

## **A Case Study of the Audience at Three Art Music Concerts in Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The development of art music and the construction of acoustically designed concert halls in Malaysia have provided more opportunities for live performances of various genres of art music. Generally, full attention is given to performers and their performances at a live concert, however it should be noted and emphasized that a live concert will not take place without the existence of its spectators. Unlike pop concerts, the size of audience at art music concerts is often small and this has become a key concern among organizers. The present study was carried out to identify the characteristics of the Malaysian audience at eight performances of three selected art music concerts: a concert version opera, a symphony concert, and a musical. A survey was used and interviewers intercepted potential respondents after each concert. Respondents were either interviewed or requested to complete the same survey questions themselves. A total of 660 samples were gathered. Based on the analysis on the respondents' occupations, it was found that they were mostly students and were generally below 30 years old. There was a balance between those with and without music background among the respondents. Musical was found to be the most preferred genre among the seven music genres given to the respondents. The results of this survey could function as a preliminary examination for future research to trace the changing characteristic of audience over time.

**Keywords: Audience, art music, concert, musical, Opera, performance, Western Classical**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Live public performances of various art music genres such as Western classical, Musical, Opera, traditional and others are held in Malaysia, especially in major cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang. The number of concerts has tremendously increased in the recent years, showing that this developing country has given emphasis to enhance culture and arts. The construction of acoustically designed concert halls such as *Istana Budaya* (IB), *Dewan Filharmonik* (MPO) and the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPac) has provided more opportunities for not only foreign but also

local performers to be involved in the music platform, and has thus indirectly offered the society with the experience of wider range of music genres.

Art and pop music can hardly be compared due to the different nature and cultural background they have, as explained by Johnson on the classical music, 'like art more generally, cannot be understood in the terms of popular culture' (Johnson, 2002, p. 46). However, in terms of publicity, a clear distinction between these art music and pop concerts is apparent, as the pressure of marketing Western classical or art music concert do not exist only in the West

(Schiff, 1997; Maleshefski, 2006; *New York Times*, 25 June 2005; 24 June 2007; 28 October 2008), but also locally (Markovitz, 2003). Indeed, individual preferences and the low rates of attendance at some art music concerts may be explained by the less immediate entertainment value, as Fineberg (2006, p. 29) suggested:

Whether we call art and culture high or low, those things that cannot support themselves in the marketplace are threatened. We must decide whether in some cases artistic or aesthetic value ought to override economic value and popular preference in the allocation of society's resources. In other words, we need to ask, 'Why should I pay (or help to pay) for something that I don't like?' The first step towards answering this question is to address the underlying paradox: If it's really better in a meaningful way, why don't I prefer it? Unless I can satisfactorily answer this first question, it will be very hard to continue onward to the benefits, other than sheer satisfaction or diversion that might justify continued support.

Another important aspect to consider is the fundamental setting of art music concerts. The contrast with pop concerts, where crowds and noise feature prominently, is obvious. Spectators at popular concerts are free to respond to the music through gestures, movement, shouting, singing, and many other expressive acts and emotions. However, an art music concert presents a totally contrasting atmosphere, where quietness throughout the whole performance is obligatory, with even coughing and sneezing are minimized.

A more direct description is provided by Pitts (2005, p. 257), 'the traditional practices of the Western Concert hall assume a relatively passive role for listeners, leaving them able to respond to decisions made by performers and promoters only to the extent of their applause and their future attendance.' These are the basic reactions of the art concert audience in general. Malaysian audience, at such concerts,

resemble these descriptions, but little research has been carried out to find out the way in which Malaysian audience respond during an art music performance, and who these attendees are, particularly in relation to the history of the Western Classical music in this country, which is not extensive.

In addition, the declining audience of the art music concerts has always been a challenge, not only for the organizer but also for the artistes (Schiff, 1997; Botstein, 1999; Maleshefski, 2006; *NYT*, 24 June 2007). Thus, to survive in the competitive world and struggle with the economic crisis, organizers and performers could hardly depend on the conventional performance setting in this modern day (Maleshefski, 2006). Therefore, organizers and performers often need to find ways to ease the seriousness of the conventional concert format in marketing their product, with the aim that the music sounds less remote to the public (*NYT*, 3 June 2007). Aside from those who are musically trained and those who are actively involved in art performances, there is an uncertainty as to which other groups of people are interested in them. Hence, identifying the characteristics of the audiences and gaining a better understanding of their responses to art music concerts will provide useful information for artists when choosing their programme, for organizers seeking to develop the scope of art music, and to give context to requests or complaints from the audience.

## CONCERT BACKGROUND AND VENUES

In this study, the targeted respondents were those attended three concerts held in Kuala Lumpur between the end of 2006 and mid 2007. In other words, all respondents were attendees of the chosen concerts. Meanwhile, observations and surveys were conducted at a total of eight performances from the three concerts:

- Three performances of the musical *Butterfly Lovers*, produced by Dama Orchestra at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPac), held from 6 to 8 September 2006.

- Two performances of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9, 'The Choral'*, performed by the National Symphony Orchestra at Istana Budaya, on 16 and 17 March 2007.
- Three performances of the concert version of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, performed by the KLPac Sinfonietta and soloists at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPac) on the 23 and 24 March 2007 (including a matinee performance).

