

**HANDS PERCUSSION: MOVING TOWARDS A
MALAYSIAN IDENTITY**

JOTSNA NITHYANANDAN

**CULTURAL CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

2015

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**DESSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
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**CULTURAL CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the idea behind the compositions of Malaysian Chinese Shigu drumming performing group Hands Percussion (HANDS) that have incorporated Gamelan, and the Indian Tabla drumming patterns as part of their repertoire. HANDS began with the 24 Seasons Drums, when it was founded in 1997, as a Malaysian Chinese percussion ensemble. This dissertation elucidates how HANDS later forms a multi-ethnic identity in its production that moved away from a single ethnic Chinese performing art group. This study touches on issues of culture and intercultural exchanges on the premise that HANDS is based in Malaysia, a country that is pluralistic and multicultural and how this in turn influences the creative process of HANDS composer and founder, Bernard Goh and guest composer, Susan Sarah John. It will also look at the process involving the composition of pieces such as these, and an enquiry into the poesis stage of the composers. Past literatures on Malaysian music focused extensively on indigenous genres that are mostly singular in their ethnic basis. This research identifies new scholarship into a multi-ethnic context and identity as a Malaysian music-making process. Methodology involves fieldwork, performance analysis, video and recording analysis, interview and transcription. The outcome of this research shows the music-making process of HANDS and its portrayal of a Malaysian identity.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dibuat untuk mengenalpasti idea di sebalik gubahan muzik sebuah kumpulan muzik di Malaysia yang dikenali sebagai "*Hands Percussion*" (HANDS). Gubahan muzik mereka menggunakan alat muzik Gamelan serta mengandungi corak rentak tabla dari India. Pada sekitar tahun 1997, kumpulan HANDS menggunakan 24 Seasons Drums dan dikenali sebagai sebuah ensemble perkusi Cina Malaysia. Melalui analisis, kajian ini juga akan menunjukkan bagaimana HANDS merombak semula identiti mereka dengan menggunakan penyertaan pelbagai kaum. Kajian ini menyentuh ciri-ciri budaya dan penggunaan pertukaran budaya. Antara premis yang menjadi pokok kajian ialah keunikan negara Malaysia yang berbilang budaya. Kajian ini juga mengetengahkan cara-cara kepelbagaian budaya ini telah mempengaruhi proses Kreatif Pengasas HANDS, Bernard Goh dan komposer tetamunya, Susan Sarah John. Kajian ini juga akan meneliti proses dan cara pemikiran penggubah-penggubah ini. Literatur mengenai Muzik Malaysia sebelum ini telah mengkaji muzik dari setiap golongan etnik secara berasingan. Kajian ini mengenalpasti cara-cara baru identiti Muzik Malaysia digubah menggunakan konteks pengaruh masyarakat majmuk. Metodologi yang digunakan ialah kerja lapangan, analisa skor, analisa video dan audio, temubual serta transkripsi. Hasil Kajian ini menunjukkan proses penggubahan HANDS (dalam konteks baru) dan penggambaran sebuah identity baru yang boleh dikenali sebagai identiti Malaysia.

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The term ‘guru’ that is of Sanskrit origin means, ‘from dark (gu) to light (ru) so therefore in that sentiment, I would like to pay obeisance to my teachers who have guided me and literally lit up my path that was filled with questions and doubts. First and foremost, my supervisor, Dr. Loo Fung Ying whose patience, understanding, support and encouragement has been the backbone to the completion of this study. Her feedback and prompt responses to my frequent cries for help, is greatly appreciated and for all this I am truly grateful.

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LIST OF GLOSSARY

ASWARA	An institution of higher learning established in 1994 by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism. It offers full time or part time training programs leading to a Certificate, Diploma or Degree (Bachelor of Arts) in Performing Arts.
Bharata Natyam	Southern Indian ancient dance form.
Celana Gelombang	Pant costume used in Randai.
Digeridoo	Wind instrument developed by Indigenous Australians.
Dikir Barat	Musical form, native to the Malay Peninsula, that involves singing in groups.
Dizi	Chinese transverse flute.
Gamelan	A traditional ensemble music of Java and Bali in Indonesia, made up predominantly of percussive instruments.
Guru	Sanskrit origin, meaning teacher.
Gurukul	Type of school where the student lives with the teacher as part of his training.
Jidor	Drum with Javanese origins.
Joget	Traditional Malay dance, influenced by the Portugese.
Kampung	Hometown or village.

Randai	Folk theatre tradition of the Minangkabau ethnic group.
Rebab	Bowed string instrument, originating from Afghanistan.
Rebana	Malay tambourine used for Islamic devotional music.
Shigu	A large barrel-like drum the shigu is part of a percussion ensemble that accompanies the Chinese lion dance during New Year celebrations and other folk festivals.
Sifu	Respectful form of address or master, Chinese origin.
Taal	Rhythmic cycle, Indian origin.
Tabla	A pair of small drums fundamental (since the 18th century) to Hindustani music of northern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The higher-pitched of the two drums, which is played with the right hand, is also referred to individually as the tabla or as the daya (dahina or dayan, meaning “right”).
Zapin	Malay traditional dance popular in Johor and Pahang.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study examines HANDS or Hands Percussion, a Malaysian Chinese percussion ensemble that was established in 1997. This percussion ensemble began with *shigu*, the Chinese barrel drum used famously in the Chinese Lion Dance as its main instrument. This research examines the change in Hands Percussion's repertoire after the year 2007 that re-contextualized this all-Chinese percussion ensemble, into a multi-ethnic Malaysian ensemble. In this research, the focus will be on the identity of Hands Percussion, the intention of its producers and composers in the framing the group's identity, along with the various Malaysian cultural policies that will provide supporting material as part of the discussion.

An analysis of the compositions of HANDS was conducted in order to gauge the Malaysian element, in particular, a multicultural merge of Malay, Chinese and Indian instruments or musical elements used in the selected repertoire. It especially aims to establish the representation of Gamelan as a 'cultural signifier' of Malaysia, rather than just an element of 'fusion' in the music of HANDS. By extension, this research refers to 'musical change' and how political and social influence shaped HANDS from its musical past to present. This chapter introduces its research background, research objectives and questions, problem statement, conceptual framework, significance of the study and a layout of its chapters. For the remainder of this dissertation, Hands Percussion will be referred to as HANDS.

1.2 Background of Study

Malaysia is a pluralistic society and embraces the diversity of views and cultures of various ethnic groups (Johan, 2013). Amongst the three main ethnicities, over half of the population (50.1%) is of Malay descent who are also known as *Bumiputera* (people of the earth). Those of Chinese descent form almost a quarter of the total population, which comes to around 23% and Malaysians of Indian decent form approximately 7% of the population. This leaves the indigenous people who in combination, form about 11% of the total population in Malaysia (“Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal,” 2015). The status of the *Bumiputera* is enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution, Article 153, acknowledging the incontestable special rights of the *Bumiputera*.

According to Nettl (1983), the relationship of past to present, is one of the principal issues in all human cultures. The same goes for music from its past to present including changes and its relationship with cultural and social change. Music is one of the most primal and fundamental aspects of human culture with many researchers arguing that music (at least in a primitive form) pre-dates the emergence of language itself (Vikas, 2013). In a Malaysian context, music is significantly influenced by many foreign elements from different cultures such as the Hindu and Arab and most definitely the Western Culture (Mohd, 2004).

According to Rahmah (1987), the word *culture* may be narrowly defined as the aesthetic or intellectual achievement of a group of people, in a designated area, within a specified time. Malaysia’s multiethnic community maintains a diversity of artistic tradition that interacts and yet remains tangential to one another therefore to define an integrated Malaysian culture is not easy.

As Stelz and Seligman (2009) perceived, social identity considers one's self-definition in terms of one's in-group. People derive some parts of their self-definition through the establishment and maintenance of collective identities (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). People's preferences are developed through interpretive interaction with members of their own community. Thus, social identity becomes a key factor in understanding what defines how our taste in music is formed (Aróstegui & Louro, 2009). The process of borrowing each other's cultures is called acculturation. Acculturation refers to the manner in which individuals negotiate two or more cultures, where one culture is dominant while the other culture is perceived to have less cultural value (Berry, 1984). Bernard Goh, the founder of HANDS, a Malaysian born, second generation of Chinese descent, sees himself as a by-product of this very 'negotiating of cultures' due to his vast exposure to many ethnic cultures apart from his own from a very young age. In fact it is this that led him to explore various different drumming patterns that although was unrelated to the 24 Season Drumming group, sparked the inspiration to start a new group, Hands Percussion.

While HANDS's core musical instrument is the *shigu* (lion drum), the ensemble along with Bernard Goh, have placed a lot of interest in the musical instruments, music and sounds of the cultures in Malaysia, and those encountered during their travels abroad. Since then, HANDS has performed for audiences in Malaysia and overseas with their innovative and avant-garde performances. They are well known in the Kuala Lumpur performing arts scene and have performed at numerous world-class international festivals (Chan, 2006). The ensemble's performances has been highly regarded and admired as they endeavour to preserve their cultural heritage while introducing new dimensions to theatrical drumming by venturing into contemporary percussion music and exploring different cultures. Today, HANDS has eight (8) full time performers, eighteen (18) part-time performers and twelve (12) trainee performers.

These performers were then divided into the two performing groups thus forming the first group with original core members called HANDS 1, and the second group as HANDS 2, which was formed in 2007. Many HANDS members, including Bernard Goh, developed drumming skills during their school days from their participation in the 24 Festive Drum Ensemble, which is sometimes referred to as 24 Season Drum (*Ibid.*). These traditional Chinese drums have been part of Chinese culture since ancient times but it played only a supportive role in all cultural performances. Two cultural activists, Tan Chai Puan, a businessman, poet and cartoonist, and the late Tan Hooi Song, a renowned musician, shared the same vision and, with missionary zeal, thus worked together to create the 24-Season Drums in 1988 (Chee, 2012).

These two founders, based their creation on the 24 festivals in the lunar calendar of the Chinese agricultural calendar. Annual competitions to join the 24 Seasons Drum ensemble are held with the committee setting strict rules as to how the *shigu* drum should be played. Since the concept itself was based on agricultural calendar depicting the lunar movements, the composition and choreography was tightly bounded to the concepts, festivals, activities and phenomenon that occurred during those changes. The founding committee had created rules and regulations on how the *shigu* should and should not be played

Due to these “restrictions” participants were bound to the traditional methods and were unable to step “out of the box” in terms of performance and compositions. It was then, that Bernard Goh decided to form Hands Percussion with the assistance of Eric Ch’ng. This group would then take *shigu* drumming to a different level incorporating dance and theatre in their performances. More importantly, HANDS constructed their performances unique to the Malaysian Chinese identity.

HANDS Gamelan Group was formed in 2007 when a custom-made Gamelan set was acquired. For HANDS, incorporating musical instruments from the various cultures in Malaysia began with a search for a Malaysian Chinese identity (Figure 1.1). Growing up in a pluralist society, the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia has integrated some of the cultural practices of their neighbouring communities, inventing their very own localised culture in time (Chan, 2006).



Figure 1.1: Kaleidoscope III (Picture Courtesy of HANDS).

Apart from all this, HANDS has a team that looks into research and development in percussion in order to develop their percussive art. They take note of the various Malaysian ethnic percussive instruments available and try to know more about them as well as the different cultures where they come from. They want to include other local elements in their performances. Many of HANDS members have enrolled to learn *tabla*, which is a Northern Indian Classical form of drumming. Thong Yoong How and Lee Mok Yee, started learning *tabla* from Prakash Kandasamy (of the Temple of Fine Arts) in 2009. Although they may not necessarily play the *tabla* during performances, they have incorporated the knowledge acquired into the compositions (Goh, personal

communications, 2014). HANDS, also engages their members in training in the art of playing the Gamelan. Susan Sarah John, a graduate from ASWARA has been performing on the Gamelan, after having learnt it formally. She has written many pieces on Gamelan for HANDS and also trains the members the method and technique involved in playing the Gamelan. She was the Artistic Director of the recent performance of 'Tchaikovsky on Gamelan' that was held in KLPAC in 2014 (Figure 1.2).

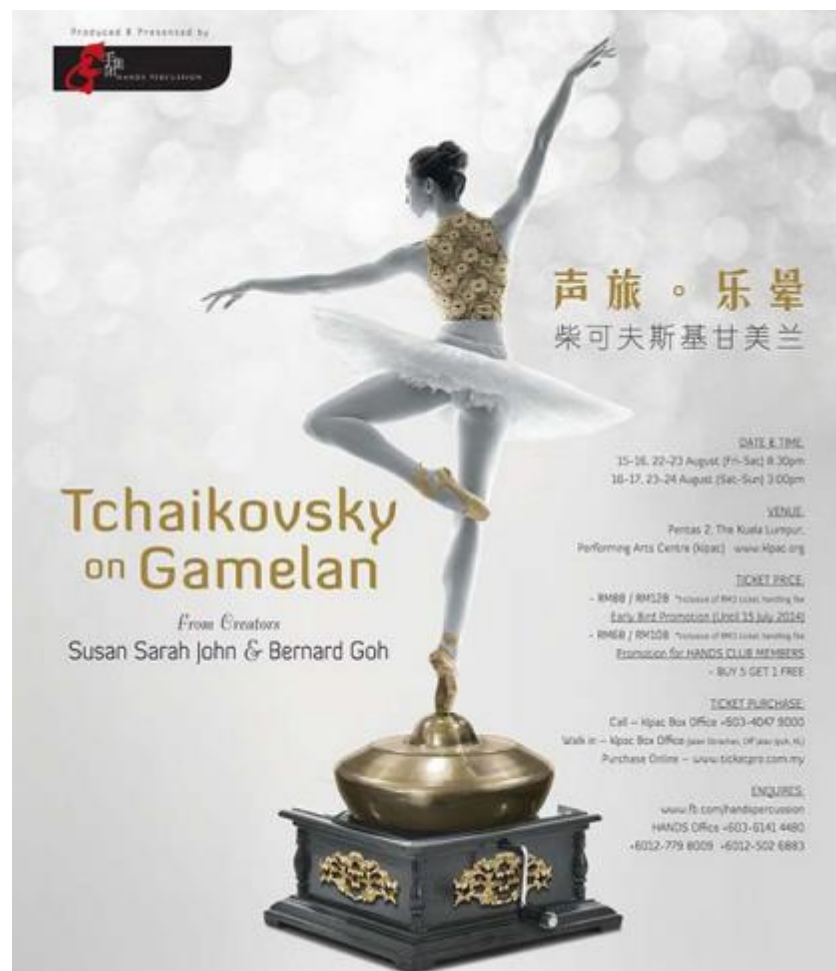


Figure 1.2: Tchaikovsky on Gamelan (Photo Courtesy of HANDS).

Since 2007, HANDS has incorporated a variety of musical instruments from Asia and decontextualized them from their original cultural context. These musical instruments include the Gong chimes and Gongs from the Malay gamelan; Malay drums such as the *gedombak*, *gendang*, *kompang*, *rebana*, *rebana ubi* and *jidur* amongst many

other ethnic instruments from Malaysia. In Malaysia, Gamelan, is also identified with the *Bumiputera* as a cultural signifier of the Malay culture. In Malaysia, as in Indonesia, Gamelan music may well have been the court music of the sultanates and thus has been accorded special status and function. In the Malay culture the Gamelan and Gongs are associated with mystical and spiritual ownership (Walton, 2007).

For HANDS, incorporating musical instruments from the various cultures in Malaysia began with a search for a Malaysian Chinese identity. Growing up in a pluralist society, the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia has assimilated some of the cultural practices of the surrounding communities thus inventing their very own localized brand of culture in time (Chan, 2013). Part of their goals and objectives is to “perform” a multicultural society. Thus the postmodern notion of ethnicity can no longer be experienced as “naturally based on tradition and ancestry” (Ang, 1993, p. 14). Incorporating these musical elements, allows HANDS to experiment and explore their multiple identities as Malaysian, Chinese, modern and cosmopolitan citizens through continuous experimentation with unconventional sounds and movements founded on the different themes and concepts during their annual concerts (Chan, 2006, p. 108).

