



The Forging of a “Singapore Sound” in Saxophone Compositions of Zechariah Goh

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine two of Goh’s saxophone works that demonstrate how the composer realized Singaporean identity through the synthesis of Western, Tibetan, and Indian musical elements. The research design of this qualitative case study is narrative research with data collection carried out by semi-structured questions, email interview with the composer and review of text, videos, and journal articles that relate to the government policies of racial integration and multiculturalism in Singapore, followed by analysis of two of the recent works that evolved from the fusion of Eastern and Western styles. The two works for this qualitative study are *Images of Tibet for Soprano Saxophone and Piano*, and *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*. The findings show that 1) *Images of Tibet* uses Western formal structures, the technique of thematic development, and Tibetan musical idioms; and 2) *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam* employs the Indian Tala, motivic modification technique used in the Fugues of Johann Sebastian Bach, and pandiatonicism as employed in Impressionistic works of Debussy and Ravel. This study reveals the two ways in which the composer uses to intertwine the East and West in his connection to his cultural roots.

Keywords: Saxophone music; Singapore Sound, Singapore composition

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INTRODUCTION

Zechariah Goh Toh Chai is Senior Lecturer in Composition at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), where he hosts the Singapore Saxophone Symposium. It is an annual saxophone event that attracts both international and local artists. His compositions for saxophone are also pivotal to the development of both saxophone music and its status as a solo instrument in Singapore. Goh’s works are usually premiered by renowned saxophonists whom he provided performance op-

portunities in the Singapore Saxophone Symposium. This, in turn, allows young saxophonists of Singapore to experience firsthand the instrument’s virtuosic capabilities (which is not prevalent in the early stages of saxophone education in Singapore), encouraging them to pursue serious saxophone training.

Regarding his artistic excellence in the field of composition, Goh received the Young Artist Award (Music) from the National Arts Council in September 2003. This award was presented to Zechariah Goh by the President of the Republic of Singapore

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at Istana (Music Education Global, 2021). Goh was awarded the Artistic Excellence Award from the Composers and Authors Society of Singapore in 2013 and the distinguished Alumni Medal from NAFA in 2014 (Music Education Global, 2021). He has written over 60 choral works and was commissioned to write *The Spirit Rejoices*, the compulsory set piece for the final of the inaugural World Choral Conducting Competition that took place in Hong Kong in July 2019 (Music Education Global, 2021).

To date, Goh has written six works for the saxophone: *Concertino for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble* (2004), *Suite for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (2006, 2010-2011), *Homage for Saxophone Quartet* (2012), *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble* (2013), *Images of Tibet for Soprano Saxophone and Piano* (2015) and *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam* (2018). Among his works, *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble*, *Homage for Saxophone Quartet*, and *Images of Tibet for Soprano Saxophone and Piano* are performed regularly by saxophonists in Asia and the United States, such as the recording of *Homage for Saxophone Quartet* by h2 Quartet in their album *Infinity Mirror*. His *Suite for Alto Saxophone and Piano* was also chosen as one of the choice pieces for the Second Asia Saxophone Congress Competition.

In a video interview conducted by Project Idiom, a website supported by Yale-NUS that featured composers who write concert music in Singapore and explores their preoccupations, motivations, stories, and music, Goh commented that it has become very helpful for him to think about music that is related to his roots and tradition (Project IDIOM, 2019). To the composer, folk music is a means of reconnecting with one's heritage, especially as a citizen of an emerging country with a short history; however, it is just the starting point for this process, which Goh would decide what folk elements he would employ in a particular composition, followed by treatment of the music with traditional Western composition techniques (Project IDIOM, 2019). In Goh's saxophone music,

his approach of inter-mingling of elements from both Western classical and traditional Tibetan and Indian music into his composition, such as time signature and traditional elements is apparent in his two latest works for saxophone, *Images of Tibet* and *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*.

Images of Tibet was written in 2015 as a request of Ao Kun, the saxophone professor of the Wuhan Conservatory of Music, who specifically requested Goh to compose a saxophone work incorporating Chinese folk elements, in which Tibetan elements were selected for this composition (Wong, 2020, p. 51). Here, the composer uses Western classical formal structures, but the music is filled with traditional Tibetan and Chinese folk music elements such as employing grace notes and "bisbigliando" to mimic the production of the short drawl and "Shan" in traditional Tibetan speech and Chinese music respectively.

Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam was composed for NAFA and Mahidol University students to perform together at the 18th World Saxophone Congress in Zagreb, Croatia (Wong, 2020, p. 56). The use of Carnatic material is interesting for this composition at this particular event as Southern India music is often viewed as having a close correlation to gaining new prominence due to the emerging presence of South Asia (Kalmanovitch, 2005, p. 136). This composition follows the formal structure of a *Tala* (a metric cycle with a specific number of beats) and incorporates compositional ideas from Indian Vedic literature. For example, Goh employs the elements of *Yajur Veda* (a collection of mantras and verses that forms part of the ancient sacred literature of India) in the construction of the second thematic material by using the chant syllabus of four notes—two main notes and two accents as the source material of the second thematic material (Young, 1998, p. 6). More examples are provided in the following section regarding this composition. The fusion of Eastern and Western styles that Goh employs can be seen as his

embrace of multiculturalism in Singapore. This socio-political movement initiated by Singaporean government promotes liberal ideas such as tolerance and acceptance of diversity among Singaporean citizens, and it also influences the Singaporean concept of sound (Lizeray & Lum, 2019, p. 20). Born in 1970, Goh is one of the first generations of Singaporeans that was brought up in this imaginary national-building exercise conceived by the Singapore government to build an identity for its nation.

The populations of modern-day Singapore are mostly descendants of laborers recruited by the British from China, India, and Malaya (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 71). It is precisely this cultural hybridity that Singapore finds itself neither East nor West (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 71). The national identity matter was of utmost importance to the Singaporean government after it left the Malaysia Federation in 1965 to begin its journey as a sovereign country (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 73). With no pre-colonial past, Singapore embraced its multiculturalism as a form of inventing its nativity from a mish-mash of different groups of immigrants (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 73). The validation of each group of immigrants is done through the celebration of the different cultures that they bring from their respective homelands but in a delimited form that they can also experience in their new home in Singapore (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 78). It should be pointed out that the government policy was not to assimilate but to integrate each different community to build up common attributes such as one common working language, same loyalties, similar values, and attributes so as to make the different communities more cohesive nation (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 79).

The use of traditional Tibetan and Indian elements in these two works is in line with Goh’s interview with Project Idiom SG. Here, he mentions his early attempt to channel the influences of traditional Western classical and traditional Chinese, Indian, and Malay music, to which he was exposed in his childhood through television programs, in his compositional process

over the past ten years (Project IDIOM, 2019).

Despite the popularity of Goh’s works, there has been no scholarly work on his music for the saxophone. Much of his biographical information for this paper was gathered from his interviews with Project Idiom SG and Music Education Global. This study aims to provide insights into Goh’s fusion of Western music composition techniques with traditional Tibetan and Indian music elements in two of his saxophone works: *Images of Tibet for Soprano Saxophone and Piano*, and *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*. Also, it discusses in detail how the Singaporean composer realizes his own “Singapore sound,” which coincides with the national trend emerging out of the Singaporean government’s attempts to characterize a cohesive and overarching national identity after its independence in 1965.

METHOD

The research design of this qualitative case study is narrative research to discover the social constructivist that enabled an artist in Singapore to develop his own unique sound concepts and composition direction.

Data collection methods employed were email interview employed with semi-structured questions with the composer to provide context for each of his musical works for the saxophone. Text, videos, and journal articles that relate to the policies of racial integration and multiculturalism by the government and its influence on the arts were also reviewed, followed by an analysis of two of the composer’s recent works that evolved from the fusion of Eastern and Western styles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Scope and Context of Multiculturalism in Singapore

This section deals with how the Singapore government’s policies on promoting a multiracial society significantly im-

pact the country's fusion of Western and Eastern musical elements. As there is no published scholarly writing on Goh or his music, this study will serve as a pioneer study on the Singaporean composer and as a companion for future research on saxophone or other instrumental works by Singaporean composers.

The scope of this paper would be limited to: Giving an overview of how the government's policies since the founding of Singapore to modern-day Singapore influenced the diversity of different races in Singapore; The study of two of Zechariah Goh's latest two pieces of work: *Images of Tibet for Soprano Saxophone and Piano*, *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam* and illustrated how his music is influenced by multiculturalism in Singapore, allowing him to have a perspective.