A total of 660 respondents were gathered from the eight performances (213 respondents for the *Butterfly Lovers*, 225 respondents for *Magic Flute* and 222 for Beethoven's *Symphony*). Members of the audience were approached immediately at the end of each performance, with the intention of acquiring responses while memories regarding that particular performance were still fresh. Those who agreed to respond to the survey were either interviewed by the enumerators according to the questionnaire, or completed the same questionnaire on their own. After an art music concert, it was observed that the audience could generally be divided into two groups: those who hurry out to either the car-park or to catch public transport, as evening concerts usually end rather late; and those who seemingly show much more appreciation of the social aspect, mingling among other attendees despite lateness of the event. Moreover, family members, colleagues or friends apparently gathered in groups to discuss, comment, or to simply have conversation. The availability of this second group meant they undoubtedly formed the majority of the respondents, who provided replies and suggestions with much willingness and sincerity.

Although these concerts were either derived from or in the form of Western genres, all of them were completely produced by locals. In particular, the musical *Butterfly Lovers* was based on the film *The Love Eterne*, which was produced by the Shaw Brothers in 1963. The story, a historical legend set in the period of the Eastern Jin dynasty (265-420AD), is well-known in the Mandarin-speaking world, even forty

years after its debut, and is reputed to be one of the finest works of the Chinese Folk literature. The music and songs (*huangmei*) of this musical were arranged and composed in different styles, including traditional and Western Classical forms. Mozart's famous opera *The Magic Flute* was also adapted to include visual projection and narration, with the aim of reaching a wider audience. Among the three concerts, the one that closely resembles a conventional Western Classical performance was Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9, 'The Choral'*.

Apart from the Beethoven, the aim of the other two concerts was clear; their adaptation was intended to deliver those particular productions in a more 'user-friendly' manner, especially for those of the public without any musical background. For instance, although the *Magic Flute* is a famous work amongst the Western Classical musicians, not much is known about it in Malaysia. Similarly, the classical Mandarin language used in the performances of the musical *Butterfly Lovers* assimilates exactly the version in *The Love Eterne*, which is difficult for an audience without any Chinese education background to understand. Thus, the English narration has helped the audience to fully understand the Musical than merely relying on the singing, music, or acting to guide them.

The concert venues were strategically located at the centre of Kuala Lumpur. Each venue possesses distinctive and individual architectural features with acoustic properties appropriate for a concert hall, and these halls also provide an ambience which is ideal for social events. The KLPac was founded in May 2004, and its auditorium 'Pentas 1' accommodates 504 seats. Istana Budaya or better known as *The Palace of Culture* was founded in September 1999, and the hall can accommodate up to 1412 spectators at a time.

#### **BASIC PROFILE OF THE MALAYSIAN AUDIENCE**

With the development and the increasing number of art music concerts in Malaysia, such as the consistency of the performances by the

Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, and events held at KLPac, it is crucial to identify the characteristics of this small group and what the functions of the concert is to them. Furthermore, the question of how to increase potential audience in Malaysia should not be neglected as this will affect the development of the local productions and the acceptance of the artistes' performances by the general public.

Tertiary music education, which is provided either by the government or private institutions, seems to represent a noteworthy source of spectators at the art music concerts. Similarly, the development of music education and co-curriculum in both primary and secondary schools has contributed to the growing interest in such performances. The emergence of student orchestra, wind bands, and Chinese orchestra in some schools in major cities has no doubt showed a direct involvement of students in art music. This provides a possible reason why the survey of the eight performances outlined above indicated that a relatively large number of respondents (33.2%) were students. Another reason why students represented the largest group of attendees is no doubt due to the role of the performers as teachers or co-students. The social interaction between the teacher and students after each performance was clearly evident, particularly for Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*.

This is in comparison to the West, where the problem of an aging audience has become an issue (*NYT*, 25 June 2005). A research from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the United States revealed the aging population of attendees for several music genres, especially for the Western Classical and Opera (Peterson, Hull and Kern, 2000). Although the comparison between Malaysia and foreign countries in regards to the age profile is not feasible, organizers of local productions definitely wish to avoid this problem in their future performances. For these reasons, three local concerts, in which the overall respondents aged between 21 and 30 and below 20 year old were ranked the highest and second highest populations (*Fig. 1*). The

age range of the respondents could explain why a large number was recorded for 'students'. For example, over 50 % of the respondents for both the symphony (Beethoven) and the opera (Mozart) were below the age of 30. In contrast, the respondents for the musical *Butterfly Lovers* were evenly distributed between the age groups and these were from 21 to 60 year old, as shown in *Fig. 2*.

The reasons for such results are clear. Music education, as mentioned in the earlier section, has indirectly encouraged younger attendees, especially for the Western music genre, whereas the older generation (particularly those aged 50 and above) tend to be less involved with this particular genre. However, in the particular case of *Butterfly Lovers*, the Chinese folk-orientated musical based on the famous legend of *Liang and Zhu*, the older generation became the target audience. In a discussion with Khor Seng Chew, the music director of this production regarded that the *huangmei* tunes used in this Musical are especially familiar to the older Chinese-educated generation. Although the music was completely modernized in this production, the fact that it depicted a story from a 1960s movie is likely to be what attracted this age group to a Western form of the musical.