The Malaysian Chinese drumming group HANDS Percussion, due to the incorporation of gamelan into their predominantly Chinese drumming ensemble, is an example of a Malaysian fusion musical ensemble as opposed to performances by Chinese Opera group Xiao Kee Lin Wayang who are preserving the purity of that genre and thus remaining true to the original counterpart abroad in China.

Thus, this research aims to analyse the compositions of HANDS in order to gauge the Malaysian element, in particular, Gamelan present in the pieces. Of late, many composers tend to demonstrate the sound of the Gamelan whilst experimenting in a more recognizable ‘western’ context. Composers like Debussy and Messiaen have been

influenced by the music of the Gamelan thus earning it a part in their compositions (Han, 1992). Lou Harrison developed compositions for the Gamelan as early as in the 1960s and augmented the ensemble with other instruments such as the piano, violin and the harp (Miller & Lieberman, 2004).

Since ‘world music’ has become a popular topic and export in this globalised era, this makes sense but also has a legitimate role in educating and encouraging cultural exchange (Durkan, 2011). This research also aims to recognize those elements that set the Malaysian music apart and distinguishes them from other music genres. This research plans to establish that HANDS as a Malaysian Chinese drumming performing group have incorporated Gamelan which is a Malay traditional instrument and in doing so have distinguished themselves as “different” and unique from their counterparts in China. It gives rise to the possibility that being Malaysian born is a contributing factor to this phenomenon (Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.3: RhapsDrums 2010 (Photo courtesy of HANDS).

This dissertation establishes a different perspective in compositions of Malaysian bred composers such as HANDS, who use multicultural elements in their compositions to reflect their Malaysian heritage. For the purpose of this paper, the research will center mainly, around the incorporation of Gamelan in selected productions of HANDS. Other instruments such as the *tabla* will also warrant some mention to further strengthen the validity of this research. This paper will also not venture in depth into the theatrical aspects of Hands which is a very integral part of their performance, except in the score analysis and how that is incorporated into their practices, score and rehearsals.

1.3 Problem Statement

In Malaysia, music generally falls under the category of traditional, classical and folk based on the Indian, Chinese or Malay ethnicity and everything else under syncretic or fusion (Matusky & Tan, 2004). Matusky and Tan further emphasize that although the culture of Malaysia is multi ethnic, its music genre distinction especially among the various ethnic groups is very clear as not much assimilation has taken place (*Ibid.*). As a Malaysian composer, the author questions the multicultural innovation in music as part of an outcome from a pluralistic nation. To what extent does the work from HANDS represents a Malaysian identity; and in what context did the re-contextualized HANDS, in forming a new identity and moving away from a single-ethnic based ensemble, incorporating the Malay Gamelan and Indian *tabla*. These notions form the problem statements in the quest of this research.

Malaysia although independent, was a place where the greater traditions of the world have come to confluence (Chopyak, 1986). Chopyak further comments that Malaysian music seems to have little impact on the world and very little has been written about it (*Ibid.*). Malaysian music is still in a state of evolution and will continue to evolve for some time. Malaysian music, one in which various elements of the various local

cultures are merged and blended into a uniquely distinguishable musical style, is something that has become attainable only in recent times (Matusky & Tan, 2004). This is reflected in the relatively recent emergence of various Malaysian contemporary composers, be they from the classical or popular music traditions, who, consciously strive to achieve this blending of cultures in their work (Ang, 1993).

According to Morrison (1993), prior research has identified listener's ethnicity as a significant factor in the construction of music preference decision, and more positive responses have been recorded when the music that was being evaluated, carried same clear 'same group' cultural associations. Tan (2012) has written that the political conditions in Malaysia can help the issues faced by arts practitioners by implementing cultural policies that unite a nation rather than separate them. With the implementation of the National Cultural Policy in 1971 many felt that that its terms stipulated that only the culture practiced by the indigenous people of Malaysia would be recognised as part of the national culture. In practice, this policy welcomed mainly traditional art forms and practices of the Malay community. The exclusion of other traditional cultures (namely those of the Chinese and Indians) was compounded when government ministers started intervening and trying to change non-Malay traditions to suit these government-made policies. An example of this was seen in 1979, when Minister of Home Affairs, Ghazali Shafie, the then Home Affairs Minister, reiterated that the lion dance was foreign and could never be accepted as part of the national culture. Instead, he suggested changing the Lion Dance to a Tiger Dance accompanied by Malay music (Lee, 2009).

For this research, looking at HANDS and their background in *shigu* drumming, it is obvious that their creative experiments have changed the cultural norm that is associated with traditional *shigu* drumming. *Shigu* is essentially a large barrel like drum used in

percussion ensembles that accompanies the Chinese Lion dance during festivals such as Chinese New Year and other Chinese folk festivals (Figure 1.4). In recent times, it has also evolved from its ritualistic realm to competitions held amongst local and international groups.



Figure 1.4: *Shigu* (Photo courtesy of HANDS).

The lion dance itself, was once seen as a threat to enshrined National Malay culture, as well as the 1971 National Cultural Policy. Now, however with multiple political interventions, it has become an important part of “Citrawarna” (Colours of Malaysia), a street parade organized annually by the Cultural Ministry and the lion-dance performance is seen to no longer just represent only the Chinese but instead it is harnessed towards the construction of a larger identity that reflects multicultural Malaysia. It is used here to represent Malaysia’s embrace of diversity and difference.

The acceptance of diversity and difference in ethnicities from the national government has opened up further discussion and debate about what it meant to be Malaysian. Needless to say, this in turn spurred much discussion within communities of Malays and non-Malays. Suffice to say here that a singular “Bangsa Malaysia” has not yet become a reality, but is still in the process of negotiation. The Malaysian national consciousness is still an imagined community (Anderson, 2006).

Chan (2006) goes on to say that in Malaysia, generation X, Y and Z grew up in a pluralistic nation which due to intermarriages became increasingly multicultural. Intermarriage is considered as one of the most definitive measures of the dissolution of social and cultural barriers, and therefore of social and cultural integration because it is the result of close social interaction between people of two different ethnicities (Bean & Stevens, 2003). As Malaysia tries to compete with the rest of the world and achieve the status of an industrialized country through Vision 2020, many cultural forms have been recreated grandiosely to project a Malaysia, which is technically advanced with an identity of its own (Tan, 2003).

Literature by Freedman (2001), states that, Malaysia is the perfect place to implement a “social experiment” in which people of the most diverse cultural origins can be brought together to see what happens, as a result of coming together, a new society is formed. Nagata (2002) focuses particularly on the definitions, both within and between ethnic communities. In her research she addresses the problems of at what levels of integrations can occur especially given the lack of horizontal integrative mechanisms and the fact that the vertical integration exists at the state level and exist in a very superficial manner. However, in Malaysia, there is lack of research done in this area looking into composers who incorporate this multiculturalism in their music.

Therefore, which genre this music then belongs to as well as what these compositions reflect, remain unanswered questions. Is it sufficient to group these compositions under the banner of “Syncretic Music” as proposed by Patricia Matusky and Tan Sooi Beng (2004) in their book, *The Music of Malaysia*.

1.4 Significance of Research

This paper presents a qualitative study into looking at cultural and identity formation based on the field of music. More precisely, this research documents how HANDS has moved away from the past single-ethnic identity to the present in aim of a Malaysian identity. It is the aim that data collected from this study will deliver new knowledge and theories that will contribute to the existing field of ethnomusicology and cultural musicology in Malaysia. The analysis and its outcome show how a particular social group forms its identity, and factors causing its change and identity formation, which includes temporal and spatial factors and via contact and influence from other social groups.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

This research is based on a qualitative theoretical framework with HANDS as the selected subject. Data come largely from documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, and participant observation. Its purpose is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. A qualitative evaluation was utilized for this research leveraging subjective methods such as interviews to collect substantive and relevant data (Yin, 2003). Interviews were conducted with the respective composers and the members of HANDS. Blacking and Byron's theory in musical change will be employed here as its theoretical basis (1995).

1.6 Research Objectives

This research aims to investigate the usage of Gamelan and *tabla* elements in a Chinese drumming percussion group, with the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the background of HANDS.

- 2) To examine HANDS's identity formation since the launch of HANDS Gamelan Group in 2007
- 3) To discuss the music performance of HANDS, that project a Malaysian identity.

1.7 Research Questions

- 1) What is the major instrumentation used in HANDS
- 2) Why was Gamelan incorporated in the compositions of HANDS?
- 3) What is the aim of the composer in combining the non-Chinese instruments?
- 4) How music elements from various ethnic background were employed in these selected works from HANDS Gamelan Group?
- 5) What and 'Who' does the music of HANDS represent?
- 6) Does combining various ethnic instruments work to give HANDS a Malaysian identity?

1.8 Limitation of Study

This study is within the scope of a Mix-mode Master's degree and therefore, is limited to the musical aspects in the productions of Hands Percussion that have incorporated Gamelan and will not provide an in-depth analysis into the dance and movement aspects but as supporting material. This study will concentrate on selected repertoires from 'The Next', 'Promenade' from Kaleidoscope 3 (2014) and 'Where River Duo Meet' from *Lafaz Gema* (2013), while the production concepts employed in Kaleidoscope II and III will also warrant some mention as supporting information.

Although HANDS have explored other Malaysian elements such as *tabla* and *gendang* as part of their repertoire, this research will not do a detailed analysis of those

aspects. However, a very brief overview is warranted as an important contributing factor to the overall phenomena. This paper will also not venture in depth into the theatrical aspects of Hands, which is a very integral part of their performance, except for some mention in the score analysis, and how that is incorporated into their practices, score and rehearsals.

1.9 Organization of Study

This dissertation comprises of five chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of this study, a case study on Hands Percussion and the incorporation of the Malay Gamelan in their repertoire. A study on the background of HANDS percussion as well in the context of national identity as well as multiculturalism was also done.

The second chapter, is primarily concerned with defining research parameters of the phenomena of music, ethnicity, cultural identity and how these relate and impact on each other, via a literature review. The literature takes the reader through the existing cultural environment and the trend that it is heading towards.

Chapter Three discusses the method in which this study was carried out i.e via qualitative research, which mainly encompass, interviews with the composers, as well as performers of Hands Percussion. Other forms of data collection through direct observation and secondary data collection was also done. The research was carried out in three phases

In Chapter Four the results of the data analysis are presented. The data was collected and then processed in response to the problems posed in chapter 1 of this dissertation.

The Final Chapter presents a conclusion in response to the research questions and states whether the objectives were met. Chapter 5 also states recommendations for future research into this area of study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter review the literature associated with the main areas of interests in this study. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006),

a literature review is helpful in two ways. It not only helps researchers glean the ideas of others interested in a particular research question, but it also lets them read about the results of other (similar or related) studies (p. 67).

In this chapter, literatures relating to Malaysia as a multicultural society as well as the political climate will be studied. Other references include intercultural dialogue and combined practices. A literature review in this research is particularly important as the subject matter pertaining to the Malaysian cultural identity is yet a new venture and not much has been written on it in its current practice.

2.2 National Identity

‘Identity’ group people of similar attributes together, whereas ‘cultural identity’ links people who have common cultural characteristics (Hng, 2004). Culturally “pure” societies are extremely rare these days due to the movement of people across boundaries and territories. Blacking (1995) theorized that every society believes in certain elements such as ritual, dancing and music to be passed on to the subsequent generations that bear the collective emotions and values of society members. This notion has primarily formed the basis of this research.

In keeping with the evolving attitudes at the time of his writing, Blacking (1995) suggests that:

No musical style has 'its own terms': its terms are the terms of its society and culture, and of the bodies of the human beings who listen to it, and create and perform it (p. 25).

It follows that changes in culture bring about changes in music; just as the music from other cultures or innovation in composition may become accepted as "musical", shifting from perception as non-musical sound or noise.

In support of this, invention of tradition as mentioned by Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983), Hugh-Trevor Roper, draws on the example of the Scottish kilt that was created as the result of the changing needs of society. The Scottish costume is, Trevor-Roper shows, simply the latest example of an ancient national habit: the forging of tradition. In Benedict Anderson's (2006) book, *Imagined Communities*, the contention that a nation is 'imagined' does not mean that a nation is false, unreal or to be distinguished from 'true' (unimagined) communities. Rather Anderson is proposing that a nation is constructed from popular processes through which residents share nationality in common:

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson, 2006, p. 6)

This understanding, according to Anderson, both shapes and is shaped by political and cultural institutions. This occurs as people 'imagine' they share general beliefs, attitudes and recognize a collective national populace as having similar opinions and sentiments to their own. Anna Halprin calls her performances 'rituals' in order to overcome a sense of being socially fragmented as the need to build communities is fostered by rituals (Schechner, 2002). The process of the ritual itself encourages innovation and therefore opens up new possibilities for it to evolve by means of changes introduced by individuals at a local level (*Ibid.*).

French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, defined and utilized a concept called Habitus. His work can be used as an analytical tool to understand human behavior by understanding how “various discourses” impact upon the individual (Connolly, 1997). In a study on African ethnicity amongst young people in Africa, Bourdieu’s theory was used to determine the colonial and post-colonial experience, which has influenced how Africans have come to view themselves (*Ibid.*). Therefore, Habitus refers to the space in which will help us define our social world. It incorporates the teachings from the time we are born, our everyday experiences, which in turn “help us guide our future actions and behaviors and dispose us to thinking in a certain way” (*Ibid.*, p. 71). This concept is particularly interesting and relevant in the Malaysian context as it can be used as a basis to understand Malaysia’s generation X, Y and Z. Generation Z has been nicknamed the “digital natives” who depend on technology to survive (Chan, 2006). According to Mohd Anis (2008), young Malaysian contemporary musicians and choreographers of Malaysia are interested in constructing their work based on a multicultural landscape of Malaysia. Generation X are those born between 1965 and 1980 and Generation Y, are those born between, 1981 to 2001. It is these two groups that are currently in the workforce or rather, in the performing arts scene in Malaysia. This young group of musicians, who were born after the 1970s, did not experience the chasm of the 1960 racial riots that spurred the formation of the National Cultural Policy (NCP). This generation of Malaysians is “more interested in the present state of intercultural experiences rather than indulging in re-creating the past to idealise separate cultural identities, which is often confronted with chasms of socio- religious divide” (Chan, 2013, p. 97).

It is important to consider, how nations leaders perceived ethnicity as a key element in shaping Malaysian identity. This has always been an important issue in the historical development of the country. ‘Vision 2020,’ shaped by former Prime Minister, Tun Dr.

Mahathir Mohammad, and '1 Malaysia' by current Prime Minister, Dato Seri Najib Razak, was not only a mission for Malaysia to advance economically, but also for the nation to achieve an ideal social and political environment.

Apart from that, it emphasises on the betterment of governmental system, life quality, social and spiritual values, national pride as well as confidence. However, as much as Tun Dr. Mahathir envisioned a united *Bangsa Malaysia* (Citizens of Malaysia) regardless of race he also contradicted these goals with opposing policies such as the NEP (National Economic Policy) which was set to favour one particular race as well as the National Cultural Policy that sought to do the same as far as culture was concerned. Hou (2002) in his writings regarding the cultural identity of the Chinese in Malaysia states that the Malaysian Chinese identity and culture are a product of the changes in the Malaysian ethnic politics.

Hall (1992) speaks about identities as bridging the gap between the 'inside' and 'outside', the personal and public worlds thereby having several, sometimes contradictory identities. The basis of his argument is that a person's national identity is not something he or she is born with but rather is formed and transformed within and in relation to representation.

Scholars such as Wiora (1949), Saygun (1951), Moore (2002) discussed the notion of 'folk authenticity' where identity and aesthetic are concern, thus, music and its identity in terms the how and what is 'authentic' and what is not always remain a lengthy question to be answered. Howard (2000) perhaps may be the closest in defining identity via a postmodernist account that is defined as "fluid, multidimensional, personalized social constructions that reflect sociohistorical contexts" (p. 367).

2.3 Cultural Identity in Malaysia

Culture and identity are two inter-related issues of great importance today especially in a country such as ours. Identity, is a distinctive quality that differentiates one individual or group from the other (Embong, 2011). Therefore, group identity is different from national identity because of the difference between states (negara) and nations (bangsa), the former being a political, geographical entity and the latter an ideology and values of the people (Yong, 2004).

