opening of the Substation on 6 September 1990 featured a marathon concert for the DIY scene. 1991 saw an acceleration in the proliferation of DIY albums, by which time BigO was then regarded as a glossy magazine and Mega Z filled its original shoes. BigO did become a magazine in 1991 and local bands began to get radio airplay. TNT Studio opened up in 1993 providing all DIY participants with recording opportunities. Much of the 'indie' productions were in themselves indicative of the fragility of their practice and much of that fragility continues to exist in the present.

In the 1990s Singaporean rock n'roll, R&B, blues bands performed in small circles of pubs and lounges like Crazy Elephant, Anywhere, Bernies' BFD and Roomful of Blues; not quite the Golden Venus but the resurgence of the blues. Singaporean musicians generally agreed that music, particularly rock n' roll, was one of the few ways to discover one's own identity and gain acceptance outside of school and sports, as much as it did for those of the Golden Venus era. The 1990s also saw a greater proliferation of independent voices from across a number of domains, from tertiary students to practising lawyers, professionals who wanted to express themselves via music. They were hardly restricted by means and they seemed to possess sufficient capacity to pen their lyrics and songs which were largely diatonic and pop, R&B, folk rock, soft rock ballad format.

Paul Zach (Zach's Shack on 91.3FM) counts among the first few media to publicise local acts and this was taken up by Michelle Chang more prominently via Singapore Jam during the brief tenure of 99.5FM (which ceased operation in December 2003). Philip Cheah of BIGO (which also folded recently) and Chris Ho, in thought, word and deed, functioned as the broadcaster of many of these young amateur proponents. Names of groups were decidedly attention getting: The Oddfellows, Force Vomit, Rotten Germs, Band of Slaves, Corporate Toil, Pug Jelly, Opposition Party, Concave Scream, to name a few among them.

The internet became towards the late 1990s a new and well established haven for many aspiring artists to publicise themselves on the World Wide Web. For some, no expense was spared in the production of a CD and then having the confidence of marketing it on the net. Many of them have websites where interested parties can have e-access to them. Local websites like Audioreload, guapunya.com, as two of many examples, have allowed fans and other participants access to groups and group members and their comments on the scene. Not all of it is positive; Burhannudin of Urban Karma recalls how he had to endure insults, not knowing if they were real or simply immature rantings by fans of rival bands.<sup>59</sup>

Several other musicians have produced music what is perceived as reflecting multiracial context of Singapore. Chris Ho's Buddy Buddy mixes English with Malay words, MC Siva Chy and the Kopi Kat Klan's "why U so Like Dat" criticises yet celebrates the widespread use of the Singlish patois. Chris Ho became for the punk and pop avant garde both an example and an independent and still influential voice across a number of media including radio programmes where he has distinguished himself by introducing "the now sound of the future". He currently hosts the morning slots on a new radio station Lush 99.5FM (the frequency of the previous NAC-run Passion Radio 99.5FM) as well as an Radio Singapore International (RSI) Programme during a weekday afternoon focusing on local acts.

## Singapop

Around the 1980s towards the 1990s, Craig Lockard identifies Dick Lee whom he considers *the most important local singer and composer* in the local English music scene. Lee Tong Soon accords him the honour of being the progenitor of Singapop. This research has not come across another artist in this Singapop tradition. He is considered a major figure in music of popular culture in Singapore, particularly with *songs that often deal with the mixed cultural context and confused identity of the plural society...Lee has specialised in creating a distinctively Singaporean sound and mood, integrating Asian genres into his commercial mix of jazz, fusion, electropop and classical styles. His thoughtful lyrics, some utilising Singlish, probe realities and mythologies of Singapore life and culture. Flower Drum Song (1985) is an example. Another prime example listed is Internationaland which is criticism levelled at middle-class materialism which he finds so prevalent in the city. This 1989 song was Lee's Mad Chinaman which explores the sometimes contradictory and bewildering feelings generated by growing up in the city's cosmopolitan environment.*<sup>60</sup>

Some background into Dick Lee is necessary here. C.J. Wee Wan Ling points out that Dick Lee is from the colonial-created, English-speaking Chinese minority...and grew up in middle-class Singapore. His early exposure to jazz, contemporary pop and Stephen Sondheim Broadway soundscapes (instructive that Wee notes this was a privilege available to those growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in Singapore) – make their contributions to his Asian pop style. Lee’s background is Peranakan and uses this background in his work.<sup>61</sup>

