EXTERNAL PUBLIC PIANO EXAMINATIONS
IN MALAYSIA: SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC
SIGNIFICANCE

BY

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Date: 3 October 2002
I certify that the thesis entitled 'External Public Piano Examinations: Social and Symbolic Significance',

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any other university or institution is identified in the text.

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"This thesis is dedicated to Alastair, Katrina, Ian and Mum"
ABSTRACT

The thesis investigated the social and symbolic significance of acquiring a ‘music education’ through the taking of piano tuition and external public music examinations. It aimed to discover why the learning of the piano and the certification of musical attainment are so prevalent and revered among Malaysian music students. Its purpose was to unravel the socio-cultural raison d’être of this approach to music education through the creation of a metatheoretical schema, which is premised upon the theories of symbolic interactionist, George Herbert Mead, music analyst, Heinrich Schenker and social theorist, George Ritzer.

Central to the argument in this instance is the symbolic significance associated with the act of playing the piano. The investigation attempted to determine if this ‘act’ conveyed a symbolic meaning that is peculiar to a specific cultural vista. It further examined the degree to which this practice represented both a validation and a sense of conformity to social norms in the continuity and stability of an expanding middle class society in Malaysia.

The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) is the largest of the five main external public music examination boards that operate in Malaysia. Since 1948, over one million candidates have enrolled for ABRSM examinations in Malaysia and a team of approximately thirty ABRSM examiners visit Malaysia for three months every year. The majority of the candidates are pianists. Given such large numbers of piano candidates, one might expect a healthy development of musical talent in the country with aspiring pianists eager to demonstrate their musical prowess. However, this does not seem to be the case. On the contrary, there appears to be a curious lacuna between the growing number of students who enrol for external public music examinations and the seemingly lack of interest in public music making and the honing of general musicianship skills. The thesis hence examined the symbolic meaning of this socio-musicological phenomena.
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PREAMBLE

The 'I' reacts against the 'me' which is the organised set of attitudes of 'others' which one himself assumes (Mead 1934)

*The Star, 8 Oct 1998*
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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction and statement of the research problem

In Malaysia, the piano is the most popular musical instrument to learn and many students are sent for piano tuition from a young age. Almost immediately, these students embark on a system of being taught by and learning by graded levels, usually from Grade 1 to Grade 8. Students normally take examinations at the end of each level of study. These music assessments are generally conducted by examiners from one of the five main external public music examination boards which operate in Malaysia. Since 1948, over one million Associated Board examinations have been undertaken in Malaysia (Malaysian Jubilee Newsletter, 1998).

The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) is by far the leading provider of music assessment in the country. In 1999 alone, an estimated 35,000 students undertook the graded examinations in Western classical music conducted by the external public music examinations boards operating in Malaysia (National Piano Festival, 2000). This approach to music education appears to be significantly shaped by the demands of the assessment boards to the extent that the primary goal of learning the piano appears to be centred on meeting syllabus requirements and passing music examinations. Public music-making, concert attendance, general musicianship skills and music appreciation do not appear to feature significantly in the teaching-learning milieu. Curiously, parents and society in general also do not seem to regard these attributes as essential components of a music education. This peculiar approach to music education by taking piano tuition and external public music examinations is at the centre of the research problem being studied.
1.2 Background to the problem and identifying the paradoxes

The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music is the leading external public music examination board in Malaysia. It also has the largest network of music examination centres worldwide and conducts more than 80% of music examinations in the world (Upbeat, July 2002). It first offered external public music examinations in Malaya in 1948 and by 1998, teams of approximately thirty examiners visit Malaysia for three months every year examining thousands of piano candidates (Malaysian Jubilee Newsletter, 1998).

Given such large numbers of students who learn the piano, one might expect a healthy development of musical talent in the country with aspiring concert pianists eager to show-off their musical talents. One might also expect a high standard of playing and a lively interest in public performance and concert attendance. Yet, strangely, this does not seem to be the case. The growing number of students who enrol for the public music examinations is not commensurate with the visible interest in public music making. On the contrary, there appears to be a curious lacuna between the large number of Malaysians who undertake private piano lessons and the lack of public piano performances or performance-based activities amongst students, teachers and Malaysian musicians. Why then do so many thousands of pianists take music examinations year after year if they do not seem to be actively involved or interested in public music making? Is there a measure of the overall standard of public performance since opportunities to gauge the standard of public performance are few and far between?

One indicator of the performance standards could well be the outcome of an inaugural national piano competition sponsored by a private limited company in collaboration with Yamaha Music (National Piano Festival, 2000). At the end of the event, the panel of judges comprising three musicians of internationally standing unanimously decided not to award the first prize and the Foong Seong Challenge Trophy, stating that the quality of playing exhibited did not warrant
making the award. Did this decision imply that the standard of musicianship and performance was rather low or simply that Malaysian pianists were generally not competitive in nature? Did this outcome also suggest that thousands of students learn the piano for the sake of examinations? A paradoxical situation has emerged in the disparity between playing in private for the music examiner and playing in public. Thus, can it be construed that playing to the music examiner has assumed the place of playing to the public audience? These are some of the issues that will be addressed in the investigation.

1.3 Aims of the investigation

This thesis aims to investigate the social and symbolic significance of acquiring a music education through the taking of piano tuition and external public music examinations in the Malaysian context. Its objective is to discover why the learning of the piano and the certification of musical attainment through the taking of external public music examinations are so prevalent and revered among Malaysian music students. Central to the research question in this instance is the symbolic significance associated with the act of playing the piano by an individual. The thesis thus aims to determine if this act conveyed a symbolic meaning that is peculiar to a specific cultural vista. It further aims to examine the degree to which this practice represents both a validation of and a sense of conformity to social norms in the contribution to the continuity and stability of an expanding middle-class society in Malaysia. By the application of interdisciplinary methodologies and metatheoretical principles, the thesis seeks to extrapolate the social and symbolic meaning of this peculiar approach to music education.

1.4 Rationale for the research

The enormous influence of the ABRSM over fifty years of examining in the country has in essence shaped the psyche of a segment of the Malaysian society towards the purpose and meaning of and the approach to music education.
The power and influence of the external public music examination boards has significantly moulded the practice of music education in the country so much so that the entire private music education system in Malaysia is structured upon the services provided by these external examination boards. The five main external public music examination boards operating in Malaysia are the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Trinity College London, London College of Music and Media, Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Australian Music Examination Boards. The word ‘external’ is initially used to reflect the fact that these assessment boards are not based in Malaysia but originate from abroad, primarily from Britain or Australia, although several of them have offices in the country. Since Malaysia does not have its own examination board the word ‘external’ will generally be omitted when referring to these assessment boards.

In terms of candidate numbers and popularity, the ABRSM is by far the largest provider of musical assessment and the most well-known examination board in Malaysia. Anecdotal evidence received from one of the thirteen state education departments of Malaysia, revealed that 13,901 candidates enrolled for the ABRSM music examinations in 1997 and 14,054 candidates enrolled in 1998 with more than 90% of the candidates being pianists. It is estimated that the ABRSM controls over 70% of the entire music examination market in the country and Malaysian students represent one of ABRSM’s top three international music examination clientele. Nevertheless, in spite of the large interest in musical assessment among Malaysians, there is, as mentioned earlier, no national or ‘local’ music examination board in Malaysia. Neither is there a national music accreditation board.

Although the subject of music was introduced in primary schools in 1983 its development and delivery have been regarded by several music educators as being less successful and in need of much improvement (New Straits Times, 4.8.02). Furthermore, the subject of music is primarily taught by generalist classroom teachers although there are marching bands found in several urban
schools. However, many of the members of these marching bands are self-taught although some of the band members take private instrumental tuition. These bands are generally led by senior students and they are usually called upon to perform at school functions and interschool competitions. These school bands are self-funded and meet after school hours during co-curricular periods. Once the students leave school, they often leave behind their band playing skills, particularly since there is little opportunity for them to play outside the confines of the school environment. Few students thus have the opportunity to pursue careers as instrumentalists in an orchestra. There is only one professional orchestra in Malaysia, although there is a National Symphonic Orchestra that calls upon guest players when a concert is organised. Established in August 1998, the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra is Malaysia’s only professional orchestra. Nevertheless, two years after the orchestra’s establishment, the dearth of highly proficient instrumentalists is so severe that, yet again, only four Malaysians succeeded in securing a place in the orchestra (*Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra*, 2000). Attendance at its concerts is generally popular among members of the expatriate community and the local elite.

1.5 **Significance of the research**

The significance of the research may be viewed as follows:

(i) The study represents research in an area that has been little explored despite its relatively widespread prevalence in Malaysia.

(ii) It represents the first major piece of research conducted on the private music education system in Malaysia.

(iii) Its findings may also be of significant value to the international music examination boards that conduct music assessment in Malaysia and elsewhere.

(iv) It represents research that is based on an innovative method which combines socio-musicological and metatheoretical principles in the formulation of a unique theoretical model upon which the analytical
framework and findings rest. It juxtaposes the seemingly diverse orientations of two schools of thought, namely, Meadian and Schenkanian, and further addresses problems associated with interdisciplinary research by the application of a rigorous research strategy towards the substantiation and validation of research outcomes.

1.6 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis comprises eight chapters. It is designed to incorporate four structural components, namely, the establishment and contextualisation of the research problem, review of both substantive and methodological literature, the formulation and application of the theoretical and procedural framework, and finally, the presentation, analysis and synthesis of findings. The organisation of the thesis thus adheres to metatheoretical principles of procedural explanation in the formulation of arguments and the application of overarching methodological theories in the elucidation of extant knowledge and the creation of new knowledge.

1.6.1 Situating the study

The opening chapter lays the foundation to the research problem and explains the manner in which the thesis is formulated and presented. It begins by stating the research problem and provides a background to the study. The aims of the research are stated followed by the rationale for undertaking the research. The significance of the study is then propounded. The organisation of the thesis is explained whereby the inherent four-stage procedural formulation of the thesis is embedded in the elucidation of arguments in eight chapters.
1.6.2 Literature review and contextualisation

Chapter Two presents a review of the substantive literature. It contextualises the research problem by providing a brief background to the historical and socio-cultural roots of Malaysia as influenced by the British during the colonial period. The multicultural heritage of the country is described. A diagram illustrating the musical practices in Malaysia aids understanding of the various types of music found. It also locates the position of Western music studies in the 'big picture' of Malaysia's musical heritage. The national education structure of the country is also briefly described and some of the developments in higher education are elucidated. Music in schools is discussed in relation to private music education practices. The review of literature concludes with some descriptions and comparisons of the main music assessment boards which operate in Malaysia.

1.6.3 Theoretical orientations

Chapter Three reviews the theoretical orientations relevant to the research. It begins with a historical sketch of the development of sociological theory. The sociology of music is discussed and the inherent problems associated with interdisciplinary research are addressed. Two major theoretical orientations form the basis of the theoretical framework. They are primarily the sociological perspectives of the Chicago School led by symbolic interactionist, George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and the musicological concepts of a leading twentieth century analyst, Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935). The predominant link between these two contemporary thinkers is their contribution in the deconstruction of symbolic meaning. Essentially, the Median school of thought focuses primarily on the individual’s ‘self’ and the interaction between one’s internal thoughts and emotions in the area of social behaviour. It examines the process by which individuals form opinions, make decisions and take action. Philosophically it focuses on an understanding the self, self-interaction, self-development and the symbolic meaning of an ‘act’. Mead considered the act to be the most ‘primitive
unit' in his theory, and in analysing the act itself, he was much influenced by the
behaviourists’ approach to the study of stimulus and response. This theoretical
position is thus congruent with the aim of the research in unveiling the
significance of the ‘act’ of piano playing. In this instance, Mead’s ‘act’ is
represented by the photograph of the boy playing the piano as illustrated in the
preamble page of this thesis.

The formation of the analytical framework is also inspired by the ingenuity
of Schenker’s use of structural stratification that he termed in his theory as the
foreground (Vordergrund), middleground (Mittelgrund) and background
(Hintergrund) of musical events, an analytical approach which I studied in some
detail during the period of undergraduate study. In his approach, Schenker
demonstrated the manner in which the unfolding of musical events could be heard
and experienced through the immediate, intermediate and remote levels of
perception. Postmodern interpretations of Mead’s and Schenker’s theories are also
examined. Metatheoretical principles in postmodern deconstructive theories are
discussed as are the interrelationships of micro-macro and subjective-objective
levels of social analysis, as propounded by George Ritzer (1996).

1.6.4 Methods and procedures

Chapter Four explains the research strategy. A brief survey of the main methods
of research is presented. The case study method is identified as being most
most appropriate to the interdisciplinary nature of the investigation. The
strengths and limitations of this eclectic and descriptive method of approach
are discussed. The next part of the research strategy unfolds the procedures
employed to generate data. Essentially, the multiple procedures utilises include
ethnographic and causal-comparative approaches in the application of primarily
grounded qualitative research techniques in the construction of a clear experiential
memory. The techniques employed include questionnaires, interviews, critical
incidents, media coverage and vignettes in the form of photography.
In line with the ‘procedural’ approach in the elucidation of ideas, the rationale for selecting the various research procedures is then presented in what is perhaps a less conventional manner. A set of eleven questions and answers in the style of ‘frequently asked questions’ is designed to explain the manner in which various research research techniques are adopted and applied. It also provides insights into the ‘thought process’ during the crafting of the research strategy. Generally, the mode of investigation is empirical, naturalistic, contextual and empathetic. The final part of the chapter deals with ethical concerns associated with research.

1.6.5 Processing and sorting information

Chapter Five and Chapter Six contain the empirical data obtained by the application of the research strategy. They also functioned as the ‘processing or sorting house’ for the information acquired. The diverse research techniques employed yielded rich primary data which aided the process of triangulation and thus reinforced the validity of information. The research participants included music teachers, parents, music students, piano dealers and music book retailers as well as several representatives of the music examination boards and music school administrators. Means of collecting data included the use of survey questionnaires, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation sessions and critical incidents. Visual anthropological means such as published photographs from the print media were also employed.

1.6.6 Categorization and triangulation

Chapter Seven is concerned with the categorization and triangulation of data from different sources. Data acquired from the private and public domains are categorized and ‘triangulated’ in a sociogram of musical interrelationships. Triangulation may thus be described as the cross checking of data against multiple sources and methods. It is utilized in this
research to investigate the different viewpoints of research participants. Thus the process of triangulation serves to ‘map-out’ or to explain more fully the complexity of human behaviour by studying it from various standpoints, making use of both qualitative and quantitative data. Key issues are analysed and categorised by applying the theoretical orientation as earlier identified. Micro-macro and subjective-objective orientations are identified in the process of data categorization and themes are drawn.

1.6.7 Emergent model

The final chapter unveils nine themes that evolved from the analysis of data from the micro-macro domains. By taking the analytical movement one step further, emergent themes are meta-analysed against the Schenkerian model of the background of fundamental structure, middleground and foreground of musical events. Through this process of thematic metamorphosis, musicological and sociological perspectives pertaining to the analysis of the ‘symbolic gesture’ in question are juxtaposed in a newly created disciplinary matrix of social analysis. Mead’s idea of the duality of the ‘selves’ provides the sociological dimension in the interpretation of symbolic meaning in the wider context of the social act under investigation. Chapter Eight thus reveals an analytical structure in which the musicological and sociological dimensions are unified into an integrated social paradigm. By applying both the sociological and the musicological perspectives in the process of acquiring, classifying and categorising data, a new analytical infrastructure is developed. Findings are then presented from both the macroscopic and microscopic levels of objective-subjective interrelationships within the backbone of a historically influenced, fundamental structure in the form of a metatheoretical schema. The finding are then briefly summarised.
1.6.8 Threats to validity

The final part of the thesis addresses the limitations of the study and the implications for further research. The interrelationships between people's everyday procedures for solving practical problems through the construction of commonsense accounts (micro issues) are examined in relation to the individual's adaptation to society (macro issues) in the evaluation and understanding of symbolic meaning within the context of the study. The thesis also addresses various issues associated with interdisciplinary research. It further recognises the threats to validity and makes reference to the codes of ethical conduct. It argues that the exercise of metatheorising represents a form of 'methodological triangulation', which serves to balance the weakness of one methodological approach against the strength of another, particularly in the case of interdisciplinary research studies. Systematic triangulation thus helps strengthen validity and aids theoretical development, bringing about a better understanding of extant profound theory in the process of creating new knowledge.

1.7 Chapter summary

The opening chapter presents the aims and objectives of the investigation. It then situates the study and provides a rationale for conducting the research. The case is presented by examining the paradoxical nature of the research instance. The possible contribution to extant knowledge illuminates the significance of the research. A structural overview of the eight chapters embodies the conceptual and analytical framework of the thesis. This encompasses the theoretical foundation and overall methodological design upon which the thesis is premised. A sociomusical stance is taken as the fundamental theoretical argument for this piece of interdisciplinary study. The research strategy highlights the procedural manner in which the research method and techniques are selected. A descriptive method of research in the form of a case study is
chosen and various modes of data acquisition are set in place. Two forms of data are acquired, one being ‘micro’ in nature since information is solicited from private consenting sources such as interviews and the other being more media related and thus arguably, more ‘macro’ in nature since data is drawn from sources in the public domain. In this manner, the act of triangulation has been put in place at the very outset of fieldwork studies. Key issues from the initial analysis of data are examined within a sociogram of musical interrelationships. The analysis of micro and macro relationships yielded nine themes which were further meta-analysed. By an application and juxtaposition of the socio-musicological theories of Mead, Ritzer and Schenker findings are presented in a metatheoretical model. Findings are briefly summarised. The thesis concludes with due recognition of its limitations and points towards the need for further research in the direction of the study undertaken in particular and in the sociology of music education in general. This thesis thus examined a unique syndrome that had been little investigated and through its analytical framework, secured findings that possibly served to fill a gap in existing knowledge.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE RELATED TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

2.1 Chapter overview

The review of literature aims to ascertain what has been written in relation to the problem under investigation. Six areas of relevancy are covered, namely, Malay indigenous music, the geographical structure and ethnic composition of the country, British colonial influence in Malaya, musical practices in Malaysia, the education system and developments in higher education as well as music education opportunities, and music examination boards that operate in Malaysia. On the whole, the review of literature has revealed that very little has been written about the overall music education structure in Malaysia and no research has been conducted on the topic under investigation. Although there are studies on the different types of music in Malaysia and the position of music education from an Islamic perspective (Ang, 1998; Ramona Tahir, 1996), research to date has largely focused on Malay indigenous music.

The review of literature situates and contextualises the research problem by explaining the geographical structure and ethnic composition of the country, and also examines the British colonial influence in Malaya. It explains the relevance of large scale migration to Malaya in the second half of the nineteenth century. This effort serves to provide a better understanding of the multicultural musical forms and practices that mirror the ethnic diversity of the country. It further aids the analysis of social and symbolic action in relation to the historical past of the country.

The thesis later relates the continuance of socio-cultural practices of Malaysian society to former colonial policies as inherited from the British. It further attributes the country's peculiar musical practices as being an offshoot of such
historical and political influences. The myriad forms of musical practices found in Malaysia are then categorised and illustrated. This diagrammatic representation of musical practices also serves to locate the research problem in relation to the wider context of the nation’s diverse musical activities. The review continues with an overview of the Malaysian education system and highlights developments in higher education opportunities in the country. This is followed by an explanation of the Malaysian music education system as afforded in the public and the private sector. The last part of the review highlights information pertaining to the history of music assessments in Malaysia. It provides a brief background of the five main music examination boards that offer graded assessments in Western classical music. The operations of other smaller and newer assessment boards are also briefly discussed.

2.2 Malay Indigenous Music

Research into Malaysian music seems centred on the study of indigenous cultures focusing on traditional Malay music (as associated with Malay theatre) and musical instruments (Mohd Taib, 1969; Malm, 1974; Matusky, 1982). Research in ethnomusicological studies is further supported by the publication of a South East Asian Cultural Series which includes the work of an established Malaysian ethnomusicologist, Tan Sooi Beng (1992). Furthermore, Matusky’s and Tan’s (1997) work on the traditional music and musical instruments of Malaysia represents one of the most comprehensive pieces of research into ethnic musical instruments and traditional musical practices in the country. Other researchers of Malay music (and dance) include Rahmah Bujang’s (1975) study of ‘Bangsawan’, popular Malay opera, Ghulam Sawar’s (1976) study on ‘Mak Yong’, a ‘Kelantanese’ music-theatre, Mohd Ghouse Nasuruddin’s (1992) research on Malay traditional music and Mohd Anis’ (1993) study on the ‘Zapin’, a Malay folk dance. Why is there such an interest in ethnomusicological research? A review of the abovementioned names indicate that several of the researchers are attached to the cultural centres of two universities, namely Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Malaya. Also, many of the academics engaged by
Malaysian universities are of Malay origin and hence appear to research music of their ‘own culture’. The cultural centres and music departments of these universities have traditionally supported such studies. In 1997, University Putra Malaysia offered music degree programmes majoring in performance, education and music technology in conjunction with the establishment of private universities and colleges.

By 2002, there are 16 universities in Malaysia (New Straits Times, 8.5.02) of which seven offer tertiary studies in music. They are, Universiti Malaya, Universiti Sains Malaysia, University Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Univerisiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Thus, as more music departments are established and postgraduate music programmes are offered, a greater diversity in research fields is anticipated in the near future.

2.3 Geographical structure and ethnic composition

Malaysia covers an area of about 329,733 square kilometres (Statistics Yearbook 1997). The country is a federation of 13 states forming a constitutional monarchy in Southeast Asia. It is made up of 11 states in the peninsular of West Malaysia and two states in East Malaysia, separated by some 650 km of the South China Sea. West Malaysia is bordered on the north by Thailand, on the south by Singapore, on the west by the Straits of Malacca, and on the east by the South China Sea. The states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia occupy the northern third of the island of Borneo, and are bordered on the north and west by the South China Sea, on the east by the Sula and Celebes seas, and on the south by the Indonesian province of Kalimantan. The federal territory of Kuala Lumpur is Malaysia’s capital and largest city. Malaysia has a diverse ethnic population, reflecting its position on one of the major sea-route crossroads of Asia (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, 2002). Ethnic Malays and indigenous groups who originated from different parts of the Malay peninsula and South East Asia, make up about 65.1% of the country’s total population of 23.27 million. About 26% of
the population is of Chinese origin and 7.7% are of Indian origin (Census 2002). In West Malaysia about half the population is ethnic Malay living mainly in the rural areas although an increasing number of Malays are leaving for the cities in search of work. Most of the Chinese on the other hand are concentrated in the cities. The remainder is made up mainly of Tamils and Pakistanis many of whom work on the plantations. In Sabah and Sarawak about one-half to two-thirds of the population belongs to one of about 30 indigenous ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Kadazans of Sabah and the Ibanis and Bidayuhs of Sarawak. The Chinese constitute the largest non-indigenous group, and the largest single ethnic group in Sarawak. The Malays are a minority group in both Sarawak and Sabah. The following map of the country provides a geographical view of the various towns and cities in the respective states of West and East Malaysia.

Figure 2.3 Map of Malaysia towns, cities and states in West Malaysia and East Malaysia

2.4 British colonial influence in Malaya

In the 18th century, the British Empire became active in the Malay archipelago, partly in search of trade but also to check French power in the Indian Ocean (Kennedy, 1962). In 1786 the ruler of Kedah, a state in the north of the Malaya peninsular, leased the island of Pinang to the British East India Company in return of help against the Siamese. Later, in 1819 Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company founded Singapore, and in 1824 the British acquired Malacca from the Dutch (Turnbull, 1989).
These three locations were then collectively known as the Straits Settlements. In 1824 the Anglo-Dutch Treaty ended the Dutch presence in the Malay Peninsula. Using diplomacy and taking advantage of emergent dynastic quarrels, the British persuaded the various state rulers to accept British ‘residents’ or advisors, who in effect dictated policy. From about 1850, there was a rapid expansion of tin-mining and agricultural activities in the Malay Peninsula resulting in a shortage of labour. In 1874, the Pangkor Engagement marked the beginning of indirect British rule in Malaya and a system of indirect rule under the British administration was enforced (Kelly, 1993). During this period of economic expansion under the British Residential System, wide scale immigration into the Malay Peninsular was encouraged. Kelly (1993) further provides some insights on the impact of such large-scale Chinese and Indian migration into Malaya in the second half of the nineteenth century. Immigrants from mainland China were encouraged to opened up the tin mines as well as the provide labour needed for the industry. An influx of immigrants came from China’s southern provinces either by the indenture system or by the half-yearly profit sharing co-operative system. Similarly, immigrant workers from South India were sought. From 1833 Indian labourers were recruited for work in coffee, sugar and more importantly rubber plantations in Malaya by the indenture system.

Gradually the British moved to take control of more peninsular states, working indirectly through the Malay rulers. The various states were then classified as either federated or ‘non-federated’. British control was somewhat looser in the non-federated states. The federated states were Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang. The non-federated states were Johor and the four northern states, which were acquired by the British from Siam (now Thailand) in 1909. At the top of the British system of rule was a High Commissioner, who was also governor of the Straits Settlements. By the 1940s the population of the Malay Peninsula states was approximately 50 per cent Malay, 37 per cent Chinese and 12 per cent Indian. Divisions between these groups were deep, coinciding substantially with religious and linguistic differences, the Malays being largely Muslims, the Indians Hindus and the Chinese practising Buddhist beliefs with each group conversing in their
respective mother-tongues (Fell, 1957; Smith, 1965). In 1946, despite Malay opposition, the British imposed a scheme known as the Malayan Union (Mohammed Noordin Sopice, 1976). The British said the union was a move towards self-government, but many Malays feared it was a preliminary step to ending Malaya's status as a protectorate and turning it into a full colony.