Sigmund Freud (1910) theorized, that individual identity is formed through the process of how an individual assimilates and combines objects and people during his childhood. This theory emphasizes the inner force of a person's psychic structure or mental abilities as possessing a continuous identity.

The modern nation of Malaysia is a rapidly developing complex, multiracial society (Chopyak, 1986). Malaysia although independent was a place where the greater traditions of the world have come to confluence (*Ibid.*). He goes on to say that Malaysian music seems to have little impact on the world and very little has been written about it (*Ibid.*). According to Morrison (1993), prior research has identified listener's ethnicity as a significant factor in the construction of music preference decision and more positive responses have been recorded when the music being evaluated carried same clear same group cultural associations. However research into cultural identity by Sigmund Freud (1910), states that it's a psychodynamic tradition based on an individual's ability to assimilate objects and people from childhood.

When examining the historical events of Malaysian culture, the evolution of musical instruments and musical activities, which have contributed to Malaysian musical culture, can best be described according to two different perspectives, which can be

termed adaptation and idiosyncratic (Nik & Mohd, 1995). Musical instruments such as the serunai, originally from Arab was adapted, changed and modified, to be used in Wayang Kulit or the shadow puppet theatre. Therefore it can be said that the evolution of musical instruments in Malaysia are derivative. However, through time some of these instruments such as the Gamelan and its music have become synonymous within the region of South East Asia, and Malaysian in particular. HANDS reasons for using the Gamelan will be elaborated on in the Fourth chapter but it is noteworthy to mention that they had a custom made Gamelan set that is different from the traditional set that follows a prescribed tuning system.

Another example would be Kroncong. Its music is played on string instruments, sung by both men and women and is considered a cultural product of the encounter between indigenous groups of this archipelago and foreign traders during the heady days of the western European age of discovery (Becker, 1985). Kroncong's musical elements went through subsequent periods of changes as a syncretic, acculturated form of expressive culture. The reason for this is that, kroncong musicians have continually combined musical elements from other local musical genres, particularly gamelan thereby causing a capacity to capture local meaning. Many scholars like Becker have illustrated kroncong as the national music of Indonesia as its evolution happened during Indonesia's period of national awakening and independence.

History provides very important lessons for us, and patterns of political "behavior" are often entrenched in the nation's consciousness. Tun Dr. Mahathir's Vision 2020, which promoted a modern and fully developed country that included a single Malaysian race, (bangsa Malaysia) was implemented in 1991. This led to much discussion as to what exactly it meant to be Malaysian. However, when it is juxtaposed against the National Economic Policy and the National Cultural Policy set in 1971, Dr. Mahathir's

‘Vision’ is somewhat contradictory. The National Cultural Policy is guided by three main principles, which are,

- 1) The national culture must be based on the indigenous [Malay] culture
- 2) Suitable elements from the other cultures may be accepted as part of the national culture.
- 3) Islam is an important component in the moulding of the national culture.

Although this implementation has led to much debate and discussion, it has been still maintained as the principal guiding policy as far as culture is concerned in Malaysia. So where does the music of HANDS fit into when strictly adhering to this policy for example?

HANDS performances are Malaysian, more than they are Chinese and this gives rise to the fact that Malaysia’s cultural identity is still evolving in its definition. The musical culture of Malaysia has been heavily influenced by foreign elements especially from India and Arab, Indonesia and Thailand (Chopyak, 1986). Although the national culture as dictated by the National Cultural Policy is officially the Malay culture it is fair to say that it would be an incomplete representation without the input of Chinese and Indian music (Ang, 2002).

The performances of Bernard Goh’s Hands Percussion, promote a multicultural perspective, particularly when playing in concert with instruments such as the gamelan, rebana and tabla (Chan, 2012). It is important to observe that, is not so much what is being played, but what cultural background each of the instruments stems from and therefore what ethnicity they signify. An example of such a performance can be seen in the piece called ‘MAKAN’ performed in 2011 (Hands, 2011).

The piece was a joint composition of some of the Hands members and depicts a typical Malaysian ‘favourite pastime’ which is to ‘*makan*’ or eat. The costumes as well as the musical elements of the pieces contribute toward the experience of being in the midst of a busy hawker’s food center, which will be familiar only to locals and would never have existed outside the sociological framework of the Straits settlement.

Schechner (2002) writes about the ‘avant-garde’ counter movement that erupted frequently in the nineteenth century to disrupt the notion of a well-established theatre as an art. This proceeded as wave after wave till some of yesterday’s avant-garde performances became today’s establishments. Therefore the outcome of this is that many events that may not formerly be recognized as art become designated that stature over time. Above and beyond the literal coming together of instruments during a performance, HANDS “performs” an imagined Bangsa Malaysia during their concerts. They strive to achieve a performative enactment of a Malaysian identity that is yet to be realized (Chan, 2012).

2.4 Problems with the Malaysian National Culture

According to Bhabha (1994), colonial hybridity is a catalyst in the creation of an ambivalent culture. This argument can be used to critique the current cultural imperialism as tabled by the National Cultural Policy. The framing of this policy has created binary opposition between the hegemonic majority (indigenous) and the subaltern minority (migrants) (Mohd, 2008). To be fair, the motive behind the implementation of this policy was to steer Malaysia and its people toward a national identity, with a sense of belonging and self-esteem. However, to some quarters, the policies that were put in place seemed to safeguard the indigenous culture exclusively

thereby disempowering the subaltern (Sarkar, 2002). In many cases of prescribed ‘traditional’ forms of Dance and Music in Malaysia, the epistemological discourse of its origin have been ‘denied’ or disregarded for fear of losing its ‘national imaginary’ status of ‘belonging’ to the indigenous culture (Mohd, 2008).

On the topic of ‘originality’, there have been many disputes with Indonesia and Malaysia regarding “borrowed” culture and which dance or music belongs to whom. In 2009, the Discovery Channel broadcasted the *Balinese Pendet* Dance as being part of the Malaysian culture, and that opened up an old wound of Indonesia. Historically this dispute has been compounded by accusations that Malaysia has “stolen” the Indonesian heritage in the form of *angklung*, *Reog Ponorogo* dance and *Rasa Sayang* (Malay folk song). This dispute, even extends to the Malaysian national anthem, *Negaraku*, as being plagiarised from the Indonesian song, *Terang Bulan* (Chong, 2012).

The scope of this research cannot go through in detail the reasons for this dispute but the arguments are brought forth in this paper to further point to the fact that Indonesia and Malaysia have very different systems of defining what the National culture is. In Indonesia, knowledge and narratives of local culture are developed in association with ethnic-based regional boundaries. They are endorsed by the state and they are part of nation building. From elementary school, Indonesian kids learn about national heritage by memorizing the names of dances, folk songs and visual representations of traditional costumes. Citing the examples above, regular Indonesians would undoubtedly associate these three intangible cultural items with three different origins saying that *Rasa Sayang* is of Ambonese or Maluku origin, the *Angklung* is Sundanese, and the *Reog Ponorogo* is Javanese (Lim, 2009). In other words, there is a sense of acknowledgement as to the origin of that tradition.

In Malaysia however, the distinctions are more “crude” or simplistic and the framing

of national culture, is done by lumping cultural artifacts into racial groups such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and indigenous tribe (Orang Asli). The term “ Malay” itself is different in Indonesia and Malaysia whereas in Malaysia the term is more a product of colonialism and ethnic nationalism rather than geographical boundary of origin (Lim, 2009).

Mohd (2008), writes that when writing about dance in Malaysia one must accept the plural nature of post-colonial Malaysia. He goes onto say that the period from 1900s to 1930s saw dances of multiple ethnic origins merging into specific new forms to fill up niches created by *Boria*, *Bangsawan* and *Ronggeng*. The new dance compositions were based on some form of Malay traditions but fused with elements of dances from other migrant communities.

During the 1980s and 90s, several young Malaysian composers, fresh from their studies abroad, many trained in the 20th century music composition, started using musical and philosophical elements from the Asian cultures, thus developing a new musical style that reflected personal taste as well as a attempt to establish an Asian and indeed a Malaysian identity in their compositions (Matusky and Tan, 2004). Notable mention must be made of the composer Valerie Ross whose compositions were pioneer attempts in Malaysian traditional instruments with Western instruments (Lam, 2001).

2.5 Diaspora and Cultural Practices

Diaspora refers to the movement or scattering of a population that has a common origin in a smaller geographic area. A good example of this is the Chinese and Indian population of Malaysia who arrived around the 15th century as plantation and miners. For example many Malaysian Chinese share the same cultural heritage as the Chinese in China but their “Chinese-ness” has been transformed over the years through interaction

with the locals (Gomez, 2007). Most Chinese, especially those who are born overseas, do not look to China as their homeland. They no longer distinguish themselves as overseas Chinese descendants of Chinese migrants. Malaysian Chinese, also call themselves *Mahua* (Chinese of Malaysia) (Tan, 2007).

The Chinese community in Malaysia is not homogenous and they belong to various provinces and speak many different dialects (Lee & Tan, 2000). This brought about a social need to form organisations based on the different regional backgrounds that were indicated by differences in clan and dialect (Chan, 2012). Political upheaval spurred by riots such as the one on 1969 was a catalyst toward a common consciousness called the Malaysian Chinese (Lee, 2009). This self-identification shift between ‘Chinese’ and ‘Malaysian Chinese’ was a concept that required ‘negotiation’ with the other ethnic groups in Malaysia (Tan, 2000). As a result of daily interaction and intercultural exchanges with a multicultural society, a new “invented tradition” in the form of hybridized dance, music dialogue and even food are the representations of a truly “Malaysian culture.”

As mentioned by Mohd (2008), Malaysians performing artists, not wanting to be subjected to the narrow definitions of cultural norms began to investigate intercultural dialogues by learning diverse forms of performances. Xu & Fu (2003), mention that Chinese Malaysian cultural practitioners should ‘break through the burdens of traditional forms’ thereby enabling the creation of art that is more relatable to the current living context. Werbner (1997) furthers states that this has resulted in their own understanding of being polygots, someone who can negotiate multiple languages, in a multicultural nation thereby coping with cultural diversities, embracing them while harnessing their argument for cultural purity, which implies that culture that is static or fixed, is viewed as being irrelevant.

Bhabha's (1994) work demonstrates that the colonised subject gains power from the new cultural site created from the coloniser's and colonised's combined cultural practices. He states that the new culture that often surfaces as a result of cultural mixing can be more accurately recognised as a "third space". Local identity is different. It is neither defined by the state nor backed by state authority. It emerged naturally through the evolution of the history and cultural experience of the people; it is accepted as a signifier of a given community by that community (Embong, 2011).

Blacking & Bryon (1995) states that,

Ambiguous interpretations of musical signs are probably the most potent sources of musical innovation and change: that is, when one's social circumstances encourage the development of the idiosyncratic, rather than culturally approved, way of listening to music, one is more likely to compose music that strikes out in new directions (p. 229).

In other words he says that the performance and appreciation of a particular music is largely dependent upon one's belonging to the culture in which that music exists (Blacking, 1973). According to Chan (2006), the Chinese in Malaysia are made up of multiple identities that shift and transform according to the socio-political situation around them.

The process of the (re-)invention of tradition is central to the collective memory and to ideas about "heritage", and is simultaneously a product of local interests and context, while also shaping attitudes and creating new visions for the future. It mirrors the diverse interests and agendas of assorted local constituencies, as stakeholders" in the historical, heritage and cultural enterprise, thus ensuring that such issues are endlessly open to re-interpretation and debate (Nagata, 2002).

2.6 Evolution of Malaysian Music

Ethnomusicologists believe that music must be understood as a part of culture, as a product of human society (Nettl, 1992). They are interested in the way in which a society defines itself, especially how the music is presented in a sociological situation.

The evolution of Malaysian music is comparable to the evolution of American music in many ways (Ang, 2002). Being former colonized nations, both have emerged from this era, with plural societies which is reflected in their individual cultures. America for example, has developed its own distinct musical identity, which is apparent when we hear Jazz for example. This was due to the pioneering efforts of the great jazz composers Louis Armstrong (1900-71), Jelly Roll Morton (1885-1941) and Duke Ellington (1899- 1974) who combined catchy syncopated Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean rhythms with European melodies and dance rhythms (*Ibid.*).

In Malaysia, music is generally categorized, by the various ethnic communities such as, Malay, Chinese and Indian music. In an effort to break away from artificial division of the Malaysian society, Dr. Minnie Ang has proposed a different categorization that transcend the racial divide as defined by the former colonialists, Her proposed classification follows Robert Redfield's work on cultural theory whereby music is divided into two main categories, Great Tradition and Little Tradition. Great Tradition encompasses music, which is or has been consciously developed and cultivated deliberately whereby Little Tradition refers to folk music that has not been consciously developed.

2.6.1 Shigu Drumming in Malaysia

In terms of the Chinese *shigu* in Malaysia, which is the original membranophone used in HANDS, it is important to establish the origins of *shigu* drumming in a cultural

context and its evolution in Malaysia proceeds here. *Shigu* literally means Lion Drum and is mainly used as an accompaniment to the Lion Dance seen mainly during important Chinese festivals. For the Chinese community in Malaysia, these street performances represented their culture vis-a-vis majority community (Chan, 2014). Following the years preceding 1971, racial tensions in Malaysia resulted in the National Cultural Policy and politically driven statements such as that of then Minister Ghazalie Shafie. His inciting remarks led to a coming together of rival Chinese clan associations to retaliate and argue for the inclusion of the Lion dance as well as other non-Malay contributions into the National Policy. This led to further political debate but subsided significantly after the announcement of Vision 2020 by then Prime Minister Dr, Mahathir. The Lion dance and its accompanying *shigu* and gong musicians, now feature regularly in the government organized national parades including Citrawarna.

In an interview with Bernard Goh, he mentions that it was his teacher, Master Tan Hooi Song who developed the 24 Seasons Drum Ensemble in Malaysia, and that this particular concept did not exist in China. The reason behind this innovation is attributed to encouraging the Chinese youth to stay in touch with their traditions. Chan (2006) cites that in an interview with the local newspaper, Tan was emphatic that this new creation was “uniquely Malaysian in concept” and such a troupe was ‘reflective of the multi-racial scenario’. This concept, was taken further by Goh, who was given the mandate by Master Tan, to start a new group in Seremban (Goh, personal communications, 2014). Thus, Hands Percussion was born and its goal was the conservation of the practice of this performing tradition whilst extending the practice into a different level of artistry (Chan, 2006). HANDS engages its members in the teaching of *shigu* drumming, ensemble style, in Chinese schools as well as private schools such as Chempaka International school who request for their tutelage.

Shigu drumming that accompanies the Lion dance has a distinct drumming pattern that is proprietary to the Lion Dance. HANDS however, have incorporated many other drumming patterns that are influenced by Malaysian traditional dance rhythms such as *joget*, *inang* and *zapin*. The members of HANDS are also adept in the playing of Malay traditional drums such as *gendang*, *jidor* having learnt from Pak Nasir a *rebana ubi* maestro (Chan, 2006).

The piece ‘Promenade’, composed by Jimmy Ch’ng in Kaleidoscope III had a very strong influence of *tabla* syllables and the piece itself saw the performers chanting the syllables (*bols*) and then playing those rhythmic patterns on the *shigu* drum. This piece, as well as other similarly themed pieces will be analysed further in Chapter 4.

2.4.2 Gamelan in Malaysia

According to history, in 1811, an exquisite dance performance, accompanied by an ensemble of brass instruments, was brought from the Riau-Lingga court to enliven a royal wedding, which took place in Pekan, Pahang. This art-form’s origins are “hybrids of Indic-Javanese-Malay” (Mohd, 2008, p. 317). Since then, this performing art, now known as the *Joget Gamelan*, had developed into an exclusive entertainment for royal pleasure in the Pahang and Terengganu courts. However during World War II, the demise of its patrons almost brought about the extinction of this art form in Malaysia. Many years later Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard, a Malaysian historian, stumbled upon these abandoned instruments in a palace and successfully brought it back to an audience that included members of the public who were never able to witness this art-form before (Farizan, n.d.).