His music contains a strong element of nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s. As the occasion demands, appropriation of popular/folk Thai, Filipino and Japanese tunes (Wee prefers pirate to appropriate) sometimes arranged for scat or bebop background. When he performs he tends to use Singlish which is riddled with non-English expressions, as a local marker.<sup>62</sup> For full visual effect, Dick Lee appears in video cameos and album covers with a combination of resplendent traditional costumes with trendy street-wear/work-wear. The labels come fast and furious, cultural magpie, frivolous, mere entertainer but as Wee points out “he has avoided a claustrophobic and binding notion of Asian identity in his music”.<sup>63</sup> Although he was well known as part of a singing family trio in the late 1960s and early 1970s, much of his prominence begins with his interest in music in the late 1970s, writing and performing a combination of English-language pop and light-jazz music.<sup>64</sup>

Beginning in the early 1980s, he increasingly inserted significant local touches into his music. Lee’s regional success really began with *Mad Chinaman* 1989; in this release he blended traditional Chinese and Southeast Asian music and older Chinese pop songs either to create his own compositions or to be played on top of more contemporary rhythms. The music this makes gestures towards being World music, or at least to being a quasi-World pop. What distinguishes Lee from being labelled definitively as an oriental World Music artist is the too-knowing and sometimes (self-) parodic incorporation of the authentic, an incorporation which simultaneously questions the status or need for the authentic, while on another level proclaiming a true “Asianness”.

In local markets, Lee sold fairly well with university and polytechnic students who appreciated the novelty of his hybrid pop-jazz, despite the critics’ scathing reviews. Given his success in Japan, apparently Japanese youth also like the new sound of his quasi-World pop. Lee’s own sophisticated, witty and cosmopolitan personality, displayed for example in his chic Armani attire, gained in appeal as he began to foreground the Asian elements of his cultural make-up. Arguably, within Southeast Asia, only Singapore, with its specific Anglo-Asian cultural configuration, could

have produced a star like Dick Lee. Initially rejected by the usually humourless political establishment in Singapore for his populist sending-up of local life, Lee has become part of the state's approach to the national-popular. The Singapore Symphony Orchestra performed Lee's music in July 1995, in a programme with singers Sandy Lam of Hong Kong and Tracy Huang of Taiwan. As one of Singapore's best-known personalities, his shows are reportedly often sold-out; he recently hosted a television talk show, was a judge in Singapore Idol 2004, a show modelled after the American Idol Series; his albums sell at around the 15000 (Wells and Lee 1996 tell us that 5000 to 10000 is considered a good number in terms of sales). Public opinion of him remains unevenly balanced between an English speaking middle class who think Dick is not serious enough, while the Chinese speaking population feel he is using their culture inauthentically.

Album and CD productions have formed the bulk of Lee's musical career. Among his best known albums:

Life in the Lion City (1984)

Suriram (12-inch single 1984)

Fried Rice Paradise (1986)

The Mad Chinaman (1989)\* his most popular and creative work to date

Asiamajor (1990)

Orientalism (1991)

The Year of the Monkey (1992)

Wee points out that the very titles are indicative of the pan-Asian and Singapore-Asian ideologies he has chosen to valorise and stage.<sup>65</sup> However, it is significant success he has had in Japan which prompts a further examination of the ways in which his music has had an impact. Koichi Iwabuchi, in his book on popular culture and Japanese transnationalism, devotes a not insignificant space to discussing the perception and reception of Dick Lee in Japan especially when it is contrasted against the backdrop of a Japanese Orientalist conception that 'their' future is 'our' past, with specific reference to the production of pop music in the 1980s.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly Iwabuchi observes:

*The success of Singaporean musician Dick Lee in the world music genre around 1990 dramatically displaces this perception and threw Southeast Asian hybridity into high relief. Dick Lee has been the most successful Asian pop singer in the Japanese market in terms of CD sales figures. The attractiveness of his syncretic music for Japanese audiences lies in its playful mixing of Western pop and various adaptations of traditional Asian musics. Mad Chinaman (1989) and Asia Major (1990) were particularly well received. It is suggested that in these two album releases he attempted to articulate his search for an impure identity as a*

*Singaporean and an Asian, respectively, through the syncretic remaking of traditional Asian songs and instrumentals in contemporary (Western) pop music styles.*<sup>67</sup>

The attraction of Dick Lee's music, at least in Japanese discourse, resides in the combination of two factors. The first is an exoticism which derives from the incorporation of local cultural traditions, and the second is a sophisticated modern music style, backed by the use of the latest technologies. Iwabuchi suggests Dick Lee became a cause célèbre for Japanese critics because his music embodied a radical sense of a hybrid Asian identity that was beyond the reach of the self-contained Japanese cultural formation; producing almost single-handedly "a new sound by fusing West and East that Japanese musicians, who just mimic Western music style, could never do".<sup>68</sup> For Iwabuchi, his music presented a different form of cultural negotiation between Asia and the West, a more cosmopolitan mode of hybridisation that Japan had yet to attain. Nakazawa Shin'ichi (1990), a prominent Japanese advocate of postmodernism. He argues that Lee's music reflects the postmodern condition of Singapore, a floating intersection of culture, which unlike China or Japan lacks a strong sense of communal identity.<sup>69</sup> Nakazawa contends that in Singapore, no attempt is made to insert its diversity of cultures into a nationalising melting pot that homogenizes them: *Dick Lee for the first time succeeded in making Asian pop music attain a consistent multiplex structure, so much so that his music suggests the possibility of the mingled existence of multiple different rhythms in one song...Dick Lee as a Singaporean is free from a strong drawing force to the motherland and therefore has attained the freedom as well as the sorrow of a nomadic subjectivity.*<sup>70</sup>