The Context of Multiculturalism in Singapore

Singapore is a multicultural Southeast Asian nation with rich traditions, forged by complex processes of migration and settlement (Lizeray & Lum, 2019, p. 1). It is also a country that is rapidly changing. Its economic policies promote free trade and the free movements of capital have led to the high penetration rate of technologies and cultural influences from the rest of the world (Lizeray & Lum, 2019, p. 1). As a result of these historical processes, Singapore is often taken to be at once to be hyper-globalized yet firmly grounded in Asian traditions (Lizeray & Lum, 2019, p. 1). These phenomena are characterized as two forces that pit themselves against one another, and the struggle to synthesize the two continues to preoccupy Singapore's leaders in their attempt to form a cohesive and overarching national identity (Lizeray & Lum, 2019, p. 1). However, the coexistence of globalization and traditionalism has raised the important question of how Singaporeans and the Singapore art scenes can best experience and reconcile the dichotomy between the contemporary and the traditional in the construction of their identity (Lizeray & Lum, 2019, p. 1).

Singapore invests enormously in the official validation of three separate reified cultures – Chinese, Malay, and Indian – as it is through these three “Asian high cultures” that Singapore aims to forge its unique and quintessential multiracial Asian-ness (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 78). As a result, ethnicity has been lifted out of the realm of un-self-conscious, lived culture and into the sphere of ideology. In the Singaporean context, Chinese-ness, Malay-ness, and Indian-ness are constructed as sites of authentic Asian-ness, designed to provide the national culture with substance and original solidity (Ang & Stratton, 1995, p. 78).

This coexistence of culture began with the founding of modern Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles, and music has always been an integral part of this heritage, as the British brought along Western music entered the island to join the indigenous Malay musical traditions of the region (Dairianatha & Phan, 2005, p. 2). An influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants also contributed their own musical heritage to an already rich multicultural mix of Western and Malay influences, as well as the surviving Portuguese traditions dating back to the pre-colonial occupation (Dairianatha & Phan, 2005, pp. 2-3). With the culmination of the rich diversity in cultures, Singaporean music developed into what today can broadly be divided into two categories: 1) “Traditional Singaporean Music,” which is comprised of Malay, Chinese, and Indian music, and 2) “Western-based musical compositions” by Singaporean composers (Dairianatha & Phan, 2005, p. 3).

A government policy to foster multiculturalism is the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP), which was introduced in 1989 (Chan & Chong, 2021). As mentioned by the Minister for National Development of Singapore, when Singapore was still under British rule, the Raffles Town Plan, also known as the Jackson Plan, designated separate geographical zones to ethnically separate the living areas of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Europeans (Chan & Chong, 2021). This segregation was not conducive to promoting interaction and integration

between the races (Chan & Chong, 2021).

When Singapore gained its independence in 1965, its founding fathers were determined to build a cohesive, multiracial society that was based on the idea of one united people, regardless of race, language, or religion (Chan & Chong, 2021). The government encouraged this through its public housing policies (Chan & Chong, 2021). For instance, when new towns and estates were built to provide public housing for Singaporeans, the government consciously allocated flats in such a way that every HDB block and precinct all over Singapore reflected the ethnic mix of the general population for new apartments. As a result of EIP, public housing estates remained inclusive and diverse, even beyond initial flat allocation (Chan & Chong, 2021). By the late 1980s, there was an increasing concentration of ethnic enclaves in the resale market (Chan & Chong, 2021). As a result, it capped the proportion of flats in each government housing block and neighborhoods that can be owned by households of each ethnic group (Chan & Chong, 2021).

While Singapore’s diversity lends itself to unique musical and artistic expressions, that very diversity also poses a significant challenge for those who seek to define the music of Singapore (Dairianatha & Phan, 2005, p. 1). It also makes the challenge of chronicling the music of Singapore a difficult one, as the writer must contend with the questions of where and how to begin as well as which type, genre, or tradition of music to feature (Dairianatha & Phan, 2005, p. 1).

The confluence of past and present, of the traditional and the contemporary, and of local singularity is the direction that many Singaporean composers take in their creative route (Lizeray & Lum, 2019, p. 1). Goh’s recent compositions for saxophone also reflect this. When he was a child, the composer was highly influenced by music television programs featuring Indian, Chinese, and Malay traditional music (Project IDIOM, 2019). Such exposure allowed Goh to develop a “sound library” of sorts

in his mind and also serves as a reference when composing music related to his roots and local traditions (Project IDIOM, 2019). He also stressed that thinking about national identity has facilitated him in developing his composition process. Goh mainly employed Chinese elements in his compositions in his earlier days, but over the past decade, the composer has increasingly used Malay and Indian music in his writing (Project IDIOM, 2019). Notably, obvious components such as tunes or scales from traditional Malay and Indian music are not present in his works. Goh, rather, incorporates Carnatic ideas and rhythmic structures in his work *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*. Therefore, audiences might not be able to recognize Malay and Indian musical influences in his works. (Project IDIOM, 2019).

