Preventing Malaysia’s Traditional Music from Disappearing

Connie Lim Keh Nie and Mohamad Fadzil Abdul Rahman discuss how instrumental music performed in the past by the indigenous tribes in Sarawak, are gradually vanishing, or merging with contemporary musical styles, transforming to a modern fusion of ethnic folk music. The authors touch on the diversification of Malaysia’s traditional music, and the approaches adopted by composers and arrangers.

As the advocates of ecology do their best to keep nature intact, musicians should strive equally hard to ensure that traditional and ethnic music survive. Negligence will allow the music to vanish in the process of globalization and changes in trends, lifestyle and preferences, particularly among the new generation.

The world of music has been experiencing an evolution of genres through the years. In response to these changes, the rationale for diversifying various aspects of traditional music in the form of performance, instrument making/modifications or repertoires should be considered. Using different approaches to keep traditional music alive can ensure its survival. They are, however, not tantamount to abandoning the authentic forms of traditional music, as some critics claimed.

The term “World Music” has long suffered the difficulty of precise definition. In the media and the music industry, it was first used as a marketing/classificatory device to generally classify any kind of non-Western mainstream music. However, it is now accepted that in musical