The Malayan Union debacle is generally regarded as a turning-point in Malaya's political history and the history of Malay nationalism (Stockwell, 1979). With independence for the peninsular states approaching, Malays were concerned that immigrants might acquire political power. There was equal opposition to plans under the union to give most immigrants citizenship and voting rights, and a transference of the sovereignty of the Malay rulers to the British Crown thus reducing the power of the Malay rulers. Opposition to the union led to an armed struggle for liberalisation from colonial rule led by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). It also contributed to the formation of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) which acted as the Alliance coalition. Independent elections were held in 1955. Meanwhile the CPM attacks on tin mines and rubber estates led the British to declare a state of emergency in June 1948 (Snibbs, 1989). By 1954 the CPM was ready to negotiate peace. However, sporadic fighting continued for another six years before the party formally agreed to lay down its arms (Short, 1975; Tan, 1997). By then British and the Alliance had worked out the post-independence constitution, providing for a federal state, a two-house parliament (one house elected and one appointed), citizenship for most non-Malays, and protection for the Malays, who were regarded as less economically developed and were given preferential status for civil service jobs, scholarships, and business licences. Incidentally, such privileges accorded to the Malays have been maintained since 1955 although their long term merits have been questioned. Whilst the policy was meant for spearheading advancement for the 'Bumiputras' or 'sons of the soil', the Malays declaring that it was their right to maintain dignity in their own nation, such special privileges may have been
‘misused’ to shelter and protect the Malays. Columnist, Dr. Shad Faruqi wrote in the Sunday Star:

Many economic, social and educational programmes since ‘Merdeka’ [Independence] and especially after 1971 are structured along ethnic lines. The status of a ‘Malay’ or ‘native’ is the key to innumerable doors of opportunities both in the public and private sector (Shad Faruqi, 26.5.02).

Nevertheless, on August 31, 1957, the Federation of Malaya was established with Tunku Abdul Rahman, leader of UMNO — the dominant member of the Alliance, as the country’s first Prime Minister (Miller, 1959). By then Malaysia had become not only a multicultural but also a plural society with each group emphasizing its respective ethnicity through vernacular education, beliefs and general way of life. In 1961 Tunku Abdul Rahman proposed a British mooted pan-Malaysian federation comprising Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo (later called Sabah), and Brunei. However, although enthusiasm for the idea was largely limited to Malaya, all but Brunei joined an expanded federation, renamed Malaysia, on September 16, 1963. Economic and political disputes led to Singapore’s departure from the federation two years later in 1965 leaving Malaysia as it is today (Mohammed Noordin Sopiee 1976).

2.5 Musical practices in Malaysia

The implementation of British colonial policies has resulted in the emergence of a multiracial Malaysian society with each ethnic group preserving its own customs, religions, social norms and musical practices. In addition there appears to be a desire to adopt western social practices which are perceived to be synonymous with modernisation and socio-economic advancement. This quest includes the assimilation of Western musical practices, adding to the myriad of musical practices that accompanied the early migrants to Malaya. Malaysia’s musical heritage is thus symbolic of the British in Malaya with musical tastes and preferences left behind long after independence.
In order to provide a comprehensive view of the wide range of musical genres and to locate the study in relation to the myriad forms of musical activities in the country, I have categorised Malaysian musical practices as stemming from two root-streams of musical development, namely, traditional-local art music and Western music. The following diagram illustrates the various musical practices found in Malaysia.

**Figure 2.5 Musical Practices in Malaysia**

![Musical Practices Diagram]

In the process of categorisation, I have used the term ‘traditional’ to signify that much of the non-Western art forms practised in Malaysia stem from much older musical cultures such as Carnatic and Hindustani music from the Indian subcontinent, secular and court music from mainland China and gamelan music from the Malay archipelago. The term ‘local’ serves to describe the different kinds (and functions) of dance-theatre music, folk music and religious music found in the country. Under the category of Western music, I have included popular music and classical music.
Not unlike other global trends, popular Western music appeals to many Malaysians and several radio stations air Western popular music ranging from music of the 1960's to contemporary rap and rock fusion genres. This category of music making includes live band music and music created by electronic means in the recording studios. In addition, students have been introduced to the study of popular and jazz music in 'graded' levels as promoted by examinations boards such as the Rock School (validated by Trinity College) and the ABRSM.

Prior to the establishment of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra in 1998, the performance of Western orchestral music in Malaysia had been of sporadic frequency. Within two years of its establishment, the MPO has carved out a reputation as being an orchestra of international standing although the participation of Malaysian orchestral members remains limited. The other orchestras in the country may be described as 'amateur' or at best, 'quasi-professional'. They include the Kuala Lumpur Symphony Orchestra, the Penang Symphony Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra. Several of these orchestras play 'light' classical music and popular music. It is also noted that since the inception of the MPO, performances by these older orchestras have dwindled. In the category of Western Music, I have made special mention to piano music since it represents the main source of a classical music education among the Malaysian community. It is within this category of musical activity that the thesis has developed. The flow chart finally indicates a 'combination-category' of cross-cultural musical forms that represent areas of interest of contemporary composers and experimental groups who fuse Western and traditional musical elements.

Thus, in analysing the significance of the various types of musical practices in the lives of Malaysians, three main observations are made. Foremost there seems to be a clear demarcation of the roles and functions of the various types of music. Traditional music is regarded as representative of the cultural 'roots' of the three primary ethnic groups in the country, namely the Malay, Chinese and the Indians.
Traditional music is usually played to accompany dance, ritual and some social functions although there are some traditional ensembles courses conducted at institutions of higher learning such as the National Arts Academy (Akademi Seni Kebangsaan, 1998). However, in general, there seems to limited interest in learning traditional music among the young. Of the three ethnic groups, the Chinese seem to be most interested in enrolling their children for a music education, preferring to be educated in Western classical (piano) music. The discovery of reasons for such preferences thus represents part of the aims of the research. Hence, there appears to be a clear distinction between music to be heard in a social context (including its accompaniment in traditional dance demonstrations) and music as a form of education, the former being generally relegated to traditional music and the latter, to Western music. Secondly, interest in the practice and performance of traditional music does not seem to be commensurate with interest in its research. Whether this situation is due to social, political or economic constraints remain debatable and possibly within the ambit of another research. Thirdly, there are some Malaysian composers who have created music using a combination of traditional Malaysian musical instruments and Western musical instruments in an attempt to express the assimilation of their musical experience and upbringing as ‘Malaysians’ regardless of their ethnicity. These composers may be regarded as belonging to an emerging group of music educators whom I term as the ‘new academics’ since many of them are attached to institutions of higher learning.

2.6 Education system

The Malaysian system of school education is divided into the primary level (ages 6 yrs to 12 yrs) and the secondary level (13 yrs to 18 yrs) of study. All schools follow the curriculum guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education. At the primary level there are two types of schools, namely national schools and national-type schools. In national schools the medium of instruction is Malay (Bahasa Melayu), the national language of the country.
In national-type schools, Mandarin or Tamil is the medium of instruction. English is a compulsory subject in national schools and both Malay and English are compulsory subjects in national-type schools.

At the secondary level there are four types of schools, namely academic schools (which include both national and national-type schools), technical schools, national religious schools and vocational schools. The schools practice yearly school-based assessments and prepare students for common public examinations towards the end of primary and secondary schooling. The Primary School Achievement Test is taken towards the end of primary school and the Malaysia Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia), which is equivalent to the British ‘O’ Levels, is taken at secondary school. In total, students spend eleven years at school, six at the primary level and five at the secondary level. Students may continue post-secondary school culminating in the Malaysia Higher School Certificate (Sijil Pelajaran Tinggi Malaysia) examination, which is equivalent to the British ‘A’ levels. However, many students enroll in private colleges for Foundation Studies, Matriculation or the British ‘A’ Level courses soon after completing their Malaysian Certificate of Education examinations. This is in preparation for entry into undergraduate programmes offered by numerous colleges in collaboration with British, American, Canadian and Australian universities.

The Education Guide (1999) illustrates the education structure of Malaysia (Appendices A and B). In addition, two main types of private schools operate in Malaysia. These are the Malaysian private schools and international schools. They are fee-paying schools and usually offer better facilities. Classes are smaller ranging from 15 to 25 students per class unlike public schools where each class size may reach up to 45 students especially in urban locations. In terms of the curriculum, Malaysian private schools also adhere to the National Curriculum whereas the international schools follow the national curriculum of their respective countries. For example, the Garden International School adheres
to the British National Curriculum whilst the International School of Kuala Lumpur follows the American system of education. Like the music examinations boards which operate in Malaysia these international schools were set up to cater to the educational needs of expatriate families.

2.6.1 Development of private higher education

Education in Malaysia comes under the jurisdiction of the Kementerian Pendidikan (Ministry of Education, Malaysia). Education plays an important role in realising the country’s vision of achieving the status of a fully developed nation by the year 2020, in terms of economic development, social justice, and spiritual, moral and ethical strength with the ultimate objective of creating a society that is united, democratic, liberal and dynamic. The National Education Policy, drawn up by the government, is based on the National Philosophy of Education. It aims to develop and produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually and physically balanced, knowledgeable, competent and with high moral standards (Education Guide, 1999).

The new Education Act of 1996 contains legislations that govern private education. They include the Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996, under which the National Accreditation Board (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara) was established and the National Council on Higher Education Act 1996 (Yahaya Ibrahim 1999). The introduction of these new legislations fostered the boost in private education both at the school level and in particular, at tertiary level.

Private education in Malaysia became a burgeoning industry and by 2002 about 700 colleges have been established (New Straits Times, 18.8.02). Various types of arrangements with partner universities emerged. These include transfer programmes and validated programmes. The number of years of study in Malaysia and at the home university is commonly marketed as ‘1+2’ or 2+2’, meaning, either one or two years of the programme are completed in Malaysia.
In some courses all three years of the undergraduate programme are completed in Malaysia and these are commonly known as ‘3+0’ programmes. Yahaya Ibrahim (1999), the President of the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges, provides a succinct overview of the stages of development of private higher education in Malaysia (Appendix C).

The practice of British external examinations dates back at least half a century. From the days of Cambridge ‘O’ Levels in the 1950’s to the ‘3+0’ tertiary programmes in the 1990’s, there is a clear history of British involvement in the education of Malaysians. Private education is thus much influenced by the initiatives of private colleges and enrolment appears to be largely targeted towards members of the non-Malay community. This is because places at public universities are largely reserved for Malays as the provision of affirmative action in favour of the Malays is enshrined in Article 153(1) of the Federal Constitution (Shad Faruqi, 2002).

This practice dates back to the historical pact by the British and the state rulers in granting special privileges to the Malays during the formation of the Federation of Malaya as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless issues have been raised about the manner in which the quota system of university placement operates in favour of the Malays (Education Quarterly, Sept/Oct. 2001). Thus, one of the offshoots of such policies is the polarisation of public and private education by race with the Malay students largely found in public universities and non-Malay students seeking educational opportunities in the private sector.

2.7 Music education opportunities

As mentioned earlier, very little has been published about music in public schools or the state of Malaysian music education as a whole. Although music is taught in primary schools its impact seems limited, which is perhaps one of the main reasons that parents send their children for private music studies. Although music as a subject was introduced in Malaysian primary schools for nearly two decades,
its curriculum continues to focus mainly on singing, recorder playing and minimal music appreciation (Music Curriculum, Primary Schools 1995). Due to a shortage of trained music teachers, anecdotal evidence suggests that many schools, especially those in the rural areas, do not conduct music classes. In this sense one can argue that music education in Malaysia, at least in reference to the acquisition of musical skills and music literacy, is largely borne by the private sector.

However, opportunities for tertiary music studies are available at several Malaysian public universities as mentioned. In other words, the government provides opportunities for ‘musical experience’ at the school level and funds tertiary music education at selected universities. As such the ‘music education’ of the child, at least for the present, is left to the discretion of individual parents, who may or may not send their children for private music studies.

2.8 Music examinations boards

Five main music examination boards provide assessments in Western classical music in Malaysia. They are the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Trinity College London, London College of Music and Media, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Australian Music Examinations Board. These institutions offer assessments in Western classical music from preliminary to advanced levels of musical proficiency and in the theory of music.

The history of music assessments dates back to 1877 when the Trinity College of Music became the first institution in the world to offer external practical examinations in music (Flourish, Feb. 02). Founded in 1872 by Henry George Bonavia, Trinity College was set up ‘for the advancement of church music and the improvement of church musicians as a class’ (Trinity, 2002). Trinity College London opened examination centres throughout the UK and by 1879 there were around two hundred local centres drawing some three thousand and seventy-three candidates in theoretical subjects. According to an article (undated) entitled ‘Origins and History’ prepared for Trinity College of Music’s International
Music Examinations Board, overseas centres were opened in 1881 in South Africa, India, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Australia. The College was renamed Trinity College of Music, London in 1904. By 1921 over half a million examinations had been conducted and over 500 centres had been established in the UK and the ‘dominions’ (*Trinity*, 2002, p.3). The graded music examinations had proved to significantly influence the learning styles of young musicians (Salaman, 1994).

Following British expansion into the Malay Peninsular in the second half of the nineteenth century, the British expatriate community increased in the country. Some of the British families with younger children felt a need for a form of recognised musical assessment whereby the musical progress of their children could be measured. The rationale was that, upon their children’s return to Britain for further education, some form of certified recognition of their musical achievement whilst in Malaysia was available.

Thus began the introduction of the earliest public music examinations in Malaya. The success of Trinity College’s examinations led the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music to form the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music in the 1890’s. Later, two other music colleges in Britain joined the Associated Board. They were later named the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

The majority of music students in Malaysia sit for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations, administered by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The Associated Board first offered examinations in Malaysia in 1948 when John Sterling conducted the first examinations in a combined tour of Malaysia and Singapore (*Malaysian Jubilee Newsletter*, 1998). By 1954 exam entries had increased to such an extent that each country had its own visit. The growth in candidature was phenomenal. Anecdotal evidence revealed that in 1997 some 28,000 Malaysian students sat for ABRSM practical examinations.
Another well established examination board, the London College of Music and Media (LCMM) first offered music assessments in South East Asia, in Singapore, Johore Baru and Terengganu (LCMM 1996). Established in London in 1887 to cater for mainly part-time students, the London College of Music was incorporated as a public institution in 1939 and its is now part of Thames Valley University, UK (Forte, Summer 1998). In 1994 the London College of Music embarked on an expansion programme and representatives have been appointed throughout Malaysia (LCMM, Dec. 1999).

On the other hand, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD), in an effort to consolidate its operations in Malaysia, entered into an agreement with Yamaha Music Malaysia. After some fifteen years of operations in the country, the GSMD, in 1997, transferred its operations from its representatives, such as the Malaysian Institute of Art, to SP Music Centre Sdn.Bhd, a holding company of Yamaha Music Malaysia (GSMD, 1997).

Incorporated in 1974 in Malaysia, Yamaha Music Malaysia Sdn.Bhd is one of the oldest music organizations in the country, employing the largest number of music teachers in Malaysia. It has the largest group of music schools throughout Malaysia, divided into dealer schools and branch schools. There are over eighty nine dealers and music schools spread over eleven states the country with a student enrolment of nearly thirty thousand (Yamaha Music, 1992).

Founded in 1887 by two Australian Universities, the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) provides a system of assessment in music with an aim to improve the standards of music education, particularly in the teaching of performance skills and theoretical knowledge (Bridges, 1970). The franchise holder of the AMEB for Malaysia (and Brunei) is a company known as Marketing Management Services based in Kuching, Sarawak in East Malaysia. During 1997, the AMEB substantially expanded its International Programme in various towns and cities in Malaysia as well as in the South East Asian of Indonesia and Thailand (AMEB 1998).
2.8.1 Other music examination boards

Established in 1992 by Norton York, the Rock School provides assessments in graded levels of popular music study. Its syllabus is validated by Trinity College (*Trinity News*, 2001:4). In November 1998, the Rock School held its first music examinations in Malaysia. Richard Beale conducted the first examinations in Kuala Lumpur, assessing thirty-two candidates on drums, bass and guitar at Bentley Music, the franchise holder for Rock School’s operations in Malaysia (*Rock School*, 1998).

Another assessment board that offers examinations in popular organ music is Yamaha Music. The Yamaha Music School began as an experimental classroom in 1954 and in October 1966, the Yamaha Music Foundation was established (*Yamaha Music*, 1996). Yamaha Music’s expansion in Asia took place in two distinct phases. The first phase began in the early 1970’s with the setting up of music schools in Singapore and the establishment of a subsidiary in Malaysia. The second phase was effected in the mid-1980’s transforming Yamaha Music Asia into a holding company as part of its corporate expansion and diversification programme (*Yamaha Music*, 1992). Yamaha Music’s forte is the provision of graded assessments in the electronic organ, validated by Yamaha Music Foundation in Japan. It also conducts Junior Music Courses where children from four years of age are trained in aural perception, keyboard facility and general musicianship. Similarly, Technics Music offer graded assessments in popular music and like Yamaha music, their services seem closely associated with the sales of their electronic music products (*Technics*, 2000).

Yet, another music assessment board which offers music assessments in Malaysia is the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing. Founded in 1950 this college represents one of the leading institution of higher learning under the Ministry of Culture of the State Council, China (*Central Conservatory of Music*, 1997). In 1956 the International Music Exchange Center of the Conservatory was established, opening its doors to international students.
In Malaysia, the Central Conservatory of Music and Art in Kuala Lumpur was set up in 1991 as a representative of the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing. Examiners from Beijing conduct graded tests (Grades 1 to 9) on six Chinese instruments, namely, ‘Gu Zheng’, ‘Ruan’, ‘Er-hu’, ‘Pi-pa’, ‘Dizi’ and ‘Yang Qin’. Examinations are held in various towns in Malaysia. Examination pieces are published in Malaysia and cassette tapes of examination pieces are also produced in Malaysia (Central Conservatory of Music, 1997).

Finally, a second Australian assessment board has established operations in Malaysia. Represented by Sunwave Music, a music school which used to represent Trinity College (before Trinity’s establishment of its Malaysian National Office), a private limited company by the name of the Australian Guild Music and Speech (M) Sdn Bhd has been formed with a network of representatives in Malaysia. It has embarked on an educational outreach programme offering free music education workshops to interested parties (Guild, May 2002). Operating along similar lines to the five main examination boards mentioned earlier, the Guild offers graded assessments in classical music, representing the newest examination board to compete for candidates in the vibrant music assessment market in Malaysia.

2.9 Chapter summary

The review of literature has been drawn from printed sources such as dissertations, conference papers, books, newspaper articles, official reports, journals, newletters, electronic databases and relevant websites on the World Wide Web. It thus covered a relatively wide spectrum of areas relevant to the topic under investigation.

The review first examined the areas of music research that have been conducted and the outcome reveals that research to date has largely centred on Malay music and its associated dance forms. The review then proceeded to locate the study with a brief description of the geographical structure and ethnic composition of
Malaysia. A map of the country indicating the major towns and cities was provided. In contextualising the research problem, the review examined literature pertaining to the British colonial presence in Malaya. This served to provide an historical understanding as to the evolution of Malaysia’s pluralist society and offered an insight into the political construct of the country.

The various types of music found in Malaysia were then discussed. These categories of musical practices found in the country were illustrated in a diagram, which also aimed to place the study of Western classical piano music in the larger context of musical events. The review continued with a description of the Malaysian education structure. Developments in the field of higher private education were explained. The review of literature then examined music education opportunities that exists. It appears that music in schools has yet to make a significant impact on the music education of young Malaysians. The provision of an education in music thus appears to be placed on the private sector, relying largely on the services of private piano teachers and the various music assessment boards. A description of the five main assessment boards which operate in Malaysia followed. The review of literature concluded with a brief examination of the operations of other smaller or newer music assessment boards.
CHAPTER THREE

A REVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGICAL LITERATURE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter provides a review of methodological literature relevant to the scope of the research. It aims to arrive at a preferred methodological standpoint which forms the basis of the theoretical framework. Chapter Three is in four main parts. The first part provides a background to the sociological perspectives associated with the research. A historical sketch traces the development of sociological theory. The second part examines the sociology of music and its inherent peculiarities. It extrapolates the interaction of sociological with musicological perspectives, and considers the problems associated with the sociology of music. It further argues for the use of multiple methodologies or methodological ‘unions’ in the field of interdisciplinary research as propounded in the postmodern era.

The limitations of such orientation are also highlighted and measures to address the identified weaknesses are discussed. In part three, sociological and musicological methodologies are further extrapolated with the aim of arriving at a preferred methodological standpoint. Two major theoretical orientations are then adopted, namely, the sociological perspectives of the Chicago School led by symbolic interactionist, George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and the musicological concepts of a leading twentieth century analyst, Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935). The rationale for the selection and adaptation of the theories of Mead and Schenker is then presented. The final part of the chapter relates to the integration of social paradigms by an application of metatheory (Ritzer, 1996).
It further proposes the creation of a metatheoretical schema that embodies the multi-dimensional mode of categorizing data, analyzing themes and presenting findings under the micro-macro and subjective-objective realms of socio-musical interrelationships.

3.2 Development of sociological theory: an historical sketch

The development of sociological theory can be traced to the effects of various social and intellectual changes brought on by forces such as the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the history of empirical social research generally is much older (Glaser, 1959; Oberschall, 1972; Kent, 1982; Eriksson, 1993), early sociological theory was much influenced by the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Each of these theorists possessed a distinct philosophical stance. Karl Marx, for instance, embedded his dialectic in a material base, arguing that the problems of modern life can be overcome by changing the materialistic structure of capitalist society (Marx, 1867). On the other hand the impact of Durkheim's major work, the *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), lies in the guidance it provides for the conduct of empirical sociology, emphasising both the theoretical and empirical elements of research as well as placing importance on the interconnection of relationships. Max Weber's (1949) analysis of the methodology and philosophical problems of sociology however, denied that sociology could discover the universal laws of human behaviour but rather, emphasised that sociological study should aim at the understanding of the meaning of comparative action.

Further developments in the history of sociological methodology can be traced to the intellectual contributions of the modern and postmodern theorists such as Mead (1934), Habermas (1970), Foucault (1980), Baudrillard (1972), Giddens (1987) and Collins (1988a). Thus, the history of sociological theory since the beginning of the twentieth century is characterised by several factors such as the interest in social Darwinism, the rise of symbolic interactionism led by George Herbert Mead of the Chicago School, and the pioneering sociological work of Pitirim Sorokin at Harvard University.
Various theories were also developed. They include the rise of cyclical theory (Sorokin, 1937) and the formulation of action theory (Parson, 1977a), the legitimisation of 'grand theory' and structural functionalism (Davis and Moore, 1945; Parson, 1949), the proposition of exchange theory (Homans, 1961) and the rise of conflict theory (Dahrendorf, 1959).

Conflict theorists gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s. They operate essentially on a similar paradigm as structural functionalists although conflict theorists look at change rather than equilibrium, and conflict rather than order. In addition, a major development in Marxian theory in the twentieth century was the rise of the Frankfurt School as propounded by the work of Weber (for example, the process of rationalisation in belief) and the theoretical and practical developments in the field of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud. In the 1960s phenomenological sociology, premised on the work of Alfred Schutz (1932), gained prominence. This period also saw the rise of ethnomethodology, a distinctive kind of sociology that places importance on the study of commonsense knowledge and the establishment of procedures to aid the understanding of analytical methods such as conversation analysis (Garfinkel, 1967; Schegloff, 1979). Thus, ethnomethodology is determinedly empirical in its orientation. Its proponents generally prefer to go out and study the social world rather than to theorise on it (Clayman, 1993; Giddens, 1997). In other words, ethnomethodologists are interested in how people act and react in a given social situation. Thus, whilst phenomenological sociologists focus primarily on what people think, ethnomethodologists are more concerned with what people actually do.

Also, in the second half of the twentieth century, Marxist theories of various types came into their own in sociology (Jay, 1973; Habermas, 1973; Kohn, 1976). Micro-macro relationships entered the field of symbolic interactionism and found renewed attention in feminist theories (Sandy, 1974; Daniels, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Smith, 1993; Lengermann and Niebruge-Brantley, 1995). Finally, with the fall of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, postmodern sociological thought gathered increased momentum with the resurgence of structuralism (Clark and Clark, 1982; Lemert, 1990), the emergence of neofunctionalism (Alexander, 1985a; Colomy, 1990b) as well as the
development of poststructural and postmodernist theories (Baudrillard, 1972; Harvey, 1989).

This historical sketch illuminates the development of diverse views in the field of sociological research. Drawing upon this understanding, the present investigation builds on the roots of symbolic interactionism as the basis of its theoretical argument on which a superimposition is made with musicological theory. The review of methodological literature continues in the following section with a discussion of the sociology of music and the problems associated with interdisciplinary research.