From 1913 to 1942 both the king and queen of Terengganu were active in developing and patronizing the *Joget Gamelan*. Certain aspects of the music and dance

differentiated the Malay style from the original Javanese model of the 19th century which included the dance movements, costume, the change in the tuning system for the musical instruments, the instrumentation of the orchestra, and also the use of melodies not originating from the Javanese tradition. As a result of these changes the musical tradition changed its name to '*Gamelan Melayu*' and '*Joget Gamelan*'. Thus the Gamelan was localized and distinct as compared to their Javanese and Balinese counterparts. The Malaysian *gamelan* is closely associated to the Javanese *gamelan*, with some modifications in the tuning and the music (Macy, 2002). However, to date there are still many disputes that arise amongst ethnomusicologists as to the 'authenticity' of these modifications.

After the racial riots that erupted in 1969, drastic steps were taken by the government to rebuild the country by constructing the National Cultural Policy with an aim to construct a national identity (Mohd, 2008). To facilitate this construction a National Congress was held, whereby the *Joget Gamelan* was encapsulated as a performance tradition that signified the markings of a national Malaysian identity (Sheppard, 1970).

The 1990s marked the beginning of the contemporary Gamelan movement in Malaysia that began with the formation of a gamelan group called the Gamelan Club, founded by Sunetra Fernando (John, personal communications, 2015). Fernando, being a gamelan exponent herself, exposed the members of this group to the various styles associated with traditional Gamelan forms, including the Malay, Javanese and Balinese styles. She later founded 'Rhythm in Bronze' a current contemporary Gamelan performing group that when contrasted with the traditional *Joget Gamelan* and *Malay Gamelan*, seems to transcend boundaries and open up new possibilities. HANDS has worked with Rhythm and Bronze on several occasions but first started out with the

Gamelan Club in 2001 for a production called SUARA. This collaboration thus fostered a mutual love for the contemporized version of this traditional instrument.

2.7 Contemporary Malaysian Performance

Evidence of a globalised syncretic Malaysian popular music scene can be traced as far back as the 1930s. According to Matusky and Tan (2004), the music produced in the *bangsawan* theatre and the *joget* dance halls, then considered popular culture, amalgamated a multitude of rhythmic styles.

An example of Malaysian music in its truest form reflecting these various musical cultures of the country is Tan Sri P. Ramlee. His vision was to create a Malaysian folk style music that incorporated the various local musical cultures. This was evident in his film “Ali Baba Bujang Lapok”. His music style reflected the Malay infused *joget* and *inang* whilst incorporating the Western waltz, rhumba as well as the Indian Hindustani melodies (Chan, 2012). The music of Sunetra Fernando, Valerie Ross, and Tan Sooi Beng is consistently composed in the cross-over aesthetic with the use of Gamelan and other ethnic instruments and singers (Macy, 2002). In written reviews of the pieces composed by Sunetra Fernando (‘Sembuh Sudah’) and Tan Sooi Beng (‘Perubahan’) the reviewer claims that the new breed of composers used Malaysian traditional elements and textures that can only be found in a multicultural setting (*Ibid.*).

Lockard (1996) notes that while there was evidence of a fusion of many intercultural musical influences in early popular music, these influences are recognised as a seminal part of the repertoire of the Malay popular cultural tradition. This assimilation could have occurred largely because the musical influences were rooted in what was understood as a traditionally Malay rhythmic pattern and incorporated traditional folk themes and tonalities (*Ibid.*).

Leng Poh Gee's review of Hands Percussion's "Next" is based on carving out a space for youth to participate in and celebrate Chinese cultural heritage in a Malaysian context (2013). He goes on to note that the government's pro-Malay cultural policy inset since 1971, has provided minimal support for Chinese pride, but the troupe has gone far beyond its beginning point to an embrace of Malay and Javanese gamelan and the eclectic elements that make contemporary Asian drumming ensembles both rhythmically mesmerizing and visually engrossing. It took Hands to rethink this formula in a Malaysian frame, using the new and diverse resources that Southeast Asian sound-movement genres provide. In this concert we again experienced the fusion of Chinese, Malay, and Indonesian sources that make for something that is both grounded in a Southeast Asian heritage and dealing with what it is to be something that is new and a fusion of all the sources one can claim as a Malaysian.

In order to make clearer the point of this research we have to establish how it differs from classical music. In this context classical music refers to the music that originated from the subcontinent of India and China respectively. In Malaysia there are many schools and performances that teach Indian and Chinese classical music, which in comparison is similar to the content that is found in India and China.

The Indian diaspora study Indian Classical music according to the traditions set hundreds of years ago. The methods may vary slightly but the basic syllabus and contents remain the same and follow strictly the codes and rules of classical Indian music be it Carnatic or Hindustani (Shehan, 1987).

This distinction is vital to this study because it reiterates that the 'official' division of music styles in Malaysia, especially with regards to the Chinese and Indian genres is limited because it is solely based on classical music, originating from their respective homelands.

2.8 Conclusion

In Malaysia, one has both a cultural and an ethnic identity. Both these categorizations serve to delineate members of different groups. This is further reinforced by a political setting that advocates separate political parties and educational institutions, as well as stories and practices, literature, etc., that groups people to their heritage from officially promulgated narratives that describe a common heritage of those that belong to the same nation

Although extensive research and supportive literature denotes the current situation in the cultural scene in Malaysia, very little has been said regarding the intermingling and intercultural exchanges that have become synonymous with “being Malaysian”. In my research I have come across only three scholars Chan (2006), Leng (2013) and Chan (2009) who have studied the performance of HANDS. These scholars bring forth the idea that HANDS has recontextualised the *shigu* drum from its essential cultural musical context and thus concentrates on the socio-cultural reasoning behind this move. Although some mention of multiculturalism as well as hints of a Malaysian identity is apparent in their writings, this particular research hopes to focus on the notion that the multicultural aspects of HANDS are not merely superficial but rather, stem from an existential viewpoint. This research hopes to establish that there is a need for further research into the Malaysian musician’s identity that is not necessarily divided on ethnic grounds. This research attempts to highlight this gap and bring forth the idea of a (avant-garde) Malaysian cultural identity regardless of race is a unique one.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) base their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm which claims that truth, is relative and that it is dependent on one's perspective. This paradigm doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity but instead recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning.

According to Yin (2003, as cited in Robottom & Hart, 1993) a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (p. 992).

This research will be taking on a qualitative approach. A case study is chosen where the subject in query is Hands Percussion and its re-presentation of Gamelan in its productions. A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).

According to Yin (2003),

the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" because "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (p. 2).

Yin (2003) has identified specific case study types such as Explanatory, Exploratory and Descriptive, whilst Stake (1995) has included three other types which are Intrinsic, Instrumental and Collective.

This research will employ the Instrumental type of case study which according to Stake (1995), will provide insight into an issue or refining a theory. It becomes the base for further research, which will then support a theory that binds a common issue or interest.

This case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses, which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.

Data will be collected via interviews with Bernard Goh, who is the Founder, composer and Artistic Director of Hands Percussion, Jimmy Ch'ng, a senior member of HANDS, who is also a composer and main percussionist of HANDS. Interviews were conducted with Susan John who has composed for Gamelan in several productions of Hands Percussion as well as Prakash Kandasamy who teaches tabla as well as Indian rhythm concepts to the members of HANDS. Data also includes interviews from Thong Yoong How and Jack Wan who is the Head of the Gamelan Ensemble in HANDS.

It was generally difficult to meet Artistic Director, Goh, as well as the members as they travel frequently and are also involved in rehearsals most of the time. Interviews were done face-to-face whenever possible, via skype as well as phone interviews. Data was collected from September 2014 to April 2015.

3.2 Research Design

According to Hartley (2004), "research design is the argument for the logical steps which will be taken to link the research question(s) and issues to data collection, analysis and interpretation in a coherent way" (p. 326). Research Design is defined by De Vos and Fouche (1998) as a blueprint or detailed plan of how a research study is to

be conducted. There are many different sources of evidence, which include documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). Indeed, the case study's unique strength is "its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations."

This research is designed to be divided into three main phases. Phase 1 is the initial investigation to conduct background study on the composer and the compositions. This phase will include secondary data collection via performance reviews, newspaper articles and literature written on Hands Percussion as well as notes collected by author during direct observations at Hands Percussion performances.

During Phase 2, interviews were conducted with the composers and the musicians and then in Phase 3 the interviews other external composer(s) who have composed and arranged for Gamelan and *tabla* within Hands Percussion.

3.3 Secondary Data

Secondary data must relate to the actual circumstance of the research problems defined and the research objectives. Secondary data in a general academic understanding is a secondary reference that will support the notion of the actual research topic or framework. In the case of HANDS, there have been many reviews on performances that they have done over the years. These reviews have been published in journals, magazines, newspapers as well as on the World Wide Web. Before taking any data into consideration, the author has to verify the validity of the data as some of the material may be outdated. This will be done during the interview sessions with Bernard.

In the previous chapter, a literature review was done to explore acculturation and its effects in a pluralistic nation such as Malaysia. It was also established that Malaysia currently acknowledges its variety in music genres amongst its multiracial citizens but

only in terms of them being separate and thus classified as Malay Traditional, Indian Classical, Chinese traditional and Folk music. Therefore it is important to establish that there is a gap in the existing literature with regards to a unique cultural identity in Malaysia.

3.4 Primary Data Collection

Data will be collected using:

- 1) Interviews with composers,
- 2) Observation during performances, and
- 3) Interviews with performers.

3.5 Secondary Data Collection

- 1) Newspaper Articles
- 2) Newspaper and magazine reviews
- 3) Other literature on Hands Percussion
- 4) Score and Performance Analysis

3.6 Data Analysis

Upon transcribing and collating the data derived from the interviews, analysis will be done manually using an informal coding system. Coding is the process of dividing the data into units. These divisions are based on keywords called “mentions” that represent a particular category (Calloway & Knapp, 1995).

3.7 Performance Discussion and Observation

A section of the research is devoted to discussing the music that is performed by members of HANDS. This discussion will focus on the use of multicultural instruments in the compositions of Susan Sarah John, Bernard Goh and Prakash Kandasamy. The discussion will also include the rationale behind the use of these instruments and how they may or may not contribute toward the formation of HAND's Malaysian identity.

Performance observation as part of the author's field work, is based on four repertoires that was deemed representative of HANDS's performance identity and drumming philosophy. These four pieces were also chosen as a result of pre-study research based on concept, score and video availability and accessibility. Performance observation is method is used to inquire into the performance and composition elements in HANDS's pieces. The observation by the author is further informed via interviews with the composers and members of HANDS.

3.8 Expected Outcome

It is hoped that this research will help identify a need for a genre that sets Malaysian based compositions apart from being associated with general terms such as "fusion" or "contemporary music". This research also aims to bring forth the compositions of HANDS that signify the group as being "Malaysian".

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on data collected in answering the three objectives. Performance observation and discussion revealed answers in meeting with the research objectives examining into the background and music performances of HANDS and their identity formation. Data collected from interviews with key informants such as Bernard Goh, Susan Sarah John, Thong Yoong How, Jimmy Ch'ng and Jack Wan were analyzed and discussed. Additional interviews with Prakash Kandasamy a professional *tabla* player and guru (teacher) to members of HANDS, was also conducted to understand further how HANDS endeavored to learn multiethnic instruments and how they used that knowledge in their performances.

An introduction to these interviewees and a background to their work and experience is brought forth and their responses to the interviews is grouped under separate headings. Interviews were conducted in many stages including phone and face-to face meetings.

As supporting material, this chapter will also include an analysis section on the scores that were used during the performance and the training of the pieces that have been selected for this research (See Appendix). It would be important to note the inclusion of different rhythms in the scores especially for the *shigu* and the Gamelan. This is to denote the use of *tabla* rhythms that have been incorporated into the compositions that use the *Shigu* and *Gamelan*. A performance observation report on the production called *The Next* (Figure 4.1) was also done to show the performance style adopted by HANDS in bringing forth the their musical concept. *The Next* was a production that premiered in 2012 and speaks about the inception of HANDS, their

identity formation as well as their future aspirations. In order to further substantiate this point, two other pieces, *Where River Duo Meet* and *Promenade* also warrants some extent of analyzing based on observation. The motive behind the analysis of these pieces are not merely to record the literal translation of the movement and music in the pieces but rather to focus on the concept that ties in with the study's aim to investigate the reasons, Gamelan and *tabla* elements were included in HANDS's performances.



Figure 4.1: *The Next* (Courtesy of Hands Percussion).

The next section of this chapter is dedicated to the various issues dealing with culture and identity that is pertinent to the objective of this study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the difference in perceived performance identities of performing as Chinese, performing as a Malaysian Chinese and finally performing as a Malaysian.

4.2 The Multi-ethnic Composers

The composers for HANDS are mainly Bernard Goh and Jimmy Ch'ng. Their pieces included mostly drum-centric material. For the purposes of a multiethnic inclusion such as *gamelan* and *tabla*, two other important key players such as Susan Sarah John and Prakash Kandasamy were recruited. These composers have a reputation in ethnic music in the local scene such as Sarah John in *gamelan* and Kandasamy in *tabla*.

4.2.1 Bernard Goh

Bernard Goh was born in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan in 1971. He was amongst the first batch of students belonging to Mr. Tan Hooi Song (1947 – 2008). Mr. Tan was the founder of the 24 Seasons Drumming. Bernard started coaching the 24 Seasons Drumming in Chung Hua High School (Seremban), Chong Hua High School (Kuala Lumpur), Tsun Jin High School (Kuala Lumpur) as well as Yu Hua High School (Selangor). In 1993 he graduated from the Malaysian Institute of Art, majoring in advertising. In 1997 Bernard founded Hands Percussion (also known as HANDS) with Eric Ch'ng. HANDS started touring locally, as well as overseas, in 2004 and has travelled to more than 16 countries including Japan, Singapore, Greece and England.

Bernard has pioneered the *Balik Kampung* project where HANDS brings the 24 Seasons Drumming culture to the *kampung* (village) where the children there do not have the opportunity to enjoy and experience the performing arts. This is significant to Bernard himself, as he grew up in a *kampung* in Seremban where he was introduced to the Malay culture. Therefore by bringing HANDS members back to the *kampung*, to simple village life, he is reminded of his cultural upbringing and source of learning.

4.2.2 Jimmy Ch'ng

Jimmy Ch'ng is one of the early members of HANDS full time team and has written many compositions for HANDS to date. He is a prominent figure in HANDS's performances as most often features as the solo or main percussionist. He hails from a family with a musical background where his father, a musician himself, was the to first introduce him to Chinese traditional instruments at a young age. This being said, Ch'ng has not had a formal music education and composes 'by ear'. He admits that he has been inspired by Indian rhythms ever since he received a CD of the *tabla* maestro Zakir

Hussain, at the age of 10. He claims that his compositions, are a ‘work in progress’ toward an ultimate idea for a piece showcasing the various drumming cultures that sound different and yet have a connecting element (Ch’ng, personal communications, 2015). Ch’ng started out with the 24 Season Drumming ensemble where he first met Bernard through his brother Eric’Ch’ng who is also a director in the Hands Percussion team.

4.2.3 Susan Sarah John

Susan Sarah is a graduate from University Malaya in Classical Music and is currently freelancing as a composer. She was an active member of Rhythm in Bronze specializing in Gamelan. She has worked with Hands on numerous occasions the most recent being Tchaikovsky on Gamelan, which premiered in November 2014, where she trained, as well as composed for the performers of Hands Percussion. She herself, trained and performed Gamelan under the baton of Sunetra Fernando (formerly from Rhythm in Bronze and Gamelan Club) and currently freelances for Hands Percussion as well as Rhythm in Bronze as Musical Director. Susan has been composing for HANDS since 2007 and has to date directed 7 productions, all involving Gamelan (John, personal communication, 2015).

4.2.4 Prakash Kandasamy

Prakash Kandasamy is an acclaimed Malaysian tabla artiste who has won many National awards including Karyawan Anugerah Seni Negara as well as the Datin Seri Paduka Endon Award for Excellence in the Arts. He has also performed with members of HANDS and is currently training a couple of members of HANDS in the traditional art form of *tabla* playing (Kandasamy, personal communication, 2015).