Iwabuchi's scepticism surrounds Japanese rave reviews on Lee's music and Singapore that fail to notice the contradictory cultural and identity politics operating in Singapore. It can be claimed that Lee's music is just a fashionable, commercialised, apolitical pastiche of Western pop and traditional music; that his claim of possessing a pan-Asian identity is purely a promotional strategy; and that his claim operates, within the context of Singapore's cultural policies, to stress a multiracial, pan-Asian identity in nationalist terms (see Kong 1996; Wee 1996). Iwabuchi argues that Japanese delectation has do far been based on the place of music rather than a cultural politics of the music which tends to negate the reading of Dick Lee and a nationalist agenda.

Japanese discourses on Lee's music, although they largely ignore the debate about the music in Singapore, cannot all be dismissed simply as another attempt to domesticate something innovative by casting it either as a chimera of the fusion of

“a new sound by fusing West and East” in a way unattainable by the Japanese or as an inferior, exotic, Asian other. At the least some display an effort to appreciate Lee’s music as the embodiment of an Asian modernity whose difference articulates a telling critique of the formation of Japanese modernity and its discourse on hybridism. Perhaps it is the very essence of syncretism that permits its derivations contrasted against a Japanese agenda which Akihito Saito articulates as one of the Japanese ways of mixing cultures which suppresses its foreign origins, thereby articulating “Japanese-ness”.<sup>71</sup> As in all pro-Dick Lee sentiments in Japan, there is somehow a slightly different motivation for it. Iwabuchi makes this point in greater details articulating the weaknesses of an enthusiasm for Dick Lee in terms of the Japanese media industry which seems to have relished a phrase “Asia is one” by Okakura Tenshin at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his famous book, **The Ideal of the East** with special reference to the Art of Japan (1904), Okakura used a binary East-West opposition in an attempt to grasp ‘Asia’ as a coherent space characterised by the existence of ‘love’ underlying art and aesthetics in the region. Rather than attempting to articulate a cardinal Eastern value and aesthetic, Okakura’s work seems to reflect his desire that Asia be given an imaginary coherence by Japan; not just Asian unity in diversity but a curator, “Japan”, through whom this unity could be achieved in the first place.<sup>72</sup> When that curatorial role is taken up by the media industry through technology, as hardware – CDs and software – programming, contests, broadcast media, there is an attractiveness about the way in which Dick Lee was the most appropriate candidate for an Asian curatorial agenda. It is difficult to dismiss a series of television shows broadcast far and wide about **Asia Bagus**, **AsiaNBeat**, **Asia Live Dream**, to name a few, which begins to feature Southeast Asian representation.

Somewhere in all this curatorial discourse about an Asian unity or identity best curated by Japan (where Japanese representation is absent) is the reception of a *Southeast Asian sound* in contradistinction to Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese appropriations of Japanese tunes and sounds. We are offered some clues by Benjamin Ng Wai-Ming’s study of Japanese popular music in Singapore:

*The 1970s saw the golden period of Taiwanese popular songs among Chinese communities in Asia. Most of these Taiwanese songs were Mandarin covers of Japanese enka (urban nostalgic and emotive songs) or kayokyoku (early Japanese pop). They were very popular among the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Chinese Singaporeans became familiar with Japanese tunes, although few realised that their favourite Mandarin songs [were] borrowed from Japanese tunes.*<sup>73</sup>



Another reading can be made of the ‘syncretism’ in the Dick Lee discourse. Peter Trudgill’s study of the sociolinguistics of British pop-song pronunciation discusses the way in which punk, for example, *introduced features associated with lower-prestige south of England accents:*

*The use of these low-status pronunciations is coupled with a use of nonstandard grammatical forms, such as multiple negation and the use of third person singular “don’t”, that is even higher than in other subgenres of pop music and the intended effect is assertive and aggressive. There is also an intention to aid identification with and/or by British working-class youth, and to appeal to others who wish to identify with them, their situation and their values.*<sup>74</sup>

Herein lies some clues of the range in public reception of him; from considerable support from university and polytechnic students who appreciated the novelty of his hybrid pop-jazz to critics’ scathing reviews and an English speaking middle class who think Dick is not serious enough to a Chinese speaking population who feel he is using their culture inauthentically.<sup>75</sup> It is in appropriating and reinterpreting cultural practices which had acquired boundaries, that has resulted in this mixed reception of Dick Lee’s creative work.

