

Malaysian Composers Collective
Report for 2009
By CH Loh, February 2009

1. HSBC Young Composers Workshop 2008

The main project for the collective was Malaysia's first ever Young Composers Workshop organised with main sponsor HSBC Bank as part of their annual Classics Festival.

The workshop showcased performances of five finalists and one Honourable Mention selected from a call for scores that began in March 2008. The call for scores received nearly 20 submissions from young composers under the age of 28.

Their scores were workshopped and performed by a chamber group of three pianists, a flute and an oboe. The final concert also featured works by established composers Chong Kee Yong, Ng Chong Lim and Johan Othman, the last, for soprano and harp/piano was especially striking. The performances at the concert were by Malaysian musicians and represented the country's first ever fully Malaysian contemporary music concert by Malaysian musicians, which was an impressive achievement from the standpoint of the high level of musicianship as well as the content of the concert.

a. Workshops

The workshops began with a first public reading at KL Performing Arts Centre in June 08. A second workshop was held during the Festival on Fri July 2008.

The workshop on Friday was very well attended and was nearly full, and attendees included musicians, audiences and parents with children. Members of the composers' community in Penang also made a trip to KL to attend the workshop.

Also present were members of the broadcast media from TV Pendidikan and NTV7.

At the workshop all five finalists pieces were rehearsed and discussed, together with Overhead Projection of the score, which some members of the audience commented they found useful.

At the end of the workshop an informal private discussion session was organized by Selection Panel between senior composers present and the young participants to discuss the submitted works.

Participants in the workshop gave feedback after the event that they enjoyed the workshops so far and that it had been a very good learning experience for them, and that it encouraged them to work harder at their composition. They appreciated the opportunity to have their works performed and looked forward to future projects of this nature.

The musicians involved in the project also expressed enthusiasm for such initiatives and are eager to be involved in future new music projects as they found it not only refreshing but also meaningful.

b. The concert, Sunday July 13

The final concert saw a good audience turnout. The programme featured a variety of music from instrumental to voice. The winner of the workshop was Tan Zi Hua, 24, an engineer from Penang.

The response from the audience to the programme was very enthusiastic and spontaneous. Each piece was greeted with hearty applause and calls.

Some comments from the audience after the concert included how much they enjoyed the pieces, and how impressed they were with the quality of our young composers and performers.

The project generated publicity various print media and web media as well as television interviews with Workshop Artistic Director CH Loh by Astro Awani, interview and filming of Workshop Selection chairman Chong Kee Yong by television networks NTV7 as well as a documentary coverage of the youngest composer to attend the festival by Radio TV Malaysia 1.

c. Post Event developments

The event generated interest from various sponsors and organisations like Japan Foundation and Goethe Institute.

The winner of the YCW went on to be selected as a finalist at the Ton de Leeuw 2008 International Competition for Young Composers in Albania in Nov 08.

2. Malaysian Composers CD Anthology Volume 1

From May 07 – Jan 08 Hardesh Singh and CH Loh worked on an audio CD of 13 works by 9 Malaysian composers for free distribution with Malaysia's leading magazine Off The Edge, a subsidiary of the business weekly The Edge Publications.

The project was funded by HSBC Bank Malaysia Limited, Krishen Jit Astro Fund and several other members of the arts community, and supported by Off The Edge magazine.

The CD was distributed on 1 February to 7000 readers of the magazine nationwide as well as to regional subscribers. Further copies were distributed free at various arts events and promotions such as the Amir Muhammad Book Launch at Annex, KL and the website contest at www.kakiseni.com as well as other channels such as direct mailing to regional libraries (eg Singapore National Library and Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Library) as well as during overseas trips such as Hardesh Singh's UK Study Trip and visits to the Thailand Composition Festival 08

The project generated six newspaper feature articles.

3. Networking:

Representatives of the Collective met with regional composers during the year:

- CH Loh and Chong Kee Yong attended the Thailand Composition Festival 08 in Bansaen in July 08 and met with numerous Thai composers to set up channels for future cooperation.
- KL composers also met with Philippines composer Dr Jonas Baes at a gathering organised at the end of his tenure at University Malaya in November 08
- Chong Kee Yong met with TIMF Artistic Director to introduce him to the Malaysian music scene.

4. Other Concerts and Talks:

- Segi College Subang Jaya organised several contemporary music concerts at their premises:

- American Oboist Keri McCarthy performed a programme of South East Asian oboe works in April 08
- New Zealand composer/pianist performed various works including Chinese works in Nov 08
- A talk on Malaysian contemporary music was conducted at the alma mater of composer Chong Kee Yong at his hometown Kluang in 2008

5. Website

The website **www.malaysiancomposers.com** has proven to be a valuable resource for students and composers and a good networking and community tool for Malaysian and regional composers with the help of a mailing list and online discussion group. Dr Jonas Baes wrote a paper about the website as one of the fruits of his Malaysian tenure. The website is now in its second year of operation.

6. Plans for 2009

- The MCC is working with Goethe Institute to prepare for a full-fledged contemporary music festival in Kuala Lumpur at the end of the year.
- Plans to set up a Malaysian contemporary music resource centre at Segi College has also been initiated and is being studied. The resource centre will be an archive for Malaysian scores, recordings and other related material and will include collections of other contemporary scores, books and study material as well as music as donated by members, for the benefit of students and researchers.
- A follow up CD of Malaysian music is being discussed with potential partners and targeted for release in 2009.