3.3 The sociology of music

The sociology of music differs from traditional musicology in that it does not primarily regard musical composition as the ultimate object of study, but rather the historical, social and cultural context in which the music was created. In this sense it does not examine the “aesthetic” merit of individual (or collective) pieces of work but rather, analyses the social causes of differing tastes and perceptions by examining the conditions under which certain social classes and strata, produce and consume different musical idioms and forms. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* defines the sociology of music as:

> A discipline that examines the interrelationships of music and society. Properly speaking, it is neither musicology nor sociology but may borrow from both whatever tools and techniques it requires to establish and implement the conceptual framework and methodology that is peculiar to itself... it takes as the basis of its investigation the material circumstances of the production and reception of music. The results depend in large measure on the orientation of the investigator (Sadie, 1980, p.432).

The approach to socio-musicological research is also different from ethnomusicology, for instead of studying the inherent ethnic features of a musical form or the peculiar production of a musical style, the music sociologist investigates, among other things, the material basis of the
social forms that underlie and influence the generation of music in the culture under study. The parameters of socio-musicology are possibly less delineated than musicology or ethnomusicology and thus music sociologists have a more challenging task in maintaining their discipline’s identity.

Nevertheless, some theorists have subdivided the sociology of music into general and special categories of investigation (Silbermann, 1963). The former category concerns itself with the relationships of music’s social functions whilst the latter emphasises the historical significances that influence the outcome of the first category of socio-musical investigation. Silbermann (1963) offers a three-stage explanation in an attempt to provide a systematic procedure in socio-musicological research. Taking an historical point of embarkation, the initial dynamic stage represents the conditions that form the evolution of certain socio-musical patterns. The second stage represents the functional and descriptive period during the unfolding of events whilst the final comparative stage analyses the materials gathered.

The chief representative of the sociology of music based on historical idealism or Hegelism was Adorno (Sadie, 1980). He subscribed to the concepts propounded by Marx and Weber and included elements of positivism in the sense of appreciating sociological entanglements and attitudes towards music in the market place. According to Sadie (1980, p.434), Hermann Abert was possibly one of the earliest theorists in modern times to resume the political basis of musical production. He laid the foundations of the new sociology of music by analysing views on the music of earlier times. For instance, in his critical historography, Abert described the struggles of the medieval church against the increasing popularity of the new light music of the masses as opposed to the bourgeois art music of the higher social classes. Thus the positivist sociology of music postulates that the source of cognition is that which is experienced. It concerns itself with the examination of musical life, and the ‘commercial’ and social value of music (Shepherd, 1991).

Furthermore, in a move towards a rationalistic sociology of music there was an attempt to address the theoretical problems of musicology by placing some of its features in the perspective of another science. In such cases, the use of multiple research methodologies (as applied in this thesis) is particularly appropriate in
interdisciplinary research studies. The attraction of such 'methodological marriages' as described by Warwick (1983) lies in its 'triangulatory' merits since the multi-methods enable the weakness of one theoretical orientation to be balanced against the strength of another as further explained in the following section.

3.3.1 Methodological unions in the postmodern era: merging sociology with musicology

A notable development in modern sociological thought is the use of multi-methodological paradigms or 'methodological unions' that embody the various levels of social analysis (Blalock and Wilkening, 1979; Hage, 1994a). In a sense, the interest in such collective use of various extant theories and methodological approaches represents a synthesis of the many theories engendered in the course of the twentieth century. Thus, in some ways, methodological unions may be viewed as new ways of seeing old theories. In others, it represents the evolution of new theories as a result of the transformation of 'old ideas' set in new situations. For example, an outcome of the resurgence of renewed interest in conflict theory is a focus on the transformation of the dialectic method into specific research procedures and to emphasis on the use of multiple theories or methods of investigation (Jay, 1973; Collins, 1990).

In further developments, postmodern sociologists such as Brian Fay (1975) view critical social science as operating within four simultaneous phenomena levels. Fay talks about the phenomena as being at levels of false consciousness and crisis, and thus in need of educational enlightenment and transformative action. With regard to postmodern views on the transformation of knowledge and multiple research strategies, Banks (1993) challenges mainstream academic view of knowledge as being objective, neutral and uninfluenced by human interests and values calling for a greater integration and clarification of conceptual problems. Banks (1993, pp. 4-14) argues that 'transformative academic knowledge', which comprises themes, paradigms and concepts, 'serves to develop theoretical principles and models that provide greater explanatory value to research findings'.
Banks further advocates an extended use of multiple paradigms in the consideration of pedagogical issues that encompass ecological and political factors, and further encourages a multi-dimensional approach to the study of teacher-student interrelationships. Derrida (1981) considers such deconstructionist measures as a form of poststructural criticism (that is, anti-objective, introspective, interpretive) that demonstrates the 'impossibility of meaning'. Finally, one of the most recent developments in postmodern synthesis is the surge of interest in metatheory, not only in the field of sociology but across disciplines (Radinitzky, 1973; Schmidt et al., 1984).

3.3.2 Problems associated with the sociology of music

The employment of multiple methodologies in interdisciplinary research is not without its limitations. Difficulties encountered in research of this nature include the hybrid form of the subject itself, the epistemological framework of reference, the role accorded to concept formation and the logic of the explanation as well as the criteria for data collection and evaluation. In addition, the choice of theoretical orientations adopted in such a study may pose a further dilemma. For example, one of the main criticisms of symbolic interactionism is its almost exclusive focus on 'small-scale face-to-face interaction with little concern for its historical or social setting' (Haralambos et al., 1999, p.700). Ropers (1973, p.50) adds that Herbert Mead's approach is a view of humans engaged in activities which 'are not historically determined relationships of social and historical continuity but they are merely episodes, interactions, encounters and situations'. Interactionism has also been criticised for its failure to 'provide an account of the social structure' (Skidmore, 1975, p.245), its non-consideration of the social and political constraints on action, its inadequacy in explaining the manner in which standardised normative-behaviour evolves and why members of society are motivated to act in accordance to social norms (Kolb, 1944; Meltzer, 1975; Stryker, 1980). In other words, the chief criticism of interactionism is its inability to explain the source or origin of meaning to which its proponents attach such importance.
However, several of these shortcomings are addressed by the combined use of additional theoretical methodologies that focus on the issues at hand. For example, by placing importance on the structural-historical dimension in the analytical mainframe of the study (as adapted from Schenkerian theory of structure and significant symbols), one of the issues in relation to the historical limitations or the downplaying of large-scale social significance of interactionism is addressed. Also, the inclusion of postmodern perspectives (Chodorow, 1978; Bell and Klein, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997) in the analysis of data provides an added dimension to the representations of the ‘I’ and ‘me’ discussions of symbolic meaning. In a similar vein, the weakness in the ‘generalisation factor’ may be balanced by use of a combination of research means and the input of multiple sources in data acquisition as evident in Chapters Four and Five. Thus, the adaption and juxtaposition of multiple paradigms and theoretical perspectives (such as those of Mead and Schenker) serve to strengthen the analytical framework.

Furthermore, the creation of a metatheoretical schema, which encompasses the micro-macro and subjective-objective analysis of multiple paradigms, provides a comprehensive study of the situation. Hence, the use of multiple methodologies, structured within an analytical schema, may adequately serve to substantiate the validity and generalisation of findings.

### 3.4 Adapting Mead and Schenker: a rationale

The foremost reason for adopting (and adapting) the ideas of Mead and Schenker is the inherent socio-musicological link between these two distinguished contemporarics in relation to the interdisciplinary nature of this study. Their relevance lies in their respective invaluable contributions to the deconstruction of symbolic meaning. The key elements in the work of both Mead and Schenker reside in the interpretation of meaning within the symbols and understandings that surround action and interaction.
In this study the Mead’s ‘act’ is characterised by the playing of the piano whilst the analysis of the gesture is inspired by the Schenkerian approach of structural stratification as applied to the immediate, intermediate and remote levels of musical happenings. Thus, it is argued that Mead read in the social ‘act’, what Schenker delineated in the musical ‘sign’. To this end the analytical ideas of both theorists relate closely to the socio-musicological character of the topic under investigation.

3.4.1 George Herbert Mead and Symbolic Interactionism

One of the most significant contributors to the history of symbolic interactionism is Herbert Mead (1934). Whilst traditional sociology begins with the psychology of the individual, in an effort to explain social experience, Mead argues for a reverse view in that priority should be given to the social world in understanding social experience. He says:

> We are not, in social psychology, building up the behaviour of the social group in terms of the behaviour of separate individuals composing it; rather, we are starting out with a given social whole of complex group activity, into which we analyse (as elements) the behaviour of each of the separate individuals composing it... For social psychology, the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole, not the whole in terms of the part or parts (Mead 1934/1962 p.7).

Mead considers the ‘act’ to be the most primitive unit in his theory and in analysing the act itself, he focuses on the behaviourists’ approach to the study of stimulus and response, adding that the stimulus simply poses as ‘an occasion or opportunity for the act’ (Mead, 1982, p.28). The act, which involves only one person as opposed to the collective ‘social act’ is, according to Mead, comprises of four dialectically interrelated stages, namely, impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation (Mead, 1934).

The impulse thus represents the immediate sensuous stimulation and the actor’s response to the stimulation, whilst perception pertains to the reception of stimuli through the senses, which in turn conjures imagery, analytical search and the assessment of the newly created mental object.
In the manipulation stage, reflective action or postulation takes place as an outcome of the manifestation of the perceived object followed by the actual move or consummation of the act, which serves to satisfy the original impulse.

Gestures, on the other hand, may be vocal or physical. It represents the basic mechanism/movement found both in the social act and the social process (Mead, 1934). Gestures may also be significant, involving a prior deliberative analytical process before action taken, or non-significant (instinctive). Gestures become significant symbols when they arouse in the actor, a response from those to whom the gestures are addressed. According to Mead, 'it has been the vocal gesture that has pre-eminently provided the medium of social organisation in human society' (1959, p.188). The set of vocal gestures mostly likely to become significant symbols is language, which 'signifies a certain meaning' (Mead, 1934/1962 p.46).

Thus, language is a widely shared system of symbols which links past, anticipated future and present experiences, thus enabling people to link personal and social experiences. Hence, a symbol is any structure (such as a word or an object), which represents something other than itself. Such structures are part of the language of science and in particular the language of sociology which may be contrasted with everyday language. Furthermore, the very language used creates frames of mind that fosters knowledge and understanding, itself being limited by its scope of coverage. Thus, it may be argued that symbolic structures, theory, data, explanation and prediction represent the basis of the scientific method in research. Therefore, a structure may be regarded as a set of elements of phenomena with persistent interrelationships that interact with its environment.

Different kinds of theoretical structures exist. Phillips (1985) postulates that there are several theoretical orientations that emphasise structural aspects such as:

(i) the functions or contributions made to society by existing social structures (structural-functionalism).
(ii) social change resulting from the opposition between large-scale social structures (conflict theory).
(iii) the individual's adaptation to society based on the communication and structuring of symbols (symbolic interactionism).
(iv) the alteration of behaviour on the basis of the goals and reinforcements associated with interaction (exchange theory).

(v) people’s everyday procedures for solving practical problems in situations through the construction of ethnotheories, experiencing phenomena and constructing commonsense accounts and prophesies.
(Philips, 1985, p.67).

Thus, central to the position of symbolic interactionists is the focus on the self, the act, social interaction and joint action. Its basic principles are premised on the capacity for thought, action and interaction (Blumer, 1969). It further interprets gestures either as ‘non-symbolic’ (that is, an immediate response to one another’s gesture) or ‘symbolic’ (where action is an outcome of the interpretation yielded by the meaning of another actor’s gesture).

In any case, gestures serve to initiate response either actively or passively, immediately or at a later time, likened to the foreground and middleground of Schenker’s structural stratification of musical events.

Organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1964), on the other hand, is based on different human activities that contribute towards the shared goals of society as opposed to the similar activities of mechanical solidarity. Social facts such as domestic relations are external to the individual and to the sociologist. Thus classifications like domestic relations are based on external reality rather than on the sociologist’s internal ideas. This outward orientation is emphasised in structural-functionalism. Thus, for structural-functionalism, the central question is to explain the existence of society whereas Marx’s position is to understand how one might change society. Much of Marx’s writing deals with the conflicts or contradictions within a capitalist society. He says:

When the product becomes a commodity, the commodity becomes the exchange value it possess... Its exchange value has a material existence apart from the product...[and] leads a separate existence. This exchange value, which is severed from the commodity, and yet is itself a commodity is – money. All the properties of the commodity viewed as exchange value appear as an object distinct from it: they exist in the social form of money, quite separate from their natural form of existence (Marx, 1971, p.59).
Thus, in relation to the research problem, the idea of the double existence of exchange value as a result of a product-commodity transformation bears relation to Mead's concept of the duality of the self in the deconstruction of personal meaning and social purpose.

Furthermore, according to Lacan (1977), performativity and referentiality in an 'act' represent a dual view of oneself. In other words, the 'I' is a spontaneous impulse to act whilst the 'me' represents the superego of the self as influenced by the perspectives of oneself that the individual has learnt from others in social interaction. Here the attitude of the 'others' constitute the organised 'me' and one responds with a measure of freedom and initiative as an 'I' (Mead, 1934). Therefore, how an act is perceived and valued will bear a corresponding relation to whether or not the action is continued or discontinued. In this sense, the 'act' begins to assume its own identity.

3.4.2 Symbolism of Heinrich Schenker

Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935) is regarded as one of the most significant music theorist of the twentieth century. Schenker was dissatisfied with the prevalent approach to the analysis of music theory, which he felt conformed to a rigid formal scheme, and set out to discover and formulate new ways of explaining musical events. He inaugurated a new trend towards the analysis of a composition by explaining and demonstrating the organic coherence of a composition through a network of music symbols arranged in graphic notation (Schenker, 1969). In his approach, Schenker demonstrated the manner in which the analysis of musical structures could be heard and experienced in particular musical contexts through the immediate, intermediate and remote levels of perception which he termed in his theory as the 'foreground' (Vordergrund), 'middleground' (Mittelgrund) and 'background' (Hintergrund) of musical events (Cook, 1987 p.154). To further comprehend the roots of the Schenker's theory, his philosophical stance may be inferred from the following statement:
The origin of every life, whether of nation, clan, or individual, becomes its destiny. Hegel defines destiny as the manifestation of the inborn, original disposition of each individual. The inner law of origin accompanies all development and is ultimately part of the present. Origin, development and present I call background middleground and foreground; their union expresses the oneness of an individual, self-contained life. Therefore the principle of origin development and present as background, middleground and foreground applies also to the life of the idea within us (Schenker, 1935 p.3).

Schenker’s methodology is unique in that he relied on symbols in graphs to illustrate differences between structural and non-structural formations, surface movements of pitch, register and texture as well as directed motions of the fundamental structure in conjuring musical meaning through the interpretation of signs. Essentially, Schenker’s work is premised primarily on two main formative levels, the first being the idea that all musical events stem from a ‘fundamental structure’ or Ursatz which in turn acts as a backbone and stimulus to the second level of development and continuity through a process of continuous transformation. Schenker viewed the process of transformation in musical development as being continuous or discontinuous, directed or meandering, chromatic or diatonic and one that may also shift registers. This he believed is in contrast to the ‘imaginary voices’ of the background or fundamental structure, which he regarded as being continuous, directed, diatonic and which do not shift registers. The significance of Schenker’s theory in relation to the stratification of social-analytical levels (in this case the stability of the fundamental structure against the ‘less stable’ and changing/shift/transformative level) is perhaps reflected in his reference to the power of social institutions. Schenker states:

It is also true that the fundamental structure amounts to a sort of secret-hidden and unsuspected; a secret which incidentally, provides music with a kind of natural preservation from destruction by the masses (Schenker, 1935 p.9).

In the second half of the twentieth century, educational researchers have witnessed a surge of interest in the interpretive approaches to the study of culture, biography and human expressions arguing that the structures of representation may be viewed through symbolic statements and action
(Epperson, 1967; Denzin, 1989; Kaplan, 1990; Hoffer, 1992). Hence the postulation of the covert and overt significance of the 'symbol' has continued to exert its influence on the development of postmodernist theories in the social and musicological (re)definition of meaning.

For example, music analyst Meyer (1956, p.2), believes that music conveys 'referential meaning' whilst Walker (1993, p.195) concurs that music, due to its innate properties, may function connotatively or symbolically.

Musicologist, Van Den Toorn (1991) further argues that it is quite possible to describe and study aspects of music and of musical experience that are openly representational without relinquishing a belief in the 'irreducible essences' of interpretation. In particular reference to Schenker's use of symbolism, Van Den Toorn says:

Many of Schenker's 'technical' terms are expressive and metaphorical, yet their use and understanding would not contradict a belief in meanings that are beyond the reach of metaphors, analogies, and symbols (Van Den Toorn, 1991, p.280).

Schenker's method of hierarchical demarcation in structural functions has also drawn the attention of feminist theorists. In the deconstruction of power relationships, Susan McClary alludes to the use of sexual symbolism in Schenker's musical terminology. She further argues that:

The meaning of music is sexual-political, a meaning that embraces not just sex or sexuality but the sociology and politics of sex as well (McClary, 1987, p.281).

Thus, Schenker's play of musical signs and symbols has attracted the attention of sociologists and musicologists alike in the postmodern era, each interpreting different sets of meanings across the spectrum from the literal to the metaphorical.
3.5 Metatheory: integrating paradigms

Metatheorising is essentially the engagement in a systematic study of the underlying structures of sociological theory through an integrated paradigm of research methodologies. Ritzer (1996) suggests three main purposes of metatheorising. He explains:

Metatheorising...offers systematic methods of understanding, evaluating, criticising and improving extant theories...[it] is one of several bases for creating new theory...practitioners and researchers are provided with useful overarching theoretical perspectives (Ritzer, 1996, p. 491).

Metatheorising comprises the integration of a set of social paradigms conceptualised in multi-levels of social analysis (Gurvitch, 1964; Whitmeyer, 1994). It involves the analysis of materials in a continuum of subjective-objective elements that are viewed concurrently and interactively within microscopic and macroscopic systems of social organisation. The micro level can range from psychological phenomena (such as characteristics, action, behaviour, practices, subjectivity-objectivity) to a study of individuals or patterns of action and interaction amongst select social groups. The macro level ranges from positions and populations (that is, constructs of a society and the structural properties of social systems) to the cultures and societies in world systems. However, due to the disparity in the definitions of the meaning of ‘micro’ and ‘macro’, attempts at the micro-macro synthesis of empirical data poses a difficult task as one is dealing with diverse and different forms and perspectives of social phenomena. Further issues concern the multiple understandings of micro-macro applications in social analysis. These deliberations include the manner of linking themes in consolidating ‘mutual interrelations between micro-macro levels’ (Alexander et al., 1987, p.385), the integration and convergence of micro-macro theories (Alford and Friedland, 1985), the level and choice of emphasis of theoretical perspectives as well as different ways of integrating specific theories (Hindess 1986).
Thus, an important element of metatheory is the understanding of the significance of interrelationships between social and mental structures at a given point in time. George Ritzer (1996), one of the leading proponents of metatheory demonstrates the process of metatheorising through an integrated paradigm of social analysis. He categorises his analytical framework into four interactive levels of macroscopic, microscopic, objective and subjective interrelationships. Ritzer provides examples of what he considers as elements applicable to the macro-objective realm. They include issues pertaining to law, bureaucracy, technology and language. The macro-subjective level on the other hand relates to culture, norms and values held by a particular society. Levels three and four comprise micro-objective and micro-subjective realms respectively. The former level consists of elements such as patterns of behaviour as an outcome of action and interaction whilst the latter level deals with perceptions and beliefs that actively shape the more immediate social construction of reality. However, Ritzer clearly indicates that elements within these realms do not stand in isolation but influence one another interactively. The following figure illustrates Ritzer’s analytical structure.

**Table 3.5 Ritzer’s Major Levels of Social Analysis**

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<tr>
<th>MACROSCOPIC</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>SUBJECTIVE</th>
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<tr>
<td>I. Macro-objective</td>
<td>Examples-society, law, bureaucracy, architecture, technology and language</td>
<td>II. Macro-subjective</td>
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<tr>
<td>III. Micro-objective</td>
<td>Examples-patterns of behaviour, action and interaction</td>
<td>IV. Micro-subjective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Microscopic)

(Ritzer 1996, p. 360)
3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodologies that have inspired the formulation of the theoretical framework of the thesis. It began with a sketch of the historical development of modern sociological thought and concluded with the principles and constructs of metatheory. The inherent features of the sociology of music and its associated problems were discussed. The merging of methodologies, influenced by postmodern thought, followed. The strengths and limitations of employing multiple methodologies were highlighted. A rationale for adapting the theoretical principles of two leading theorists, namely, symbolic interactionist, George Herbert Mead and musicologist, Heinrich Schenker was provided. The duality of the self in symbolic interactionism and its postmodern reinterpretation were examined. Scholarly interest in musical symbolism was briefly discussed. The final analytical process was then formulated from a further application of metatheoretical principles of integrating and interrelating diverse paradigms of subjective-objective constructs within the realm of microscopic and macroscopic views as inspired by Ritzer’s integrated paradigm of social analysis.

Hence, to recapitulate, the theoretical framework of this thesis has been formulated from sociological disciplines combined with musicological perspectives. It is guided by grounded theory and inspired by the research methodologies of additional sciences such as behaviourism and postmodern positivism. Furthermore, the construct of the entire thesis is premised on an application of metatheoretical principles of procedural explanation in the formulation, analysis and elucidation of information towards the presentation of findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH STRATEGY: METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

4.1 Chapter overview

Chapter Four outlines the research strategy of the thesis. The first part comprises a brief survey of the commonly-used methods of research (its inclusion being a feature of the design process), followed by the selection of the most appropriate research method. The second part relates to techniques of data acquisition and analysis. Ethical considerations as applied to the research are also discussed.

Foremost, the main features of five research methods are highlighted. A descriptive method of research in the form of a case study is found to be most appropriate for the interdisciplinary nature of the investigation. The first part of the research strategy concludes with a critique of the case study method, highlighting its inherent strengths and limitations.

The second part of the research strategy focuses on the research procedures used in securing information. Both quantitative and qualitative forms of research techniques are employed. They include the use of survey questionnaires and interviews. Data has been categorised as information acquired from the private domain (for example, questionnaires and personal interviews) or from the public domain (for example, public forums and critical incidents). In addition, various forms of field research, such as participant observation and ethnography, are explored. The application of content analysis and protocol analysis in the interpretation of vignettes is also discussed. The sampling frame is illustrated in a table. Also, the rationale for the selection of samples and the manner of data collection is explained in a ‘question and answer’, self-reflective style.
4.2 Defining the research strategy

A research endeavour generally involves an application of various methods and techniques of investigation. Lawrence Neuman talks about the need to understand the various dimensions of research that serves to simplify the complexities of its conduct. He adds:

Before a researcher begins to conduct a study, he or she must decide on a specific type of research. Good researchers understand the advantages and disadvantages of each type, although most end up specialising in one (Neuman, 1991, p. 18).

The term ‘methodology’, on the other hand, denotes the systematic and logical study of the principles that guide the overarching theoretical orientation and philosophical perspectives of an investigation as described in the previous chapter. It is also concerned, in the broadest sense, with questions of how the researcher establishes new knowledge or contributes to extant knowledge. Thus, whilst the research methodology of a study embodies the theoretical structure and orientation of the investigation, the research strategy, in this thesis, refers to the research method and procedures in collecting, managing and interpreting data.

Therefore, the strategy of this research involves a discussion on the different types of research methods available, the selection of the method to be employed and the specific ways and techniques in which the range of tasks and samples are formulated for data collection. As mentioned earlier, the design of the research strategy also includes a brief survey of research methods in which the case study method is selected. The survey serves to provide an understanding of the ‘selection process’ and techniques that are common to different methods of research, incorporated in accordance with the style and design of the thesis.
4.3 Survey of research methods

Five main methods of research are briefly discussed. They are, historical research, historical-comparative research, experimental research, action research and case study. An historical approach to research involves the examination, assimilation and explanation of previous events with the objective of arriving at some conclusion regarding the causes, effects or trends of past events that may be useful in understanding present phenomena as well as to anticipate future occurrences. It stresses the relative importance and the effects of the various interactions that are to be found within different cultures (Hill and Kerber, 1967; Good, 1963). This method allows for the revaluation of data in relation to selected hypotheses, theories and generalisations that are presently held about the past. Thus, in some ways, all research is ‘historical’ in the sense that it reports on events that have taken place, placing primary importance to the examination and evaluation of data that is ‘already available’, whether in a printed form or acquired from an account of oral history (Borg, 1963; Hockett, 1955). Since historical studies seek facts relating to questions about the past and the contemporary interpretations and relevance of such information, its research procedure often utilises data gathering techniques that are associated with descriptive research. Biographical, geographical, functional and chronological dimensions are associated with this method (Gottschalk, 1950). Thus, several of the ‘elements’ found in this approach, such as the use of ‘oral history’ has been adopted in the acquisition of data within the ambit of the case study method.

On the other hand, an historical-comparative approach to research aims to situate the study within its cultural and historical context. Randall Collins (1986, p.1346) posits that the 1970’s and 1980’s represent the ‘Golden Age of historical and comparative sociology’. The increasing interest in this form of research may be attributed to the development of new theories using methods that are sensitive to the historical, cultural and political circumstances.
The historical-comparative research method avoids the excesses of the positivist and interpretive approaches but aims to challenge 'old explanations' by reinterpreting data (Gadamer, 1979; Tuchman, 1994). In addition to distinguishing itself by combining specific historical and cultural events within theoretical generalisations, historical-comparative research is cross-contextual in that it moves between concrete specifics within a particular situation to across contexts for more abstract comparisons (Neuman, 1991). Furthermore, it compares whole cases and links the micro and macro levels of social reality and may also include the use of quantitative data to supplement qualitative data in its analytical process (Griswold, 1994).