One can add to the discourse speculation of a shrewd sense of economic potential to be garnered from what Karl Marx defines as the mistaking of an object for a social relation, or vice versa - commodity fetish. Adam Krims explains the process in hip-hop, particularly the ghetto as source of despair and economic potential:

*The commodified image of the ghetto forms a libidinal object...leads...to a surplus value generated from the commodification of a lack of value...the music industry has found a way to refold some of the most abject results of world economic production, through a direct transformation...to multibillion-dollar wealth...this refolding...that constitutes hip-hop’s own mutation in the workings of surplus value...without...materially changing the living conditions at either end.*<sup>76</sup>

Chua Beng Huat’s recent chapter discusses ways in which the Singlish-Singaporean is identified more specifically in the realms of the Hokkien-speaking community and connotes *the positioning of Hokkien speakers as low life...in a country where forty years of continuous economic growth has engendered a substantial middle class...dependent on academic and professional achievements.* Therefore, in the view of an educated middle-class Singaporean, *Hokkien is being thus positioned, in representation and social reality as the language...laughably low-class ...not a serious language for the civil community.*<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, Chua also notes attempts in popular culture in Singapore to glorify the essence of Singlish Singaporean Ah Beng and his feminine counterpart Ah Lian, through the lens of middle-class educated Singaporean consumers, *for whom switching code from standard English to Singlish is a marker of 'authentic' Singaporean identity.*<sup>78</sup> Nowhere else is more amplified than in a recent and hugely popular sitcom series Phua Chu Kang, which makes the everyday existence of a poorly educated but economically successful renovation contractor (a phrase - *nouvo riche* – comes to mind here).

Applying the arguments of Trudgill and Krimms, Singlish 'emerges', in the process of economic growth and prosperity, as a ghetto-language with its *authentic* users forming its cultural ghettos. As a cultural commodity in televised theatre, it has become since the 1990s, something hugely popular within Singapore, to the extent of becoming an internationally marketable asset. The fact it is frowned upon in the recent Speak Good English Movement campaigns has only increased its value.

Applied now to Music, Dick Lee's creative works arguably contain, together with the use of hybrid pop-jazz musical elements, the use of Singlish (in contradistinction to Singapore English) as a *lower-prestige* mode of communication. When capitalized upon as a commodity fetish – the notion, which according to Marx,<sup>79</sup> both results from and reinforces the more general tendency in capitalist societies to mystify social origins – such strategies become successful in marketing a Singaporean identity. It is difficult to deny the success of Dick Lee in the Japanese markets, made particularly so when the use of Singlish in music. One also needs to consider that much of Lee's success preempts the successes in theatre-spaces of local film and television in Singapore.

More recent scholarship on Dick Lee is likely to generate further interest and research not only on his music but also of the socio-cultural circumstances of what might best be read as one of the many independent and successful routes taken in the narratives of music of Western popular culture in Singapore. Additionally, there has been very little done in terms of an analysis of the music as well as its complicity or conformity with the textual considerations, whether it is the main, meta- or sub-texts.

## Popular Culture in the Malay Community

Yusnor Ef and Burhanuddin bin Buang record notable branches in the Malay community after Pop-Yeh Yeh. In a sense it is difficult to assess the impact of both across popularity of consumption and production except in hindsight. A fruitful area of research would be to examine record or cassette sales at shops, concert ticket sales, broadcast programmes, programmes flyers and any such material that would help examine these areas in greater depth.

For Burhanuddin, Mat Rok as a social phenomenon was as much a part of the landscape with fashion statements, the problem with drugs, long hair, anti-establishment sentiments. Music's role in the Mat Rok phenomenon is far more complex than the stereotype that generally attends its subscribers. Did the music cause such behaviour? Did the music accentuate behaviour? Was rock music an unfortunate accomplice in social behavioural patterns that may have had no more than a subscription to the music because it was different from other musics? Lyrics of the great rock songs of the period are entirely different in kind from the lyrics that mark the skill and biting wit of one like Bob Dylan and like-minded, like spirited artists.