Images of Tibet for Soprano Saxophone and Piano

Most of Goh’s saxophone compositions include a fairly Western usage of formal structure and thematic material. However, in 2015, he began to employ elements of traditional Asian music in his writing. This new direction manifested in *Images of Tibet for Soprano Saxophone and Piano*. The work consists of four short movements based on Tibetan folk songs: “Song from the Prairie” (草原上的歌), “A Toast” (敬酒歌), “Lullaby” (催眠曲) and “Young Friends” (年轻的朋友) (Wong, 2020, p. 51). This is in line with Goh’s interview with Project Idiom SG; he discussed borrowing elements of traditional folk music and their formal structures and how he applies them to music he has written in the last ten years (Project IDIOM, 2019).

The incorporation of traditional Tibetan elements by Goh into *Images of Tibet* is not haphazard and superficial. In each individual movement, the composer strives to use Western structural organizations as platforms to showcase the elements of Tibetan folk music evident in *Images of Tibet*. Goh’s fusion of traditional Western elements and traditional Tibetan materials embodies this construct of the forging

of his personal “Singapore sound.” For example, the four movements of *Images of Tibet* are governed by Western formal structures such as modified strophic Form, binary Form, through-composed Form, and bar Form respectively, as shown in Tables 1-4.

Table 1. Overall Strophic formal structure of “Song from the Prairie” from *Images of Tibet*.

Mea- sure	5-10	11-14	15-19	20- 22	23-27	27-35
Key	F Maj Penta- tonic	F Maj Penta- tonic	F Ma- jor - C Major		C Major	C Major
Sec- tion	Verse 1	Verse 2	Verse 3		Verse 4	Verse 5

“Song from the Prairie” (草原上的歌) depicts a singing in the vast plain of the Tibetan plateau. In this movement, Goh uses the modified strophic Form to evoke the sense of Romantic longing in many German lieder. This structure is also used in Schubert’s lieder such as *Gute Nacht* from *Witerreise*, *Schwanengesang*, *Ständchen*, and *Die Forelle* (Roman, 1996, 372). While the lied is considered to be a 19th century art form, strophic songs were long regarded as a native German genre, popular from at least the end of the 16th century (Dellal, 2014, p. 363). This use of the modified strophic Form is an appropriate choice as it also represents the simplistic and poetic nature of the lied. Interestingly, Goh’s use the Form in a very flexible manner. The demarcation between each section is seamless and one phrase follows after another, contributing to the reciting quality of the movement.

The composer achieves the poetic quality of the lied by creating the main thematic idea in “Song from the Prairie” from four elements: a long note followed by a short ascending melisma, a descending triplet gesture, an ascending pentatonic scale in sixteenth notes, and a final descending pentatonic motive, as presented in Figure 1. The use of feathered beaming effectively creates a sense of urgency while long notes the sense of space. The composer uses all four elements throughout the

movement, either repeating them literally or subjecting them to variations of range and direction. This main theme is used in both its entirety and short fragments throughout the movement.



Figure 1. “Song from the Prairie” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 6-10.

This piece’s treatment of formal structure and thematic material is very much grounded in Western classical music tradition. The secular influences of these four short movements are extracted from different aspects of the Tibetan population and different regions and dialects; some of these songs have a ceremonial purpose, for use at weddings and other social occasions, while other songs have an occupational association, and others still are simply emotive in character (Lhalungpa, 1969, p. 8).

Tibetan folk songs provided entertainment for everyone who knew them (Lhalungpa, 1969, p. 8). They provided a feeling of company for those engaged in lonely journeys across the great plateau; they also brought consolation to those in sorrow and helped to lighten the burdens of a working life (Lhalungpa, 1969, p. 8). Thus, to effectively perform and appreciate *Images of Tibet*, both the performer and audience must have a slight understanding of the context of the music of Tibet, as the musical interpretation of this piece is very ethnic in nature. The music is written in a very simplistic and Western-notated way and there are many examples across the piece that evokes traditional Tibetan folk music.

