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TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION OF SARAWAK TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS INTO 20TH CENTURY MALAYSIAN MUSIC

Julia Chong

A famous Hungarian Composer of 20th Century, Bela Bartok travelled to the remote parts of his country. The farmers and their wives gathered to sing for him, play fiddles and flutes and tell tales. He took all this down on his recorder. When he returned home, he transcribed the music in notation. He assimilated all these folk music into his own writing. He absorbed the traits of folk music and they became his own music thinking. He used peasant tunes based on old modes and pentatonic scales. He repeated only fragments and placed them on different beats of the measures. He combined the modes and used many different techniques of writing and created many classical works.

Likewise Sarawak composers should attempt to produce musical works for the chamber orchestra and score according to the potentials of the individual traditional instruments.

The difficult part is in developing the material without destroying the local flavour. There are many ways of developing a theme. For example in an eight-bar folk melody, the music just cannot keep on repeating over and over again. This short phrase can be moulded into classical form by use of counter-point, intricate variation and rhythmic pattern, extending the thematic material by augmentation, diminution, interpolation, syncopation, ornaments, use of sequences, modulations, a combination of pentatonic and diatonic scales, etc. We have to note both the dissonance and consonance, above all the tonality. Our music must carry the pulse and heartbeat of Sarawak Culture.

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by

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In orchestra music tutti does not take place all the time i.e. all instruments do not play together all the time. The tutti is often contrasted with solo instruments or against a small group. Rests and pauses are very essential. Sometimes they occur at dramatic places to give emphasis. The colour and texture of the music composed must be taken into consideration.

Like folk music of many countries of the world, they have to be developed in order to transcribe them into proper notations and forms. When there is no development in material and when phrases are repeated