4.3 HANDS and Education

As the performers train, a separate group of full-timers commit to an outreach programme that takes performances into schools and on *Balik Kampung* tours into rural areas all over the country. “We need to let them know what can be done,” says Bernard of the villagers they encounter on their tours, “and it gives such good memories for the kids to cherish.”

The first *Balik Kampung* Project was in 2009, in Sekinchan, Selangor. HANDS conducted workshops with primary and secondary school children, getting them to drum as well as make their own instruments from simple recyclable items. Other places include, Sandakan, Kota Kinabalu, Pasir Parit and Pulau Pangkor to name a few. These camps are conducted to create awareness amongst the younger generation as well as to facilitate a cultural exchange and learn about each other’s cultures.

4.4 Performance Observation

This section reports on performance observation of HANDS’s production *The Next* and entire repertoire of that production in 2012 which is divided into two parts, *Flesh and Bone* and *Mechanics*. Further analysis is also done on two pieces, *Where River Duo Meet* and *Promenade* from two separate productions. These pieces were chosen for their concept that is closely related to the purpose of this study. The main focus is how HANDS claims that syncretizing the three ethnic instruments better represents Malaysian identity and what happens in the creative process that re-contextualized its identity from a single ethnic Chinese based production to one that better represents a multiethnic output. Its transmission method is an important issue too as HANDS’s complex musical output was mostly delivered through oral transmission, improvisation,

memorized and performance without the aid of written notation.

4.4.1 Translating Gamelan and Tabla Rhythms onto Musical Scores

Transmission method in HANDS usually takes on oral approach rather than written notation. One of the HANDS instructors, Susan Sarah John adopts an oral transmission method of teaching the students of HANDS whereby music is transferred to the learner aurally. Written notes are not used in this method and she includes frequent rehearsals and memorization techniques. Her rationale is that she herself is a very aural-oriented musician and composer and is inspired to compose ex-tempo with very little planning apart from an overall concept. She works with the Hands Gamelan group during the course of each project that she is commissioned to compose for the duration of a year approximately. However, she does acknowledge that the time span itself is a luxurious one and most times it is practically impossible to expect an incubation period of that length in any given production.

In an interview with Ch'ng, he mentions that due to the fact that he lacks formal music knowledge, he prefers to compose with the musicians in front of him, trying out different things and changing them then and there. Although, there is some form of written notes, these serve more as a reminder of major cues rather than a detailed score. A few examples of these notes are shown below. This is a testament to the memorization skills and the dedication to rehearsals that the members have developed over the years. The performances at HANDS can go on for up to two and a half hours and performers are never seen to be reading a musical score at any point (Ch'ng, personal communication, 2015).

As mentioned above, the *shigu* drummers in HANDS, do follow a method of notation albeit their own unique style. Written notes are usually prescriptive and provide

performers with information or performance directions. An example of the Joget rhythm played on the *shigu* as notated by Jack Wan is shown below in Figure 4.2. When compared to the Western discipline style of notation as in Figure 4.3, the notes are in a similar rhythmic pattern, but missing a time signature. This lack of detail is an indication that the players are not dependent on the notes but use them as a guide during rehearsals (Wan, personal communication, 2015).

The scores serve to show that the composers are not just trying to mimic or to use ‘Indian inspired’ rhythms but rather to show that they have taken the trouble to learn the instrument from its basics and have a sense of respect for the instrument itself. Bernard himself learnt the tabla at a young age and perhaps that may be a reason that he encouraged his members to take up formal lessons. This reiterates the fact the tabla was very much part of Bernard’s childhood and a integral part of his growing up and Malaysian heritage.

4.4.2 Observations and Discussion of *The Next*

The Next is a production that was inspired by South East Asian traditional dances and music that showcases the exploration and incorporation of these traditional art forms that were integral to HANDS’s journey in creating their own musical brand. The performance itself was divided into two segments, the first half called *Flesh and Bone* and the second half called *Mechanics*. The juxtaposition of both segments attempt to contrast the traditional first half with a futuristic tinged second half that pushes compositional and visual boundaries with the intention of suggesting HANDS’s future aspirations to challenge their creative strengths. The production was a collaborative effort of Bernard Goh as Artistic and Stage Director and Susan Sarah John as Musical Director performed at KLPAC (Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre) in November 2012. This production showcases the concept of depicting the many Malay cultural

elements such as the use of the rebab and jidor as well as references to traditional Malay culture such as Mak Yong and Dikir Barat. This contributes to the objective of this research that showcases the formation of HANDS Malaysian identity.

4.4.2.1 First Half – *Flesh and Bone*

In the first half, instruments such as the Chinese flute, *dizi*, *shigu* and *gendang sunda* were used in the piece *Flesh and Bone*. A brief overview of the entire piece is as follows showing the different sections and instrumentation used during the piece itself. It should be kept in mind that it is not the musicality of the instruments that are of significance here but rather the symbolism behind the use of the instruments as well as the movements and costumes of the dancers. An analysis of the piece was delineated on the table below.

The performance started off with a solo *dizi* (Chinese flute) setting the stage for the arrival of twenty-seven performers who marched onto stage from the audience area. In the background was the sound of the *digeridoo* (Australian tribal instrument). This was followed by the Malaysian tradition of *Menghadap Rebab* when the dancers knelt paying respect and faced a solo *Rebab* (bowed lute) player, whose role is symbolic of the guru (teacher). *Menghadap Rebab* is traditionally performed at *Makyung* an ancient Malay dance theatre form.

The movements that followed were improvised adaptations inspired by other traditional Malaysian art forms such as *dikir barat*, *randai* as well as traces from the 24 Seasons Drum. During the performance the Gamelan was used to create musical and rhythmic interludes. The Gamelan performers were seated downstage close to the audience. The costumes worn by the performers were inspired by the *randai* traditional costume (*celana gelombang*) but in the case of HANDS, the loose fitting pants,

included a round drumhead ‘patch’, that was designed to be used as a ‘body percussive instrument’. This is an innovative idea of marrying the tradition with function. Certain movements like when the dancers knelt in a row with bowed heads and later launching into an accelerating rhythm, chanting and clapping sequence was reminiscent of the Kelantanese *dikir barat* that also traditionally uses body percussion as part of its ritualistic movement. There were definitely creative improvisations used whilst paying homage to these traditional forms, and those improvisations could be deemed as ‘unauthentic’ through the purist ‘gaze’. However, in light of the intention of the composer or director, it was the *form* and not the *religious* content that lends its ethnically diverse and secular aspect to the performance (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.2: *Flesh and Bone – The Next* (Photo courtesy, Hands Percussion).

In the instance of the Gamelan, traditionally, musicians are meant to be attired in costumes that do not reveal any skin. The exposure of skin is view as blasphemous from religious gaze and HANDS certainly breaks those ‘rules’ with their costumes that are

made not to offend but to ease movement (Figure 4.7). In *Flesh and Bone* the make-up of the musicians seem to emulate that of the Lion Dance. Their eyebrows were painted black in a thick line followed by a thick white line below it. This was done to create the connection throughout with the history of HANDS, whose journey began with the 24 Season Festive Drum, thus paying tribute to the *shigu* from the Lion Dance that started it all (Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.3: HANDS on Gamelan (Photo courtesy, Hands Percussion).



Figure 4.4: *Flesh and Bone – The Next*, 2012 (Photo courtesy Hands Percussion).

4.2.2.3 Second Half – *Mechanic*

The second half of the performance is not very significant to this particular research but warrants mention in the analysis of the performance concept as a whole. The second half started out with five musicians standing in a semi-circle dressed in white leotard, faces painted in silver with silver studs added for effect. They played on moderate sized gongs placed on a stand. The entire musicality of the piece seemed static and reminiscent of an industrial inspired monotonous tone. According to Thong Yoong How, one of the performers, the white leotard was used to help accentuate the minimal lighting thus giving the performers an almost ‘robotic’ appearance (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.5: *Mechanics - The Next*, 2012 (Photo courtesy Hands Percussion).



Figure 4.6: *Mechanics - The Next*, 2012 (Photo courtesy Hands Percussion).

This was then followed, by a drum extravaganza performed by two members, who played on drums that were hung on a circular structure, thus posing a physically challenging feat for the musicians. More musicians with neon lit costumes representing a ‘futuristic’ theme, as well as a white cyclorama out of which a emerged a man, giving the appearance of ‘being born.’ The character brought the production to the end, possibly symbolizing the hegemonic sovereign policies that ultimately govern the arts (Figure 4.10).

4.4.3 Discussion of *Where River Duo Meet* – *Lafaz Gema*

This piece was performed in September 2013 in a production called *Lafaz Gema* (The Breath of Echo) was HANDS's first attempt at combining literature and drumming at a performance. *Lafaz Gema* featured several Malaysian written poems such as *Bangkit* written by Uji Amat, a Malaysian poet and *Sama Ada Kami Cinta Kepada Malaysia* written by Fu Chengde. Although the entire production, was geared loosely toward a 'unity within diversity' theme, this study, will focus on a piece from this repertoire called 'Where River Duo Meet' choreographed by Jimmy Ch'ng. This piece is conceptualized around a poem that was written by Yeu Chuan, on the Gombak and Klang River's meeting point. As history denotes, Kuala Lumpur literally means 'Muddy Confluence' and the name is based on the confluence of these two rivers. The idea behind the piece speaks about the differences of cultures and the final coming together, as the rivers ultimately merge with the sea. The arrangement is a very loud and intense one with the use of *Kompang*, Gamelan and *shigu* as well as *tabla* rhythms.

The piece begins with a rhythm played on a Chinese drum called the *tao-gu*. According to Ch'ng the composer, this drum is mainly used in temple rituals and not meant for the stage. However, Ch'ng's aim in using drums such as these is to bring non-performance instruments onto stage. Ch'ng also used the *tao-gu* to play polyrhythms in a very Indian sounding 7 beat cycle. This is juxtaposed with a 4 beat played on the *shigu*.

The two different drum that are played in a question-answer style introduction represents the two rivers, the Gombak and the Klang and the variety of rhythmic patterns depict the flowing of the river that ultimately culminate. This culmination is marked by the entry of the Gamelan. Interestingly the next part of the piece if played in Northern Indiana *tabla-lehera* style, whereby the Gamelan acts as the *lehera*, or the

metronome, keeping tempo via a repetitious 8 beat simple melody while the *shigu* plays complicated rhythms *ala tabla* over this melody whilst keeping with the tempo and yet using the rhythmic calculations to show percussive prowess. Ch'ng mentions that this drum 'conversation' is symbolic of the two rivers, which in turn are symbolic of the Malay and Chinese cultures. The next part of the music, which marks a synchronized rhythm pattern between the *shigu*, *tao-gu* and Gamelan, denotes the element of 'commonality' between the cultures.

According to Ch'ng (personal communications, 2015), the identity of HANDS lies in the actual concepts and the ideas behind the compositions rather than the visual and audio elements. A lot of movements and patterns are created to break the monotony of the drums, as melodically, apart from the Gamelan, there isn't much else going on. These patterns and movements may or may not necessarily translate to a literal representation of the concept except in some cases as mentioned in the analysis for *The Next*. A brief overview of the entire piece is as follows showing the different sections and instrumentation used during the piece itself.

4.4.4 Discussion *Promenade* – Kaliedoscope III

This piece is also composition of Jimmy Ch'ng. As with the earlier piece, Ch'ng has attempted to continue to develop a concept that is close to his heart.

I want to show how different people interact and although different languages are spoken here in Malaysia we still 'harmonize' in a manner that is unique to us. I am trying to show that in my music. All my pieces are parts of this ultimate concept of mine. (Ch'ng, personal communications, 2015).

Promenade opens with 8 performers standing in two straight rows, of four each. The instrument featured in this piece is the *shigu* but the drum face has been modified by

Ch'ng to create different textures that produce different sounds. When asked if this had any symbolism attached to it, he said no and that he just loved playing with rhythm and sounds. The piece itself was dedicated to Ch'ng love for polyrhythms and he admits that the piece was Indian inspired. In the piece, over a basic 4 beat tempo, two musicians play the 7 beat cycle, which after 4 bars, is juxtaposed with a 5 beat cycle. Although this is complicated, Ch'ng says that he was able to impart the technical difficulties in the cycle calculation to the musicians because he has spent a lot of time trying to understand *tabla* rhythmic cycles under the tutelage of Kandasamy. This sort of layering of different time cycles is common in Indian music.

The rest of the piece revolved around playing with the different sounds produced on the modified *shigu*. The drum-face of the *shigu* was divided into 4 parts and Ch'ng taped note pads to one part to produce a muted sound while the other parts had a cymbal and a bell. This gave variety to the sounds throughout the piece rendering it less monotonous. Another interesting part of the pieces was the recitation of rhythmic syllables, that is called *konnokol* a term originating from the South Indian tradition of drumming. The syllables recited by the musicians in unison, included both *tabla bols* i.e syllables (Dha , Ge, Ta, Dhin, Thirkit) and sounds of the *shigu* like Ting, Ta, Tong, Do.

A brief overview of the entire piece is as follows showing the different sections and instrumentation used during the piece itself. This piece did not have any theatrical HANDS signature dance movements and had all drummers standing in a straight posture with eyes only on the drum throughout the performance.

4.5 Audience reception

It was observed however during the many performances that I attended that one of

the characteristics of the audience that patronize HANDS concerts, is that the majority of them, belong to the Chinese ethnic group. This is typical in other local performing arts production such as *Prince Siddhartha* and *Puteri Gunung Ledang* (see Loo & Loo 2012, p.353). HANDS performances are tabled below:

Table 4.1: List of HANDS performances.

Production	Month	Year
Rhapsodrums	December	2010
RinYue Chu Yin	June	2011
Kaliedoscope II	March	2012
The Next	November	2012
Tchaikovsky on Gamelan	November	2014
Kaleidoscope III	December	2014

This could be attributed mainly to their sponsors and their marketing channels, which is directed to Chinese associations and groups. In Malaysia, apart from the national *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan* which are schools whose medium of transmission is *Bahasa Malaysia* (The National language of Malaysia), there are other schools such as the *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsan Cina* and *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil*, that cater to the Chinese and Indian communities. These schools use Mandarin and Tamil as their main transmission language. HANDS Education and Outreach program is accessible to some of these Chinese vernacular schools and therefore the students who patronize the performances of HANDS are from these schools mainly. It was also observed that apart from guest artistes, all performers belonged to one particular race.

Although in many aspects the productions of HANDS represent a culturally assimilated group, most of them are Chinese school educated and that therefore that poses a language barrier which is detrimental to their ability to communicate in many ways. As a result, even their school outreach and education program is catered mainly toward Chinese vernacular schools with the exception of Chempaka International School. Most of their promotional videos on *youtube* and *vimeo* are in Mandarin thereby making it less accessible to people who do not speak or understand the language.

Most of the sponsors of HANDS are of Chinese ethnicity and due to the fact that these artistes have to source funding from private sponsors, HANDS is sometimes limited to the scope of what is available to them from a marketing and public relations point of view. Some of their sponsors include:

- 1) Malaysia-China Cultural and Arts Association.
- 2) Sin Chew Daily (Chinese newspaper).
- 3) Xiao En Group.

Due to the factors stated above it would be logical to deduce that HANDS is only easily accessible to one particular ethnic group, i.e Chinese as compared to the other ethnic groups and therefore their performance identity could be perceived more as “Chinese” rather than Malaysian.

4.6 The Identity of HANDS

An important component of HANDS’s identity is the *shigu* as both an audio and visual signifier representing mainland China. In an interview with Thong Yoong How, he mentioned that when HANDS performed overseas, people assumed the identity of the group to be either Japanese or Taiwanese or even Chinese (from China). People tended to assume that HANDS was an offset of the Chinese Lion Dance group or the

Japanese Taiko drummers as these are the “Drumming Nations.” Chan (2006) says that apart from the apparent ethnicity of the performers and the drums, which are easily recognizable, anyone watching a Hands Percussion performance could easily assume that they were a Japanese Taiko group.

This was one of the reasons why Artistic Director, Goh decided to incorporate the Gamelan into their performances as then it set them apart as “different” as well as establishing the Malaysian or Asian cultural signifier. As far as Bernard was concerned, HANDS had their own unique style of drumming as it incorporated various rhythms from *joget*, *zapin* and even *tabla* in their repertoire. However, an uninitiated audience member may not be able to distinguish these differences and as much as music is auditory, it certainly helps when there is a visual stimulus.