On the other hand, the modified opera and the symphony paint another picture. The educational value may generate another group of attendees, namely parents, from their companionship or their support towards their children performing at these concerts. Through the responses from the open-ended questions, the relationship between parents and children was significantly shown among the attendees and the performers, especially in the case of the concert version opera. Among other, the responses from this particular group of audience are such as 'the narrator and graphic are very easy for children to relate to [...]', 'Overall, it was a good concert and my 11 year old son enjoyed it', 'for children, well adapted'. Nevertheless, if the opera had been performed in its original format, it was unlikely that the responses and groups of spectators would have been the same; this indicates that both the narration and animation have eased the

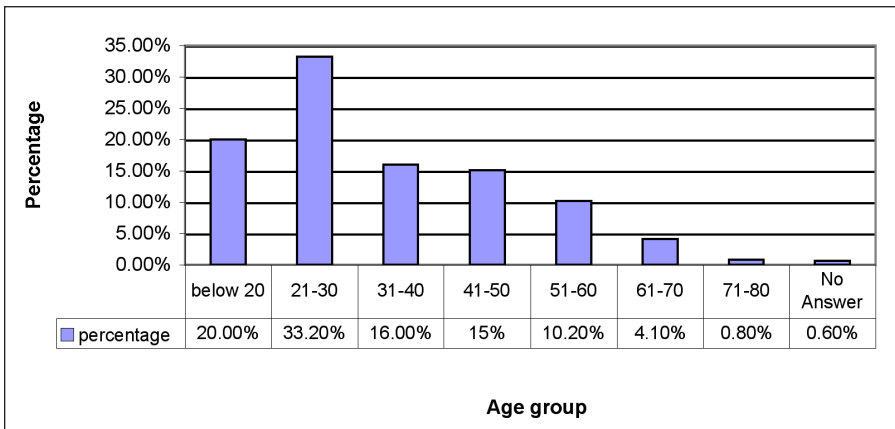


Fig. 1: Age groups of the respondents

rigidity of the traditional opera setting. The main concern is that the quality of the performance may affect the attendees or future attendees for a concert. Although this issue was not the focus of the present study, the open-ended question did draw some negative responses about the quality of the performances. Among the common issues raised by the respondents are the quality of the orchestra, voice projection, the sound system, and the venue.

However, it is important to emphasize that apart from these deficiencies in the current

performance, the aims of such productions are mainly to promote interest, educate and encourage future attendance, particularly of those who have less involvement with the art music. In terms of performance, the KLPac symphoniette has certainly provided a platform for young musicians to perform publicly and this has indirectly generated support through a parent-teacher-student relationship. The choice of performing Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* by the National Symphony Orchestra, which involved a choir and four vocalists, had also

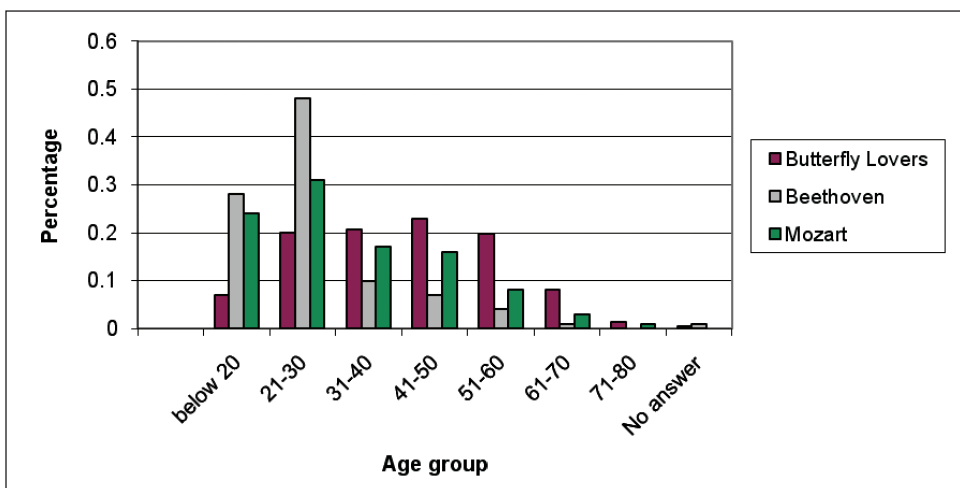


Fig. 2: Comparison of different age groups at three different concerts

guaranteed a similar group of spectators. As noticed, members of the choir were mostly teenagers. Identified by their white tops, they were seen chatting with parents, teachers, and of course their peers after the concerts.

