

Sound Art in Malaysia from a Malaysian Sound Artist Perspective

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Abstract

Early exploration of the use of computers in Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI), somehow allowed me to venture further into the domain of sound. Nothing much was known or noted in terms of the notion or historical perspectives of electroacoustic music in Malaysia. Unlike in the West, our music industry accommodated Western music, particularly popular music, but not experimental or electroacoustic music. The advancement in computer technology in music applications introduced new creative ideas, and its democratization permitted more creative exploration, technically and aesthetically. This paper is a recollection of the long journey of a Malaysian composer venturing into electroacoustic music.

In 1992 I became interested in experimenting with sounds during my involvement with an experimental music competition run by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), previously known as Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM). This interdepartmental experimental music competition was organised by the School of Art and Design, inspired by the *Band Tanpa Elektrik* (BTL) meaning 'Non Electric Band', and supervised by a UiTM music lecturer. The BTL ensemble consisted primarily of tuned percussion instruments such as *gambang*, *glockenspiel*, and *boning*, among others.

Later I continued experimenting with sounds at UiTM's gamelan studios, utilizing gamelan instruments as well as a 'detuned' electric guitar. This exploration resulted in the creation of a composition entitled *The Secret of Pentatonic*. Initially the work was arranged with what I would regard as 'intentionally detuned guitar', employing a series of repetitive notes from a popular gamelan piece called *Timang Burung*. However, the piece was deemed unsuitable for performance due to its 'out of tune' character, and was subsequently revised. The final version was premiered during our first music department concert, performed by a group of gamelan performers and electric band, a fusion of traditional musical instruments and western musical ideas.

My interest in experimenting with different musical ideas expanded when I was at York University, England. During the international MediaMix 1996 event, organised by York University's music department, I was exposed to electroacoustic music. Having been selected to work on the event sound team, I was given the opportunity to assist musician-composers such as Stephen Horenstein, Daniel Oppenheim, Jean Claude Risset, David Worrall, Nick Fells, Rajmil Fischman and others. It was during this event that I first observed real-time processing with Max in a performance by