Rebellious lyrics are now supplanted by sound worlds arrived at via distortion, wailing, crashing rhythms, amplification and by extension decibel levels approximate what many believe to be the closest definition of noise. Yet noise, as Eno observes, has special significance, even power, and nowhere else is this more keenly felt than in rock music:

*Distortion and complexity are the sources of noise. Rock music is built on distortion: on the idea that things are enriched, not degraded by noise. To allow something to become noisy is to allow it to support multiple readings. It is a way of multiplying resonances. It is also a way of 'making the medium fail' – thus giving the impression that what you are doing is bursting out of the material: 'I'm too big for this medium'.<sup>80</sup>*

But the energy levels that emanated from these new groups, the cult following thereafter, the marked observable patterns of behaviour which were by comparison significantly deviant and a potential or real threat to social order, gave rise to new levels of panic and anxiety. The indulgent consumption of nicotine, alcohol and narcotic substances was said to be high in this group and its subscribers, bordering on cult followings, were the youth in Singapore; the very youth on whom hopes were placed, socially, politically and economically, to lift post-independent Singapore out of the threatened existence of third-world status. While the anxiety

felt by Dr. Goh Keng Swee in 1973 had its reverberations across Western popular culture of the Euro-American worlds of entertainment establishments, the Mat-Rockers seemed to revel in their situated ‘marginalia’ and were contented to remain accessible to and among themselves.<sup>81</sup> This is discussed in further detail under musical practices of Heavy Metal and Rock.

Yusnor however, draws on a group of performers and singers bred on Music of popular Malay film as well as Pop Yeh Yeh but slowly overshadowing previous practices. The list of performers in the 1970s, while not comprehensive, includes Sharifah Aini, J. Mizan, Rahimah Rahim, Ismail Haron, Sarena Hashim, Zaleha Hamid, Mila Husin, Anita Sarawak, Hamidah Ahmad, Dahlia Ahmad, Sugiman Johari, S. Latifah, Elmi Salleh, Julie Remie to name only a few.<sup>82</sup> The difference was the Western influence in them; hence Ismail Haron was nicknamed Tom Jones because he did Tom Jones songs very well; Eddie Ahmad’s adaptation of Don’t play that Song (You Lied) to Madah Perpisahan; or Ahmad Daud’s Bilaku Terkenang had its inspiration from Charade and Anita Sarawak’s acknowledgement of Korina taken from the hit in the Western world Corina-Corina as examples. There were also Inang, Masri and Joget songs popularised by Sharifah Aini, Rafeah Buang, Ahmad Jais, Orchid Abdullah and Juninah M. Amin. Popular ones included Joget Malam Berinai (Masdor/Ef) and Tunang Tujuh Purnama sung by A. Ramli to name two examples. Yusnor Ef also records an affinity with Japanese songs. J. Misan is credited with Hari Ini dan Semalam, Rafeah Buang’s Kenangan based on Senno Memoro and Kembali Untukku by Ahmad Jais. Another strong influence reasserted was Hindustani songs made easier the wide-spread popularity of Hindi film. A. Ramli’s Rindu Kasih was based on **Bobby**, a Hindustani film which was very popular among the Malay community in Singapore, and his Intanku Liana was based on Agele Lagja; Sanisah Huri’s Janganku Ditinggalkan from another Hindustani film **Chalteh**. Groups that were popular during the 1970s were The Emmeralds featuring Julie Sudiro released an album titled Irama Abadi. The Quests, who were not from the Malay community, made their mark with four songs with adaptation to Malay text. The Nite Walkers with soloist Mike Ibrahim were popular for their contribution to songs for children. Others included Saadiah Saad with Hari Bendera, Angsa Ajaib, Eddynor Ali with Oh Bangau, Ahmad Nawab/Yusnor Ef—Mimpiku Malam Tadi, Kassim Masdor/Yusnor Ef Selamat Pagi Cikgu and Mila Hussain’s Pak Pandir.

Yusnor observes the influx of Malaysian artists into Singapore in the late 1970s and early 1980s permeating every sphere of activity. In a sense this signalled the inversion of centre of Malay traditional folk and popular music and culture although in this instance, it was popular culture that was starting to overtake Singapore not long after the separation. Politically, that would have been

unavoidable given Malaysia's focus on nature, role and identity based on a Malay Malaysia; a very different predicament in Singapore. Economically, the responsibility of shifting the position of the economy via industrialisation and modernisation from the 1960s into the 1970s were called on a sudden exigency to staying relevant in the English speaking high-profile commercial worlds dominated by the UK and USA. Perhaps from an economic standpoint, music of popular culture was not as highly prioritised as other more profitable sectors.

On the other hand, Singapore had always been the centre of the Malay film industry, and the recording industry particularly in the era of popular culture, profiting from economic opportunity, possessing the necessary infrastructure for surviving crises. It is therefore quite puzzling as to why the centre of the Malay world should have shifted to KL and return to almost overshadow the original centre. The then Ministry of Culture's effort in promoting culture and the arts, the legacy of the National theatre and all it stood for, Music for Everyone, and Music for the Millions Series, amidst other incentives. Further research is probably needed here on the correlation of economic upgrading with the promulgation of the arts in Singapore during the 1970s and 1980s. The fundamental question is not so much the one to one correspondence but a study of the ways in which person/s, relationships, religious, social, cultural and political and mediating institutions were seen to act as agencies or instruments in this change.