Other categories such as marital status and ethnic group also reflect the age cohorts and audience's occupations. With the largest group of the respondents being students, it is not surprising that the number who are 'not married' (65%) is correspondingly high; in fact, it is found to be double the number of the married respondents (32%). In a multicultural country like Malaysia, it is quite interesting to identify how different ethnic groups respond to local art music concerts. In this study, the Chinese were found as significantly more prominent among the overall respondents. The fact that the musical performance was based on a Chinese legend has no doubt explained the high percentage of the Chinese attendees. Even if the results for the musical were excluded, the Chinese would still represent the largest ethnic category of the respondents (56%) for both the classical concerts. Overall, the recorded ethnic

groups from the survey were Chinese (68%), Malay (17.1%), Indian (5%) and others (9.6%), as shown in Fig. 3. One possible reason for this is the involvement of more Chinese in the Western classical genre, which is also evident in the tertiary institutions or various classical music activities such as competitions, orchestra, and so forth, although more future research is needed to clarify on this issue.

As mentioned in the earlier section, students formed the largest occupational group among the various attendees. Apart from students (33%), the predominant theme of the occupation data is human service, though in comparison they are not significant. The most common occupation was teaching (6.2%), followed by homemakers (6%), managers (5.6%), and various arts-related jobs (4.5%). It could be argued that relying solely on the attendance of students, music educators and parents is not an effective means of promoting art music, and that one way to generate support for concert performances and increase the audience from the general public is to target a wider range of occupations.

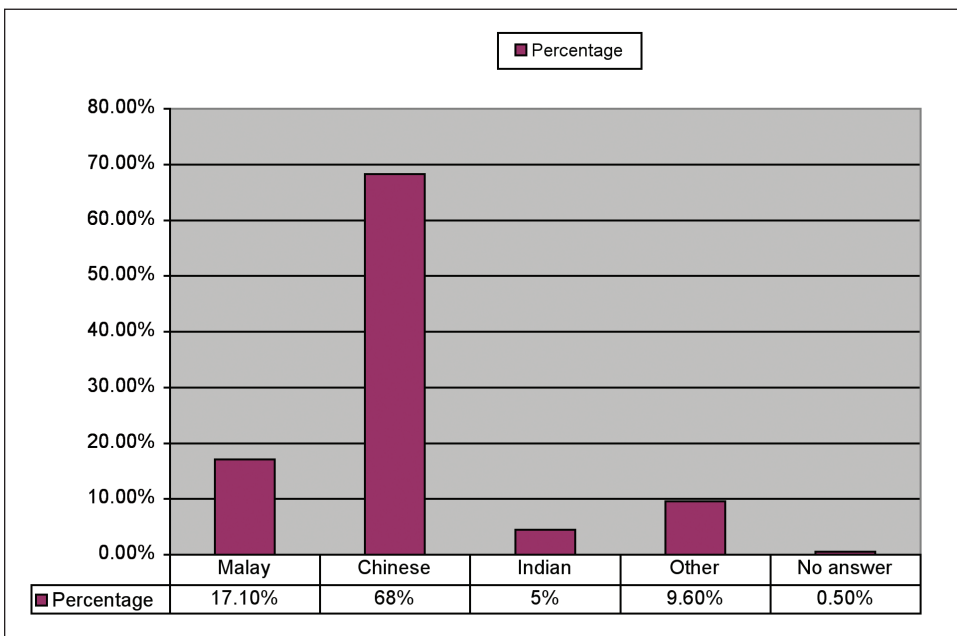


Fig. 3: Ethnical groups of the respondents



In terms of the practical aspects, although the aim of an art concert performance is not commercial gain, financial support is still important, especially for large-scale productions held in public venues. Due to the smaller market for art music, one particular problem faced by organizers and performers is whether to compromise audiences' preferred programmes or genres at the risk of restricting creativity. The programme of an art music concert should not be limited to target a selected audience only, but it should ideally be accessible to anyone regardless of their background, ethnic group or age. This explains the efforts made in making art performances more 'user-friendly', such as in the Mozart's *Magic Flute*. Ironically, the same practice may gradually lower the standard of the genre in the eyes of locals, and thus result in expressions of dissatisfaction ('I thought I was coming to an opera'), and the possibility that these spectators would not attend future performances by the same production company.

After giving a general profile of these respondents, another common question was the reason of the respondents to attend these concerts. Generally, the fundamental reasons for their attendance include the interest on a particular programme, the type of music or

because of the particular performers. For this question, the respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer among the eight choices given, which include interest, performer, type of concert, review, venue, accompanying friends and family, 'do not know', and 'others'. The result was very much predicted. 'Interest' (37.8%) recorded the most important factor that encouraged the respondents to attend these concerts. This is followed by the other reasons such as the 'performer' and the 'type of music', which recorded the second and third highest ratings, i.e. at a rather close records of 23.3% and 22.3%, respectively (Fig. 4). The predicted results could be due to the reason of the samples who were also the attendees of the chosen concert. The preliminary study of this issue may be followed by a future study in search for the audience's reasons for attending a specific genre of art music.