Like all research methods, historical-comparative research is not without its limitations. Ethical problems found in historical-comparative research include a failure to adequately document primary sources, a lack of sensitivity to customs and traditions pertaining to the issue of privacy and a misinterpretation of events in a different culture or different era. Various researchers have attempted to address some of these difficulties by applying different forms of 'equivalence' in addressing particular issues (Hazelrigg, 1973; Jones, 1983).

Simply put, experimental research refers to the task of modifying an element in a situation and then comparing its outcome with the original. The crucial factor is that in experimental designs, a researcher changes a situation or manipulates the conditions that result in change. He or she has control over the setting/s in which the change is introduced and thereby creates data. Therefore an essential procedure in an experimental research is the setting up of what is commonly referred to as control groups and experimental groups whereby comparative observations are made (Campbell and Stanley, 1963). This method is premised on the belief that predictions based on experimental findings support generalizations such as the preferred-effectiveness of one manner of approach over another (Aronson and Carlsmith, 1968; Cook and Campbell, 1978; Scheibe, 1988).
The development of action research has been attributed to the work of social psychologist, Kurt Lewin (1946) who described the method as progressing in a 'spiral of steps'. He combined the experimental approach to social science with action programmes in an attempt to address social issues. There are four main processes involved in action research. They may be summarised as an active participation in designing the plan for change from an informed perspective, an engagement in the planned act, a critical observation of the effects of change from a situated position and finally a reflection on the outcomes with an aim for further improvements in successive actions (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Thus, action research is a cyclical method based on group participatory goals. It allows for flexibility and responsiveness to change at the individual level or culturally as a group. Action research is primarily descriptive in nature. Its research report involves the diligent keeping of records at every stage of the study. In addition to the use of survey questionnaires and interview procedures, the techniques for data compilation in action research include the collection of anecdotal records and field notes of events, conversations and incident notes, diaries and activity logs documenting personal accounts of topics of interest and the time spent on particular activities as well as ecological narrations of moods and behaviours (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). In addition, audio-visual support in the form of tape recordings and video recordings as well as photographs and slides are included in the portfolio of research materials.

One of the most common methods of research is the case study. It essentially utilises descriptive modes of presenting information. A case study has been defined as an 'umbrella term' for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus an enquiry of an instance in action (Adelman, Jenkin and Kemmis 1976). As such its methodology is eclectic and its techniques of information collection fall within a wider tradition of sociological and anthropological fieldwork. In addition, its research question may be set up as an issue or a hypothesis whereby the bounded system (being the 'case'), is selected as an instance drawn from a class from which generalizations about the class are
drawn. Alternatively, it may be a bounded system being studied in order to more fully understand the problem. Also in a case study, information is gathered from a small but representative group of individuals acting on their own or interactively in a social event (Brugelmann and Elliot, 1974). Case study researches include aspects of field research such as participant observation and ethnography and may involve elements of content analysis and protocol analysis.

4.4 Adopting descriptive research: a case study approach

Premised on the above research methods surveyed, this thesis thus adopts a descriptive method of research presented in the form of a case study. This method secures explanations of social phenomena by examining the various factors that contribute towards the situation. It provides an accurate profile of the group under study and, through a systematic process of data analysis, presents a detailed picture of the problem. Cohen and Manion (1980) further define descriptive research as an attempt to answer questions concerning the current status of the subjects of study. In the sheer number of studies completed, the descriptive mode has dominated research endeavours in music education (Yarbrough, 1984). Casey (1992) suggests that a logical way to categorise descriptive research is in terms of the manner in which data is collected. Many descriptive styles of research have been further undertaken of late (Colwell and Richardson, 2002).

4.4.1 Limitations and strengths of the case study method

In a case study, a researcher aims to investigate and to analyze the multifarious facets of phenomena that constitute the elements of the research instance, with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider community to which the instance belongs. Therefore, one of the major criticisms about the case study concerns its generalisability in as much as the researcher may not be able to demonstrate convincingly that the case selected is typical of its class although it does yield extremely rich data that may be used for generating theory (Stenhouse, 1978).
Walker (1980) highlights several procedural problems associated with case study research. They include problems in areas of fieldwork conduct, political concerns stemming from competition of different interest groups for access and control over data, as well as ethical problems of preserving anonymity and confidentiality in publication. In addition, case study workers operating within the democratic mode may encounter difficulties in retaining their identities as specialists in particular disciplines and as such, according to Brugelmann and Elliot (1974), may pose major problems in accepting findings from case studies as forms of knowledge, it being again referred to as the generalization problem in the limited reliability of the ‘one instance’ and the validity for further action.

Nevertheless, Walker (1980) addresses some of the criticisms of a case study approach by stressing the importance of defining the situation under investigation and applying increasingly rigorous procedures in the systemization and validation of subjective data. This includes the preparation of vertical studies after condensed fieldwork and presenting the case study report as a mirror of events, accounts and definitions that is open to multiple interpretations. Hence, it is implicit in the notion of case study that there is no one true definition of the situation.

Nevertheless, Casey (1992) observes that, regardless of the paradigm and mode, descriptive research techniques are basic to nearly all inquiry in music education and its process remains integral to a wide range of social science studies including the investigation of groups or individuals through case studies. In addition, Casey (1992) notes that, in recent years, music education researchers have increasingly adopted research paradigms that had originally been associated with anthropological and sociological studies and are applying their research methods to observational research projects. Furthermore, researchers working in this new postpositivist paradigm aim to observe and record all that could be relevant rather than only the events they had previously anticipated (Bedsole, 1987).
4.5 Techniques of data collection: merits and limitations

For the present research, five techniques have been selected to secure data from multiple sources. They are survey questionnaires, interviews, participant observation, critical incidents and vignettes. The next few sections discuss the features, merits and limitation of the technique used, followed by the sampling frame and rationale for the selection of the particular techniques used in this study.

4.5.1 Survey questionnaire

The survey questionnaire represents an effective mode of securing a relatively large amount of data from a diverse pool of individuals. A common set of questions is posed to a selected group of people who remain anonymous. These individuals further retain the prerogative of either answering or not answering the various survey questions. In this sense, the returned questionnaire may be regarded as containing information that is willingly and generally ‘honestly’ answered by its respondents. One of the most significant benefits of the survey questionnaire is the quantifiable nature of the information obtained. Thus, it is possible to present statistically analysed data in the form of pie charts and tabulations for different types of questions answered. This quantitative method represents an important supplement to research that is primarily qualitative in nature as in this case. It further serves to strengthen the validity of findings due to the ‘objective’ nature of quantifiable data. Whybrew (1971, p.3) argues that the precision and objectivity of quantification appear to some as ‘antithetical’ to the aesthetic nature of music.

However, as with any one technique, there are inherent limitations. For example, one common criticism is the somewhat ‘standard’ choice of available reply-options as found in closed-ended questions and therefore this may yield a less accurate picture of a ‘true’ reflection of opinions. This may occur when a reply-option does not contain the preferred and thus ‘accurate’ answer.
Furthermore, because questionnaires are usually anonymously answered there is always the question of 'who' provided the information and the context in which the information was supplied. However, Neuman argues:

The crucial issue is not which form is best. Rather, it is under what conditions a form is most appropriate. A researcher's choice to use an open-ended or closed-ended question depends on the purpose and the practical limitations of a research project (Neuman, 1991, p 240).

Nevertheless, there are distinct advantages peculiar to both closed-ended and open-ended questions. For example, closed-ended questions by are quick and 'convenient' for respondents to answer. Replication and quantification are also easier and the response options often clarify the meaning of particular questions, which are sometimes more suitable for less articulate respondents.

On the other hand, the inclusion of some open-ended questions (within the survey questionnaires as found in this research) permit different (non-standardised) replies particularly to more 'complex' questions, thus allowing room for 'personalised' responses that illuminate the individual respondent's frame of mind whilst remaining anonymous.

4.5.2 Interviews

Interviews represent a commonly acceptable and flexible form of research procedure. Cannell and Kahn (1968) described the research interview as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. Interview sessions provide important means of gathering information, which has direct bearing on the research objectives and outcomes. Highly developed interview techniques often yield valuable primary data. Most importantly, interviews commonly generate data that is highly reflective of the respondents' personal experiences and pragmatic beliefs. They often contain comments and opinions that are based on value
judgement as a result of social action and interaction. Also, face-to-face interviews permit a maximum number of questions to be posed (compared to the anonymous questionnaire) and often have the highest response rates. Also, answers to queries usually contain useful explanatory information that is primarily situational in nature. Bliss et. al. (1983) further elaborates that any system of description needs to be valid (appropriate to the situation) and reliable (possessing acceptable levels of consensus). It should possess network utility (clarity, completeness and self-monitoring) and stand testability (theory against data and vice-versa). However, one of the main disadvantages of face-to-face interviews has long been recognised as being biased reporting. Interview bias, according to Hyman (1975) may occur due to the condition of the social setting such as the presence of people other than the interviewee, influence on the answers due to the interviewer’s tone and reaction to earlier replies. Other biased reporting may include unintentional errors such as misunderstanding the respondent, intentional subversion by the interviewer by purposeful alteration of answers or a failure to probe properly during the course of the interview session.

Furthermore, cultural bias may result from influenced by gender, race or geographical locations and different understandings associated with the same words. However, Suchman and Jordan (1992, p.242) stated that standardizing words did not automatically produce standardised meaning but on the other hand cautioned that the ‘validity of survey data may be potentially undermined by the same prohibition against interaction that was intended to ensure reliability’.

Another manner of interview is via the telephone. There are several advantages to this form of data acquisition. Telephone interviews permit the acquisition qualitative information from respondents who live in different parts of the country. Thus, a geographical comparison can be made to further establish the extent of the research problem. It is comparatively cost effective since selected respondents can be interviewed by long distance telecommunication at a convenient time and in preferred surroundings. Response rates are usually favourable. Furthermore, the sequence of the questions can be effectively
controlled and succinct probes can be used at appropriate moments in time. As with face-to-face interviews there may be possibilities of bias, since the respondents may be less known to the interviewee or they may have particular self-interests in mind.

4.5.3 Participant observation
Participant observation may be viewed as a form of situational analysis. Data is sourced from multi-methods such as personal participation, structured and unstructured interviews and survey questionnaires. Information is collated and sorted according to common issues particular to the social setting under investigation. A prominent feature of participant observation is its open-process and flexibility (Ball 1982). There are also different degrees of role involvement by field researchers (Junker, 1960; Gans, 1982; Adler and Adler, 1987). Junker’s system stems from the old Chicago school where there are four categories of participant observation, namely, complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer and complete participant. Gans’s is a simplification of Junker’s system. Incorporating elements from ethnography, the researcher’s involvement is dependent on negotiations with members, specifics of the setting and the particular field role as required. The researcher may participate as a peripheral member, active member or a complete member (Adler and Adler 1987). Its analysis is primarily descriptive with evidential material being assembled in a systematic manner. Explanatory models are rechecked against data with alternative explanations which are verified until an overall synthesis of conclusions is attained.

4.5.4 Critical incidents: applying an ethnographic approach
Tripp (1993) posits the idea that critical incidents are value-judgements of particular events of significance. It pertains to the selection and documentation of an event which is regarded as being ‘critical’ or highly significant to the study of a related issue. Critical incidents may be approached ethnographically, meaning that attempts are made to identify and understand patterns of conduct as well as to
explore institutional structures that shapes practice (Krueger, 1985). A subset of naturalistic inquiry, it draws its intellectual roots from anthropology. Its research approach is largely field-based and observational in character (Agar, 1986; Zimmerman, 1983). A salient feature of the method is its detailed description of an existing culture or an aspect of an existing culture.

Dobbert (1982, p.4) divides ethnographic studies into four streams of contemporary ethnographic inquiry, namely, industrial psychology, anthropology, social psychology and qualitative sociology. Its procedures include the conduct of in-depth interviewing with an aim to develop the analytical, conceptual and categorical components of explanation from emergent data (Filstead, 1970). Harre (1978) adopts the ethnomethod approach to the analysis of social interactions by drawing an explicit distinction between synchronic analysis (the analysis of social practices as they exist at any one time) and diachronic analysis (the study of the stages and the processes by which social practices and institutions were created, abandoned and/or changed). Since action takes place through endowing subjective entities with meaning, the ethnomethod approach tends to concentrates on the meaning system, in that the sequence of a social act is viewed as an episode or an incident. Speech-with-action accounts are viewed as being particularly socially meaningful.

4.5.5 Vignettes: applying content and protocol analysis
Both content and protocol analysis are particularly useful in the study of verbal and symbolic data. These two methods are similar in that they focus on the aspect of communication. The main difference is that, whilst data examined in content analysis is extant and the researcher works apart from the individuals, data in protocol analysis is newly created in the presence of the researcher (Dovring, 1954; Krippendorff, 1980). As the term suggests, the ‘content’ refers to the words, meanings and themes which may be conveyed through picture form, symbols or photographs (Walker, 1993). The ‘text’ is anything that is written, visual or spoken.
Thus, content analysis serves to yield further information about the components of an existing work. Cerulo (1989), for example, studied national anthems. With protocol analysis, the researcher aims to generate information about the cognitive processes that are engaged as the work ‘unfolds’. Richardson (1988), for instance, conducted a study on the stream of consciousness or ‘thinking aloud’ of a music critic in the analysis of emergent ‘verbalisation’ of musical thought. In this sense, the analysis is focused on the symbolic significance of aural communication and reception at a particular point in time.

4.6 Sampling frame and rationale

The table below summarises the kinds of research techniques employed, the sample sizes and the types of research participants or ‘occasions’ from which data was acquired. Thereafter, in a somewhat less conventional style, the rationale behind the construct of the sampling frame is presented in the form of ‘questions and answers’ in line with ‘self-reflective’ process of the research design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Type of Individuals /Occasions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Questionnaire</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Music teachers/parents/music students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Music exam board representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Music school proprietor/administrator.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Music lecturers/undergraduates.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano importer/Music publisher representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Music education forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Incidents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Television (current affairs) programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignettes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three graduation ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>National Piano Competition</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media photographs/Advertisement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. *What was the basis of selecting the various research techniques?*

Each technique was selected based on its peculiar strength in yielding appropriate data from different approaches, bearing in mind the various forms of field research found in the descriptive method of research. This decision was made in consideration of the types of individuals or occasions from which information was sought. Also considered was the size of the samples. This may be regarded as a form of triangulation at the 'technique level' whereby each type and source of data collection were carefully designed so as to ensure that a rich and representative pool of information would be obtained for analytical purposes. For this very reason, the employment of a variety of research techniques served to provide a good balance to offset the limitations of one technique with the strength of another, much like the engagement of methodological triangulation as discussed in the previous chapter.

2. *How was the target population for the survey determined?*

Firstly the sampling element or case in the population was identified. The target population was identified as comprising three types of individual, namely, music teachers, college-aged music students and parents who send their children to 'private' or fee-paying music tuition. Several private music schools (and music teachers) were identified through the telephone directory and initial contact (explaining the purpose of the exercise) was made through the telephone. Anonymous questionnaires (placed in self-addressed envelopes) were given to music schools and music studios in the four main urban areas in peninsular Malaysia, namely, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh and Johore Baru. Respective survey questionnaires were distributed to teachers, students and parents. Questionnaires were also sent by post to Kuching, Sarawak in East Malaysia.
3. *How were the questions in the survey questionnaire designed and tested?*

Three sets of survey questionnaires were formulated for music teachers, parents and students respectively (Appendices D, E and F). The questionnaire comprised primarily close-ended questions with a limited number of open-ended questions to afford a 'personalised' response to more complex questions as earlier explained. In terms of the overall design, the questions generally aimed to:

(i) establish the 'background' of the respondent
(ii) unveil the rationale for undertaking music tuition and/or music examinations and the meaning of a 'music education'.
(iii) indicate priority areas in the selection of music teachers and the teaching environment, and/or discover possible interests for further music education
(iv) establish the degree of satisfaction with services provided by the examination boards and/or the viability of the establishment of a Malaysian Music Examinations Board.
(v) discover the frequency of concert attendance, performance and/or amount of time spent on examination repertoire.

The over-arching purpose of the questions was to delve deeper into the various dimensions of the piano teaching and learning milieu with the aim of comparing the responses. It was also designed with a degree of 'cultural' sensitivity. For example, a direct approach of enquiring about the qualifications of respondent music teachers was avoided as anecdotal evidence suggests that a sizable number of practising music teachers did not possess music teaching qualifications. After the questions were initially crafted, a small pre-survey was carried out in which the questions were 'tested-out' on twelve respondents. Four modifications were made to the questionnaire to clarify some ambiguity in the information sought. The questionnaires were then submitted for ethics clearance by the DUHREC (Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee) and approval was obtained (approval code EC126-99).
4. How was the sample size of the survey questionnaire determined?

Although there is no published statistics regarding the exact number of music teachers in Malaysia, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are approximately five thousand music teachers in the country. According to Yamaha Music Malaysia (National Piano Festival, 2000) more than thirty-five thousand students in Malaysia sit for music examinations every year. These estimated figures were used in calculating the sample size for each of the respective target population comprising music teachers, music students and parents. As such, fifty questionnaires were sent to music teachers. This represents a ratio of 50:5,000 or 1 percent of the music teacher population. Fifty questionnaires were sent to music students, thus the ratio of 50:35,000 or 0.1 percent of the music student population were queried (based on the estimated yearly examination candidature). Forty questionnaires were sent to parents of music students calculated at approximately 40:17,500 or 0.2 percent of the target parent population (17,500 being the parents of 35,000 examination candidates). The survey questionnaires were distributed to respondents living within the geographical sampling frame as mentioned earlier. This form of stratified sampling technique seemed appropriate particularly since the stratum of interest represented a small percentage of the general population, and as Neuman (1991, p. 221) says, 'a large sample size alone does not guarantee a representative sample'.

5. What was the main purpose of including open-ended questions in the questionnaire?

The open-ended questions in the survey questionnaires were designed to secure some qualitative commentary from respondents. For example, respondents were asked to describe, in three words, what they understood as 'a music education'. Such qualitative descriptors helped to better understand the psyche of particular individuals and social groups in terms of behaviour, attitudes and dispositions to
act. It also afforded a qualitative analysis that compared response-descriptors from across the sampling frame.

6. How were interviewees identified?
Four key-words associated with the research problem, namely, people, places, organisations and events were identified. A comprehensive list of people who may be directly or indirectly connected with the music learning-teaching industry was drawn up. Various possible interrelationships were considered. As a result four main categories of individuals were identified, they being, (i) the representatives of the music examination boards, (ii) music school administrators, (iii) music lecturers and undergraduate music students and (iv) piano importer and music books publisher. In this instance, the selection of individuals was based on their experience and professional or occupational standings relevant to the topic under investigation. Semi-structured interview questions were formulated (Appendix G) and submitted for ethics clearance. In total, thirteen interviews were conducted, five in the first category, two in the second category, four in the third category and two in the last category. Nine of the interviews were face-to-face in nature whilst the remaining were telephone interviews. Mindful of the various forms of bias possibilities, the interview sessions were conducted with care so that data obtained may be as rich and as 'accurate' as possible.

7. What was the rationale behind the use of participant observation?
Serendipitous invitations to speak at two public forums provided opportunities to participate in the creation of data. The public forums represented events of social interest, the first being a one-day music workshop held in Penang and the other, a current affairs programme called ‘Global’ which was broadcast ‘live’ on national television. The issues that were brought up by panel members and the audience during these two events were highly relevant to the research problem. In both events, ‘I’ as an invited member of the panel, participated performatively in the discussion of musical issues whilst ‘me’ the researcher, participated referentially in the analysis of events, along the lines of Mead’s theoretical proposals.
In this sense, my participation may be described as ‘complete’ whereby I assumed an active membership role in the core discussions while maintaining a researcher’s identity.

8. What constitutes critical incidents?

In this instance, three graduation ceremonies and a national piano competition were identified as critical incidents. These events were selected because they represented ‘significant moments’ in relation to the scope of the investigation. The critical incidents were presented as a discourse of language-in-action and aimed towards the construction of social reality, as expounded in the principles of symbolic interactionism. The fourth critical incident is represented by the announcement of the results of a national piano competition. A paradox emerged as the nation failed to produce one pianist (out of the thousands of piano examination candidates and possible participants) who could convince the panel of judges that he/she is deserving of the first prize.

9. What constitute vignettes and why were they included?

Photographs, short descriptions and character sketches may be described as vignettes. Three images (including that in the preamble page) were selected as vignettes. Two of the visuals were press photographs and the other was an advertisement related to the field of education, also in image form. The visuals were selected based on four main factors, namely, (i) their mass circulation and public accessibility, (ii) the visual ‘strength’ of the images in relation to the social message that they transmuted, (iii) the relevancy to the issue under investigation, and (iv) the currency and contemporariness of the image-data. In addition it is argued that the three images provided strong visual stimuli that evoked thought and extended imagination.
10. How was data sorted and analysed in the first instance?

Data was initially sorted according to whether it was acquired from the private domain (survey questionnaires and interviews) or from the public domain (forums, critical incidents and vignettes). The analysis and management of data took into consideration, (i) the similarities and differences in the patterns of choice and opinion, (ii) the grouping of items under subject categories, categorisation of content, omissions and contradictions and, (iii) the (re)construction of social life with the objective of tracing thematic traits. An ethnogenic approach was utilised, based on the belief that people’s tacit and explicit knowledge is influenced by their communication, culture and traditions in making use of commonsense knowledge as a basis of action and interaction in the network structure of musical relationships. This aesthetics of approach in reading data formed the basis of some of the observations described and therein, analysed within the sociogram of musical relationships that was created specifically for this purpose.

11. In what ways did this form of multi-technique approach serve to strengthen validity?

This multiple approach to data gathering and presentation skills afforded the application of a relatively wide range of data analysis, each of which was suited to a particular frame of reference. In many ways, the varied research procedures offered multiple ways of seeing and interpreting events. This being the case, it may be argued that these ‘techniques-as-concepts’ served to mediate theory with data and acted as a conduit towards metatheorising. Therefore, with the application of different forms and levels of triangulation, validity was strengthened at each stage of the research from methodology to strategy and vice-versa.
4.7 Code of ethics and accountability

Developments in the field of social science investigations have been accompanied by a growing awareness of the attendant moral issues implicit in the work of social research. This necessitates a delicate process of balancing benefits against possible costs without threatening the validity of the research endeavour. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) regard this basic dilemma as a cost-benefit ratio. Benefits, as such, might assume the form of significant findings that serve to empower the disadvantaged through a change of policy or bring about professional development through self-reflection while costs to participants may include affronts to dignity and lost of trust in social relations. For example, some studies have pushed the limits of ethical practice by the use of deception (such as Stanley Milgram’s 1965, study of obedience).

Various researchers have investigated issues concerning acceptable and unacceptable codes of conduct. They include Bulmer’s (1977) discussion on the need of research commitment and intellectual vigour, Diener and Crandall (1978) deliberations on the right to privacy, Kimmel’s (1988) address of confidentiality and betrayal issues, Plumme’s (1983) argument on the weaknesses of both the absolutist and relative stance, Mannheim’s (1936) debate on the neutrality of value and Zimbardo’s (1984) emphasis on explicit and implicit moral principles.

The codes of ethics would then necessarily include elements of informed and voluntary consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality between the researcher and the informant. Furthermore, information sourced from the public domain will serve to substantiate information obtained privately (and vice-versa). In conclusion it would appear that ethics and accountability adhere to the logic of conventional wisdom. Ethical practices thus prompt researchers to act within the boundaries of personal and communal codes of conduct that embrace the universal principles of honesty, accountability and moral integrity.
4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the two-prong design of the research strategy. The first part of the strategy is represented by the selection of the most appropriate method of research upon a review of five common methods of research. Under the aegis of descriptive research, the case study method was selected. Its strengths and limitations were discussed.

The second part of the research strategy provided a description of the various types of research techniques used for collecting data. Analytical approaches such as ethnography, content analysis and protocol analysis were highlighted. Various systems of participant observation were also deliberated. The sampling frame and rationale were presented in the form of questions and answers. To summarise, the eleven questions and answers served to explained the, (i) basis of selecting the various research techniques, (ii) manner in which the target population and sampling size was determined, (iii) design of the questionnaire and, (iv) rationale behind the selection of multiple research techniques and the categorisation of data.

The research strategy thus utilizes a variety of contextual means in securing and managing information. It poses both theoretical-analytical and interpretive issues within a continual transformation of the internal perspectives through knowledge from external and internal views. The chapter ends with a brief discussion on the codes of ethics as applied to the research endeavour.
CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA SOLICITED FROM THE PRIVATE DOMAIN

5.1 Chapter overview
This chapter comprises two main parts. The first part presents the statistical analysis of data gathered from survey questionnaires which were distributed to music teachers, parents and music students respectively, based on the sampling frame as explained in the previous chapter. Quantitative data coding was utilised for the statistical analysis of the closed-ended questions and inferences were drawn. The outcomes were described with the aid of charts and tables. Qualitative statements by parents and students found in the open-ended portions of the questionnaires were analysed and compared in a table of keyword-descriptors. The second part of the chapter contains salient quotations that were extracted from a series of face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews conducted with five representatives of music examination boards, two music school administrators, two music lecturers and two undergraduate music students as well as a piano importer and a music book publisher’s representative. Using techniques found in protocol analysis and content analysis, key phrases were extracted from the interviews and its meanings were deconstructed. The chapter closed with a brief summary of its contents.