Yusnor observes a slightly different shift in the 1980s to groups that emerge like Al-Mizan, Al-Jawaher, Hidayah, Orkes Al-Suraya (Medan)...quite clearly Arab or Middle- Eastern influences. Songs like Panggilan Kaabah, Doa dalam Irama take prominence in this sphere. Composer, arranger and lyricist Ahmad Baqi who seemed to have paved the way for others such as Faridah M.Amin, Habibah Osman and Rohayah. This wave, as he observed, was short-lived because of its comparatively lower marketability in the face of popular culture with strong Western influence.<sup>83</sup> Like all other domains, the Malay community was unlikely not to be affected by pop, disco, rock and trash (metal) influences. M. Nasir is probably one of the most influential names in the field of slow rock or rock ballads. Craig Lockard's assesment of the ex-Singaporean, who left for Malaysia and gained prominence with his group Kembara, draws parallels with Bruce Springsteen in the equivalent world. One might add that commercially Nasir was well in demand while latching on to an Islamic sentiment powered by Indonesian Rhoma Irama.<sup>84</sup>

Of all the rockers, Yusnor recognises a few, one of which is Ramli Sarip, who in Singapore garnered the label “Raja Rock” or King of Rock. Yusnor remembers: *Ramil Sarip asked me to write him a song...I said...how can? Your songs [are] all rock...mana boleh....so he said try try...in the end I wrote him a song called Ada Kerja Ada Gaji....in one album named Batu....under Sweet Charity....for that group I could not write a very mellow sound.*<sup>85</sup> The fact that Sarip managed a comparatively successful solo career and still does to this day, has earned him the reputation of something of a rock legend and that reputation seems to have transcended Singapore with the vivid rock image of long hair and the rugged look known and loved by Mat Rokers across the peninsula.

In the incursions into jazz, Malaysian Sheila Majeed became an prominent example, winning a BASF award in Indonesia, where she gained much popularity. Yusnor notes her popularity extended to Japan and the US. We are told of the presence of Amin Sahab, who is associated with M. Nasir and Ramli Sarip but promotes Islamic messages criticising meaningless rock lyrics. A guitarist we are told who established a name in Malaysia was A. Ali, from the group Nite Walkers who wrote children’s songs and has been responsible for writing for singers like Noranizah Idris, Headwind, Zaiton Sameon among others.<sup>86</sup>

Yusnor also notes that SENADA, EMI, PANDA (Hoover) Records, WEA, LIFE were companies in Singapore. Toady, there is only a publicity office here for high ranking members. SENADA and PANDA have gone. His observations summarise the position that Singapore was the centre of the Malay peninsula from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. Today he laments that popular and promising artistes in Singapore are eclipsed by their Malaysian counterparts. Ramli Sarip is the only representative in the rock and popular culture domain alongside a handful of others. Anita Sarawak is known not only in the Malay community but internationally in music of popular culture in the English speaking world. Iskandar Ismail, who began his life as Hangloose Iskandar in the jazz world, is today demanded as an arranger. The list is small but growing and he claims pride in the Malay community for them: Indra Shahril, Jan Johari, Reduan Ali, Nora Ismail, Bong Shaaban, Ismail Marzuki, Nazim and others.<sup>87</sup>

A number of performers in pop, jazz, heavy metal and hip-hop circles remain anonymous largely because they perform in spaces which do not resonate with the Malay-conversant communities. One notable example is Bani Faruk who was the

guitarist in the group which played in the group Jive Talking at the Hard Rock Café. Bani was known as the George Benson of Singapore even towards the end of his life.<sup>88</sup> Other examples include Sheikh Haikel, formerly of Construction Sight, arguably Singapore's first rapper, Triple Noize, the youngest rap group after Construction Sight and Urban X'change, and many heavy metal musicians who prefer their practice in the English conversant domain. Yet there are those who suggest that in the domain of the Malay music industry, Singaporean artists pale in comparison to their Malaysian and even Indonesian counterparts. Yusnor laments the divide between Malaysian and Singaporean artists in Music of popular culture in Malay has now reached the point of stratification, with a similar cry made in the domain of the English music industry with respect to creative work:

*Musicians claimed that Singaporean audiences were not supportive of local talent.*  
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## Popular culture in the Chinese Community