### RESPONDENTS' MUSICAL BACKGROUND

The question of whether art music can only be appreciated by listeners who have formal musical training is complex and it can lead to a long discussion or study. However, one of the aims in this study was to discover how the two

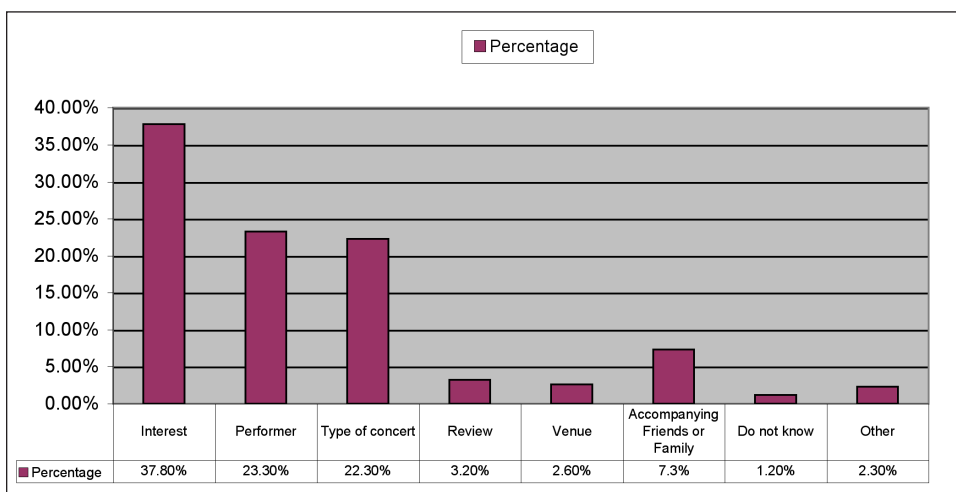


Fig. 4: Respondents' reasons to attend a concert

different groups (i.e. those with and without formal music training) made up the attendees of the chosen performances. For this purpose, the respondents were asked to indicate if they had any formal musical background or training; an open question as to the kind of qualification or training they have achieved, or the current training they are undergoing, followed for those answering in the positive. For this study, attendees in the category of those who have had formal musical training include various music professions, those who have experienced music lessons (for example, leading to graded examination from various professional bodies), or those who are currently pursuing music courses, diploma, degree or higher degrees.

On the contrary to what was expected, the proportion of the respondents without music training was found to be slightly higher, although the figure is not much larger (about 8% more), giving a ratio of approximately 1:1 (Fig. 5). Looking at each concert individually (Fig. 6), the opera achieved quite balanced numbers of respondents (i.e. both with and without musical background), while the *Symphony* and the *Musical* contributed to the discrepancy between the groups. It is important to note that the unusually high proportion (70%) of the non-musically trained attendees at the *Musical* was not surprising. As discussed earlier, the *Musical* revolved around a famous Chinese legend and it had therefore attracted many members of

the public, particularly the older generation to whom it is most familiar. The audience might have not anticipated how this folk legend would be portrayed, but the title of the *Musical* performance itself would have been sufficient enough to attract their attention, particularly amongst those from the Chinese community.

On the other end of the spectrum, almost twice as many respondents were musically trained as those without any musical background (64% and 35%, respectively) at the *Symphony*. The reason is apparent; the Western Classical music has often been categorized as boring, dull, and unexciting for the non-classical listeners, and therefore the greater number of the respondents who are musically trained is not surprising (Johnson, 2002; Blacking, 1995; Bayles, 1999; *The Guardian*, 22 August 2005).

Older respondents also tended to less likely have a musical background, while the musically trained spectators were largely under the age of 30 years old (69%). The respondents below the age of 40 years old were more likely to be musically trained but this trend was reversed among older attendees (Fig. 7). As stated in the earlier section, the fact that young people are more exposed to this genre of music may explain the existence of a larger group of young attendees in Malaysia.

Meanwhile, the attendees who claimed they had no musical background could probably have a different appreciation of the art music