5.2 Survey questionnaire outcomes
In this study, the descriptive survey technique was used. Three sets of anonymous questionnaires were employed. A total of one hundred and thirty-three out of one hundred and forty distributed questionnaires were received. This represented an average response rate of 95%. A total of ninety-six replies were received from music teachers and music students, representing a 96% response rate. Thirty-seven out of forty parents returned their questionnaires, representing a response rate of 92%. A following table tabulates the responses received in accordance to the sampling frame as discussed in the previous chapter.
Table 5.2a  Response Rates of Survey Questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>No. Distributed</th>
<th>No. Replied</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music Teachers</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Students</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1 Analysis of music teachers’ responses

The next section presents analyses of the replies to the questionnaires acquired from music teachers (Appendix D). Responses to the seventeen questions in the questionnaire were collated into fourteen areas of feedback, each referenced to the respective question/s in the questionnaire and illustrated with a pie chart or/and table. Qualitative responses to the final question were comparatively analysed and presented in Section 5.2.4.

(a) Teacher status

Response to the first question in the survey indicated that 62% of the respondents were teaching full-time whilst 38% taught on a part-time basis suggesting a relatively high incidence of temporary employment in this particular profession.

Figure 5.2.1a : Ratio of full-time to part-time teachers

(b) Identifying teaching locations and preferences

Questions 2 and 3 of survey revealed that piano teaching occurred primarily in the home environment whilst some piano teaching was conducted in music schools and colleges. However, when respondents were asked where they would like to teach, only 11%
replied that they preferred to teach in students' homes. Teachers generally preferred to teach in music schools or in their own homes compared to peripatetic teaching. The following figure illustrates this preference.

**Figure 5.2.1b : Identifying teaching locations and preferences**

Teaching locations & preferences: A (Teachers' homes), B (Students' homes), C (Music Schools/Colleges)

(c) *Ethnic origins of music students*

Anecdotal evidence suggested that piano lessons were conducted mainly in urban towns and cities which were largely populated by Malaysians of Chinese descent. In question 4, teachers were asked to indicate the percentage of Chinese Malaysian students they taught. 81% of teachers replied that more than 90% of their students were of Chinese descent whilst 14% responded that more than 70% of their students were Chinese. Only 5% of the teachers surveyed replied that more than 50% of their students were of Chinese origin.

**Figure 5.2.1c : Malaysian students of Chinese origin**
(d) Importance of music examinations
In response to question 5, 29% of teachers indicated that music examinations were very important to them whilst 42% replied that they were quite important. 24% of the teachers replied that examinations were not very important whilst only 5% felt that music examinations were unimportant. This provided a strong indicator of teachers' perception with regard to their view of music examinations in relation to their role as music educators.

Figure 5.2.1d: Degree of importance of music examinations

(e) Frequency of music examination entries
The entry of candidates for musical assessment appeared to be a matter of priority for many music teachers. The response to questions six and seven revealed that more than half of the teachers surveyed entered their students for the practical and theory of music examinations on a yearly basis whilst others submitted their students for music examinations in alternate years. Only 4% of the respondents stated that they entered their students for the practical examinations once in three-to-four years. It was significant that none of the teachers surveyed, replied that they entered their students for examinations 'once-in-a-while or not at all', indicating that the preparation for music examinations represented a major element in the curriculum of music teachers.

Table 5.2.1a: Frequency of music examination entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examinations</th>
<th>Yearly submissions</th>
<th>Alternate years</th>
<th>Once in 3-4 years</th>
<th>Once in a while not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(f) Decision makers for music examination entries
In response to question 8, 53% of teachers stated that they were responsible for the decision to send their students for examinations. Another 31% said that parents were the decision makers whilst only 13% stated that the students themselves made the decision. Only 3% of respondents stated that the music school administration was involved in making decisions about submitting candidates for music examinations. These outcomes revealed that the decision to enter students for music examinations, according to teachers, was largely in the hands of those other than the candidates themselves.

Figure 5.2.1e : Decision makers

(g) Order of priority when selecting a board of examination
In analysing question 9, teachers felt that the main factors, in order of importance, which influenced their choice of examination providers were the availability of workbooks and examination materials, how established the particular examination provider was in comparison to other boards, the pass rate of their students in relation to the degree of difficulty of the examinations and parental approval. Of lesser priority were factors relating to costs, such as examination fees, the frequency of examination sessions per year and professional support programmes offered by the respective music examination boards.

Table 5.2.1b : Order of priority when selecting an examination board

| Availability of workbooks and exam materials | 1 |
| International Recognition                     | 2 |
| Pass rate percentage                          | 3 |
| Degree of difficulty                          | 4 |
| Parental approval                             | 5 |
| Cost factor-examination fees                  | 6 |
| Frequency of examinations per year            | 7 |
| Cost factor-course materials                  | 8 |
| Accessibility of board representatives        | 9 |
| Curriculum support programme                  | 10 |
| Professional development courses              | 11 |

Key: 1-11 (most important to least important)
(h) Popularity of examination boards

In response to question 10, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music appeared to be the most popular 78% of the teachers surveyed replied that they sent candidates to this examination board. 12% of teachers said that they sent candidates for the Trinity College examinations and 6% has sent candidates for the Guildhall School of Music and Drama examinations. Only 2% of those surveyed had sent students to the London College of Music and Media examinations, and another 2% of teachers had sent their students to the Australian Music Examinations Board for assessments.

Figure 5.2.1f: Comparing the popularity of music examination boards

In question 11, teachers were asked if they were satisfied with the selected assessment board. More than 88% of teachers replied that they felt satisfied with both the practical and the theory of music examinations. 6% of the respondents however, felt particularly dissatisfied with the theory of music examinations. This may be due to the major change in the ABRSM’s theory of music curriculum in 1992 whereby the theory of music examinations (higher grades) were perceived to be considerably more demanding (Ross 1998).

Table 5.2.1c: Degree of satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of satisfaction</th>
<th>Practical</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(i) Use of multiple examination boards

In question 12, it was also interesting to note that 80% of the teachers surveyed said that they had used more than one examination board and of this pool of teachers, 56% believed that it was a wise decision to use more than one assessment provider whilst 13% responded in the negative. Another 18% of the respondents felt that they were unsure if they had made the right decision in utilising more than one assessment provider whilst 13% felt that it was too early to tell if their use of multiple assessment boards had proven to be a wise move. This implied that teachers were well aware of the existence of different music assessment boards and the range of services that they provided. Of the teachers who had used more than one examination board, it was significant that only slightly more than half of them felt that this was a wise step.

Figure 5.2.1g : Response to the use of multiple examination boards

(ii) Perception of parental objection to not taking examinations

In question 13, teachers were asked to indicate the proportion of parents whom they believed would object if their children were not entered for music examinations. 21% of respondents indicated that 90% of the parents of their students would not be happy if there were no examinations and another 29% of teachers were of the opinion that more than 70% of the parents would object if their children did not sit for music examinations. 36% of respondents selected the option that more than half of parents would object whilst only 14% of teachers thought that more than 30% of parents would object. Such perception indicated that teachers were sensitive to parents’ wishes. In cross-examining data from another set of questionnaires, this perception appeared to be valid as survey data collected from parents (discussed in Section 5.2.2) revealed that music examinations were rather important to parents in the music education of their children.
Figure 5.2.1h: Perceptions of parental objection to not taking examination

(k) Proportion of work allocated to non-examination repertoire
In an effort to determine the proportion of time spent on learning pieces not related to examination requirements, teachers were asked in question 14 about the amount of time that they spent on widening musical repertoire. 47% of teachers surveyed replied that they spent less than 60% of their time teaching non-examination related repertoire, 41% spent less than 40% of their time in this area whilst only 12% of the respondents stated that they spent less than 20% of their time teaching pieces not related to the examinations. The outcomes revealed that whilst all teachers spent some time on teaching non-examination repertoire, a significant number of them did not prioritise this area of musical training.

Figure 5.2.1i: Percentage of work allocated to non-examination repertoire

(l) Degree of ‘natural’ musicality
In question 15, teachers were asked about the proportion of their students that they considered to be ‘naturally musical’. Surprisingly, many of the teachers surveyed believed that their students were not naturally talented. 21% of the teachers surveyed were of the opinion that less than a fifth of their students were naturally musical whilst 54% of the teachers replied that less than 40% of their students were naturally musical. 17% of respondents were of the opinion that less than 60% of their students were
naturally musical whilst only 8% of teachers said that less than 80% of their students were naturally musical. Such responses suggest that teachers realise that their students' musical achievement had to stem from the discipline of practice and formal assessment rather than largely through 'natural' musicality. Therefore, it may be argued that the music examinations serve to reinforce the notion of acquiring a 'music education' without necessarily requiring the demonstration of what music educators generally understand as 'having received a music education' such as the ability to display overall musicianship skills, possessing relatively wide musical repertoire and being able to perform different types music in private and in public.

**Figure 5.2.1j: Teachers' perception of their students' 'natural' musicality**

```
17%  8%  21%
54%
```

**(m) Music as a profession**

In question 16, teachers were asked if they would encourage their students to take up music as a profession. Only 20% of the respondents answered 'yes' whilst another 16% replied 'no'. 4% of teachers recommended teaching music on a part-time basis. 60% of the teachers surveyed preferred to leave this decision to the students themselves. These responses may imply that teachers themselves were less satisfied with the music teaching profession or that they believed that not many of their students were sufficiently 'naturally' musical to become professional musicians as evidenced by their response to the earlier question.

**Figure 5.2.1k: Music as a profession**

```
60%  20%  4%
10%
```
(n) Professional development for teachers

In question 17, teachers were asked about the types of courses that they themselves would be interested in undertaking. 29% of the respondents opted for diploma level courses, 47% for degree level courses and 24% for postgraduate courses. This response implied that a number of musicians in the piano teaching practice did not necessarily possess tertiary music training and teachers surveyed were all desirous of professional development.

Figure 5.2.11: Desire for professional development

![Pie chart showing preferences for professional development](image)

5.2.2 Analysis of parents' responses

This section represents an analysis of the replies to the questionnaires acquired from parents (Appendix E). Responses to the thirteen questions in the questionnaire were collated into eight areas of feedback, each area referenced to the respective question/s in the questionnaire, with several explanations illustrated with pie charts or tables. Analysis of the qualitative responses to question 14 are found in Section 5.2.4.

(a) Reasons for sending children to piano lessons

In the first question parents were asked why they sent their children to piano lessons. 79% of them responded that wanted their children to appreciate and enjoy music. 10% of the parents surveyed felt that learning the piano was a good way of keeping their children ‘occupied’ whilst 5% of parents sent their children for piano classes because they viewed music as a viable career option for their children. 6% of parents declared that they wanted their children to acquire a musical training that they themselves had missed out on.
5.2.2a Reasons for sending children to piano lessons

(b) Reasons for selecting the piano
In the second question, parents were asked why they sent their children to learn the piano instead of learning orchestral instruments. 52% of the respondents said that it was their children's choice whilst 29% replied that they themselves preferred the piano. Another 5% of the respondents stated that it was due to the wide availability of piano teachers whilst others couldn’t recall the reasons for their choice.

Figure 5.2.2b: Reasons for selecting the piano

(c) Criteria for selecting music teachers
Given eight criteria in question 3, parents were asked to rank, from a scale of one to five, their areas of priority when selecting piano teachers for their children. The outcome is presented in the table.
Table 5.2.2a: Comparing factors when selecting teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s qualification</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s experience</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of recommendation</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination results</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class enjoyment</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching environment</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience [of location]</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees charged</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: 5 to 1 (most important to least important), 0 = not answered

In the area of experience, qualifications and the choice of teachers based on the strength of recommendations, feedback revealed that parents placed a higher priority on teachers’ experience compared to their qualifications although both criteria appeared to be important considerations when selecting music teachers. More than three quarters of the parents surveyed indicated that they secured teachers on the strength of recommendations from friends or sent their children to recommended music schools whilst a small number of parents located piano teachers through newspaper advertisements. This indicated that the ‘word of mouth’ played an important role for parents selecting a music teacher. It is argued that one of the measurements of a ‘good teachers’ are those who had high success rates in music examinations. Such information would have been intimated primarily through the ‘word of mouth’ from other parents. This assumption is supported by the importance placed upon examinations by respondents. In a rating of one to five, many of the parents believed that music examination results was a rather important factor to consider when choosing music teachers. In question 4, parents were asked if they were likely to send their children to teachers who did not recommend music examinations but favoured repertoire work and public performances. More than two thirds of parents replied that they would not or were unlikely to engage such a teacher to teach their children. This again pointed to the high priority placed on music examinations as opposed to studying music for the pleasure of performance. This ‘market preference’ would undoubtedly play a significant role in shaping a music teacher’s instructional content.

Parents also believed that class enjoyment and suitable teaching environments played important roles in music classes, possibly suggesting that if their children enjoyed their music lessons, they would fare better in their music examinations thus adding greater...
satisfaction since music examinations played such an important role in their children’s music education. Parents valued convenience and this may account for much of the teaching being conducted in the homes of students.

Another aspect of the music education practice in Malaysia is the grades-fees link. Fees for music lessons in Malaysia are charged according the level of student proficiency. Since proficiency is linked directly to graded attainment it may be argued that the fees charged for music lessons is indirectly related to music examinations. Students pay increasingly higher tuition fees after every graded music examination taken. This system of relating fees to musical grades, as opposed to purely time-based costing as practised in some countries, appears to be a culturally and socially accepted practice amongst music teachers and parents in Malaysia.

However, one notable outcome from this survey was that the rate of fees was not of a major concern for 63% of the parents surveyed. This supported the assumption that it was the more affluent sector of Malaysian society who sent their children to music classes and with the expansion of the Malaysian middle class, increasing numbers of children have been sent for music lessons. This observation was supported anecdotally by a senior official from the Ministry of Education who remarked, at a gathering organised by ABRSM, that every year his office processes increasing numbers of examination entries. For example, in 2000 his office received approximately 70,000 applications for the ABRSM practical and theory of music examinations. About half of this number was applications for the ABRSM theory of music examinations and the balance was for the practical examinations. The regional representative of ABRSM who was present at the function concurred with this statement.

**(d) Familiarity of music examination boards**

In question 5, parents were asked the examination board with which they were most familiar. Of the five examination boards proposed, all the parents ticked the ABRSM with a quarter of them selecting more than one board. The order of familiarity following the ABRSM was the Trinity College, London College of Music and Media, Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Australian Music Examination Board.

**(e) Purpose of practising**

Parents placed relatively high importance on the allocation of time for piano practice. In question 6, 33% of the parents surveyed regarded practising the piano as being just as important as school work whilst 7% regarded practice as even more important than
school work. The rest of the parents surveyed (60%) felt that musical practice was of lesser importance when compared to schoolwork.

Figure 5.2.2c Importance of practice in relation to school work

(f) Listening, classical music knowledge and concert attendance
Responses to questions 7, 8 and 9 of the survey revealed that many parents did not spend much time listening to their children play the piano, professing limited knowledge of classical music and seldom took their children to concerts. In response to question 7, 55% of the parents surveyed replied that they seldom found time to listen to their children play the piano. 25% of parents replied that they quite often listened and the rest only sometimes listened to their children playing. In response to question 8, 89% of the parents surveyed replied that they were either unfamiliar and/or had little knowledge of classical music. This being the case, one might assume that since parents sent their children for classical musical training they would be keen attend concerts or at least encourage their children to attend concerts. Surprisingly, this was not as one might have expected. 84% of parents professed in response to question 9 that they hardly ever took their children to concerts (for example, performances by the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra). 12% parents replied that they did not attend concerts at all with their children. Only 4% of respondents occasionally attended concerts.

These figures served to support the assumption that parents did not place much emphasis on additional musical experience nor fully appreciate the significance of concert-going as an important component of music education. The following table tabulates the responses.
Table 5.2.2b: Listening experience and musical knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening experience and musical knowledge</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seldom/sometimes listened to their children play the piano</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliar or had little knowledge of classical music</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly ever took their children to concerts</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not attend concerts at all</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(g) Overall satisfaction with the system

In response to question 10, 81% of parents surveyed were of the opinion that music examinations were either very important or moderately important to them. Only 6% of respondents felt that examinations were unimportant whilst the balance of respondents felt that examinations were of little importance. In question 11, parents were asked if they were satisfied with the practice of playing largely three set pieces of music a year for the music examinations. 18% of parents declared that they were very satisfied and the same percentage felt dissatisfied. 35% of respondents stated that they were moderately satisfied. 29% of parents surveyed felt that there were no known alternatives suggesting that a number of parents felt a need for change but the structure in place did not seem to provide an alternative. Furthermore, the response to question 12 revealed that 90% of the parents believed that failure in music examinations was due to a lacked of practice or that students were just not up to the expected standard. Curiously, none of the parents believed that failure could be due to a lack of musicality. Neither did any of the parents opt for stopping music classes or changing music teachers. The outcomes reveal that overall, parents were quite satisfied with the existing music teaching and assessment system.

Figure 5.2.2d  Satisfaction with the system
(h) Meaning of musical certification

In the final question, parents were asked what a graded musical certification meant to them. Several parents ticked more than one option, the final statement receiving a significantly small number of response. The following table lists the numerical order of responses to the statements posed.

**Table 5.2.2c Response to statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement - A graded musical certification means:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That my child has successfully completed the prescribed course</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That my child has ‘proof’ of musical ability/capability</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures my child’s musicality, example: pass, merit or distinction</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That my child is up to an accepted international standard for his/her level of work</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not matter a lot as long as he/she enjoys playing</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.3 Analysis of students’ responses

This section represents an analysis of responses to the questionnaire completed by piano students (Appendix F). Responses to the 14 questions have been grouped into 10 areas of feedback, each referred according to the question posed with accompanying charts or tables. As with the other two sets of questionnaires, the analysis of the qualitative responses to question 15, the final question, is found in Section 5.2.4.

(a) Years of piano study

The first piece of information sought was the number of years of formal music training the respondents had received, which aided understanding and analysis of further feedback. The responses received revealed that many of the respondents had studied the piano for a relatively significant period of time. 17% of students had studied the piano for 4-6 years whilst 75% of them had studied the piano for 7-9 years. 8% of respondents had been learning the instrument for 10-12 years.
Figure 5.2.3a: Years of formal musical training

(b) Examinations taken in relation to years of study
Questions 2 and 3 asked the number of theory of music and practical examinations respondents had taken. Feedback was then compared to the number of years the respondents had studied the piano (question 1). The outcomes revealed that students who had studied the piano for between 4 to 6 years had been very conscientious in taking examinations. For example, within six years of studies, 80% of pupils had taken 3-4 theory of music examinations and 40% had taken 5-6 practical examinations. Students thus appear to take at least one examination per year, either practical and/or the theory of music. Students also tended to take more practical than theory of music examinations in the initial stages. Between 7-9 years of study, pupils seem to have taken a similar number of theory of music and practical examinations. By the time students reached 10-12 years of piano study, 55% of them had taken between five to eight theory of music examinations whilst 57% of pupils had taken between the same number of practical examinations. The following table illustrates the number of practical and theory of music examinations taken in relation to the corresponding years of musical study.

Table 5.2.3a: Relating years of study to number of examinations taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Exams</th>
<th>Theory of Music</th>
<th>Practical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of exams taken</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 6 yrs of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 9 yrs of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 yrs of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(c) *Decision makers*

Only 5% of students stated in question 4 that their teachers were the decision makers when it came to entering for examinations (compared to the 53% of teachers who replied that they were the decision makers in response to a similar question in the questionnaire to teachers). 29% of students said that their parents made this decision (a figure comparable to the teachers' replies) whilst 33% of respondents stated that they themselves decided. Another 33% of student respondents stated that it was a joint decision between their teachers and themselves. These figures indicated that there was clear evidence that parents had a relatively significant influence in determining whether or not their children took music examinations. The figures also indicated that more than two-thirds of the students themselves were willing participants in the exercise.

![Decision makers](image)

(d) *Music examination boards*

In response to question 5, a number of respondents selected more than one response option. 92% of respondents indicated that they normally took ABRSM examinations. 10% of these respondents also selected Trinity College, another 7% of respondents selected the London College of Music and Media and 6% also selected the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Of the balance of 8% of respondents who selected only one option, 6% selected the Trinity College whilst the remaining 2% selected the Australian Music Examinations Board. This figures indicate that the ABRSM remains the first choice of assessment board for the majority of candidates.

Question 6 secured feedback regarding students' reaction to the idea of establishing a Malaysian Music Examinations Board. Only 29% of respondents thought it was a good idea, 12% of students thought otherwise. 21% of respondents selected the 'may be' option and 38% of students felt that there was no need for such a board. Furthermore, in question 7, it was interesting to note that 72% of students declared that they either would not or were unlikely to agree to that take examinations from a locally established
board of examinations despite recommendations from their teachers. However, 12% of them said that they would leave it to their parents to decide. These responses implied that students were generally satisfied with the conduct of the ABRSM examinations and the acquisition of an internationally recognised certificate was generally preferred to a 'local' qualification.

Figure 5.2.3c Establishing a Malaysian Music Examinations Board

(e) Choice of piano teachers who did not advocate examinations

In response to question 8, only 17% of respondents declared that they would study with a teacher who concentrated on expanding repertoire and/or public performance rather than on music examinations. 29% of students replied that they would not select such a teacher and the same number also declared that they were unlikely to study with this teacher. Another 21% of respondents selected the 'maybe' option whilst 4% of the students stated that it was up to their parents to decide on the matter. These figures indicated that many students themselves were eager participants in music examinations and actually preferred to be tutored for assessment rather than for the pleasure of playing different musical pieces or playing in public.

Figure 5.2.3d Non-examination focus
(f) Attitudes towards concert attendance

In an attempt to ascertain attitudes towards concert attendance, respondents were asked in question 9, how frequently they attended concerts. The overall feedback suggested that most of the students seemed to have limited experience (and interest) in listening to 'live' concert music.

Table 5.2.3b: Gauging Concert Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often do you attend public concerts?</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Regularly (at least once a month)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Sometimes (at least once every three months)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Not very often (at least once every six months)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Seldom</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Not once in the last two years</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(g) Proportion of time spent on examination preparation

In response to question 10, 37% of students stated that they spent 70% to 80% of their lesson time in preparing for examinations. 54% of respondents stated that they spent 50% to 70% in the same endeavour. Only 9% of respondents replied that they spent less than 50% of their lesson time on examination preparation. None of the respondents spent more than 80% or 90% or less than 30% of their lesson time on examination preparation.

Figure 5.2.3e Proportion of time spent on examination preparation per lesson

In responses to question 11, half of the students said that they spent less than 40% of their time building their repertoire and a quarter of students surveyed spent less than 60% of a year's work on building repertoire. The remaining students stated that hardly any time was spent on non-examination related materials.
(h) Response to qualitative statements

In question 12, students were asked to rate a series of qualitative statements and responses were thereafter compiled and tabled as follows.

Table 5.2.3c: Response to qualitative statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy music lessons</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like taking music exams</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn a lot taking music exams</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer practical to theory lessons</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think music exams are very important</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer learning other (non exam) pieces</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have much time to practise</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I practise regularly (more than 4 times a week)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the music certificate is very important</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I don’t have exams I won’t practise as much</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents often listen to me playing</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know quite a lot of orchestral repertoire</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My knowledge of classical music is limited to piano</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking the two highest response rates for each statement as a point of embarkation, some observations were made.

(i) The majority of students appeared to enjoy their music lesson even though many students did not like taking music examinations.

(ii) There seemed to be an equally divided opinion as to whether examinations fostered significant learning. Most students preferred practical lessons to theory lessons.
(iii) Many students did not believe that music examinations were very important and they preferred to learn non-examination repertoire (contrary to earlier feedback that they would not likely learn from a teacher who did not focus on examination preparation).

(iv) A significant number of students did not have time to practise and many of the respondents did not practise regularly.

(v) There was divided opinion as to the importance of musical certification and the issue of examinations being the impulse for practising.

(vi) A number of students declared that their parents listened to their piano playing.

(vii) The majority of respondents felt that they did not know a lot of orchestral repertoire with many students declaring that their knowledge of classical music was limited to piano music.

(i) Listening preferences
In response to question 13, a third of the students surveyed stated that they listened to popular music at home whilst 62% of students reported that they listened to all kinds of music. Only 5% said that they listened to classical music. This indicated that, although students received training in classical music, the majority did not listen to this genre of music as a matter of preference. This implied that the learning of classical piano music was not necessarily reflected in listening preferences for leisure purposes.

Figure 5.2.3g: Listening preferences
(j) Music education through learning the piano

In an effort to appreciate what respondents understood by the phrase, 'acquiring a music education', students were asked, in question 14, if they believed they had obtained a music education through learning the piano. Of the students surveyed, 62% of them said 'yes', 21% said 'no' and 17% declared that they 'didn't know'. This indicated that a large number of the students surveyed believed that the system of music education, through examinations, had provided them with an education in music. However, the 21% of students who responded in the negative suggested that they expected a music education to mean more than just passing piano examinations. The 17% of respondents who stated that they did not know whether they had acquired an education in music indicated that they did not fully comprehend the meaning of learning music or it could be that they simply followed the wishes of their parents.