“Song from the Prairie” includes an example of polyrhythm in measure 13, with eighth, sixteenth, and sextuplet-sixteenth notes in the soprano saxophone part set against a quarter note triplet pattern in the piano part (Figure 2). In the context of this music, it is suggested to perform this measure as expansively as possible to port-

ray an image of the vastness of a prairie.

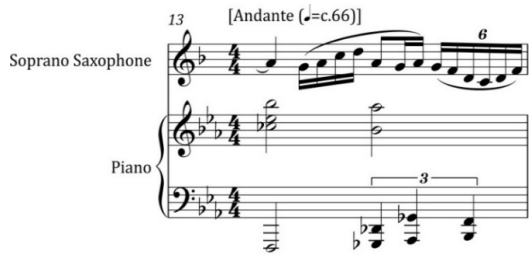


Figure 2. “Song from the Prairie” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 13.

Table 2. Overall binary formal structure of “A Toast” from *Images of Tibet*.

Measure	36-46	47-58	59-70	71-73	74-85	86-97
Section	Introduction	A	B	Transition	A'	B'

In “A Toast” (敬酒歌), the song-like element depicts the performers as though they are singing in front of a bonfire in the middle of the Tibetan fields. The Form that “A Toast” follows is a binary form that follows an ABAB structure. In “A Toast,” the saxophone entry in measure 47, serves as a basis for thematic development in the return of the second A section, as illustrated in Figure 3. Goh then employs important compositional principles from European art music when developing thematic material in *Images of Tibet* (Frisch, 1982, 215). Variation of melodic elements is used to create musical variety and contrast (Frisch, 1982, 215). In order to create cohesion within his music, Goh mixes and matches different motives and themes- setting one as melody and another as counter-melody, for example. He also uses Western techniques of augmentation and diminution to vary melodic ideas like rhythmically stretching or compressing them, respectively.

The thematic material is developed by traditional Western composition techniques of augmentation, displacing the rhythms and employing embellishment in measures 51-54 as shown in Figure 4a. In the return to the A section in return of the A section in measure 78-81 as shown

in Figure 4b, the same thematic material is augmented and fragmentized to provide variation.



Figure 3. A Toast from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 47-50.



Figure 4a. “A Toast” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 51-54 (augmentation and embellishment).

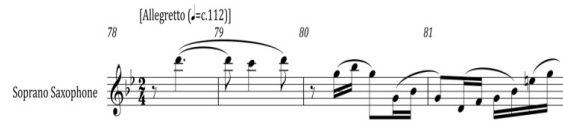


Figure 4b. “A Toast” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 78-81 (augmentation and fragmentation).

Although this is a contemporary, Westernized version of traditional folk tunes, there are many instances where the music mimics the authentic traditional performance practices of its source material (Yang yang et al., 2010, pp. 20-21). One example is the use of grace notes in “A Toast and Lullaby,” which is very reminiscent of the short drawl, which is an extension and twisting of the vowel in Tibetan speech and singing (Figure 5 and 6) (Cheng, 2014, p. 55).



Figure 5. “A Toast” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 53-54.



Figure 6. "Lullaby" from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 104-105.

"Lullaby" (催眠曲) is in contrast to the previous two movements, where it is quiet and more reflective, as though staring into the vast clear skies. "Lullaby" consists of four phrases presented by the soprano saxophone, following a two-measure introduction or interjection from the piano. The first statement is an eight-measure lyrical phrase (Figure 7) and the second statement is a six-measure phrase (Figure 8). The third and final statement of this section is a six-measure phrase from (Figure 9). Although simplistic in nature, there are many exchanges of rhythm between the soprano saxophone and piano, as seen in Figures 8 and 9 to produce a rhythmic call and response.

Table 3. Overall Through-composed Form of "Lullaby" from *Images of Tibet*.

Measure	98-99	100-105	106-107	108-111
Key	Eb	Eb	Eb	F Major
Section	Piano Introduction	Phrase 1	Piano Break	Phrase 2
Measure	112-113	114-117	118-119	120-132
Key	Eb	Eb	Eb	Eb
Section	Dorian Piano Break	Phrase 3	Piano Break (Recapitulation)	Phrase 4



Figure 7. "Lullaby" from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 98-105.



Figure 8. "Lullaby" from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 106-111.