Bernard Goh clearly identifies himself as a Chinese Malaysian. However, he feels that it is a definition that is not used to describe his music or any other music that falls into this ‘category.’ Generally in Malaysia, music falls into three major groups, Malay, Chinese and Indian and all others fall into syncretic. Being born and brought up in Malaysia culturally being imbibed with Chinese values and beliefs, he has been heavily influenced by the other races in almost every aspect of his life. Bernard grew up in Kuala Pilah, in a *kampung* where he was exposed to Malay folk music from a very young age. He also studied tabla from Master Rajendran in his early twenties as well. Although all these factors are ingredients that can imply or suggest a superficial “one-ness” Goh feels that in him, it is much deeper than that. He feels that although he was brought up in the Chinese traditional sense, he feels a strong affinity to the other cultures as well.

I don’t know how else to describe myself other than to say that I am Malaysian. I start my day with Nasi lemak and I end my day at a mamak stall. In fact my best friend during my

childhood days was a mamak boy. Yes, we feel that our tradition (Chinese) is important but it is also important for us as Malaysian Chinese to be ourselves, and we are different. Our music is a culmination of the people that we grew up with. I grew up listening to joget and P.Ramlee. I got into drumming with my sifu Master Tan as I was always very interested in rhythm, plus being young, I thought it was very “cool” to be playing the drums (Goh, personal communication, 2014).

The other composer, Susan Sarah John expressed in her interview, that her music has no identity and can only be described as being “Malaysian.” The general definitions of music, does not cover the entire spectrum of compositions that emerge locally. She did however mention in her interviews that her exposure to traditional arts only happened during her tertiary education at ASWARA. Before that, she spent most of her childhood and school days learning Western music. This led her to question the music education that is available to the primary and secondary school children and the reasons behind the current syllabi. She believes that an exposure to the multiethnic traditions in Malaysia and a hands-on experience with those instruments will promote a healthy ‘tolerant’ future generation.

Both John and Kandasamy, felt strongly that through music education at the school level a lot can be achieved. John was a Classical pianist and was only introduced to Malay traditional arts when she enrolled at ASWARA (National Arts Academy), although she had seen performances in the past. Kandasamy, who has two young children in school wishes that the Malaysian education system included music in a more productive and progressive manner. “They (the government) should make sure they educate the children about our (Malaysian) culture rather than spend all that time and energy on Western Music and that too being taught in Malay. “I feel it’s a total waste of time. If our kids learnt about each other’s cultures won’t that already be the starting point of acceptance and tolerance amongst future citizens, voters and leaders?” (Prakash

Kandasamy, personal communication, 2014). Kandasamy further notes that the policies that surround cultural performances are not in line with 1 Malaysia philosophy that was launched on September 16, 2010 by the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato Seri Najib Abdul Razak.

Kandasamy, is an important figure, enabled by HANDS to transmit *tabla* and Indian elements in HANDS's production, while merging with other genres in building a Malaysian identity. Kandasamy in his interview had an interesting story to share about the times that he has visited India (personal communication, 2014). His own *tabla* guru is based there and although Kandasamy has learn the *tabla* following the tradition 'Gurukul' (Ancient Indian method of studying) system, and being Indian, his cultural ties to his "mother-land" are very obvious, he mentions that when in India he is identified as a Malaysian. However, the irony is that in Malaysia he is known as an Indian. HANDS enabled him an important role in transmitting Indian elements in the music.

Often times, it is difficult to distinguish and separate a Malaysian art form from an Asian one as the cultural signifiers are seen as originating from the region that includes Thailand, Indonesia. Therefore HANDS, is sometimes seen as representing an Asian identity (Chan, 2009).

In an interview with Goh, he mentioned that for some time before HANDS incorporated the Gamelan into their performances, they were easily confused to be from another country, Japan for example. Also, Malaysia as a country was not very well known in the international performing circuit. He went on to say that when they performed their drum ensemble on the same platform as the Japanese Taiko drummers the distinction between the two performances were very blurred. However, with the inclusion of Gamelan, visually as well as audibly, HANDS immediately stood out as being different. These statements by Goh, was based on feedback by fellow artistes as

well as audience members during their overseas performances.

HANDS and Goh in particular started using Gamelan as part of their repertoire as a representation of their nationality and being a drumming group primarily, the Gamelan provided another avenue to drumming, in this case striking with a mallet, which fit the group's drumming philosophy. Gamelan also provided a melodic means of expression. The members of HANDS, also perform on *rebana* and other Malay traditional drums, thus acknowledge their presence in their performances as part of their Malaysian heritage.

However, the playing of *gamelan* may not reflect its original form, an experimental approach was carried out for example, the instructor John, encourages performers to explore different ways playing the gamelan which includes using their hands to strike instead of mallets. Prakash, on the other hand, explored new ways and music including the *tabla* rhythmic form in HANDS's performance. In one performance in Perth, Australia, on the 4th of November 2014, he performed a piece that included a "question-answer" section between the *tabla* and *shigu* drum. The theme of the piece revolved around a Kathak (Northern Indian Classical Dance form) dancer and therefore the footwork was choreographed following the *tabla* syllables. Thong (from HANDS) who was the *shigu* drummer, who has also learnt *tabla* from Prakash, was able to easily understand, translate and perform those *tabla* syllables onto the *shigu* (Kandasamy, personal communication, 2015). As a performer in the same piece myself I observed that during rehearsals, Thong was able to musically negotiate the theatrical style of *shigu* playing that is synonymous with HANDS with the fast paced *tabla* compositions that were used in the piece. He used the long pauses in between syllables to create a dance-like movement that added a strong visual effect to the piece.

Since year 2007 where the gamelan and later in 2009 tabla elements played a role in

HANDS's performances, the *Shigu*, which was the representative instrument of HANDS's no longer took centre-staged or featured as the main instruments of HANDS's programmes. Equal importance and focus was given to the Gamelan ensemble. In some productions, the Gamelan ensemble occupied a larger space on stage visually dominated the scene such as in *Tchaikovsky on Gamelan* in 2014 and *Ri Yue Chu Yin* in June 2011 (Figure 4.11). *Tabla* elements though, may not always be visual, as it is the rhythmic syllables as well as the *taal* elements that are incorporated into the compositions. An example of this can be seen in 'Promenade' from *Kaliedoscope III* performed in November 2014.



Figure 4.7: *Ri Yue Chu Yin* (Photo Courtesy of Hands).

The question on authenticity is a frequent topic in the field of Western art music while not very common to the field of ethnomusicology, where music is documented in its original form and learned through oral transmission. However, in the case of HANDS, 'authenticity' as a term borrowed from Western art music is discussed here in looking at to what extent HANDS employed these traditional and folk music elements

in their music creative process, how closely was its musical form, sound, and performing method were transformed when new music from HANDS was created.

In the case of HANDS, movement plays a significant role in the poiesis level of musical creation. Movement is very important to HANDS as they began with the 24 seasons drums. 24 seasons drum was invented by Mr. Tan Fui Soong and the concept was based on agricultural season according to the Chinese lunar calendar (Chan, 2006). Therefore, movements beating the drum and choreography are based on farmer's action according to different agricultural processes. Since the very beginning of HANDS creation, movement always played an important role in their performance and choreography was placed side by side to rhythmic creation. This is perhaps what makes HANDS performance very appealing to audience not only audibly but also visually. At times stylized acrobatic movements to manipulate and negotiate the instruments such as the *shigu* and the Gamelan during their performances were employed. In terms of a stage setting, HANDS does not make use of conventional instrumentation and placement. Traditionally, Drums such as *shigu* are placed on an unmovable stand and played vertically. In HANDS's productions however, these drums, are seen to be rolled, thrown and even stood on during the performance (Figure 4.12).

In some performances, the *shigu* is placed on an elevated structure resembling the *taiko* drumming style and stage setting of groups like Kodo (Japanese Taiko Ensemble). However, although Goh may have been inspired by groups such as these, during his many trips abroad, his inclusion of similar structures was done to create a theatrical effect and to add to the visual of the entire production.



Figure 4.8: Hands Percussion (photo courtesy Hands Percussion).

Gamelan, which is normally struck only using a soft mallet is used in a variety of ways, included the use of hands to tap the gongs. The Gamelan itself is used in a more stylized manner that is very different from the traditional tunes of the Javanese and Balinese ensembles. As mentioned earlier, HANDS has a custom made Gamelan set that is tuned to the slendro scale but HANDS has added three extra notes which are E flat, F sharp and A. The addition of these notes, enables them to play a complete B flat major scale rather than just a pentatonic one. The use of the Gamelan is experimental and in the case of HANDS cannot be associated with the Malaysian traditional *Joget Gamelan*. Therefore, the role of the Gamelan in HANDS could be construed to represent a more Asian identity rather than one that is unique to Malaysia.

However, as mentioned by Embong (2011), local identity is neither defined by the state nor backed by state authority. It has emerged naturally through the evolution of the history and cultural experience of the people and therefore it is accepted as a signifier of a given community by that community. It could be said that Malaysia is in the process

of finding the notion of a united nation (Shamsul, 1996) and in its pursuit of a concept called nation-of-intent coined by Rotberg (1966) which simply states that the territory, language, culture, symbols and institutions is an idea that is shared by a group of people who feel that it united them. Put in a Malaysian context, it bridges the authority defined or government defined and the everyday-people defined idea of a nation (Shamsul, 1996).

In a cultural context however, as mentioned by Mohd (2008), performing artistes not wanting to be subject to the narrow definitions of cultural practices that are currently set, are beginning to negotiate with intercultural dialogues and are more aware and culturally sensitive to the diversity that makes up this country. This is also being done whilst harnessing one's own culture and heritage.

The literature review in Chapter Two revealed that while there is broad acknowledgement of multiethnic culture in Malaysia, it is compartmentalized according to ethnicity. There is limited research on the territory that exists in between cultures which is currently being negotiated, by contemporary artistes, through intercultural exchanges in their performances and arts education.

For the remaining of this chapter the writer hopes to show a progression in identity, in particular relating to Hands Percussion, its composers, contributors, members and in comparison to other performers and composers. The term 'Performing as' used in the subsequent headings will be used to not only depict the literal cultural related issues but also the term will apply to the *performative* state of individuals as social actors. Therefore, in the pursuit of trying to analyse the mind of the composer, the different perspectives that should come into consideration in the context of identity as a performative expression are as follows. The term 'Chinese' as well, will be explained from three perspectives in order as:

- 1) As people who share a common descent and origin from China
- 2) As a socio-anthropological category especially when interacting with other ethnic groups.
- 3) Internal self-identification (Barth, 1970).

This will be followed by recommendations and justifications on the need further research. Finally the possible roadblocks or the problems with implementing the recommendation will serve as a conclusion for the chapter as well as for this study.

4.6.1 Performing as Chinese

The early migrants of the Chinese into Malaysia had very strong ties, culturally and emotionally to their homeland. Nostalgic memory of his/her homeland may be inevitable. This gave rise to the many socio-cultural groups amongst the Chinese themselves based on the many different regions of China that they originated from. In the context of this research, ‘performing as Chinese’ also refers to the traditional art forms of Dance and Music that originated from mainland China.

The traditional music and dance performances from China are specific to the region that they originate from and feature symbols of rural life, such as sticks, ribbons, fans and drums (Gonzales, 2009).

Shigu, the Chinese barrel drum is traditionally used for the Chinese Lion Dance and was brought to Malaysia by the Chinese immigrants. Within the Chinese diaspora, the street performance has held an honoured role of representing Chinese culture, community and tradition vis-a-vis a majority community (Slovenz, 1987). As a folk

practice that dates back to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it could even serve as a cultural link to a traditional past and place of origin (Carstens, 2005).

4.6.2 Performing as Malaysian Chinese

According to Lim (1999), the political upheaval and the pressure that the Chinese went through in Malaysia in the early 1960s propelled the need to strengthen the values of the Chinese culture to sustain a Chinese ethnic identity in multicultural Malaysia. With the implementation of cultural policies that challenged the Chinese society, the Chinese were forced to ‘invent’ new social practices to facilitate their stature within Malaysia’s multicultural society (*Ibid.*).

The Lion dance which was confined to street performances were taken to the stage in the form of competitions (Chan, 2002). This aspect of the Lion Dance is unique to the Chinese of Malaysia. The Lion Dance is also seen to represent the Chinese community in Malaysia, as it is included in the many national street parades organized by the government.

In the many interviews given by Goh, he mentions that it was his teacher Master Tan who created the 24 Season Drum Festival, which also makes it uniquely Malaysian. Master Tan, expressively states his association with the nationality and ‘place’ of this creation, despite the historical origin of the practice and tradition (Chan, 2006). The Chinese in Malaysia felt a great need to come together and create a united Chinese front thereby dispelling the former fragmented clan based associations. These ‘invented traditions’ became the cultural signifiers of the Malaysian Chinese.

The Education and Outreach programmes organized and conducted by HANDS members also contribute toward their performativity as Malaysian Chinese. These

programmes, aptly named the Balik Kampung Project (Returning Home), are geared toward creating awareness passing on the drumming skills to the next generation.

4.6.3 Performing as Malaysian

The cultural identity of Hands Percussion does not fit into a Chinese nor a Chinese Malaysian category but could be viewed rather as a Malaysian performing group in many aspects. The reasons are as stated below:

4.6.3.1 Conceptualisation

The conceptualisation of Hands Percussion by Goh was not to create a Chinese drumming group but rather a Malaysian drumming group. However due to its origin and its reputation in performing the 24 Season Drumming Group, the members that gyrated toward this new concept were of Malaysian Chinese origin. Goh's upbringing and childhood spent in his hometown *kampung* (village) spurred the many different concepts that he created and composed for the performances of HANDS. *Shigu* and later on the Gamelan, were communication tools through which thoughts, feeling and emotions were expressed (Chan, 2006).

The inclusion of other ethnic instruments such as the *tabla*, *gendang* and *jidor* are all part of the objective to perform a multicultural sound. Bernard himself was a student of the *rebana* and *tabla* in his young age (personal communications, 2014). Therefore the inclusion of these multiethnic instruments stem from a personal experience and disputes the mere superficial display of diversity in their performance.

4.6.3.2 Overseas Representation

Hands Percussion has performed extensively overseas and during the interviews, Bernard as well as other members related incidents that had occurred during those stints

whereby their (HANDS) identity was perceived as vague and confusing. During International Festivals in Korea and Japan, they would perform alongside a TAIKO Drumming ensemble from Japan but the was not distinguishing element to set them apart as performers and also as Malaysians. This was one of the main reasons Bernard included the Gamelan in 2007 as part of their repertoire. Apart from providing a melodic aspect to the monotonous drumming sounds, the Gamelan being a cultural signifier of the Asian region lent them their unique identity.

4.7 National Culture

Due to the unchallengeable nature of policies that are set, forming a single Malaysian cultural identity, devoid of indigenous majority or subaltern ethnic reference is definitely in the far future. The National Cultural Policy, which seeks to govern performative and non-performative aspects of culture is virtually a non-starter insofar as a united, all inclusive reform (Alphonsus, 2012).

Identity formation in HANDS led to various thoughts within the group. As mentioned earlier in Section 4.4.3.2, they have been mistaken to be troupes from China, Japan or even Taiwan. To confuse the situation even more, each composer within HANDS have different backgrounds in musical training, Goh and Ch'ng have a Graphic Design background, John, classical and traditional music and Kandasamy, Indian classical music. This could shed a cloud of ambiguity as to what identity HANDS represents in their work and thus leading to how this correlates to the National culture of Malaysia. The composers who were interviewed feel strongly that, the Malaysian National Cultural Policy seems to be religion based, and exclusive rather than inclusive. This is the general feeling amongst the performers as well. Kandasamy feels strongly that religion should be separated from culture. Due to the guidelines in the National Culture, John expressed that 'other' (minority) cultures have become parade material

whereby we showcase to the world that we are multicultural whereby on an official level we are absorbed into the main culture, which is the Malay culture, the dominant population of around 60% in the country. Hence the problem that relates back to the many government policies that have been erected in the name of ‘national unity’ (“1 Malaysia and the Unity and Disunity,” 2011).