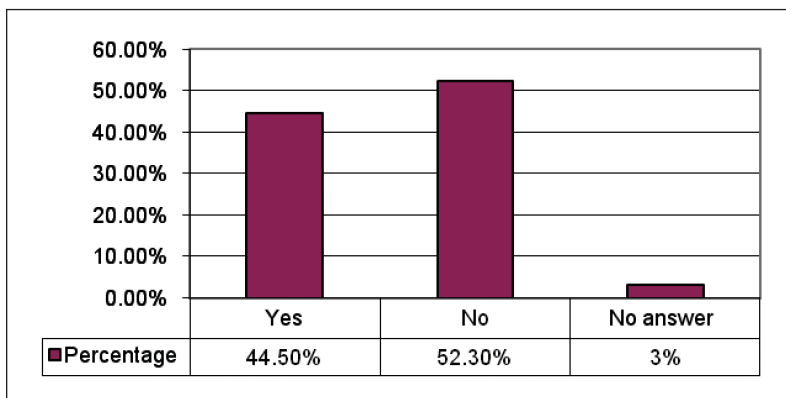


Fig. 5: The percentages of the audience with and without formal musical training



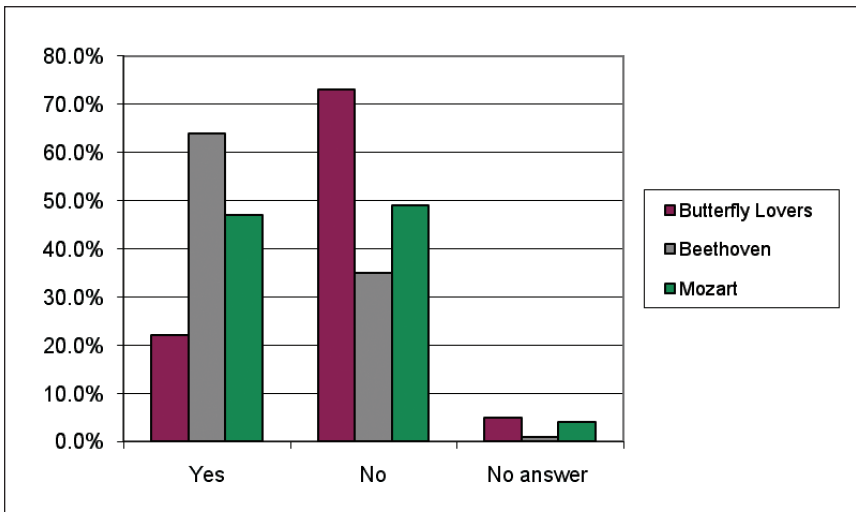


Fig. 6: The percentages of the audience with and without formal training at three different selected concerts

compared to those who are musically trained. For this group, entertainment may not be the sole reason for attending an art music concert. Other factors, such as social interaction, could gradually lead to increased knowledge about the genre and thus encourage future attendance

at such events. From a different point of view, a rather similar reception from both groups of respondents is encouraging, and this could imply that the potential for audience without formal music training to attend art music concerts does exist.

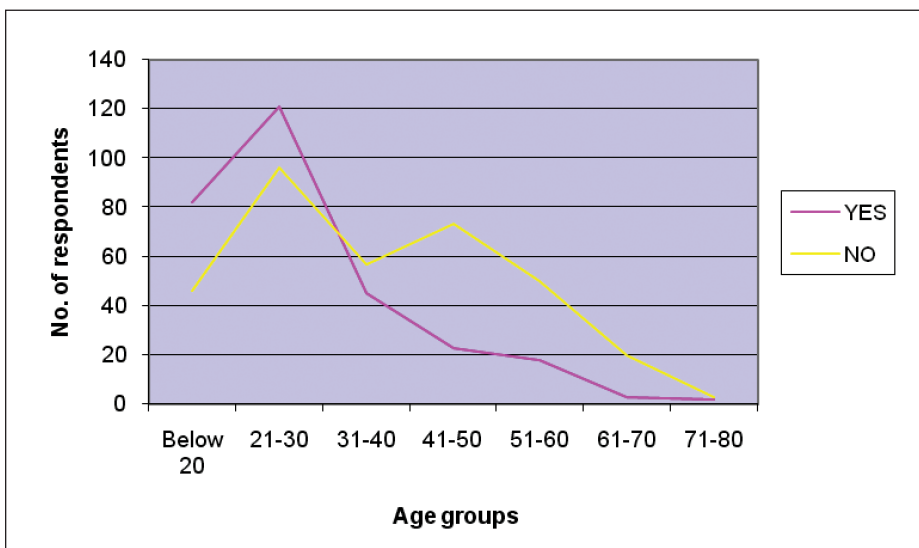


Fig. 7: Correlation between the age and music background among the members of audience

**AUDIENCE’S PREFERENCES**

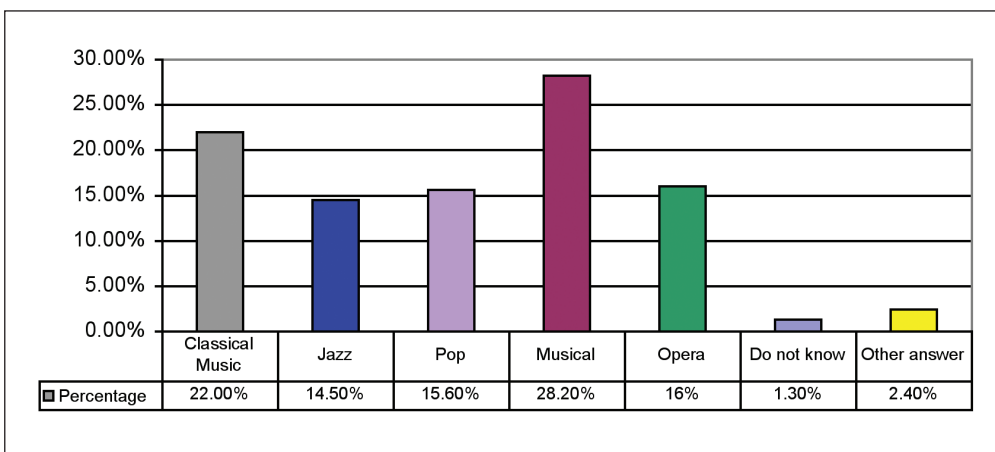
Much research has been carried out on the preferences of an audience with regards to various types of art music, i.e. the information that organizers will definitely find useful. However, the preferences of each individual may depend on his/her education or family background, as well as the influences of the society, the media, and other life experiences. Therefore, the exact reasons for the preferences of people towards certain kinds of music, especially art music genres, are rather complex. As Fineberg (2002, p. 92) wrote:

It is very easy to explain semantically why the sunset produces colours (perhaps not for me, but certainly for any physicist who understands the light emitted by the sun and its interaction with the atmosphere). However, it is completely impossible to explain why it is beautiful or why watching it is pleasurable.

