

MUSIC PERFORMANCE BEING EQUIVALENT TO RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS: A MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

There has been an aggressive push in Malaysia for academicians in institutes of higher learning to have indexed publications for promotion and tenure purposes. This leaves performing musicians in Malaysia in a dilemma as their creative output in this country is not considered on par with indexed journals which clearly disadvantages them when comparing to their peers in academia. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how the music performances can be measured and evaluated for academicians in Malaysian universities. There are already existing criteria in American universities for promotion and tenure purposes and it is just a matter of adapting them to Malaysia. The paper looks at some of these criteria and discusses on how they can be adapted to the Malaysian context so that they can be graded in different levels for promotion and job retention purposes in Malaysian universities. The paper hopes to play its part in ensuring recognition for the work of music performers in Malaysian universities so that their creative output is recognized as being equivalent to that of their scientific counterparts and in the long run can contribute to the growth of the creative arts departments in Malaysian universities.

Keywords: Music performance, indexed publications, university position.

INTRODUCTION

The creative arts are an important part of any university that has a comprehensive arts programme. The performing arts is an important aspect of creative arts and especially present an important face of the university to the outside world whether it is during the convocation, at international performances or competitions. Music performance is one important aspect of creative arts that is regularly exposed to the world.

In international universities, having internationally-renowned performers helps to put the university on the world map. Many of these famous practitioners are renowned all over for their performing ability but may not necessarily be researchers and experts in producing publications. In Malaysia, it is not merely sufficient for academicians to publish but many of the top universities insist that they publish in ISI or Scopus-indexed publications (Ahmed, 2009). By deliberately insisting so, the universities risk reducing their prolific performing output at best or at worst result in their avoiding work at the universities. Many of these music practitioners do not merely teach at the university, as active performers, they are supposed to perform on the international stage and having them reduce their creative output is going to have a detrimental effect on their international prowess.

The function of an academician is not to merely to teach or write papers to be expert practitioners in their field of expertise. For musicians in this case, performing is an important medium to display their creativity and also for others, both students and the general public, to

also learn and experience from their performance. Their performances are easily equivalent to any academy research and writing because the time and effort involved is just as much if not occasionally even more.

The creative arts contribute immensely from a financial viewpoint. In addition, they are one of the most international in character in comparison to many other fields.

EQUATING MUSIC PERFORMANCE WITH RESEARCH

Creative arts specifically is offered and recognized in international universities as a legitimate field that has just as important a standing as other areas in the sciences. In world-class universities such as Harvard University in America or London University in Britain, music is offered and is taken seriously as a research field. The importance is reflected closer to home in ASEAN countries such the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory in Singapore or the University of Philippines.

In Malaysia, music is offered in important universities ranging from the government universities such as Universiti Malaya and Universiti Putra Malaysia to private universities such as Sunway University and UCSI University. However in the chase for higher university rankings in Malaysia, the administration of the ministers and the Education Ministry in Malaysia has been pressuring academic staff to publish in indexed publications. In the race to get more indexed publications, musicians who generally do not publish in indexed publications but focus on performances have been marginalized in promotions and retentions in university positions.

The main issue in Malaysia is that many of the people who make these decisions are not affiliated with the creative arts industries and are more likely to be of the scientific fields like engineering where the *raison d'être* of their field involve publishing indexed journals. It is therefore important that a proper system of evaluating has to be devised in the Malaysian context.

According to Ian Pace (Pace, 2015), he believes that practically all composition and performance are research in some sense; in the case of musical performance the following would be some of the types of research questions that any performer has to answer in order to play a piece of music:

Which tempi should be used for various large-scale sections of the score in question?

How much flexibility should be employed within these broad tempi?

On a smaller scale, what forms of stylisation and elasticity would be most appropriate for playing various types of rhythms?

Through various combinations of accentuation, articulation and rhythm, to what extent, and where, should one tend towards continuity of line, or more angular approaches?

In polyphonic or contrapuntal textures, to what extent should one be aiming to project a singular voice which is foregrounded above others, or a greater degree of dynamic equilibrium between parts

Should one aim for a singular prominent climactic point within a movement, or can there be several of roughly equal prominence?

Just as a researcher would need to choose available data carefully and make informed and intelligent decisions, the numerous decisions a music performer needs to do is equally nerve-wrecking. Just as writing a publication in an academic journal for someone in the science field

would involve gathering and analyzing data, for a musician to give a successful performance, he or she would need to gather the relevant information and make informed choices on how to perform successfully. It would be incorrect to claim that music performance is nowhere to the level of publishing an academic paper in an indexed publication.

BENCHMARKING AND MEASURING DIFFERENT TYPES OF MUSIC PERFORMANCES

I believe the issue that is perplexing most administrators in universities in Malaysia is that they are not clear as to how to measure a music performance with the importance of a research publication. This is understandable as Malaysia does not have such an extensive and developed appreciation of performing arts compared to Western countries as our living standards are still lagging behind and there is a lot of catching up to do.

If we look at guidelines issued by international universities, the criteria is very clearly given and we merely have to adapt them to our local standards. In the United States of America for instance, NASM (National Association of the Schools of Music) works very closely with the universities to lay the guidelines clearly. Let us look at a few examples.

According to Kennesaw State University in America (Kennesaw State University, 2018), invited performances in venues generally recognized by the arts community as significant can be considered for promotion or tenure.