In tourism sector, National Culture took on another angle in portraying Malaysian performing arts. *Citrawarna* (Colours of Malaysia) is an annual parade organized by the Ministry Arts, Culture and Tourism. The purpose of this parade is to showcase the diversity in culture that exists in Malaysia, not so much for the citizens of the country but mainly for tourists. All the different cultures including the Lion Dance and the Indian Peacock dance is represented. As much as this parade’s intention is to “advertise” the multicultural nature of Malaysia, it fails to bring forth the deep-rooted tradition that accompanies each of these art forms (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.9: *Citrawarna* (Colours of Malaysia) (Courtesy of ‘Holiday Travel Notes’ blog).

My own previous experiences as a Malaysian Indian dancer, recruited under the Temple of Fine Arts to dance in the parade, the then current Minister of Culture, Dato' Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, insisted that the most important part of the parade is that it must be colourful and flamboyant. These 'guidelines' that are mandated by the top most echelon of the national government are put forward to 'masters' and 'sifus' of this traditional form who have spent years in spiritual pursuit of this art form. *Bharata Natyam* for example is traditionally performed bare footed by dancers as the stamping of the feet are likened to stamping on Mother Earth and therefore shoes are a sign of disrespect. However in the *Citrawarna* parade, which takes place on the streets, it is quite common to see the *Bharata Natyam* dancer with matching shoes, although worn for practical reasons goes completely against the ritualistic beliefs of the dance gurus as well as the dancers themselves. This sort of thing happens overseas as well as in the case of The Polish Tatra Mountains as observed by Cooley (1999), also interprets folk festivals as stylized events as part of their tourism program in order to attract healthy tourist numbers.

Susan Sarah John feels that although "Malaysian music" is a real enough phenomena there is no one definition that would be enough to describe it but rather many definitions. She quoted many musicians who fit the description of "Malaysian music" but have either been categorised into Pop or Indian etc. An example would be the Ankur Orchestra by the Temple of Fine Arts. Although the basis of the orchestra was Indian the music was "distinctly Malaysian sounding" and "unique" to this country (Ganesan, 2014). Another group worthy of mention is Rhythm in Bronze of which Susan is a regular participant. Rhythm in Bronze is Malaysian based contemporary Gamelan group, whose Gamelan playing techniques have pushed the limits of the traditional confines of Gamelan playing, thus rendering some aspects of the performance as taboo (Seneviratne, 2007). Other performances include "Lets Go Mamak" by Ken Hor that

showcased a reflection of Malaysian traditions and the “way the different ethnic cultures have come together and evolved through time through communication and interaction”(Mages, 2009).

Goh has worked with many artistes in the current Malaysian performing arts scene and he feels that we are slowly but surely moving toward an era whereby Malaysian music must account for something and not just be categorized as ‘fusion’. Although fusion may be a correct term to use, he feels that it is insufficient to express the sense of belongingness he feels when he composes using different Malaysian cultural elements as well as that the word fusion can also denote an artificialness about it. He has worked with artistes from Rhythm in Bronze, The Temple of Fine Arts and many others who are making their mark as Malaysian bred musicians and composers. He mentioned that, due to lack of recognition by local authorities, these Malaysian composers are lesser known than the popular, commercial singers and musicians, again compartmentalized ethnically. Mainstream media hardly ever covers events by these artistes and this poses a huge stumbling block to the frequency and creativity of these composers as they spend a lot of time and energy sourcing funds to produce and promote their performances.

4.8 Conclusion

With the advent of the internet and easy access to information, societies have become increasingly integrated and interconnected. It has become increasingly difficult to establish the root culture of the post-modern musical styles whose cross-over nature reflects the globalization effect on music.

In the case of HANDS, performing on an international platform at world music festivals, as a representative from Malaysia, saw a need to distinguish their identity from being grouped with other percussion centric groups from drumming nations such

as Japan and Korea. This led to the reconstruction of the philosophy of HANDS with the conception of HANDS Gamelan group in 2007. The Gamelan, seen as an instrument that fit with HANDS drumming motive was thus absorbed for two reasons. The first being, that it is identified with the Malaysian-Asian region, and secondly, because it would provide melody, to an otherwise monotonous drumming score.

The background of the composers, led to a multiethnic collaboration, have contributed to the experimental nature of HANDS's performances. Purists may view the treatment of the instruments in HANDS as unorthodox, questions as to how ethnic elements were used in the music of HANDS and to what extent these are comparable to the traditional and folk genre may be difficult to answer. As the notion of 'folk authenticity' discussed by scholars (see Wiora, 1949; Saygun 1951; Moore, 2002), HANDS has never claimed to be 'authentic' and have used the *form* and not the *religious* content that lends its ethnically diverse and secular aspect to the performance. How HANDS shaped its identity reflects what Howard (2002) discussed in identity formation from a postmodernist context (see Chapter 2, p.20; see Fig. 4.14)).

This leaves with a question as to what exactly is 'Malaysian;' and why members of audience and performers are mainly Chinese. How is HANDS distinguishable from other percussion groups who share a similar outlook. The ambiguity in the response to these questions, are inevitable, and this is mainly due to the indistinguishable nature of the origin the elements that make up culture in Malaysia. Based on current definitions by Matusky and Tan (2004), music in Malaysia is divided based on ethnic boundaries and everything else is a syncretized sound. Rather than leave it at that, this study is aimed at probing this 'in-between' state and to explore the validity of the emerging trend in Malaysian composers such as HANDS, from this 'space.'

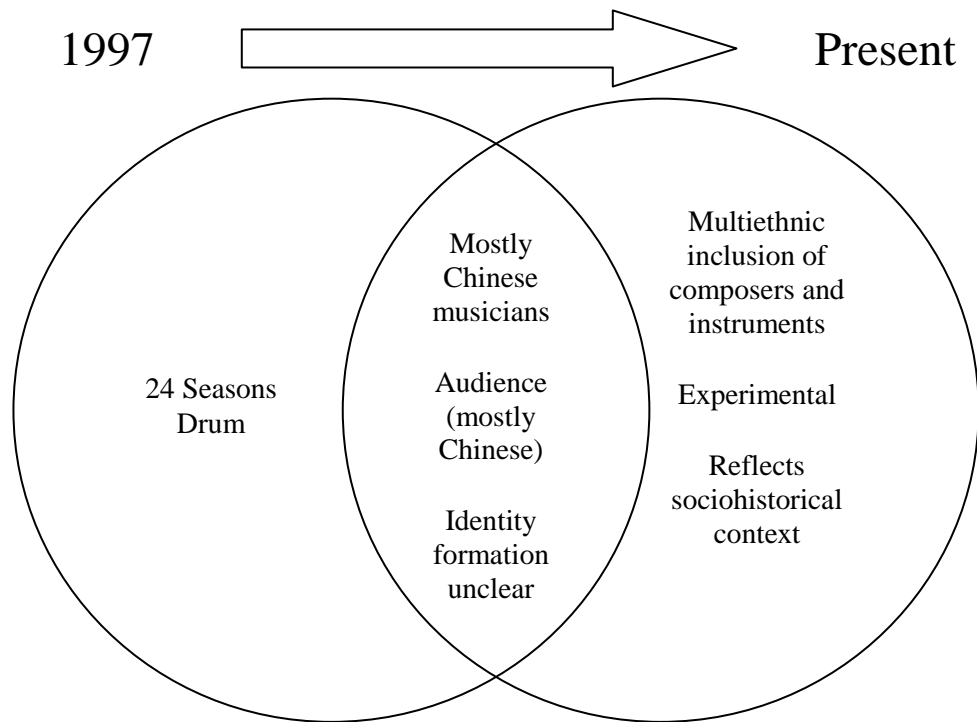


Figure 4.10: Transformation of HANDS since 1997.

Evidence from the literature review reveals a history of this trend from the 1960s with *bangsawan*, film music as well as art music but the authour feels that over time there have been and will be more composers jumping on this bandwagon as compared to before, thereby warranting some study in this area.

When the music of HANDS is viewed from a ‘world music’ perspective, the description is certainly in line with HANDS’s multiethnic instrument representation. However, in line with the cultural history and background of the composers the term ‘world music’ must be looked upon as a generalization based solely on the music and the ‘intercultural’ nature of the instruments. When considering the composer’s perspective it is important to note that the elements of the music represent the ‘home - culture’ and not mere elements of fusion.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study was set out to explore the concept of syncretizing the Gamelan, *shigu* and *tabla* in Hands Percussion's Malaysian Identity. This research questions the reason behind why the composers of Hands Percussion whose main instrument being the Chinese *shigu* drum, which has been part of Chinese drumming ensembles such as the 24 Season Drums, performing for the Chinese member audience, decided to include the Malay Gamelan as well as other instruments from various ethnic backgrounds in their performances. This research documented this phenomena looking into both its musical elements and context related to culture and nation building concepts. Due to the fact that Hands Percussion sees themselves as promoting a Malaysian rather than just a Chinese identity, the more pertinent questions center around the social and cultural identity of the composers, their choices in musical instruments and musical concepts thereby hoping to shed light on 'who' and 'what' their music represents.

This was done, by examining the background and history of Hands Percussion, which is intrinsically linked, to its founder and Artistic Director Bernard Goh and to some extent the guest composer Susan Sarah John and Prakash Kandasamy.

The main objective of this study was to bring forth the notion that, ethnic boundaries aside, the 'imagined' identity of being Malaysian first, and Chinese second, is a major contributing factor to the formation of the group's identity. This phenomena, highlights the fact that in Malaysia, music is defined monolithically by ethnic divisions, and therefore there is a lack of terminology to recognise this special 'genre' of music produced by HANDS and many other similar music groups in Malaysia.

The literature review in Chapter Two revealed that while there is broad acknowledgement of multiethnic culture in Malaysia, it is compartmentalized according to ethnicity. There is limited research on the territory that exists in between cultures which is currently being negotiated, by contemporary artistes, through intercultural exchanges in their performances and arts education. Extensive research and supportive literature, denotes the current situation in the cultural scene in Malaysia, very little has been said regarding the intermingling and intercultural exchanges that have become an important part of the performing arts scene in Malaysia.

There is much debate as to what it constitutes to be Malaysian and due to many racially motivated riots, the government has implemented policies that safeguard the indigenous majority of Malaysia which are enshrined in our Constitution as well as in Cultural Policies. Various other government related policies, with a seeming all inclusive aura, are often deemed paradoxical when juxtaposed against other policies from the same government.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This research's aims were to investigate the usage of Gamelan and *tabla* elements in the Chinese drumming percussion group Hands Percussion, with the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the background of HANDS.
- 2) To examine HANDS identity formation since the launch of HANDS Gamelan Group in 2007.
- 3) To discuss the music performance of HANDS in projecting a Malaysian identity.

It was proposed in the methodology that interviews would be the best method to try and understand the composer's intention and the ideas behind his/her compositions. This study would not be seen as representing the true sentiments of the composers of HANDS if this information was procured any other way. This data is supported by interviews with other members of HANDS as well as a score and performance analysis on selected repertoires HANDS's performances. Secondary data in the form of articles and journal articles were also considered as supporting material. The results of this is as follows:

In first objective of this study, the examination of HANDS role in the Malaysian performing arts scene it was found that although the basis of HANDS, from their productions and to the founder, Goh was rooted in a singular ethnic group, they have crossed this 'boundary' by assimilating other ethnic instruments into their repertoire such as the Gamelan and the *tabla*. As theorized by Hall (1990), identities are subject to radical historicization and are in the constant process of change and transformation.

The musical performances that incorporated the *shigu* and *tabla* were used as performative tool that was used as cultural signifiers thus setting the performances of HANDS apart from being lumped up with others from Japan and Korea during their performances on international platforms. However, although the aim of the founder, Goh was to establish a unique Malaysian identity, their cultural identity was mostly associated with being Asian rather than Malaysian specifically. The background of the composers, reflect an East-West mixture that have contributed to the experimental nature of HANDS's usage of the Gamelan and *tabla* during their performances. It is the portrayal of the form of these instruments and not the religious content that lends its ethnically diverse and secular aspect to the performances of HANDS.

Therefore to summarise the third objective of this study, HANDS's identity since the formation of its Gamelan team in 2007 as a performing group, is based on the notion that being Malaysian apart from just being Chinese is a huge and important part of their identity as members of society as well as performers on a national as well as international platform. They consider themselves as *performing as* Malaysians rather than just *as* Chinese or *as* Chinese-Malaysian whereby the term '*performing as*' implies the performative state of these individuals, in this case Goh and his team members, as social actors in the Malaysian performing arts scene.

The need for a cultural signifier in their search for a Malaysian identity, saw the inclusion of Gamelan as part of their repertoire. The Gamelan and *shigu* formed the main allies in support of the drumming philosophy adopted by HANDS. It can be concluded that this concept of a 'Malaysian identity' that HANDS claims to be is a new and uncharted territory in Malaysia and has not been explored extensively although there are other similar groups or individuals who seem to emulate this sentiment in their performances as well. Currently, it is definitely easier to 'fit' HANDS into an Asian cultural context rather than a 'uniquely Malaysian' one due to the associations and cross-over nature of HANDS's own ethnicity and their multiple instruments of various Asian ethnic groups. The culture of Malaysia itself being a culmination and assimilation of its neighbouring countries, poses difficulties in terms of separation and 'ownership' of the elements that make up this culture. Therefore it is difficult to recognize the urgent need for such a distinction to be made available in the Malaysian cultural context. However, there is enough evidence to point toward a need for some kind of acknowledgement of these 'Malaysian made' performances, in the current developing socio-cultural society of Malaysia. This is in line with John Blacking's theory of musical change that states that every society believes in certain elements in culture that

is passed on to the subsequent generations that bear the collective emotions and values of society members (Blacking & Byron, 1985).

Therefore, it can be concluded that this study's objective of investigating HANDS's identity formation post 2007 and to question what and who their music represented has been achieved. However, the results procured are dichotomous in nature. This separation is due to a disconnect in the theory and the realities of individuals who 'feel' that their culture is 'borderless' and "me and my neighbor are one" but in reality are still marginalized by the many government policies, imposed under the pretext of unity, but are paradoxically propagating their true agenda of racial segregation and hegemonic supremacy.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study may have further implications for the development of research into what is termed 'contemporary,' 'fusion' or 'syncretic' music in Malaysia. During the course of this study it was apparent that HANDS is not alone in their search for a Malaysian cultural identity. Therefore, it is important for future research into various other composers and groups such as Rhythm in Bronze, '*Ankur*' of the Temple of Fine Arts and future productions of Hands Percussion. Although there are many up and coming composers of this 'genre' the literature available only discusses past composers such as Valerie Ross, Tan Sooi Beng, Johari Salleh.

5.4 Conclusion

At the very heart of this study is a fundamental question about a sense of belonging and a search for an identity that pays respect to the differences in cultural background and acknowledges the similarities in the shared experiences as equal participants in a national imaginary. As a active member of this society that prescribes to the statements

above, I do feel that it is imperative that socially motivated 'change' in thinking and planning is not only important but a necessary process. At this point, it is difficult to define what it means to produce music with a Malaysian identity in this multicultural country. It is easier to say that the music produced by HANDS does not fit into the current definition of Chinese music or any other category that has definite parameters to gauge what belongs to a Malaysian identity. Although it is simple to term music such as this as 'fusion' or 'syncretic music', it simply will not be enough. Due to the rise in local Malaysian talents and productions this research will definitely warrant a second look at our current musical definitions.