A study entitled, ‘How Americans relate to Classical Music and their Local Orchestra’ revealed that ‘consumers have a unique relationship with classical music as an art form, which is distinct from other art forms. Some people have diverse cultural interests while others choose to focus exclusively on one

particular form of art’ (Knight, 2002, p. 30). A survey on the public participation in the arts from the National Endowment for the Arts (Bradshaw and Nichols, 2004) carried out in 2002 revealed that 23% of adults preferred visiting an art museum, while attending a musical performance was the next most common response. In this study, the respondents were given the freedom to choose from a selection of seven music genres which are performed in the country. Given the fact that the data were collected at the art music concerts and that the respondents were likely to be attending the performances of their preferred genre, it is perhaps unsurprising that Musical, Classical, and Opera received the highest number of votes (*Fig. 8*).

Famous musical productions from abroad which were performed in Malaysia have indirectly introduced the genre(s) to the local audience and perhaps encouraged more local productions. The first popular and major local musical, *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, was produced in 2006, and this was later followed by *M!Opera* (2006), *Butterfly Lovers* (2006), *Broken Bridges* (2006), *Tunku* (2007) (celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Malaysian independence), *P.Ramlee* (2007), *Jewel of Tibet* (2008), *Ismail* (2008), *Impak Maksima* (2008), *Prince Siddharta* (2009), and many others. The demand for some of the well-received large-scale productions



*Fig. 8: Respondents’ music preferences*

is evident with these performances being re-staged (the so-called second or third seasons), and the invitation to perform abroad (*The Star*, 3 April 2007; December 2008; 10 February 2009; 22 May 2009). The success of the recent musical performances is undoubtedly due to the fact that the content of these productions is well-known to all and this has attracted the attention of the public, even those with little or no knowledge of the this musical genre. The contents include popular literature, well-known people or historical events, and this familiarity has also encouraged artistic creativity in many associated aspects of the production, not just in terms of the music. By encouraging this trend within the genre, it is hoped that more members of the public who are without any musical background will be involved in the art music events through a variety of programmes that they can easily understand. This might be an effective way of introducing or leading them to more formal, serious art music. Le Cocq (2002, p. 11) reflects Adorno's view on the perceptions towards contemporary new music when he states that 'the public by and at large prefers and will pay for only the familiar and unchallenging.'

Another aspect that should be taken into account is what makes the musical performance

the most popular genre. In general, the music itself is not the only element of this genre. A musical performance is not complete without many other theatrical aspects such as acting, props, costumes, choreography, and so forth, while the impact of these visual elements on the spectators is an important consideration. Unlike a Western classical concert which depends solely on the serious music of the performance, all other artistic aspects may contribute to the success of a production. More importantly though, unless it is a contemporary, modern, avant-garde musical, a direct and explicit form of a musical seems to be more acceptable to audience of all ages.

A few other figures worth highlighting are the respondents' age groups and their music preferences (Fig. 9). The musical performance is found to be the most popular across all ages (excluding the age range of 61-80 years due to the small sample size of this particular group in this study). For the younger generation aged below 21 years, popular music came a close second after Musicals. However, the preference for popular music dropped to fourth and fifth places in other age groups. Another notable genre is Opera, which was less favoured by the respondents under 30 years, but was voted the second or third most popular among the older

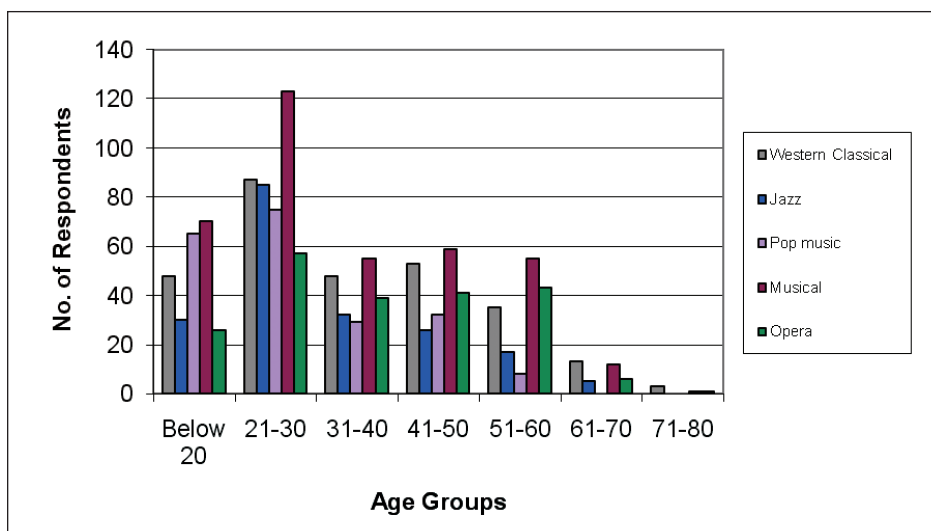


Fig. 9: Age groups and their music preferences

age groups. In this study, the Opera refers to the Western Classical Opera which is rarely performed in Malaysia (although certain arias and songs are sometimes included in recitals or concert programmes). The different languages used in many famous operas, especially Italian and German, are probably the main barriers to the genre being easily accepted by the general public, particularly by those who do not have any direct involvement with it.