Figure 5.2.3h Music education through learning the piano

5.2.4 Defining music education: comparing qualitative descriptors

In the final question of all three survey questionnaires (Appendices D, E and F), respondents were asked to use three words or phrases to describe what a music education meant to them. These qualitative responses were collated and analysed as belonging to three categories of descriptions, namely, social, recreational and educational, as illustrated in the table below. This is followed by some observations of the tabulation.
### Table 5.2.4a: Defining Music Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Social** | High class  
Asset  
Well-rounded person  
Using talent  
Exposure to music  
Balance to character | Copying others  
No life  
Read music  
No relevance  
Gain experience  
Don’t know | Up social ladder  
Recognition  
Appreciation  
Paper chase  
Understanding styles  
Well-rounded person |
| **Recreational** | Hobby  
Relaxation  
Entertainment  
Fulfillment  
Expression of feeling | Time consuming  
Chore  
Entertainment  
Parents force  
Boring | Fighting for time  
Practise  
Sometimes fun  
Parent’s wish  
Enjoyment |
| **Educational** | Hardworking  
Discipline  
Systematic learning  
Effective learning  
Taking tuition  
Understanding basics  
Increasing knowledge | Work  
Practising  
Pass exams  
Learn music  
Play music  
Informative  
General knowledge | Focus  
Less stressful  
Preparing exams  
Reading notes  
Discipline  
Testing  
Routine |

Parents' definitions of a music education appeared to be centred on the virtues of learning within a socio-recreational context. What was strangely missing were the 'performance' or 'concert attendance' descriptors. None of the respondents described music education as possessing strong performance abilities or overall musicianship skills. Apart from the comment that music lessons were expensive, there were no negative descriptors expressed by parents. In general, parents appear to believe that learning the piano served to improve their children's social status and that this activity had considerable educational benefits that could be delivered through recreational means.

However, students and teachers did not entirely concur with parents’ positive views, judging by their comments. On the contrary, a number of students described music education as having 'no relevance' (presumably in reference to their daily lives) and a 'time-consuming chore'. Several students defined music education as 'copying others' whilst one student remarked that music lessons were 'for people with no life'.
Several students replied that they ‘didn’t know’ why they were taking piano lessons. One student described the acquisition of a music education as taking on ‘work, work and more work!’

Teachers were generally aware of their students’ heavy workload from school when assigning music homework. For some of them teaching students to master three pieces of music for the examination was actually less stressful than say, preparing them for public performances. Furthermore, teachers’ perception of a music education appear to be influenced by several social elements. However, many teachers did believe that given of the lack of better alternatives, the existing form of ‘music education’ was still the best available option, apart from affording themselves a satisfactory living as piano teachers.

### 5.2.5 Summary of key points

Some overall observations are drawn from the responses received. Foremost, the majority of teachers spend considerable time preparing students for either the practical or the theory of music examinations rather than focus on widening their students’ general repertoire. There appeared to be little attention paid to performing in public or to attending concerts and limited general music knowledge of the different types and genres of music. Teachers perceived that they were meeting ‘market’ (or parental) demands by conforming to the social norms of providing a music education through the medium of a structured programme of musical assessment that is internationally recognised and valued by members of the community.

Many teachers themselves had acquired a musical training through regular graded examinations. Thus, it was not unusual for teachers to replicate teaching methods of which they had first hand experience (Gibbs, 1993). A cyclical pattern of music training through the system of regular music examinations appears to have been established. Its practice seems widespread and well supported by the Malaysian community at large.

The responses received revealed that parents valued music examinations highly. To them, success at music examinations meant that their children had received a sound music education by being able to play a musical instrument and this belief was reinforced by certification conferred by internationally music assessment bodies.
Many parents believed that their children preferred to learn the piano and since they too liked the instrument, the piano became the favourite choice of musical instrument to learn. In addition, taking piano lessons represented a means of appreciating music and a form of recreational activity as well as affording a possible career option.

Parents also selected music teachers based on various criteria and they placed great importance on music examinations. As such, the choice of music teachers appeared to be closely related to the success rate of their students at regular music examinations and many parents openly stated that they would not send their children to teachers who did not focus on examinations. Parents also believed that a conducive teaching environment would encourage learning. Much of music teaching appeared to be conducted at the students' homes at the convenience of the parents. Fees charged appeared to be linked to the students' level of proficiency, which were in turn associated with graded attainment at music examinations. In other words, a teacher may charge increasing higher fees at the end of each examination session when the student is 'promoted' to the next grade of piano study. Parents appear to be happy with this form of fee structure and increasing numbers of students sit for yearly practical and theory of music examinations. Furthermore, their belief that 'practice makes perfect' seems congruent with recent research in the significance of practice in acquiring musical expertise (Sloboda, Davidson, Howe and Moore, 1996; Davidson et al, 1996; O'Neill, 1997).

Thus, the entire business of the music teaching-learning milieu appears to be linked to the business of examinations. This was evident from reading data on the purpose of practising, repertoire studied, choice of music teachers, grades, fees link and the social measure of musical ability in direct relation to graded musical achievement.

Paradoxically, the issue of not being able to perform well or play in public did not appear significant to parents. When queried as to what they understood by having 'acquired a music education' several parents actually declared in the questionnaires that they 'didn't know' what it meant.

Many music students appear to be the recipients of a system of music education that is almost entirely centred on assessment and certification, so much so that this approach to the study of music is seemingly unquestioned. Students did not appear to be perturbed by the somewhat incessant pursuit of playing examination repertoire primarily for the sake of passing music examinations nor did they question this 'pedagogical' approach to music education. This may be possibly due to similar experience within the school education system.
Thus, if the purpose of education is to pass examinations, then music education, they believe, is perhaps no different. A parallel is drawn between this belief and the phenomena under investigation, presented in Chapter Seven. This will be argued in the context of Schenker’s idea of the Hintergrund or ‘background’ of musical structure in the mapping of thematic routes.

5.3 Views of five music examination board representatives

The following section presents extracts from interviews conducted with representatives of five different music examination boards. For purposes of anonymity, the representatives of the five assessment providers have been referred to as John, Jill, Pat, Lee and Mariam respectively. At the end of each interview, some conclusions have been drawn utilising elements of protocol and conversational analysis in the extraction of key words and key phrases as focal points of reference in the interpretation of meaning. The following extracts highlight the salient aspects of the interviews in the respective respondent’s own voice. A brief summary and interpretation of the interview follows each extract.

5.3.1 Interview extracts and outcomes with John

Valerie:
As a representative and examiner of one of the leading music exams boards, having been based in Malaysia for a many years, can you share some insights with regard to how you view the ‘Malaysian passion’ for music examinations?

John:
Firstly, speaking as an outsider, I see the need for music to be perpetuated in a real way in your country. It all boils down to how you use a system. Systems were created with the best intentions, sometimes for motivation, other times to meet a need... These exam boards have a long history... way back in the 1870’s the Royal Society of the Arts in England ran exams. So our tradition goes back a long way. I’m not sure if in Malaysia, you have this heritage of concert making, listening and generally socialising through music. What you have here is a system that you’ve adopted to meet commercial needs. I think the way exams are used here is rather peculiar. In the UK, the business of wanting to take a music exam is purely incidental. You played a lot then one day you think it’s a pretty good idea to gauge your musical level so you take an exam. The school curriculum in UK encourages group playing and making music together. But in Malaysia that doesn’t seem to be the case although some schools have marching bands.
Valerie:
How different are we then?

John:
A little too much individualism, I think. It seems to me that the whole music scene and education has been borne on the shoulders of the piano teachers. In order to maintain their own credibility, they have used the system to perpetuate the system. Don’t get me wrong, it is well known that there are some excellent teachers around, but they work at a different level... There’re so many other teachers who are working below this level, just using the system. I think it turns a lot of youngsters off. They may very well wonder what’s the connection between what they hear on the radio and what they learn during music lessons... Sometimes I see it so commercially wrapped, almost like a school subject, revealing chapter by chapter, grade by grade.

Valerie:
Since there are no statistics available on the number of qualified music teachers in the country, based on your many years of experience as an external examiner in this part of the world, what percentage of Malaysian music teachers would you say are ‘qualified’ not just by certification but by general musicianship and musicality?

John:
20% would be my answer- someone who is an all rounder and a specialist, only that percentage I see have all the other windows, not just in a technical way. By that, I mean teachers who are able to create and recreate. Creating does not mean recreating what is put in front of you. Let me give you an example. I noticed that students who are on the way to tertiary level music studies, listen to a good CD then come back a week later aping the performance. That’s not even recreating. Show them another edition that is not Associated Board’s edition and they’re astonished. Just ask them, play me something, anything, create a thunderstorm... play me something that’s purely yours – can’t do it... I don’t think many teachers study pedagogy, spot of lipstick and powder, the day they get their results, they’re teachers.

Valerie:
Don’t you think that’s because of the system that we were brought up in?

John:
Like I said, there isn’t a heritage here. You may have impressive buildings but you haven’t got the history, the government subsidy and the fabric of society to support this culture. Sure, you have an impressive new orchestra and hall that draw a lot of visitors but where are your future audiences and players? Don’t get me wrong, it’s great to fill a concert hall with subscribers but are they the true music lovers or purely socialites? You’ve got to develop good listeners and educate families to understand and appreciate music. I heard that some of the orchestra players go out to different parts of the country to give workshops and that’s a good thing but right now, parents’ reliance in providing a music education comes down to these lovely lonely piano teachers! What is the
connection between what they're doing and providing well-rounded music education? Most of what is done is commercial.

**Valerie:**
Maybe they’re meeting a market demand.

**John:**
Yes, exams serve very well. The effect an exam system carves neat little slots and does orient students and parents to enter into set grades. This exam urgency needs to dilute. Youngster here are very busy all the time, lots of assignments, homework, tuition... seems unkind to tie them to a time scale all the time.

**Valerie:**
Have you got suggestions to improve the situation?

**John:**
I'd love to see a consultative group of music teachers. There's no association to form an artistic pressure group, which the ministry can consult, maybe a national register of teachers. All sorts of music graduates are coming back to Malaysia, from Britain, USA and you have your own local universities running music degree programmes, yet no one is running a register, or a directory... For the new young parents, the basic approach may be a little dated unlike the previous upper class parents who wanted to get rid of their kids for an evening, so they sent them to piano lessons!

John talked about the need for music to be perpetuated in a real way, suggesting that the way in which music was learnt and disseminated locally was perhaps rather artificial. He implied that this may be due to the manner in which the system of musical assessment had been misused or used inappropriately by Malaysians. He referred to the 'socialising' effect and functions of music in British society, and questioned whether the tradition of listening and 'concertising' existed in Malaysia. Therefore, he rationalised that Malaysians may not have fully understood why music exists. Here it is noted that John used the term tradition in a rather different way from Malaysians suggesting that Western classical music is regarded as traditional music in British society. On the other hand, the use of the term 'tradition' in the Malaysian context generally implies a social practice or norm that is culturally associated with age and ethnicity. For example, when one refers to music as being 'traditional', the image of Malay gamelan music or Indian tabla music comes to mind. In this sense, Western music is regarded as non-traditional music. Even though Malaysia possesses a myriad of traditional music types (as explained in Chapter 2) it curiously lacks a thriving audience! Why this is the case should perhaps be the scope of another study.
'Heritage' on the other hand may be understood more widely as that which has been inherited and this immediately conjures the image of various British colonial practices that the country inherited. For example the external music examination system is a British heritage but this 'inheritance' has been transformed into a lucrative business. By adopting a method of music assessment that is internationally recognised, the practice itself has evolved into a 'heritage' in another society with different purposes.

With regard to the teaching-learning infrastructure in the Malaysia, John seemed to empathise with parents' aspirations in securing an 'international music education' for their children and by participating many parents have entered into a system that has entrusted the 'lovely, lonely piano teachers', as John called them, to deliver the goods. Surprisingly, John was of the opinion that only 20% of the practising music teachers were truly 'creative' and possessed all round musicianship. That being the case one could argue that the remaining 80% of the teaching fraternity were not 'truly' qualified musicians but were nonetheless able to successfully deliver the requirements of the existing system of assessing musicality. Does this suggest that musicianship is not a prerequisite for good teaching?

Although this system is supporting the livelihood of an estimated five thousand music teachers, John believed that music teachers use the system to bring credibility to their profession whilst satisfying personal and market needs. However, the 'society' according to John has yet to understand that impressive buildings and an orchestra of 'imported' musicians would not solve the problem of honing performance skills and musical creativity amongst Malaysians. Furthermore, John seemed perturbed that, despite the return of numerous graduates from abroad and the establishment of music degree programmes in local universities, there appeared to be a lackadaisical attitude towards the establishment of a body which represents music teachers. Perhaps this is due to the 'individualistic' nature of the piano teaching profession and training.

Furthermore, many music graduates return from music studies abroad, only to find themselves perpetuating a system that they grew up in with little or no change in sight and perhaps, seeing no cause for change.
5.3.2 Interview extracts and outcomes with Jill

Valerie:
You are one of the representatives of the 'newer' examination boards to offer music assessments in Malaysia. Can you tell me more about your operations?

Jill:
This board originally catered for its own nationals. Then, there were lots of migrants from Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Hong Kong, so this organisation was re-established to service the demand. Expansion occurred. Over the past three years, throughout Malaysia, we've got more than a thousand candidates.

Valerie:
That's a pretty good start. Do teachers ever say to you, 'Oh, why another board'?

Jill:
Why another board? Yes, sure they do. Everybody is looking for another board. There's always a lack of satisfaction with both the theory and practical exams...although teachers are aware of the availability of exams and frequencies of exams from various examination boards, there is still no proper understanding of the syllabuses of different boards...There are lots of good teachers but the younger ones have limited ideas on styles...because they themselves are not strong teachers, their students fail, so they're out shopping, looking for a system that's easy, more flexible...they try it out, then realise - gosh, it's even more work, viva voce to prepare or new syllabuses that they have to learn and teach, so they return to their former board or look for some other avenues.

Valerie:
What do the parents think?

Jill:
Ah, now modern parents begin to realise what is good music and what's bad. They are more educated and although they don't know much about music they listen to their kids and compare...There are two types of teachers out there. Those who go for the easier three-pieces-a-year option and those who really are quite tired of this route...Students of today are very different, new social agendas, school projects, music homework not practised so they practise in class. A week before the exam they're in a mad rush...the same old attitude problem...some parents say, 'oh, doesn't matter if they don't do exams' — so they say

Valerie:
So what do you see as coming out of the Malaysian school music curriculum and the various local universities which offer music degrees?
Jill:
Although the primary kids have had music lessons in school for over fifteen years the product is not there. I think music in schools does not delve deeply into the subject, a very shallow approach, just to get the children to know something about music. In Japan where I travel often, many people have ‘given-up’ music. Students are more interested in doing well academically, yet music as a career is so competitive there and difficult to make a living. I see it’s going to happen here. Even now it’s difficult to get student numbers because there are so many teachers.

Valerie:
So do you think it’s time to develop the music of our own cultures – our own cultural identity?

Jill:
What cultural identity? We have the culture but it’s not clearly defined and not nurtured. Different races go about their own way and there’s not much assimilation. The modern Chinese are western music inclined, yet everybody has their own group. For example, the ‘Dama Chinese Orchestra’ is so well known but many Chinese can’t relate to the music that they play and will not support their group... some say, ‘too much of China’, so it appeals to the oldies. Modern Malays are not interested in the traditional ‘wayang kulit’ [Malay shadow play]. The Indians have their Temple of Fine Arts but the Indian Christians think it’s very Hindu orientated. So, it’s back to the ABRSM.

Valerie:
Well, where are we all heading then?

Jill:
To the exam hall, I think! [Laughter]... How to inspire them? I think there’s a very small number of real talent but lots of intelligent kids. Anyway, competition is healthy so let the boards compete.

Valerie:
How do you see your operations as being different?

Jill:
Firstly we have specialist examiners who only examine instruments of their study and they are university professors. Constantly, we are asked by parents, ‘Is your board recognised and how do we know because my friends have not heard of it before?’ Parent can only see one thing – that piece of paper. Overseas music institutions do not just look at your certificates but whether you can play, transpose, improvise! Here we have examiners from ‘famous’ boards who are high school teachers. Of course they’ll say, ‘but our examiners are trained vigorously’. But never mind, who cares, as long as you’ve got the certificate!

Valerie:
In that case what about creating Malaysia’s own system of musical certification?
**Jill:**

I think it’s possible but it’s going to take years. I don’t think we have enough expertise. Then we have the issue of running and financing it, and as for the government, they regard such activities as private education. Furthermore, people won’t buy it. The external boards are here to stay. Malaysia is considered big bucks when it comes to exams. We feed the boards more than 30,000 candidates every year — big bucks, more of a business thing rather than an educational thing. Everybody has got something to offer, not just offer, but take. At least our board doesn’t look out for big profits but just to cover cost... Fees are lower, so parents are interested because of the savings especially with the economic downturn. When I was in Ipoh, I heard that ABRSM candidates had fallen by one third. Where have they gone?... The recession has affected all areas, even our music industry, people are weary, prudent with their money... some parents don’t mind if their kids don’t take exams for the year. ‘Save some expenses!’, they say but at the back of their mind, they want their kids, the girls particularly, to complete grade eight... Just in case they can’t find a suitable job later, they can teach at home.

**Valerie:**

Do you think then that more people will join the teaching profession?

**Jill:**

Actually from my own experience, a lot of the young people say they don’t want to teach or they say they can’t teach... but girls also have so many options now. Our universities have started music degree programmes but I have not seen the fruits of our local training... What kinds of products will come out? I’m just waiting to see.

**Valerie:**

Thanks Jill for your time and comments.

Like agents of all examination boards, Jill represented an organisation that created a system of musical assessment to initially serve the needs of its own people and only thereafter extended its services to other countries. She appeared to be well aware of the ‘competition’ that exists among the different examination boards and this has created opportunities for teachers to ‘shop around’ for a system that is more flexible and examinations that are perhaps easier to pass. Here it is noted that Jill, like John had used the word system to describe the peculiar nature of the music education practice in Malaysia. Another observation by Jill was that many parents ‘did not know much about music’ and therefore they perhaps relied heavily on external experts from recognised institutions to assess musical attainment. Such verification of achievement is represented in the form of music certificates.
Representatives of different examination boards market their syllabuses, examiners’ expertise, frequency of examinations and overall reputation. It is well known that the Malaysian music assessment market is one of the largest in the world and several music educationists have questioned the purpose and direction of such a form of music education practice. On one hand some teachers seem tired of teaching ‘three examination pieces a year’ whilst others thrive on it.

In any case, on close scrutiny one would notice that all the examination boards require more or less similar examination requirements, thus the idea of using multiple examination boards may be somewhat redundant.

Furthermore, students appear to be burdened with a host of extra curricular activities whilst classroom music taught in primary schools has been regarded as ‘shallow’ in content and delivery. Jill also talked about the competitiveness among music teachers for students and like John she was of the opinion that ‘real’ musical talent was at a premium in Malaysia. She also expressed her concern about the lack of cultural assimilation among the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia and offered her views as to the limited interest in learning traditional musical instruments and playing traditional music. Many modern Chinese Malaysians preferred to learn Western music. Perhaps second generation and third generation of Malaysian-born Chinese find it difficult to relate to the music of China as their cultural ‘heritage’. On the other hand, modern Malays have been known to prefer popular music to traditional Malay music whilst some fundamentalist Muslims do not condone the practice of music per se. Some Indian Malaysians of the Christian faith regard Indian music and dance as having religious Hindu connotations. Hence such fragmentation of musical tastes and preferences may account for the general lack of support for certain forms of music which is seen as adhering to particular social, ethnic and/or religious bias.

Learning to play the piano on the other hand is regarded as honing a musical skill which requires discipline and training. For many parents the repertoire learnt is secondary to the discipline. That being the case, would parents welcome a Malaysian national examination board that standardised such a discipline? Jill was of the opinion that it would take time as there were too many issues at stake, from the lack of expertise and funding limitations to the question of recognition, despite the fact that several Malaysian universities have begun to offer tertiary music programmes.

Finally, Jill concluded that the option of teaching piano posed an attractive profession, particularly for women, presumably due to the peculiar nature of this ‘cottage industry’ (Ehrlich, 1976).
5.3.3 Interview extracts and outcomes with Pat

Valerie:
As one of the local representatives of a music examination board, how influential are parents in deciding the nature of their children’s music education?

Pat:
I suppose you’ve heard this again and again. Parents in Malaysia tend to press their children for examinations. They believe that piano examination results provide proof of their children’s musical experience. Because many of them don’t know much about music, their ‘reward’ is seen in terms of a music certificate... some see it as a form of ‘compensation’ for their investment in time and money. However, if you ask them, they’ll say it’s for their child’s enjoyment or hobby, knowing full well that nobody likes examinations so it’s kind of a masquerade—a play of words.

Valerie:
You believe that language plays an important role in music education?

Pat:
Some parents are attracted to the medium of instruction as music classes are conducted in English. The examinations too, are set in the language of instruction. One music examination board tried to attract students by also offering their theory papers in the Malay language. Good sales gimmick but I don’t really buy it because parents want their children to master the English Language. We have a language problem here. This is all part and parcel of the quest for ‘international’ recognition. That’s why ‘local’ university qualifications are also snubbed at, not because they are not good but the standard of English of their graduates leave much to be desired - and that means less chances of being employed particularly by the private sector.

Valerie:
Do you believe that the ‘recognition’ factor plays a crucial role in the marketing of examination boards?

Pat:
Yes, I do. For us, it’s a business. Malaysia represents one of the three largest Asian markets for music examinations, the other two being Singapore and Hong Kong – all former British colonies... As far as music assessments are concerned, Malaysia continues to be a lucrative colony... Never mind what they do with the certificates, it is a passport to a livelihood that regurgitates itself. That’s why there are so many assessment boards operating here... We offer examinations three times a year so students and teachers have a wider timeline choice and our examination fees are cheaper too. It’s also more convenient.
Valerie:
Is that how you attract new clients?

Pat:
Basically, we try to gauge the shortfalls of another boards to strengthen our position. Students often complain, 'too much homework and no time to practise'. Some teachers change boards because they think that it would be easier for their children to pass. We welcome feedback on areas of improvement in examinations such as aural test requirements.

Valerie:
So do you think Malaysia should have its own examination board?

Pat:
I don't know about that. It's a good way to develop a world standard in music as there is no local syndicate to measure us. It depends on the expectations of parents. They feel that their children must take examinations and pass to obtain certificates for compensation for what they have paid and also their pride when they compare their children with others so if 'others' have more established certificates, then the local board will not be so 'laku' [meaning popular]!

Valerie:
Thanks, it's been really nice talking to you.

Pat:
Thanks for coming down all the way from Kuala Lumpur. Hope to see you again.

The interview with Pat was conducted in a city in the southern part of Malaysia. Upon explaining the nature and purpose of the research Pat seemed confident that I would have had encountered familiar responses to the questions that I had posed to her. In analysing the conversation, Pat on several occasions used the words, 'results, reward, investment, compensation, colony, measure, compare, recognition and regurgitate' to describe her views as to why large numbers of parents send their children for piano examinations. She felt that it was mainly the parents who pressed for musical certification, the piece of paper being a return from an investment of effort, time and money. Furthermore, Pat seemed rather sceptical that parents really believed that their children enjoyed music lessons whilst being required to attempt one music examination after another. She was of the opinion that parents were masquerading with words. Pat also believed that the use of English as the medium of instruction and assessment further signified the global recognition of the training that the students had received, thereby increasing their employability particularly in the private sector. An articulate lady and a shrewd businesswoman, Pat described the music certificate as a 'passport to a
livelihood' in the business of examinations. She called Malaysia a 'lucrative colony' in reference to its former colonial status and she was quite forthright in explaining the competitive edge of the examination board that she represented. Pat returned to the question of 'recognition' when asked if a local music examination board could 'compete' with the international examination boards. Her tone of response and facial expression seemed to resonate the same measure of scepticism as earlier encountered, when she referred to 'musical enjoyment' as a masquerade of words and action.

5.3.3 Interview extracts and outcomes with Lee

Valerie:
Can you tell me some of the problems that you've encountered as a representative of one of the music examination boards?

Lee:
Our main problem is the cost of examination books. Although we are getting more support materials for our syllabuses many teachers tell us that they are not keen to change, and risk students failing because of their own unfamiliarity with the syllabus of another board, so we organise workshops to encourage teachers to teach our syllabus. The cost of buying music books is so prohibitive so the photocopying culture is rampant ... We have suggested printing the examination books in Malaysia as not many shops will stock non-ABRSM books because the demand isn't there ... Another problem is that there are too many representatives around. Sometimes representatives are given the wrong information, thinking that they are the only representatives in the state. Once an examiner remarked that it was his second day examining ... I found out that there was another representative servicing the area. So our integrity is questioned. One parent even asked me how she can be assured that representatives won't run away with the exam fees! Sometimes parents complain about the environment in which examinations are conducted especially when another teacher's home is being used as an examination centre. Some students complain about the state of the piano ... Other teachers don't like the idea of letting competing music schools know how many students they enter and their results due to the possibility of student pinching. For instance, although I am a representative of one of the examination boards, I send my own students to two other boards, one batch for the graded examinations and the other for diploma examinations ... I was once rather annoyed when my diploma student told me that the music school which held the examinations sent her a flyer about diploma lessons at their school, conducted by one of the examiners from the board ... We are also governed by the administrative office in London. Sometimes parents can be difficult when the timetable given clashes with their children's other commitments and they request for changes ... We tell examiners the problems that representatives encounter but I think that some examiners dare not make noise or they won't get to come to Malaysia the next round if they go back with lots of complaints.
Valerie:
So how do you encourage teachers, parents and students to support the board you represent?