Figure 9. "Lullaby" from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 112-117.

The final "Lullaby" measure has a timbral trill that decrescendos to niente (Figure 10). Timbral trills are often indicated by the term "bisbigliando," which refers to a trill using two or more alternate fingerings (Weiss & Netti, 2015, p. 35). The difficulty in executing this measure lies in creating the aural sense of an echo, similar to the production of "Shan" in traditional Chinese music (Yang Yang et al., 2010, p. 16).



Figure 10. "Lullaby" from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 132.

Table 4. Overall Bar form of Young Friends from *Images of Tibet*.

Measure	133-154	155-176	177-198	199-211
Section	A1	A2	B	Coda

"Young Friends" (年轻的朋友) is the concluding movement and begins with a robust and chirpy style which becomes more chaotic before finally settling down in a three-measure cadenza that ends off resoundingly portraying the musical depiction of friends engaging in vibrant conversation. The structure of "Young Friends" is a AAB+Coda form which is known as the Bar form, a term in musicology denoting this particular Form (Brunner, 2001). The

origins of the usage of the term can be traced to the 15th to 18th centuries by German Meistersinger (Brunner, 2001). These forms are taken from medieval German song, but are also generally applicable and could be found in the early Middle Ages as Gregorian chant repertoires and later in many hymns (Brunner, 2001). In a more expanded form, it became particularly important in the songs of the Provençal troubadours, the northern French trouvères, and the German Minnesinger, Sangspruchdichter and Meistersinger (Brunner, 2001). In more history of German songs, it saw a significant revival in the songs of Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms (Brunner, 2001).

“Young Friends” follows the structure religiously. In the first A section, it is broken up into three phrases, respectively from measure 133-136 (Figure 11), 137-143 (Figure 12), 144-153 (Figure 13), and transition in measure 154. The second A section sees the composer developing from the first A section with variations on the melodies, ornamentations, and the use of canonic texture for distinguishing the two A sections (Figure 14).



Figure 11. “Young Friends” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 133-136.



Figure 12. “Young Friends” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 137-143.



Figure 13. “Young Friends” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 144-153.



Figure 14. “Young Friends” from *Images of Tibet*, mm. 155-176.

Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam

Traditional Indian music is divided between the Hindustani (northern) and Carnatic (southern) schools (Young, 1998, p. 8). In Indian classical music, Raga is the basis of melody and Tala is the basis of rhythm (Pudaruth, 2016, pp. 2-3). In the past, Hindustani music has dominated the Western concept of Indian music (Kalmanovitch, 2005, p. 136). This reflects the influence of 14th century Muslim rulers and the traffic in culture and materials along the Silk Road (Kalmanovitch, 2005, p. 136). Therefore, it is not surprising that the tabla and sitar of Hindustani music, and not the mridangam and vina of Carnatic music, have underscored Western fantasies of an exotic India (Kalmanovitch, 2005, p. 136). This has seen a change as the South Asian diasporic presence has emerged worldwide, allowing Carnatic music to

assume new prominence (Kalmanovitch, 2005, p. 136). This fact is attested by the widespread presence of South Indians as a main influence for Indian musical practice in Singapore (Dairianatha & Phan, 2005, p. 204). Classical traditions and music, by implication, appear in the early films of the 20th century in the form of folk and Hindu mythology and are also prevalent in temple grounds and in rituals throughout the year (Dairianatha & Phan, 2005, p. 204).

Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam was composed based on Carnatic (Konokol) rhythm, with an improvised part by the ethnic instrument the mridangam (Wong, 2020, pp. 77-78). The mridangam is perhaps the most highly developed and ancient of all percussion instruments and an indispensable accompaniment to vocal and instrumental music in Carnatic music (Krishnaswami, 1971, pp. 36-37). The drum is hollowed out of a block of wood almost cylindrical in shape and 1.5-2 feet in length, with the right head of the mridangam covered with three concentric layers of calf and sheepskin and the left side with two layers of buffalo and sheepskin (Krishnaswami, 1971, pp. 36-37).

In *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*, the formal structure is governed by a Tala of 8 cycles of 12 measures in 5/4 time with its thematic material, tempo, and rhythmic structure derived from elements of Vedic literature (Figure 5). The Tala is important in this composition, as Goh employs the strict Tala structure of Carnatic music in cyclic patterns (Pudaruth, 2016, p. 3). The use of Carnatic material is interesting because it mirrors Kalmanovitch's (2005) argument that the Carnatic music of South India is becoming increasingly interesting to musicians due to its comparatively more elaborate rhythmic (Tala) system (136). The specific utility of Carnatic rhythmic systems for Western professional musical education now provides musicians with a clear framework and specific tools to incorporate Carnatic ele-

ments into their improvisation and composition (Kalmanovitch, 2005, p. 136).