Meanwhile, the Western classical music occupied the second place across the three age groups, namely 21-30, 31-40, and 41-50 year old. However, the margin of the preference for the musical over other genres is greater in the age group of 21-30 years than in other age groups. Apart from Musical, the same age group showed an even preference for Western Classical, Jazz, and Pop music. Jazz shows a stable performance, and it became the fifth choice for most age groups, except for the attendees aged 21-30 and 41-50 year old.

### CONCLUSION

The development of art music in Malaysia is no doubt accelerating, as can be observed from the current frequency of art music concerts held, the construction of music halls, and particularly the educational aspects. It is worth highlighting that due to the multicultural ethnic profiles of the Malaysian audience, the complex issue of their preferences towards a particular music genre cannot be avoided.

Based on the survey conducted following eight performances of three different art music concerts between September 2006 and March 2007, two significant audience profiles were identified, namely those below 30 years old, while those who identified themselves as students clearly represented the majority of the respondents in this study. Music education is an important predictor for attendance at the two Western classical concerts, the Symphony and Opera, but not for the Musical. This correlates with the majority of the respondents below the age of 30 years old with a music background, though the level of music qualifications among

these respondents was not determined at this point. On the contrary, more respondents without any musical background turned out at the musical *Butterfly Lovers* in which a more balanced profile of age groups was noted, probably due to the nature of the genre and its well-known story among the Chinese community.

In addition, the development of music education at local schools and tertiary institutions in the recent years has also resulted in higher number of younger people attending these music concerts. The existence of music education also provides a greater opportunity for the younger generation, particularly students at tertiary institutions, to be involved in and exposed to various music activities. In particular, music students at various levels form the main target of many art music concerts, whether they are indirectly involved in the performance or participating as members of the audience. The availability of students indirectly secures a certain number of attendees for many local art music concerts. Apart from interest, another possible reason for students attending these concert performances is their involvement in the subject (for example, as a student with a project or an assignment for the subject) and the intention to acquire experience of listening to live art music concert.

However, depending on this small audience alone is obviously not effective for the future development of concert productions and the quality of local performances. The need for local art music performances and performers to gain public recognition, which seems to lack in the country, is therefore important. Through conversations with musicians and music directors in this study, there are members of the audience who were reluctant to spend more on local productions and who have complained that tickets were expensive (even though they were priced at lower rates as compared to production abroad). A similar finding was also indicated for the Peking Opera performances in China, in which 'even free shows have failed to attract a full house' (*Asia Times*, 19 July 2008). This could be a major problem faced by most organizers of art music concerts, with the

exception of those who are fully sponsored. The setting and effort of the art performances may seem simple for the general public, and most are not aware of the preparation required before a performance. Fineberg (2002, p. 67) explains this by stating:

Classical music is not very expensive to write (even the most famous composer's commission fees are relatively modest) as long as we don't expect composers to live off the commissions and royalties they receive for their music. It is outrageously expensive to rehearse and perform, however. The amount of infrastructure used to create scores and parts, rehearse pieces, rent concert halls and percussion instruments (because percussionists play such a variety of instruments, they don't usually own them all, and so they are rented for concerts), tune pianos, make recordings, and so on, is enormous. I have spent a lot of time organizing concerts, and while the best of them are amazing experiences, a certain suspension of disbelief is required to justify such an expense for something that exists so briefly. This is a real disadvantage the performing arts have relative to the plastic arts.

Therefore, there is a need to expand the types of audience and the awareness of the public towards the various types of art music in order to support local performers and production. One of the reasons why productions such as Mozart's *Magic Flute* was staged in a concert version was probably to attract and educate a wider public to this kind of music in the hope of gaining future attendance from this audience. However, productions in this manner may lose another category of audience, i.e. those who wish to attend a more serious, conventional opera.

In this study, the Musical which involves many aspects beyond the music is the preferred genre and this probably explains the recent frequency of the local musical productions. Looking at the various musicals performed, the many aspects of these productions have

brought significant changes to the genre. Future research regarding the hybridisation of the music, settings, designs, and most of all, the identity of the current local musicals is very much needed. The flexibility of this genre to incorporate various art subjects could be one of the important factors why it is easily accepted by the public. Similarly, this also applies to the productions where the genre allows room to showcase creativity in different aspects of performing arts.

In conclusion, although the art music performances in Malaysia are presently being focussed in research, the nature of their reception should not be neglected. In particular, the audience's profiles may not be of concern to performers, but any performance needs the support of an audience, not least by their attendance per se. If the pressure of targeting audience in art music becomes worsen, it may gradually affect the quality of the performers, particularly the potential of the future generations. Even though the aim of art music performances is not for commercial purposes, they can hardly sustain themselves without a certain amount of return. In more specific, it is not practical to aim for a large audience such as those at the commercial concerts since the function of both types of music is completely different, but it would be encouraging if these performances were embraced more by the public, at least to alleviate concerns about the number attendees. Moreover, the development of music education plays a vital role, while the continuous support from different aspects is also important to guarantee the future of art music in Malaysia.

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