Lee:
Although I'm currently representing one of the boards, my business is a franchise school where we also sell Japanese made pianos and organs. We offer various examination options to cater to parents' requests... To promote the board which I represent, some of the teachers suggested that 'contact' with the parent college will encourage closer rapport... having graduation ceremonies is a good idea... You know, some of the other boards give travel trips to teachers who send the highest number of candidates. Some teachers have switched to such boards and they even offer free exam books... Some examiners give talks but now it's not so popular... also depends on the fee and the location. Some teachers ask for talks to be organised but when they are organised, teachers don't come! Anyway, most of them want to know one main thing - that is, how to get their students to pass the exams, talk in other areas and it will fall on deaf ears... Usually it's totally about exams - music making in Malaysia is about passing exams. Teachers are preoccupied with their students passing exams, take for instance the change in the ABRSM Theory syllabus in 1992 - teachers didn't know how to teach the new syllabus and many of their students failed. Teachers were worried and quickly switched to other boards. Recently the exams were made easier so now they are slowly going back to ABRSM although a lot of students stop after Grade 5 theory... so it's examinations all the way... Results make or break a teacher- bad results and the teacher has had it- parents will be furious... Parents leave it to the teachers once they have the confidence in them... Some parents complain that fees are too high, especially if it's a family of three children taking exams... Then sometimes because of the ABRSM Grade 5 theory pre-requisite before candidates can take the higher grades, teachers switch to Trinity Grades 6 and 7 for the practical exams... But there'll always be strong supporters of ABRSM... why? Many parents feel that since only this board is government approved it is more recognised.

Valerie:
You seem to be very well versed with the operations of the various boards and the preferences of the music community by and large.

Lee:
I go back a long way - more than thirty-five years...Do you know how the ABRSM became successful? It was not because of their high standards... During the colonial times, the director of education in Malaya was from the colonial education service so in every district education office, British exams were held... till today these exams are still available... we inherited these monsters. [Laughter and more laughter]

Valerie:
In terms of popularity, how are the various boards perceived or ranked amongst the teaching community where you are stationed?
Lee:
At the moment the league table appears to be (i) ABRSM (ii) Trinity College
(iii) Guildhall School of Music (iv) London College of Music and Media and (v)
Australian Music Examination Board. How do the teaching community perceive
them? Well, ABRSM sets the standards, Trinity offers the teacher’s ‘license’ to
teach. Guildhall is easy to pass and now Yamaha Music Malaysia represents
them although I heard that the Japanese aren’t too pleased as they’re not quite
sure if the franchised schools are serving British or Japanese interests. Anyway
the Japanese are more interested in selling their instruments. The London
College of Music’s collaboration with Thames Valley University has boosted
their image and AMEB is considered rather ‘new’ and too ‘local’ in the sense
that the Australian examinations don’t have the whole world with them.

Valerie:
Well thank you for your wealth of information. Any concluding comments?

Lee:
I must meet you when I come to Kuala Lumpur and hey, before you hang up I
must tell you a story, bit of gossip... This board sent an examiner, traveling from
7am by coach to Miri [town in East Malaysia], then examined students straight
upon reaching the centre until 9.30 pm. One of the diploma candidates prepared
the wrong piece but passed the exam. We questioned the examiner’s judgment,
examining such a long period of time... When my friend queried, the chief
representative said the examiners were used to it... that’s not what the examiner
said when he was taken back to the hotel... Also, do you know that some
teachers prepare students for two graded exams simultaneously with two
different boards? Then there were two students who received a failed grade but
never got a mark sheet or a proper receipt from the representative, I bet you they
wouldn’t know if they had been examined by a bogus examiner... And there’s
that lady up north who is happily taking commissions from two different boards
that she represents! [the tale goes on]...

An astute businessman and a highly experienced music teacher, Lee’s comment may be
summarised into eight main areas of concerns, namely:

(i) the rampant photocopying of copyrighted music due to the high cost of imported
books.

(ii) too many representatives being appointed by examination boards, some of whom
represent more than one board.

(iii) less satisfactory examination conditions and conduct.

(iv) ethical concerns with regard to confidentiality of examination results and
‘student-pinching’.
administration of examinations by local representatives versus administration by the state education department.

organising graduation ceremonies, workshops and giving away free trips to improve business.

music making synonymous with passing music examinations.

perceptions of competing music examination boards by the public.

He pointed out the problems associated with the industry and provided his views as to how and why these issues occurred concluding with a league table of the perception of standing among the five music examination boards which operate in the country.

5.3.5 Interview extracts and outcomes with Mariam

Valerie:
Thank you for agreeing to speak to me. I know you must be very busy.

Mariam:
You're welcome. I'll tell you what I can.

Valerie:
Can you tell me about how the ABRSM is administered in your department?

Mariam:
I don't know about other states but up north here we act as a 'postal and certificate collection centre' for the board. Very often teachers and parents think we are the representatives but we are not. Sometimes parents get confused and ask us why the other examination boards are not recognised by the Ministry so we tell them that we merely administer the ABRSM examinations for a fee and it is not related to the question of 'recognition'. Furthermore any questions regarding examination results have to be directed to the regional representative or to the ABRSM in London. Now with e-mail it's so easy. The Ministry of Education merely helps administer the theory and practical examinations each year and this has been the case for many years. We receive the documents from ABRSM and teachers collect the application forms from us usually between late November and early January each year. They fill in the computerised forms supplied by ABRSM and send them back to us with the appropriate fees and three self-addressed envelopes. We then send back the details of the time and place of examinations. The theory examinations are held on the second Saturday of March in designated schools and the practical examinations are held in hotels between the months of June and August each year. We organise the invigilators and stewards making sure that the examinations run smoothly. Any other professional support events are organised by the Regional Representative who
used to be stationed in Kuching but the new representative is stationed in Kuala Lumpur. I’m sure you know him since you live in Kuala Lumpur.

Valerie:
Yes, I do. We have met on several occasions...Can you tell me the number of candidates who enrol in the theory and practical examinations each year?

Mariam:
I can’t give you the exact numbers because it varies from state to state. As I said, we collect the examination fees, take our cut and convert the rest to pounds and send it to London. Yes, this can be quite touchy because of the large outflow of currency. I think it’s common knowledge that about 70,000 candidates sit the ABRSM examinations each year. The entries are quite evenly divided between theory and practical candidates. So at an average of one hundred and fifty Malaysian Ringgit or thirty Pounds Sterling per candidate, you can calculate the amount yourself... Sometimes representatives from other boards visit us so we know that it’s quite competitive out there. We have been asked when the Ministry will start local examinations but so far there are no plans. In fact I heard from a colleague who has just retired that the Ministry of Education asked the ABRSM to recognise its SPM [O’ Level equivalent] school curriculum as equivalent to the Grade 5 examination but Grade 3 was the board’s initial response.

Valerie:
What a blow! Is that really necessary?

Mariam:
Well, does that answer your question as to where we are?

Valerie:
Hmm, there seems to be a lack of understanding as to the developments in the current music scene with local universities offering music degree programmes at undergraduate and even post-graduate level.

Mariam:
It’s always the case of the ‘authorities-that-be’, as we aptly term anything that we can’t change. The civil service works at its own pace you know... Anyway, the state departments are quite pleased with the current arrangement as it actually receives money as most of the time it has to spend money!

Valerie:
Ah, so that’s the crux of the matter!
Mariam:
Well, it's quite evident to everyone... We know what's happening. My nieces take piano lessons from a teacher who comes to the house and they take the ABRSM examinations all the time... I don't think it is of national interest to the government as it is a private affair between the teacher and the family... Anyway the government cannot be seen to promote Western classical music and neither has it the expertise nor manpower. It's got enough on its plate trying to promote traditional music... Everyone seems happy so why rock the boat?

Mariam, a senior officer attached to a division of the Ministry of Education that handles the administration of ABRSM examination, offered her candid views about the ABRSM's association with the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Essentially she confirmed that the Ministry was administrating the examinations rather than representing the board. Thus, the question of 'official endorsement' of the ABRSM examinations is an outcome of an administrative role rather than one of academic/musical judgement as perceived by the public.

The association is reinforced by a mutually-agreed financial arrangement between ABRSM and the Ministry, and by a continuation of historical practice. Curiously, the Ministry of Education regards candidates who enrol for the ABRSM examinations as private arrangements between the respective teachers and the families concerned. By continuing to administer the ABRSM examinations and seeking the board's endorsement to recognise the government's own school music programme, the practice suggests that the Ministry of Education concedes that it has neither the expertise, manpower nor desire to set up a local assessment board to meet the needs of the music education requirements of the people at the current point in time.

5.4 Comparing the views of two music school administrators, Linda and Richard

Linda and Richard are administrators of two randomly selected music schools, one located in Kuala Lumpur and the other in Kuching. Linda also owns the business but Richard is an employee of the school. Many similarities were found between the practises of both schools despite the geographical distance between them. Extracts of the interviews are presented, followed by a summary of key points that highlights the commonalities of both responses. Linda explained:
My husband and I own and run our music school. We bought this shop-lot and renovated it into a showroom where we sell pianos, organs and music books. We partitioned the back portion of the premises into seven piano studios and one larger organ studio for group teaching. We have eight piano teachers, one organ teacher and one guitar teacher… the organ and guitar students are only a handful. The organs are getting obsolete and we don’t intend to upgrade them so it is likely that we’ll will discontinue offering the classes once the last batch of students drop out… All the teachers except me, are part-timers, working on a commission basis. The ones with diplomas earn 60% of the fees paid and the ones with Grade 8 earn 55% of fees paid. Lessons are conducted once a week, lasting from thirty to sixty minutes each session and fees range from RM50 [approx. AUD $25] a month for beginners to RM300 [approx. AUD $150] a month for diploma levels… We hold a concert for parents once a year but most of the time everyone’s too busy. We pride ourselves in securing a 100% pass rate so we can advertise for more students (Linda 01).

I asked Linda about the over-emphasis on music examinations and how music educators might make a difference in refocusing the purpose of learning music to performance.

Linda responded:

It’s not just music examinations but all sorts of examinations inbuilt into our education system. There’s so much examination pressure and meeting parental expectations. Look, when kids start school at the age of seven, they are already prepared for all sorts of tests-monthly tests, term tests and year-end tests. In addition, they sit for national examinations at ages nine, twelve, fifteen and seventeen… Do you know that a student in the South Australian Matriculation (SAM) programme in a private college just committed suicide because of the pressure of examinations and the whole class goes for tuition, even at tertiary level? You are fighting a system here… Hey, you know, there are many music teachers who are able to encourage the love of music in the kids but half the time they’re just ‘sandwiched’[makes a gesture] in the middle of parents and the paper chase. Always, I hear the teachers moan, ‘no time, no time’… Then there are those who couldn’t be bothered about anything else as long as the parents are happy. If they push too hard, they lose a student—my school loses commission on the student… Same story with the kids, what with Maths tuition, English tuition, Malay language tuition, computer tuition, ballet classes and school co-curricular activities, it’s really no fun being a kid now… Sometimes you don’t really blame the parents, they need to get as much out of their kids as possible. Many of them don’t earn that much but they are willing to pay for the music lessons. There’s a parent who earns RM800 a month as school teacher and pays RM600 for her two daughters’ Grade 8 and diploma piano fees and that’s not uncommon. She says that when it comes to education, she’ll pay the price as long as her children get a better life and she knows much the piano teachers in my school earn! See, it’s all one big business deal (1.02).
In Linda’s schools, concerts were held as a form of ‘marketing tool’ to attract more students rather than primarily to encourage students to attend concerts or to play in public. Nevertheless, concerts were held infrequently because teachers and students were ‘too busy’, presumably preparing for examinations. Good results represented even more powerful means of advertising the school. Linda aptly termed her operations as ‘one big business deal’. She viewed the music education infrastructure as being comparable to a wider system that operated with a similar focus on examinations as the primary goal of teaching, hence any effort to change current practice was likened to ‘fighting the system’. Like many of the other respondents, Linda talked about examination pressure in meeting parental expectations. Whilst there were many teachers who were able to encourage the love of music in students through the pleasure of performing, they were unable to do so due to time limitations. Again there was a reference to parents who viewed music lessons as a form of educational investment in which they were prepared to pay a high price.

In a telephone interview with Richard who ran a school in East Malaysia, several similarities in the manner in which the music education system operated were found. Richard commented:

Basically the teaching scene is the same here – we also have the ABRSM, the Trinity College and AMEB is perhaps more well known here because their chief representative’s office is based here. It’s pretty similar here in terms of the teaching set-up. You have the music schools which also sell books and pianos and the private music teachers roaming about... Life is a bit of a sleepy hollow here compared to Kuala Lumpur although we have visiting orchestras now and again. We have a music department in our local university here, but again nothing close to the multitude of educational opportunities in music and various other disciplines as available where you are. In fact many young people go ‘overseas’ to West Malaysia to study... When they find a job in Kuala Lumpur, they don’t come back... The older people like it here (Richard 01)

I asked Richard about the various forms of professional development such as talks and seminars available to teachers and whether students played more frequently in public. Richard replied:

Most of our teachers work part-time and they are paid according to a percentage of the fees we collect. Many of them feel they have an easy life, they don’t bother to upgrade their musical skills and they are very protective of their own knowledge. For example, they have a habit of keeping really quiet during a question and answer session, say at the end of a seminar. Maybe they think, ‘if I raise a question it may sound stupid and the other teachers will know my weak points’, so they keep quiet from beginning to the end... small town mentality.
Sometimes they have a problem, they also smile...although they may keep quiet in a group, they can be quite vocal on a one-to-one basis. You must remember, most of the teachers that we are talking about have only completed their Form Five [Year 11] school education. They didn’t go to college or university so they may be shy or even jealous as rivals teachers may be present. Sometimes, students who don’t do well in the examinations blame the condition of the piano... Basically I think many of the teachers are quite happy with the examinations because they can keep the students enrolled with them by ensuring that they are committed to the examination preparation throughout the year. Once the results are out, they can proudly announce how well their students have done... Parents choose teachers after getting recommendations from friends and relatives and they’ll pay... Sometimes, schools like ours help sell tickets for visiting concert pianists and orchestras. Occasionally we organize small concerts to encourage our kids to play but you know, the piano is a rather lonely instrument so many just play their examination pieces. Anyway, through such concerts we spread the word. For example, one parent told their friends, ‘my little daughter is only nine years old and she is already in Grade 5’. Another parent boasted, ‘my daughter skipped one grade and finished her diploma before her Form 5 examination... this music school has very good music teachers’ (Richard 02).

5.4.1 Summary of key points

Six aspects were found common to the responses of Linda and Richard. Both administrators were of the opinion that:

(i) teachers generally earned a good living teaching part-time in music schools on a commission basis.

(ii) the music examination boards have established a sophisticated network of representatives in both East Malaysia and West Malaysia to market their services.

(iii) preparing for music examinations remains in the forefront of the education process of students and the focus of teachers.

(iv) students were generally pressed for time as they had to attend various forms of co-curricular activities in addition to taking piano lessons.

(v) concerts were organised by music schools with an aim of increasing student enrolment and promoting the sale of pianos.

(vi) parents played a significant role in supporting the system of music education.
5.5 Interview extracts and outcomes with two music lecturers, Tom and Sarah, and two undergraduate music students, Deborah and Farah

Four interviews (two with lecturers and another two with undergraduate music students) were conducted in two universities that offered music degree programmes. A music lecturer from each of the universities was contacted and briefed on the purpose of the interview. They in turn asked if any one of the undergraduate music students would like to participate. Concerns expressed by the lecturers and feedback from students with regard to their earlier training in preparation of their tertiary music education were collated. The following represents extracts and outcomes of the interviews.

5.5.1 What music lecturers say

Valerie:
As music lecturers who receive entering students into your music degree programmes, which aspects of the students’ music education do you see needing improvement? How has the current system of musical training prepared them for tertiary music education?

Tom:
Several areas of musical training needed further attention. They include a wider appreciation of musical styles, greater knowledge of orchestral repertoire and sol-fa system of training as well as more experience and participation in public performances.

Sarah:
In many ways our universities are promoting the kind of music education that is found in Malaysia. By endorsing a minimum of Grade 7 as the music entry requirement for our students, aren’t we saying we accept the training thus far? Even though we conduct auditions, the scope is very much like the ABRSM examination, where applicants have to play pieces of music in different styles, demonstrate knowledge of scales and take aural and sight-reading tests. Furthermore, within the degree programme, we adopt similar forms of assessments so aren’t we in a way extending their training to incorporate a wider scope of musicianship which is premised on the existing practices?

Valerie:
Please tell me a bit about your music department.

Tom:
We offer the three-year Bachelor of Music (Honours) programme in three majors, namely, Music Education, Music Technology and Performance. The music department started in 1997 and we have two intakes per year of about forty students in total. We have six full-time faculty and numerous part-time faculty who teach various instruments.
Sarah:
We were one of the earliest universities to offer tertiary music options in Malaysia, namely, a Bachelor of Arts Honours (Music) although we now offer a Bachelor of Music Honours in Pedagogy. Our department is part of the cultural centre of the university. It’s a small department and two of our faculty are in the USA for their doctoral studies. We use to have two intakes of around thirty-five students per year but the numbers have dwindled so we take in one batch of students per year. Ethnomusicology is our strength here and we try to inject interest in our traditional musical arts.

Valerie:
Where do your graduates normally find work?

Tom:
Several of our undergraduates are school-teachers who are ‘up-grading’ their diplomas acquired from teacher-training colleges. They have taken half-pay leave for the duration of their music studies. Upon completion, they either return to their respective secondary schools or they are sent to another school. Sadly, some do not get to teach music because it is still not part of the national secondary school curriculum although I know music is available in the 20 pilot ‘smart-schools’... Anyway, several end up teaching subjects like English language or mathematics which they also take as minors. This is because music is offered in primary schools but degree holders would be sent to secondary schools where music is largely an extra-curricular activity. Those not attached to the civil service start teaching practices whilst some seek work in music schools, colleges and recording studios. Most of our undergraduates are pianists and, ironically, those who major in Performance also end up teaching the piano. Although our students receive some orchestral training, they again have little opportunity to play their second instruments once they leave the university. As you know, the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra is closed to them and after more than three years of operations everyone knows that there are only four Malaysians who have been offered jobs in the orchestra which I personally think is a national embarrassment. Anyway, let’s say we are training future audiences for them, if you like.

Sarah:
One of the reasons for starting the pedagogy major was to address the need to formally train musicians on the art of teaching. Many of the piano teachers out there have hardly any formal training as to how to teach or what to teach except perhaps the examination pieces. This ‘trial and error’ approach adopted by many of the young music teachers needs change. Most of our undergraduate students are ‘ABRSM’ trained. Several possess the Associate Trinity College Diploma in Performance as well but we know that they’ll end up as piano teachers. Our students can also join the jazz band so at least they end up being more well-rounded musicians once they leave the university. We’ve got an up-hill battle in that the pedagogy in Malaysia is centred around Western music teaching whilst our traditional music seems to find limited following. Perhaps it’s due to a lack of job opportunities in this field but then again we are bounded by our political and cultural habits.
Judging by the views of Tom and Sarah, limitations in the field of music pedagogy and musicianship training appeared to be addressed but perhaps the same could not be said for the state of performance opportunities, both in the field of Western and non-Western music. Thus, whilst some inroads have been made into tertiary education in the field of music, graduands will perhaps find that little has changed upon completion of their studies, particularly for those who embark or return to a career in private teaching. Hence it is argued that this ‘cyclical’ phenomenon expands its horizons to include music graduates who feed back into ‘the system’ as later discussed in Chapter Seven.

5.5.2 What undergraduate music students say

Valerie:
Why do you think your parents sent you for piano lessons and how has the graded training prepared you for your tertiary music studies?

Deborah:
I think my parents gave me a chance at something that they couldn’t have. I wouldn’t be here if not for my mum. She insisted that I take every examination there was and as fast as possible. ‘Aim for a goal’, she said, ‘nobody is going to believe you unless you have a certificate to show... music lessons are so expensive so you better hurry up and finish it’, so here I am. I guess I’m fortunate to be accepted into a local university. If my parents could afford it, I’d go overseas for my music or go to a private college to do a twinning programme. But music here is OK, we learn a lot as we’ve got the basics.

Farah:
You don’t really know what’s going on when you were a kid except that you get driven to music classes every week and play those pieces given to you. Then you go to this posh hotel once a year and a white guy called the examiner ‘from England’ listens to you and off you go. Then on one Saturday in March, you go to some school with a smelly toilet as I remember, and you sit a theory exam. Then it starts all over again with the practical examination and everybody’s happy when you get this yellow certificate that says you are such and such a grade, signed by R.O Morris. It’s all so nicely packaged so nobody complains. So if you asked me if have I had been adequately prepared I’d say that if I had ‘known then’ what I see now as examination drills, I would be complaining but since I did reap the benefits of my ‘ignorance’, I can’t say that I should complain.
Valerie:
Do you see any limitations in your musical training?

Deborah:
We classical pianists can't play a thing without the score, we can't improvise and compose spontaneously at the piano unlike these jazz pianists who seem to have such great fun playing on their own or in a group. That, I think, is what our training lacks. Have you read in the papers about this guy who teaches his own 'play-by-ear' course? He claims that he has trained over 7,000 clients in his career precisely because of this lack and that his students can 'play like a pro' after attending four levels of his self-designed course, each of six months in duration. My friend's mother took some of the courses. She said that it was good fun and paid a lot of money for the package. My lecturer said that it was a sales gimmick. This guy gets his housewife students to testify to his claims that the long hard years of learning to play piano by the classical route is a waste of time and money, and gets the press to write impressive articles about his unique 'play-by-ear' method that he invented. He also 'franchises' the technique to several teachers who have to pay him commission to use his method and he advertises that is 'method' is recognised by an American university.

Farah:
The problem is that our training equips us with little else to do but to teach. Then again that's where we can make a living. Teaching is boring! I don't know how my former teacher does it — day-in and day-out facing the same children for years playing the same pieces over and over again, what a life! I like music but not like that — you know, a more creative approach to music making... By the way have you seen the recent McDonalds advertisement on television? It showed a piano teacher conducting a lesson, wielding a ruler in front of a miserable looking kid. It was in a home setting and the boy was crying as he was playing the last bar of a Sonatina, Mozart I think it was, for his bespectacled, fierce-looking piano teacher. Also in the advertisement was a young girl, depicting her sister I suppose, performing a pirouette across the living room in her tutu. Then came the punch-line where a voice-over declared, 'because there are unhappy children, McDonalds has Happy Meals'. This advert says a lot about what's happening. Whoever wrote the script must have been there!

Deborah felt grateful for the opportunity to attend music lessons. She recollected her parents' urge for her to 'hurry up' and take every examination as quickly possible so she could 'finish' her musical studies. The 'goal' appeared to the certification of musical attainment. On the other hand, Farah's recollection of her early training was one of intrigue and amusement. The image of the 'examiner from England' and the memory of being ferried to regular piano classes, together with an air of 'ignorant-bliss' evokes the master-plan of her parents.
It is argued that this cyclical process of individually preparing for the practical-theory assessment is symbolic of the act of micro-action within the larger social framework of the macro-action of participating in the examination system. As for the degree to which this ‘micro-action’ had prepared the undergraduate students for tertiary studies, there seemed some discontentment with the lack of ability to play without music notation.

Similarly, the perceived drudge of music lessons was capitalized by the media in an advertising campaign. Nevertheless, as part of the process of modernisation and Westernisation (arguably a distinction without a difference), patronizing fast-food chains is portrayed as an ‘up-market’ activity, socially compatible with learning piano and ballet. The advertisers were trying to associate the eating of a McDonald’s meal, a ‘happy’ pursuit of the aspiring middle class, with one of that class’s less pleasurable activities. The young generation are thus offered an eating experience as a substitute for possibly ‘unhappy’ pursuits such as those depicted. Sadly, the ‘reality’ as portrayed by the McDonalds advertisement of the miserable child suggested that some sections of the society have acknowledged the limitations of the system but were somehow at a loss as to how to change the system.

5.6 Recollections of a piano importer

This section analyses the recollections of a major piano importer, Patrick Hoe, portrayed in narrative style through oral history. It aims to examine the extent to which historical practice has shaped the evolution of the ‘system’ of private music education in Malaysia by analysing the recollections of one of the earliest piano importers in the country. This information will be used to determine the impact of colonial heritage and socio-historical practices in the micro-macro analysis of findings.

The Hoe family have been in the business of importing and manufacturing musical instruments for the Malaysian market for three generations. In an interview with Patrick Hoe, the owner of Wagner Piano Sdn Bhd, a number of relevant topics were discussed, ranging from the early days of the piano industry to the formation of the system of private music education in Malaysia. The following represents the key areas that emerged from the interview.