According to Augusta University in America (Augusta University, 2016), high level scholarship activities that can be considered for promotion and tenure include the following: performances and professional activities at a high artistic level in professionally significant venues, performances and professional activities at a high artistic level with professionally significant musical organizations, national or international recognition as a scholar, composer, performer, clinician, or other creative artist, recording contracts and positive reviews of performances, and other artistic activity .

According to Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University in Bloomington (Jacobs School of Music, 2015), the following can be considered for promotion and tenure positions: solo performances and performances with chamber groups, orchestras, or other ensembles, performances related to scholarship, guest conducting appearances and recordings and recording contracts. However to be really marked as excellent in research/creative activity, the candidate can show either of the following: evidence of performances and professional activities at a high artistic level in professionally significant venues, evidence of performances of major compositions, evidence of national recognition as a performer, important recording contracts and positive reviews of performances, and other artistic activity

The University of Delaware (University of Delaware, 2009) breaks the rankings of creative artistry and performances into the following categories for promotion and tenure. For the moderate category, the following are considered: conducting a student ensemble at an area festival, solo, conducting engagement or commission with nonprofessional ensemble, full recital performance, single regional performance with national commercial group, on-campus or other local performance less than a full-length recital and Jingle recording for single-market distribution. For the High Category, the following are considered: performer/clinician/conductor at a regional convention, conduct an all-state ensemble or significant district-level ensemble, significant contribution in single-market broadcast, (i.e., regional impact) as conductor/soloist/accompanist/ensemble musician, solo, conducting

engagement or commission with regional ensemble, major role, conducting engagement or commission with a regional opera company, conducting student ensemble at a major regional convention with a juried, highly competitive selection process, national show tour player or performer, soloist/accompanist/chamber player for a regional class recital, regular contract player or guest conductor with a regional-class ensemble, recurring performance with national commercial (pop) group, as a substitute or extra player with national-class ensemble and Invitational performances, such as performing arts series, featured performances at other campuses, tours, workshops. The following types of recordings are also considered - contribution as conductor/soloist/accompanist/ensemble musician and jingle recording for distribution in a multiple market. For the Highest category, the following are considered: soloist/collaborator/chamber player or conductor invited to perform with an ensemble or in a venue of national or international prominence, significant contribution in multiple-market broadcast, (i.e., national impact) as conductor/soloist/accompanist/ensemble musician, featured role with nationally prominent opera company, solo, conducting engagement or commission with nationally-recognized ensemble, regular contract player with nationally-recognized ensemble, conduct student ensemble at a major national convention with a juried, highly competitive selection process, featured clinician/performer, conductor or composer at a major national convention, performance as a soloist/chamber player/conductor at a major national/international music festival, performer/clinician/conductor at a national convention, recurring substitute player with a national-class ensemble, consistent work as a substitute player with a nationally-recognized ensemble and invitational performances, such as performing arts series, featured performances at other campuses, tours, workshops and recordings that have significant contribution as conductor/soloist/accompanist/ensemble musician.

ADAPTING TO MALAYSIAN STANDARDS

Based on what we see in international universities, I believe we can adapt music performance into different levels equivalent to academic research. The following is an example that can be adapted in the Malaysian context:

Moderate (can be considered for promotion to senior lecturer- a sizable number will be needed for consideration for promotion to associate professor)

1. Recordings as an ensemble musician in the background for featured artistes and local TV jingles.
2. Chamber and ensemble performances in the university and local community.
3. Conducting or performing solo as part of a concert at the university or community level.

High (can be considered for promotion to associate professor – a sizable number will be needed for consideration for promotion to professor)

1. Recording contract as a soloist for national distribution.
2. Positive review or interview in national media for performance.
3. Conducting a national-level ensemble (National Symphony Orchestra etc) for an entire concert or sizable portion of a concert.
4. Performing with an international-level ensemble (Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra).
5. Performing internationally at internationally-recognized events (Hong Kong Arts Festival, Dartington International Music Festival etc.) or venues (Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Sydney Opera House etc.) either as a soloist or part of a small chamber ensemble.
6. Leading a student ensemble to victory at competitions at the international level.
7. Performing a full solo recital at a national venue or on television.

Highest (can be considered for promotion to professor)

1. International recording contract as an internationally-recognized artiste

2. Giving a world premiere performance as part of a commissioned work by an internationally-recognized composer.
3. Performance as a soloist or conductor with internationally-recognized ensemble (Sydney Opera, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra etc.)
4. Being a prizewinner at a major international competition (Asia Mozart Piano Competition, Seiji Ozawa Conducting Competition etc.)

CONCLUSION

By having clear benchmarks and guidelines, the higher management in Malaysian universities in general and the Malaysian Education Ministry should have more obvious criteria in promoting and retaining top musicians in the academic field. By doing so, Malaysia can avoid losing some of its best and most promising of the performing musicians to other countries and the resulting brain drain may end up depriving Malaysian students a chance to study with some of the best in their field.

It is hoped that in the not-so-distant future in Malaysia, the output of the creative arts in general and music performance specifically will be recognized as having the same academic weight and equivalence as their scientific counterparts. As Malaysia is striving to be developed country, a country can only be considered developed and advanced when equal attention is given to creative arts. Recognizing the value of their creative output will go a long way into ensuring that the best in their respective fields are retain in the best Malaysian universities to educate the next generation of students.

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BIOGRAPHY

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