Table 5. Tala formal structure of *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*.

Measure	1-12	13-24	25-36	37-48
Cycle/Tala	1	2	3	4
Section	Theme 1 + 2	Theme 1 + Theme 2 Augmen- tation	Theme 3	Theme 3 + Theme 1 Fragments + Staccato Gesture
Measure	49-60	61-72	73-84	85-95
Cycle/Tala	5	6	7	8
Section	Theme 3 + Stac- cato Ges- ture	Melodic Staccato+ Theme 2 fragments + 16th notes	Theme 2 + Theme 1	Conclu- sion

In the analysis of this composition, it is clear that Goh uses the ideas of Indian Carnatic music and infuses them with Western ideas of thematic development. In *confluence*, there are some references to Vedic literature which can be traced back to the four Vedas, an ancient compilation of sacred and religious texts, prayers, hymns, chants, and rituals dedicated to various gods (Young, 1998, p. 6).

One characteristic of Vedic literature is the use of percussion and the use of odd and even meters (Young, 1998, p. 6). The use of the *mridangam* in this composition and the use of the meter in 5/4 conform to these points. Another characteristics of Vedic literature are usually first recited as a monotone and then later developed into three notes—a main tone with one tone higher and one below—which can be seen in the first thematic material (Figure 15) (Young, 1998, p. 6). In the Yajur Veda, the chants develop into four notes—two main notes and two accents—which is also represented in the second thematic material (Figure 16) (Young, 1998, p. 6).



Figure 15. *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*, mm. 1-3.



Figure 16. *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*, mm. 9-11.

The tempo of *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam* are also borrowed from the *Samagana*, a part of the *Sama Vedas*, with importance given to tempo using *Druta* (fast), *Laghu* (short), *Guru* (long), and *Pluta* (lengthen) (Young, 1998, p. 6). Each of these characteristics is represented in the piece, with the quarter note = 150 tempo, the staccato gestures throughout, the augmentation of theme 2 and the long phrase of theme 3, and finally, the extension of the thematic material from measures 73-97 respectively corresponding to these characteristics of the *Samagana*.

Some Western elements we can observe from confluence are the Johann Sebastian Bach influence. We can see the thematic material being imitated by canonic texture often seen in Johann Sebastian Bach’s fugues and adding a perfect fourth skip in the middle of the motives (Figure 17, 18). Secondly, we can observe the use of pandiatonicism to create a texture that is reminiscent of impressionistic works such as Debussy’s *La Mer*, Maurice Ravel’s *Pièce en forme de Habanera*, Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*, Bela Bartok *Mikrokosmos*, among others (Figure 19).



Figure 17. *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*, mm. 22-24.



Figure 18. *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*, mm. 12-14.



Figure 19. *Confluence for Saxophone Ensemble and Mridangam*, mm. 25-28.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the founding of modern Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles, the British, preexisting Malay, Chinese, and Indian immigrant populations, and their respective musical traditions have always coexisted like was the norm since it began its standing as a free trading port. After Singapore broke away from Malaysia to become an independent country on August 9, 1965, the country tried very hard to maintain the cultural balance between the three major races of Chinese, Malay, and Indian but, at the same time, presented itself as one Singapore. This resulted in a significant challenge for those who seek to define the music of Singapore, and the result is the confluence of past and present, of tradition and the contemporary, and of local singularity as the direction that many

Singaporean composers take in their creative route in their merging of the traditional and the contemporary.

The saxophone is also a young instrument that is very deeply rooted in the tradition of French repertoire written in the 1900s, but at the same time, it is also highly involved in avant-garde music. This also sees the instrument taking the creative route of merging traditional and contemporary. Furthermore, with the rising importance of the Asian market and the economy growing in the region, the appearance of more music that is written for the saxophone that reflects this change would also surface.

Goh's saxophone music seamlessly fuses Singaporean cultural heritage with Western music practices. This unique synthesis reflects his personal interpretation and concepts of the "Singapore sound," which is successfully achieved by the instrument still seeking new possibilities in the musical world.

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