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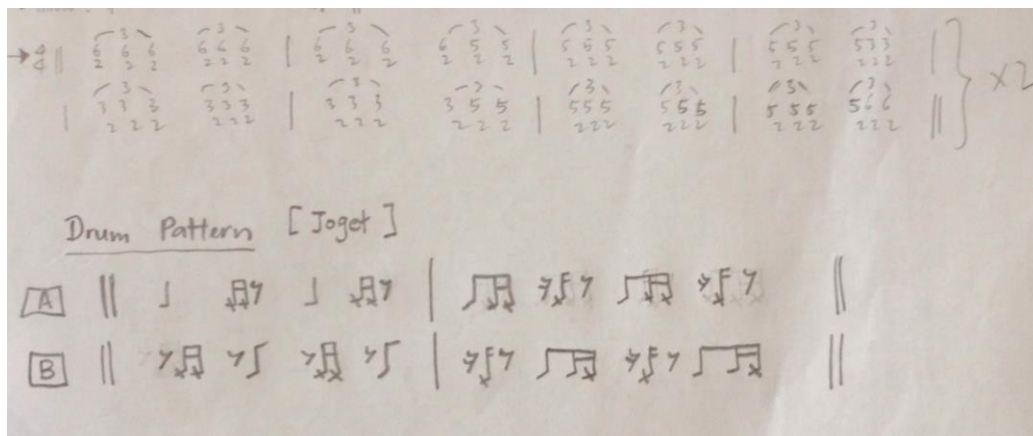
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APPENDIX 1



Joget Notation (Courtesy Jack Wan, HANDS).



Rentak Joget (Photo Courtesy, Suhaimi Ahmad).

In an interview with Jack Wan (personal communication, April 5, 2015), he explained that it gets little more complex when notating for *tabla* rhythms especially when dealing with complex rhythmic cycles. Rhythm in Indian music performs the function of a time counter. A *taal* is a rhythmic cycle of beats and there are many different cycles such as 6, 7, 8, 10 12, 16 cycles. Within a cycle, the syllables are broken into groups that are predetermined by the rules of that *taal*. These groups form the basis for the accents on the drum. Taking the example of two *Taals*, *Dadra* and *Khemta*, both cycles of 6 beats but differing in the accents. For example:

Beats	1	2	3	4	5	6
Dadra	X			X		
Khemta	X				X	

Dadra's accents are on the 1st and 4th beats and Khemta's accents are on the 1st and 5th beats. So although both taals have the same number of beats (cycle), the different accents render them to sound very different when played.

An example of a score used by HANDS denoting *tabla* syllables, are shown below in Figure 4.4. Jimmy Ch'ng who composed this piece called 'When River Duo Meet' uses the accents according to his musical interpretation and not following the traditional prescribed *taal* 'rules' that dictate the accent placement. Ch'ng does however, use the different time cycles that are abundant in Indian music such as the 5 beat cycle, 7 beat cycle and the 9 beat cycle.

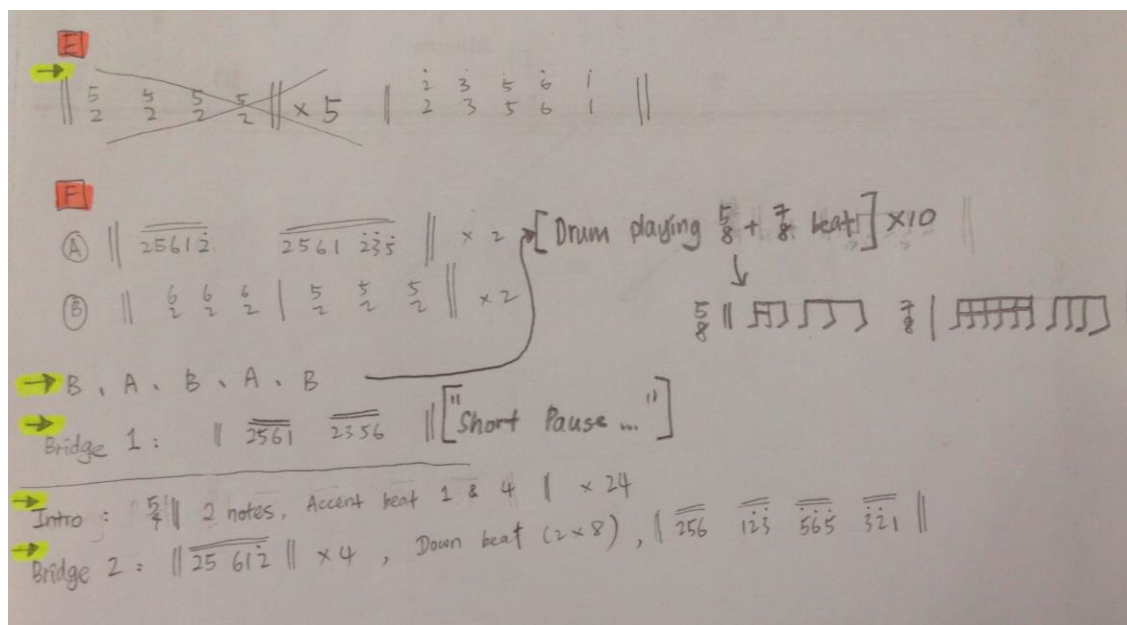


Tabla Notation – *When River Duo Meet* (Courtesy Jack Wan, HANDS).

When I asked Wan on how he interpreted his notations especially the *tabla* syllables, he gave me the example of the score as shown in Figure 4.4 and 4.5. He explained that in Figure 4.5, section F, the composition written by Ch'ng was inspired from Indian mathematical counting integrated with western polyrhythms. His explanation was that the sequence used was A B A B whereby A was a 5/4 cycle interspersed with a 7/4 rhythmic cycle.

Figure 4.5 below also shows an example of a score that was written with polyrhythms. Jack explained that the first three patterns are “Indian Rhythm” inspired played in a 5/4 pattern with accents on the 1st and 4th beats. The second pattern is played with 5/4 cycle interspersed with a 4/4 cycle. The third pattern is in a 5/4 cycle but the accents are played on the 1st and 4th beat only, the same as the first pattern.

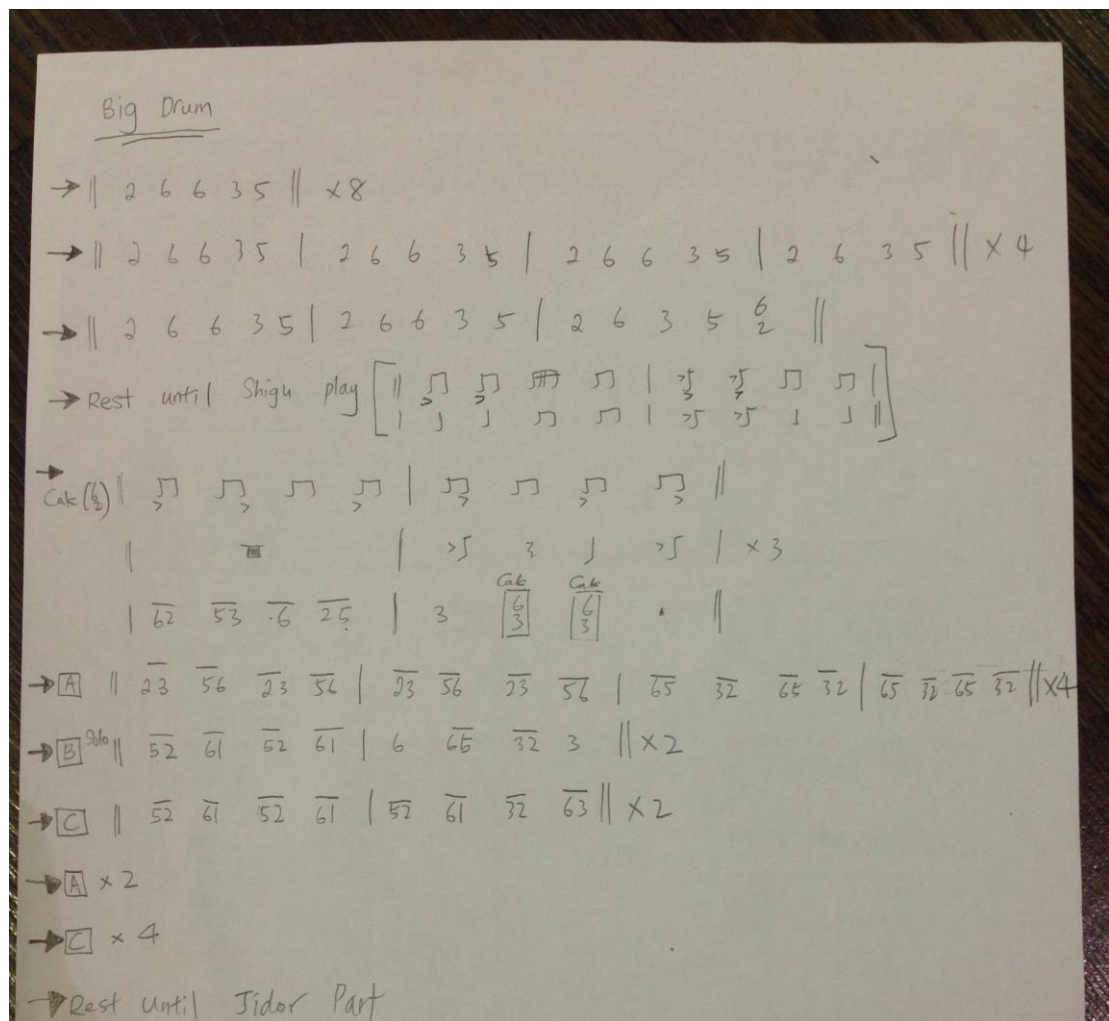



Tabla Notation – *Where River Duo Meet* (Courtesy Jack Wan, Hands Percussion).

However, I found that oral transmission is still the main approach used in teaching because the system used in HANDS notation is just a reference and is difficult for any other musician to decipher by just looking at the notes.

APPENDIX 2

Analysis of *Flesh and Bone*.

Time	Form	Note
00.01		Chinese Flute (<i>dizi</i>) solo. Flautist plays in darkness slowly lit by a single spot light.
02.39		<i>Digeridoo</i> play in the background
03.38		<i>Digeridoo</i> player is seen leading the drummers on to stage from the audience side. Drummers are in red and black with the faces painted.
05.36		Drummers kneel with heads bowed in respect with <i>dizi</i> still playing. <i>Dizi</i> player slowly makes his way off stage.
07.44		Start of new section signified with a loud ‘Ha’ sound by one of the drummers. Next part is ensemble using clapping and vocal percussion as well as body percussion to create complex rhythms while using body movement to create theatrics. Drummers create many patterns, standing in a circle and a line while clapping and using their costume that is designed as a drum-head.
08.38		<i>Rebab</i> entry, starting as a solo and drummers move around the stage in a trance like movement followed by a repetition of the clapping and body percussion.
10.37		Entry of Malay drums such as <i>gendang</i> and <i>jidor</i> to join the clapping ensemble. Malay drums played the rhythm that is similar to the <i>Zapin</i> beat.

		 <p><i>Dizi</i> joins the Malay drums, playing a melody.</p>
11.43		<i>Dizi</i> , Malay drums and clapping ensemble play together creating and layering rhythms and including movement into their music.
13.17		Gamelan solo. Gamelan is tuned to Bflat major.
14.19		Entry of other drummers carrying Chinese smaller drums called ‘ <i>Da-gu</i> ’. Small drums function as instruments that are rolled to each other, exchanged and played. Few drummers also emerge wearing the huge barrel drum strapped around their shoulders.
15.06		Gamelan changes to an upbeat melody and the rhythm of the drummers become faster and more energetic.
15.57		Solo female voice is heard over the Gamelan. Singer is part of the Gamelan ensemble.
19.00		Gamelan tempo increases to allegro and stops abruptly at 20.18
20.19		Drummers wit barrel drums leave and drummers with <i>da-gu</i> become quiet and place them in front while kneeling in a row. Thus begins the <i>dikir-barat</i> section with the drummers using the small drums, clapping and floor to create rhythmic sounds and patterns.
21.53		Drummers use the <i>da-gu</i> to play in the style of the Malay <i>Kompang</i> , using the palm of their hand to clap against the skin of the drum that is held in the other hand.

24.16		This part moves into a solo barrel drum by Jimmy Ch'ng followed by a 'question and answer' section between Jimmy and the Malay <i>Gendang</i> .
29.35		Gamelan changes to a 5 beat cycle and after 4 cycles is joined by the <i>shigu</i> playing complex rhythms to complement the 5 beat cycle.
30.00		This develops into a full blown <i>shigu</i> ensemble with 12 drummers. Tempo builds up as the ensemble is joined by the Gamelan, accented by the voices of the drummers. All other percussionist join in and the tempo increases to a sudden stop at 33.00

Analysis of the *The Next*.

Time	Form	Note																								
00.01		Announcement of item																								
00.17		Drums rolling, staccato.																								
	A	<i>Tao gu</i> composition starts in a simple beat followed by a complex polyrhythms in 7 and 5 beats.																								
01.09	B	<i>Tao gu</i> and <i>shi-gu</i> play a question and answer session.																								
01.35		Followed by the Shigu drums being hit on the rims of the drums by the sticks creating a sharp sound, very common to the Lion Dance style of drumming.																								
01.56		<i>Tao-gu</i> solo. Again the use of juxtaposed rhythms to colour the simple 4 beat cycle.																								
02.30		<i>Shigu</i> plays a mechanical ‘military’ beat mimicking the drums at a march-past during the army drill parades. Followed by <i>Tao-gu</i> improvising on top of this beat creating different accents.																								
		Different accents on the same cycle create a different feeling. For example, <table><tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td></tr><tr><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td></tr><tr><td>XX</td><td>X-</td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td>XX</td><td></td><td>X-</td><td>XX</td></tr></table> This is followed by more layering and accents Till the next section.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	X		X	X		X		X	XX	X-	X	X	XX		X-	XX
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8																			
X		X	X		X		X																			
XX	X-	X	X	XX		X-	XX																			
04.09	C	Gamelan entry with this melody (C major, pentatonic scale, using CDFGA).																								

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		DC	DC	DC	DC	FD	FD	FD	FD
04.09		<i>Gendang sunda</i> improvisation with Gamelan.							
05.00	D	Gamelan melody changes to double time accompanied by the drums. Tempo increases slightly.							
06.10	C	Back to form C, with Gamelan playing simple melody but with slight improvisations to the line.							
06.47		Gamelan changes the tempo to a 5 beat cycle by playing a (3 +2) beat. This goes on till 7.36							
07.36		Gamelan solo, in 8 beats with <i>shigu</i> accompaniment. Gets louder and very intense. Tempo is increased. The <i>shigu</i> drums are played resembling the sounds of the fire-crackers played during Chinese New Year. Piece ends by drums fading off while playing.							

Analysis of *Promenade*.

Time	Form	Note
00.01	A	Random knocking with drum sticks on side of <i>shigu</i> to produce sharp sounds. Knocking sound was uncoordinated and done in darkness.
01.54	B	Voice cue (HA) given by Jimmy Ch'ng to start coordinated drum passage based on a <i>tabla</i> ' <i>qaida</i> ' composition, incorporating multiple rhythm cycles within a cycle of 8 beats.
01.14	A	Same composition played by solo performer while other remain quiet.
01.46		Solo player continues while other join in one by one, each assigned to play different accents within the 8 beat cycle.
02.43	B	Recitation of drum syllables in the style of South Indian ' <i>konnokol</i> ' while playing the drums at the same time. All players reciting and playing at the same time.
03.00	B	Voice recitation and percussion question and answer session
03.15	A	Back to form A, coordinated playing and loud
03.45		Some players used their voice and bells to add to the accents and ongoing rhythm.
04.00	C	New part. Only the use of bells. Many cross rhythms carefully played following a 8 beat cycle but individual players had a 5 beat cycle and 7 beat cycle to play over this main tempo. Textures of the modified drums were used so as to be able to differentiate the sounds of the different accents.

04.15		Solo Bells, improvised section over 8 beats. Fading off after 8 cycles.
05.21	D	Silence for a split second followed by 7 beat cycle played by solo drummer. Layered by 16 beats broken into (6+6+4) by second drummer. Both getting louder and more intense into crescendo, then abrupt stop.
6.49	E	All drummers in a 5 beat cycle, coordinated.
7.14		Lights off except on one player, then joined by others one by one.
7.53	F	Drum rolling and moving into a completely different sound. More slow and gamelan sounding. Adagio without tempo. This went on for some time. Slowly building into a steady beat using a 4 beat cycle divided into (4+3+4+5) building into composition on part A
10.43		Composition ends with <i>tihai</i> or cadence played three times as in Indian rhythms to signify the end of a piece.
11.36		Rhythms continue till fade off at 13.36.