Proliferation of popular form of music-making and dance in cabarets and dance bands. Arguably the most popular entertainment during the 1950s in Singapore was to be found in the New World which enjoyed massive crowds every night. **Getais** enjoyed the best business in New World during the 50s. There was the **Man Jiang Hong Getai**, **Shangri-La**, **New Nightclub**, **Feng Feng Song and Dance Troupe**, and **Broadway**.<sup>90</sup> The **Man Jiang Hong Getai** was used by the famous **Zhang Lai Lai Song and Dance Troupe**, which met with enthusiastic crowd response. Part of the show included the performance of a series of love ballads between **Zhang Lai Lai** and the male lead, which was a crowd-pleaser. **Zhang** eventually moved to the Hong Kong motion picture scene. Despite her considerable success and fame as a singer locally, the troupe was subsequently dismantled. The **Man Jiang Hong Getai** was then replaced by the **Dong Fang Getai**.<sup>91</sup>

Joseph Peters' overview of musics in Singapore also reveals<sup>92</sup> that, **Bunga Tanjong** at the **New World Amusement Park**, **New World**, **Great World** and **Happy World** were venues around which a thriving nightlife in Singapore revolved in the 1950s. People flocked to these clubs every night to participate in contemporary popular dance crazes such as cha-cha, rumba, tango to name a few. Live popular band performances sufficed for all of these types of dances, thus making it economically lucrative and at the same time characterised variety and 'local' flavour in entertainment. It would not have been surprising to have speculated participation of the Chinese community in these popular forms.

The arrival of popular culture was initially scorned by those who believed music served a wholesome cause. Composer, orchestral and choral conductor Mo Ze Xi (b.1935) in his article<sup>93</sup> by noted in his narration of music in Chinese culture in Malaya, that in societies or associations have sung some form of "art songs", folk songs (Malayan min yao), Russian folk songs and 'popular' music – Zhou Xuan from the 1930s to the 1940s, Yu Min between the 1940s and 1950s, followed by Liu Wen Zhen and Fung Fei Fei in the 1960s. Much of this music, Mo felt, lacked life and energy and did not possess the value for fighting for independence or revolution.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, the influence of popular film and cabaret from Shanghai and transported to the different **Worlds** found greater support among the Chinese community who were not much more resistant to dance music and popular songs than the other communities in Singapore. According to Loo Teng Kiat:

*Huang Qing Yuan belongs to the 50s He was well known when Rediffusion was big in Singapore in the 50s and 60s. He was known for his rendition of ballads,*



*likewise for Qin Huai, who garnered intense popularity then. But they were more popular because of the distinct qualities of their voices than their looks. Both men did some appearances on TV in the late 70s and early 80s in the local mandarin variety shows, but were not able to secure their popularity due to the newer and younger 'pop idols' like Sakura Ting, who could entertain the audiences with wit and humour and a lot of dancing, a trait seriously lacking in Huang and Qin. Sakura Ting made a big appearance in the Agogo era, and was well known for yodelling in some of her 'country' style, western songs, apart from her already large on-screen reputation. Always energetic and 'sexy' in her colourful Agogo outfit, she gave very lively performances on screen. Her yodelling set her apart from the rest of the singers at that time, and another singer - Pang Xiu Qiong - did some yodeling as well. Apart from that, Sakura was also rather big in other Asian countries as well...although only two countries are mentioned; Hong Kong and Indonesia. Unlike Sakura, Zhang Xiao Ying focussed more towards ballads and other slower tempo songs. She appeared very much prim and proper, unlike the dynamic Sakura but Zhang was more popular in the late 70s and early 80s.*

*Sisters Deng Xue Hua, Miao Hua, and Gui Hua were popular from the late 70s to the mid 80s. Deng Miao Hua is the most popular of the trio, but she started off as a solo act. She sang the theme song of the TV series Xiao Fei Yu (Little flying Fish) and acted in it as well. That's when the swimming team won many medals at the SEA game, and SBC (Singapore Broadcasting Corporation) did a show about it. Ang Peng Siong and his father did cameos in the show as well. Ang Peng Siong didn't get as big a part as his father did though. When she got famous after Xiao Fei Yu, she attempted to get her sisters into the act as well. Unfortunately, they didn't make it big, and I think they did only one album. Deng Miao Hua was, I think, from one of those singing classes organised by SBC at that time. It also produced a handful of singers who performed regularly on the Mandarin variety shows such as Xing, Xing, Xing and Bin Fen Ba San Series.<sup>95</sup>*

Drummer Tony Zee<sup>96</sup> recalled the days of St. John's Hall where for \$3, one could get to dance with a hostess for a song. Tony found himself working with the pop group **Trailers** but also found himself working across domains; what was known as the Chinese pop scene. Around 1965/6, Tony did performances on a Sunday morning called the **Early Bird Show** lasting about an hour where the musicians would do band backing for artistes like Rita Chao, Sakura Ting, and Lara in what he recalled were the Agogo days. The repertoire consisted of Agogo numbers in Mandarin mostly Taiwan Mandarin but they were local covers. Musicians working in these circumstances needed to know the grooves. Each groove worked like a riff

and gave them an opportunity to know how they were going to carry this through the songs. Examples of frequently used grooves:

**Obi Cha Cha**

**Hala Hala**

**Cha Cha**

**Quick Step**

**Salsa**

Around the early 1970s up to 1972, Tony played Mandarin singles at Maxims which was located at Supreme House (Park Mall today) at the basement. The New World Cabaret was another popular haunt. There were also tea-dances at Katong Palace Theatre, the Celestial Room. Jeremy also discovered his schoolmate *Hilarian Goh a very colourful character....used to come in a pink suit and play the theme from the Pink Panther....used to play for Singapore Organ Festivals (Yamaha?)...he won electone competitions...he was playing at Chinese night clubs...at the age 14/15 and he was earning \$1600 a month...*<sup>97</sup>

Tony's critical moment came with an opportunity to work with John Teo, Douglas Tan and Randy Lee, also known as the **Stylers**, when their drummer had left. The **Stylers** earned the reputation of being the most demanded Mandarin show band particularly during the Month of the Hungry Ghost Festival. Their performance schedules were packed and Tony played with them from 1983-1985. According to Tony, the repertoire of the Stylers was based on the songs of the 1950s generation and retained their audience as long as this generation had the capacity to be entertained and afforded the expense of attending to them. The musicians worked from a score which had the music in chords, lyrics and bars as well as the groove and each person's role in it. Parts were already written out and from the samples he offered, they were neatly handwritten by John Teo the band leader and keyboardist. Given their hectic Hungry Ghost Festival schedules, they employed a sort of librarian to maintain the song list with the scores. For instance, certain pieces were to be played that night. This librarian would look through the scores and ensure that the pieces were ready on the stand for performance. Tony remembers their immense library of songs and scores which was a clear edge they had over potential rivals. They were also tight as an ensemble and the impression generated was that their fee of \$1800 a night was not something show organisers at the Hungry Ghost Festival contested. From 1986-1990, he worked with Jeramzee and from 1991 to 2001 he played with Jive Talking at Hard Rock Café.<sup>98</sup>

Towards the beginning of the 1990s, the world of Mandarin pop seems to have had either collisions or mergers with what was at one time, a truly unique Singaporean

expression, Xinyao. At one level, Xinyao lyricists and songwriters were preparing their material for Hong Kong singing sensations, while at another level, certain names seemed to appear at Xinyao festivals, linked with Xinyao events yet were not considered bona fide Xinyao practitioners. Zhang Fan makes mention of two brothers, Li Wei Song and Li Si Song as exemplars of these ambiguous links with Xinyao:

*Si Song is from a different route...Xinyao is from the school...Remember I mentioned the Singapore Artists Association in the days of the 1950s? At one time the association chairman...the chairman at the time, Fu Su Yuin who was a very popular singer in the 1950s. When I was in secondary school (15 years old), I joined the association's choir. Therefore I managed to associate with this group of entertainers...local entertainers...besides singers, they are magicians, drama actors, old guard...Wang Sa and Yeh Fong...Fu Su Yuin was the president of the association then...and Si Song and Wei Song, with their father's encouragement became his students...At the beginning, Si Song and Wei Song started out with a very clear commercial motive...pop approach...they studied under Fu Su Yuin so although they took part in the Xinyao festival in the early days when they even cut records and got an award but then they could not make it in the pop scene...one record hit...like Jimmy Yeh...but they kept an interest in the professional level doing teaching...Li Wei Song Singing School...Si Song established himself as a much demanded producer...EMI gives him singers to do recordings...so it seems they are not much of Xinyao because there were at the time some young people that started off not writing school music...they started off writing pop songs...a completely different route...and also important element...remember I talked about TCS or SBC drama series....each song...they wrote so much of these theme songs..they have this platform you know this including Mu Tze, the theme song from the Awakening (Wu Souw Nanyang) but Wei Song & Si Song wrote a lot of theme songs they have connection with the TCS producers they have this trust...<sup>99</sup>*

While the separation is made clear, it wouldn't be difficult to envision their identity with the entertainment industry. One observer noted how much the songs of Liang Wern Fook, Eric Moo and Loi Fei Huay had created the impression that Xinyao had really gone pop largely because the musical arrangements seem to be ready to compete in the Mandarin pop market. Here is where opinions differed as to Xinyao's directions. Looking at CCA school activities from 1993 -1997, Xinyao had virtually disappeared. Coincident with this was the emergence of Kit Chan, who was discovered and groomed by Ocean Butterflies. Stephanie Sun, pop or otherwise came from the Li Wei Song School and yet again some confusion with

Xinyao. Doubtless there will continue to be the greying of domains long regarded as sacrosanct between the various musical practices.

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