5.6.1 Early days of the piano industry

Patrick Hoe came from a family of piano-makers. His grandfather, Hoe Fook Ling, ran a piano factory in Shanghai, China. In 1920, Fook Ling established a piano factory in Singapore, being one of the first to do so. In 1951, Patrick’s father, known as Ah Choy, began assembling semi-completed pianos from the Britain, Germany and Japan trading
under the company name of Wagner Piano Company in Kuala Lumpur. Patrick reminisces,

You can call my dad a craftsman, if you like. He came to Malaya from China. His father was also a craftsman. So in a way, my brothers and I are the third generation in the piano business. Our family have been in the music line for more than three quarters of a century and yes, I believe that we are the last remaining family of piano importers and piano manufacturers in Malaysia (PIII).

According Patrick, the Malaysian piano industry started with the British and the French in China. The British and the French had factories in China producing pianos under brand names such as Robinson and Moutrie. During the period of colonial expansion, the British established numerous outlets selling musical instruments in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Patrick’s grandfather had a family in China but he came to Malaya on his own to find work. Like Patrick’s grandfather, it was quite common in those days for the breadwinner of a family to seek a living in Malaya and send earnings back to China to support the rest of the family.

Later, Patrick’s father also came to Malaya and joined one of the earliest British piano companies operating in the country, namely, the Robinson Piano Company. The company closed when the owner retired and returned to England. Patrick’s father then worked as a piano tuner and repairer with several piano shops that were owned by Singaporeans who had relatives and children living in Malaya.

I was curious to find out how the import and the retailing of pianos related historically to the early beginnings of the interest in the learning of the piano. Patrick explained that, in a sense, the learning of the piano was initially sparked by the import of the instrument, which in turn created small family-run business, selling and maintaining pianos. Thus, it could be argued that the source of the Malaysian piano industry could be traced from the movement of pianos from China to Singapore and then into Malaya. This activity heightened in the mid-1900’s. During the period of the Straits Settlements expansion by the British in Malaya, there was a demand for pianos by the wives and children of numerous British expatriate planters. Piano shops sprung up in Kuala Lumpur and Penang to meet the demand. Patrick summed up the situation succinctly:

Thus if you ask me, the whole business of the piano industry in this country is attributed to the influx of British families who came to Malaya in very large numbers to look after the rubber and oil palm estates and playing the piano was a popular form of social entertainment and "education"...Together with the instrument, these expatriate families
brought with them this peculiar form of 'music education' by assessment through music examination institutions in England such as the ABRSM and the Trinity College (P12).

5.6.2 Early piano teachers: adopting the syllabus as curriculum

Patrick talked about how music schools were established and run in the 1960's which, in effect, had set an historical precedent regarding the practice of a 'system of music education' that has manifested through the passage of time. Apparently, in the early days, expatriate music teachers such as Reverger and Ashcroft set up music schools or studios using the syllabus of the ABRSM as 'curriculum'. These schools or studios were in effect tuition centres that operated from residential premises. They were entirely owned and run by individuals as business entities with little to no interference from the state government. Teachers like the Revergers, a Dutch couple who originally came to Kuala Lumpur from Indonesia in 1947, set up reputable schools such as the Selangor Institute of Music. Back in the 1960's, according to Patrick, there were very few local music teachers. Expatriate mothers who knew how to play the piano taught their own children and some began teaching Malaysian children. Many parents wanted their children to be musically assessed and thus began the rise of the external examination boards in Malaysia. ABRSM examiners such as Robin Wood and Harold Ashcroft, decided to stay in Malaysia to set up music schools and to teach Malaysian students. They were still teaching in Malaysia until the late 1970's. These two teachers exemplified the pioneer music educators who were largely responsible for the growth in music teaching and learning, although there were also other expatriate music teachers from Britain who came to Malaysia, taught temporarily and returned home.

During the 1970's with the tremendous rise in the disposable income of Malaysians, more and more parents began sending their children for music tuition, which usually meant piano lessons. Kuala Lumpur remained the natural area for music schools and music students being both the capital (at that time) and the hub of economic activity in Malaysia. As the enrolment of piano students increased, these expatriate music teachers passed on novice piano students to the more senior music students who continued to teach, their work being based on the 'curriculum' of the music examinations to which they were accustomed. Some of these 'piano teachers' continued to take post-grade eight examinations in the form of external diploma examinations, the most popular being the Trinity College teaching and performance diplomas.
Thus, it is argued that historically, there has been little understanding of the difference between meeting the needs of examination requirements as found in a syllabus and the pedagogical approach to this end. In other words the syllabus of the graded music examinations has assumed the role of the curriculum. Curiously, a parallel can be drawn with the general education system in Malaysian schools where teachers too adopt the syllabus as ‘curriculum’. Many teachers feverishly attempt to complete the year’s syllabus in time for the numerous examinations scheduled. There are weekly and monthly tests as well as term and year end examinations. Norrizan Razali reported in the New Straits Times:

The education system provides a syllabus which dictates what is to be taught and learnt as though the only knowledge in this world is embedded within the syllabus. Doubts have long been cast over the qualitative skills of the majority of the school output... There is much consensus that the majority of these students are not able to communicate effectively and perform tasks creatively and independently (Norrizan Razali, 2000).

5.6.3 Purchasing and owning a piano

Buying a piano was a very expensive undertaking as was the taking of piano lessons. Patrick Hoe, one of the leading musical instrument retailers in Malaysia was able to provide some reasons as to why parents bought pianos rather than the relatively less expensive orchestral instruments. According to Patrick:

There weren’t many violin or wind teachers. Although we have branches and dealers throughout Malaysia, in Penang, Ipoh, Kuantan and also in East Malaysia, we didn’t sell many violins... Even today there aren't many local string and wind teachers. Sure, some of the MPO [Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra] players teach but that’s minimal and mainly centred in Kuala Lumpur. In order to have good teachers you must have early development, which we didn’t have. English examiners came to examine piano students and therefore there was a natural development, that is, some of those who studied the piano became music teachers but in the case of the strings and the wind studies, this development never took off. The piano is more versatile, it is almost like an orchestra and, if someone can sit down and play it, you can have a party. It is very difficult to learn to play the violin and play it on its own (P13).

Thus, the rise in demand for pianos corresponded with the increasing interest in playing the piano. Second-hand ‘British’ brand pianos such as Robinson and Neer were brought in from China via Singapore. There were some pianos that were shipped directly from Britain as part of the household furniture when British families were seconded to Malaya but due to the cost factor it was generally cheaper to purchase a ‘British’ piano made in China.
In the boom period of the late 1970's and 1980's, Patrick declared that thousands of pianos were sold every year, perhaps indicating the number of 'new families' who were investing in a music education for their children each year. By the 1990's increasing numbers of middle-income and lower-income families were buying pianos as a form of 'investment' in music education. Patrick noted:

I have customers who are vegetable sellers and petty traders. Sometimes, I deliver pianos and I'm shocked to find that the cost of the piano that they have just purchased from me actually exceeds the cost of all the furniture that they have in their home (P14).

This observation was reflective of the value placed on pianos. Although, pianos in Malaysia are relatively expensive, they nevertheless appear to attract ready buyers. Pianos can range from RM6,900 for an upright model to RM263,100 for a grand (The Star, 28.9.01).

Furthermore, as a point of comparison, the remuneration (according to the revised salary scale) of teachers in Malaysian public schools was published:

Trainees who graduate with diplomas from teacher training colleges from next July and have post-diploma efficiency certificates will get a [monthly] starting salary of RM1,003 [approx. RM2 to AUD$1] instead of the RM852 paid to certificate holders at present (New Straits Times, 21.7.98).

This comparison suggests that parents are willing to purchase pianos costing more than seventeen times the monthly average wage of a professional in government service. When asked why parents placed such 'value' on the instrument, Patrick was of the opinion that learning the piano was most closely associated with 'getting a music education'. It also had much to do with acquiring a 'lifestyle' that was perceived to be progressive and desirable in terms of social status. As a parent himself with children taking piano lessons, Patrick expressed:

It comes at a certain stage in life where after having gained certain material wealth, one associates oneself with a certain style of life like music, ballet and art. You become a part of the status-conscious people who are aware of the need of a form of music education for your own children and you provide what is available (P15).
Patrick also noted the pattern of purchase of music books amongst his clients. Apart from selling pianos, Wagner Music was one of the leading music books stockists in the country. However, Patrick noticed that over the years the increase in piano sales had not corresponded with an overall increase of music book sales. As a result, more and more of his stocks were examination-related, simply because of demand. Patrick declared:

We are looking at around 60% of stocks being exam-related. There isn’t a great deal of other books simply because people are not conscious of the need to widen their repertoire through a wider selection of general books. They’re confined to the three pieces in the exam. I think this is because teachers are not encouraging the children to play outside the exam pieces, partly because they have so many students. It may also be due to parental pressure on teachers to show results, as the saying goes — good teachers produce good exam results (P16).

The profitable business of selling pianos due to the high interest in learning to play the instrument encouraged another member of the Hoe family to venture into the music business. Hoe Tuck Wah, the founder of Vienna Music, manufactures Malaysian-made pianos. In 1987 Vienna Music’s manufacturing subsidiary Musical Products Sdn Bhd, under a licensing agreement, began making Challenger and Barratt & Robinson pianos for the domestic and the world markets. In a press interview, Tuck Wah reflected:

It is a strange situation. My father used to buy pianos from the British. Now we are making components for them... the production is about 1,000 pianos annually of which 55% is exported (New Straits Times, 17.4.98).

Despite the lower prices of locally made pianos, there appeared to exist a deep-rooted preference for ‘imported’ pianos.

Although Malaysian-made pianos have won five international awards... Malaysians still prefer to buy imported pianos (New Straits Times, 17.4.98).

The preference for imported pianos may be due to the notion that learning Western classical piano music and the taking of primarily British music examinations are still very much ‘foreign-orientated’ exercises. Imported pianos have been historically associated with the whole scenario of the internationalised or ‘foreign’ nature of the music education system and such being the case, parents still prefer to purchase imported pianos.
On the other hand, it could be simply due to the lack of consumer confidence in the price and quality of locally made pianos. Nevertheless, retailers of various types of pianos continue to place regular advertisements in the press to boost sales. One such pianos retailer even capitalised on the ‘examination fever’ by advertising that the top of the range of its pianos were particularly ‘ideal for piano examinations’ (Appendix H). Nevertheless, Patrick Ho believed that the piano industry in Malaysia had become rather ‘crowded’ with new and reconditioned pianos imported from Japan and Korea in addition to ‘name-your-own brand’ pianos in the market. However, he opined that in a developing environment like Malaysia, the piano business is still a lucrative industry unlike more developed markets like Japan and Europe where sales of pianos have dropped significantly. This may be related to the increasing numbers of Malaysian children learning to play the piano. As to the future of the piano industry in Malaysia and his personal plans, Pattrick states:

It’s a lot more competitive now to sell pianos due to the rising prices but the Teaching business is pretty lucrative… As for my family, my wife and children are now staying in Australia. I’ve sort of semi-retired and my brothers monitor the piano business that we have built up in Malaysia and Singapore… As for handing down the business I doubt if any of my children will return from Australia so it’s likely that my brothers’ children will carry on the family business (P17).

5.6.4 Cultural difference: music that is heard in public versus music that is played in private

On the issue of cultural differences in attitudes to performance, Patrick was of the opinion that parents see little relationship between playing or practising in the privacy of the home and playing in public. Neither did there appear to be a wider understanding of the need to acquire ‘musical taste’ through the experience of concert attendance. Patrick observed:

It is true that students don’t seem to perform in public. Well, I think that this is because music played on the piano is still perceived as a ‘Western’ culture and not an Asian culture. The reason that there aren’t many performances by Malaysian pianists is because there isn’t a big deal of interest from the general public as such. I suppose it’s not part of the culture. They study music just like another learning subject. The parents who have not been exposed to music here have not been much exposed to the Western culture of attending concerts… They nevertheless send their children for a music education because they know that music education is a ‘plus’ as far as their children’s future is concerned but not for their own benefit. Many thus don’t involve themselves in attending concerts
and so it's very difficult for children to go to concerts on their own or organise concerts with their peers (P18).

There are determined parents who place a great deal of emphasis on their children's educational upbringing and this includes the acquisition of an education in music. Furthermore, there appears to be a common reference to 'Western culture' when referring to the social practice of attending concerts and playing in public. There appears to be a clear difference in perception between 'music that is played in public' and 'music that is studied on a private basis'. In other words, there is a distinction in cultural understanding between public performance as a social act and private performance as an educational act. The social significance of learning 'Western' music is itself symbolic and made possible by cultural attitudes towards learning *per se*. Patrick's comments appear to support this observation:

If you look carefully into the music education in this country, you will notice that the children are not very vocal about musical styles and preferences. You ask these kids what they listen to and they'll tell you 'Hitz FM'. They learn classical music because their parents want them to, often not of their own choice. Many parents want their children to do music because it's sort of an 'in' thing in terms of social progression rather than learn music for the sake of mastering an art form; again I see it as a cultural difference (P19).

### 5.6.5 In search of a better lifestyle

We deliberated at length about this notion of 'cultural differences' in the broader social context. Patrick talked about his experiences being the son of a piano repairer. As in many Chinese families, there was little differentiation between work and play. Home was also the family business premises. There were pianos and piano parts competing with the residents for space. Pianos were available for hire, pianos were being tuned and repaired, and termite-infested pianos were being rebuilt. Patrick's early education in the trade was almost exclusively 'visual', so to speak. He and his six brothers learnt by 'seeing and listening' but, strangely enough, none of them became 'performers' but rather they became competent piano technicians and piano tuners. Patrick recalled that the family used to call their 'method' of tuning pianos as 'Chinese traditional training' by using perfect pitch listening through beats as in the 'British way'. They did not use tuning gadgets but relied on memory or 'memorising the correct number of beats' rather than through a more systematic way of listening to beats to determine the thirds and sixths, and the fourths and fifths. Patrick's father also repaired violins and in those days there were no 'certificates' to prove that one was competent in a particular skill.
Perhaps this lack represented one of the historical reasons for parents to insist on some form of 'recognition' by way of certification in any skills training undertaken and this includes the learning of the piano. Patrick concluded with a succinct observation:

Thus this fascination with the piano continues. The idea of one's child being able to play the piano like the 'Mat Salleh's' [slightly pejorative term for a European] children seemed infinitely attractive particularly to the increasingly wealthy urban community, who themselves are descendents of migrants from China in search of a better lifestyle — like my father and grandfather... As time passes, everyone is comfortable, so we continue this tradition of sending kids to piano lessons and this is what we see today as our Malaysian music education scene. So it all fits in nicely (P110).

5.6.6 Summarising the key points

This interview yielded relevant information pertaining to the historical development of the Malaysian piano industry. Foremost, it represented an important documentation of the views and recollections of a major musical instrument importer in Malaysia. Primary data was obtained through the narration of the participant's personal involvement and experience in his family's piano import and retailing business, dating back to the middle of the twentieth century. The interview also provided valuable information as to how and why early pianos were brought into Malaya. It identified the link between the availability and popularity of the piano and its early teaching-learning practices in the country. The participant's recollections represented the documentation of an 'oral history' of what it was like to be involved in the early development of the piano industry in Malaysia.

Several of the key points were presented as part of the 'interview story' cast in narrative form against a minutely observed portrayal of the social setting in which the subject lived. In doing so, the analysis of the interview data provided insights of the 'extra-musical' elements of learning to play the piano in relation to the socio-cultural nexus of social behaviour. For instance, the social significance of owning a piano and sending one's child for piano lessons was viewed as a reflection of the desire for upward social mobility. The analysis of interview data further highlighted the manner in which musical assessments were associated initially with the expatriate families and later with music examiners of the British music examination boards who retired and set up music schools in the country. This explained the historical-colonial practice of taking music examinations as a means of assessing musical ability, which therein became synonymous with acquiring a music education.
5.7 Impressions of a music book publisher’s representative

The next section captures the impressions of Paul, a senior representative of Rhythm Publications, Malaysia's leading music book publisher. The interview session revealed that this participant possessed formative insights into the role and significance of music examinations in relation to the teaching and learning of music in Malaysia. Paul's views were founded upon his wide interaction with music retailers and music teachers throughout the country. Several of such views were substantiated by press reports as provided. Furthermore, Paul's visits to the numerous music schools and communication with music teachers had contributed to his 'impressions' of members within the Malaysian music fraternity with whom he had networked closely for more than five years.

5.7.1 Nationwide tour

In April 1999, Rhythm Publications embarked on a nationwide music education awareness campaign in conjunction with their music books promotion. Rhythm is a public company, listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange with five subsidiaries involved in the publishing and distributing of music books, children's books, educational books, novels and paper-based stationary products. The press reported:

Rhythm's export markets include Hong Kong, Singapore, Brunei, China, and the Philippines... Plans are also in place to ship Rhythm's products to Australia... Rhythm Consolidated chalked up earnings of RM68 million [approx. AUD$34 million] for the year ended June 30, 1997 (New Straits Times, 13.5.98).

For three months, Paul and two other representatives of Rhythm Publications travelled throughout Malaysia visiting music schools and music books retailers. The aim was to survey the music books market and design new products to meet market demands. Paul declared:

I talked to so many music teachers, some in small groups of two to three teachers whilst others up to groups of fifty participants, listening to them and voicing my opinions... Different music teachers look for different things so we try to gauge their sentiments towards certain types of foreign music (MPR1).

Paul's regular contact with various musical associates throughout Malaysia confirmed that learning the piano and taking yearly examinations was a common practice throughout the country. Similarly, there did not seem to be an evolving culture of performing in public and attending concerts. Paul was also of the opinion that the
institutions of higher learning have reinforced the examination culture rather than having promoted the education of music through musical performance. He declared:

Even though we don’t have statistics of the number of music teachers in the country... based on our research and newsletter distribution to music schools and private teachers, we are looking at easily around three to four thousand piano teachers all over the country submitting candidates for the ABRSM examinations, even more, we don’t know... Then there are groups of teachers who also send their students to other examination boards such as the Guildhall School of Music and the London School of Music... the universities are turning out more music teachers whilst others colleges are conducting twinning programmes so the list goes on... This paper chase is getting out of hand... what I see is more certificate churning without greater interest in performing or creating a more lively music making scene (MPR2).

Paul seemed rather concerned that every year, increasing numbers of Malaysian children undertake music examinations. Thus, as more institutions of higher learning, both private and public, offer tertiary programmes in music, the graded music certificates offered by the music examination boards will assume even greater ‘market’ value as they are commonly used as entrance qualifications.

5.7.2 Focus on examination related repertoire

Paul compared Malaysia’s ‘inherited’ music education practice to that of the American model where there are no ‘graded’ examinations. During his music studies in the United States, he recalled that, although his peers did not possess ‘certificates’ they performed remarkably well on their principle instruments. In the course of his work he couldn’t help but compare these American musicians with the Malaysian grade eight and diploma holders. Paul lamented:

I find that the knowledge our musicians have is just not adequate... You ask me why? I think it’s more to do with the environment in which our musicians grow up. I don’t think it’s because we don’t have our own music examination system. Even if we have a system, it will be still be the same if it’s the same format... They just don’t have the repertoire (MPR3).

Paul was of the opinion that it was not the fault of the examination system but rather the society which used it and the problems would not be solved even if Malaysia had its own examination board. Nevertheless, on the same subject, one irate ‘Music Teacher’ wrote to The Star newspaper with her complaints about the ABRSM and suggested that it was high time Malaysia set up its own music examination board to improve matters.
Thousands of Malaysian children are about to take their music exams with the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). They [the examiners] stay in our best hotels and go back without speaking to or meeting local teachers. Sometimes the ABRSM sends a speaker over to give one or two seminars in the big towns. These speakers seem to think Malaysian teachers are capable of understanding only the simplest things. There are many teachers in Malaysia who are fed up of paying large sums of money to the ABRSM (and the costs are even higher since payments need to be converted into English pounds) in order for their pupils to sit a short examination and to hear patronising English people telling them what a lovely country Malaysia is...Is not Malaysia a world power in music? It has a magnificent orchestra...and some of the best music teachers. Isn’t it about time we told the ABRSM with its colonial mentality to leave us alone and to set up our own music examinations? (The Star, 10.5.99).

Two days later, Liew Siew Teip, a lecturer from the Department of English, University Malaya, responded to the above comments.

Teachers and students who get sucked into the ABRSM framework participate in a mindless series of examinations, which focus primarily on technique and mere head knowledge and there is little encouragement for a bright music student to develop his or her musicianship. Music Teacher’s assertion that Malaysia has ‘some of the best music teachers’ around might well be true, but I would like to remind us all that we also have some of the worst music teachers anywhere. Part of the reason for this is the rigid framework imposed by the ABRSM examinations which stifles creativity...Many music teachers in this country are, after all, products of the ABRSM certificate mill...I disagree with Music Teacher’s suggestion that Malaysia is ‘already a world power in music’. The orchestra set up by Petronas is a step in the right direction...Let us, however, not forget that most of the players are foreigners...Without a decent local framework in place to oversee the development and implementation of a proper music education in this country, it is not likely that we are going to see the emergence of a flourishing musical culture (The Star, 12.5.99).

Paul then talked about the effects of the economic downturn in 1997 which reduced the general buying power of music teachers and parents. However, although the overall sales of music books had declined, the sale of materials relating to music examinations, according to Paul, had increased. This was due to more ‘focused buying’ where parents concentrated on buying music books that were deemed ‘necessary’. The practice of photocopying music was also rampant. Paul commented:

If it is not an examination-orientated book, it doesn’t seem to be able to sell very well...Then there’s the issue of photocopying and pricing...what sells is what’s cheap! For example, we have been publishing a lot of theory books to support the ABRSM syllabus and even Trinity College. Those books sell well...so as a marketing strategy for us to sell, say a book on ‘Harmony’, what we do is to add the sentence, ‘based on the ABRSM syllabus’ and it’ll sell like hotcakes (MPR4).
Nevertheless, Paul seemed at times, rather baffled at the sceptical attitudes by some more qualified teachers towards his company's new publications in the area of popular music. Rhythm Publications also acts as one of the wholesalers of ABRSM publications supplying music schools and smaller retailers in the northern states. It buys in bulk from Penerbit Fajar Bakti, the local representative company of Oxford University Press which owns the sole distributorship for Associated Board Publications. Paul's was able to forecast book orders from music schools based on the examination period. For example, the sales of theory related books and ABRSM test papers would peak by the second Saturday of March when examinations were held. Ten to twenty thousand copies of test papers would be sold every month from November through to February. Although the cost of the British imported books has escalated over recent years, Malaysian parents are willing to pay the high prices for examination-related materials. Paul declared:

I recently did some research and found out that Malaysians are spending literally in the tens of millions dollars on imported ABRSM examination music materials (MPR5).

When asked if there appeared to be a difference in purchasing attitudes among music teachers in urban areas with those in smaller towns and also in East Malaysia, Paul responded:

The main difference I noted was the feeling of being deprived or 'left out' in arts events which seem to mainly centre in Kuala Lumpur... Yes, they are more eager to seek new books and publications, in fact anything that can help them improve their teaching, even if these imported books are more expensive (MPR6).

However, Paul remained sceptical of the possibilities for change in the use of music examinations. He offered a further example:

The ABRSM have created a graded jazz series but do Malaysians really understand what jazz is or will it become just another set of examinations to grapple with? (MPR7)

When asked why there was such reluctance to purchase music to widen one's repertoire, Paul likened music examinations to school examinations. Rhythm Publications had also attempted to supply music workbooks to schools but bureaucracy limited its fruition. He found that music in many schools was lacking:
Yes, we are supposed to have had music in primary schools for the past fifteen to twenty years but not every school conducts music classes. Rural schools don’t have much of these programmes going on so it is not implemented nationwide (MPR8).

He likened the attitudes of expanding repertoire to the reading habits of students in the general education system. Why do they buy books at all? Paul declared:

‘Because I need these books to help me pass my exams!’ Just like our exam-orientated school system. Students buy exam support books and read for the sake of passing exams...the same goes for music (MPR9).

5.7.3 Career in teaching rather than in performing

During school visits, Paul had on occasions asked both music and non-music students about their perception of music as a career. He noted:

If you ask around, kids will tell you that they want to be doctors, lawyers or one of the ‘highly esteemed profession’. I see this similar situation in East Malaysia and in West Malaysia, almost throughout the country... Then again you don’t even hear music students saying, ‘I want to be a conductor’ or ‘I want to be a performer’ (MPR10).

This implied that although thousands of students attend private music lessons, the prospect of a career in music is perhaps less attractive when compared to more established professions. Teaching appears to be the main career option open to Malaysian musicians. A case in point is the example of a Malaysian concert pianist who teaches for a living. Flavia de Souza returned to Malaysia after many years of residence in Paris. She performs occasionally and teaches in her own studio with an assistant. As with many qualified musicians, the music examination system has become very much a part of their professional stock-in-trade. In a press interview Flavia commented:

We prepare our students when we feel they are ready to take on an exam... A music exam should just become an extension of what they learn and not something that defines our ability... We pride ourselves on achieving excellent results in the theory exams, which are held annually in March. I am proud to say that we get mostly distinctions (New Straits Times, 23.10. 01).

Another well-known Malaysian born pianist, Denis Lee has taken up residence in Britain as a concert pianist and a music examiner. Lee has on numerous occasions returned to Malaysia to perform. His perception of the musical knowledge of his Malaysian audience is somewhat reflected in the following statement:
I was very glad to have been invited to perform there [Ipoh]...
What I did was, before the performance, I talked about the pieces. I wanted the audience to see the composers as human beings, give them an idea of what their lives had been like and what they were trying to do when they composed a particular piece... But if I were to do something like that in London or New York, I would have been ridiculed (The Star, 28.10.01).

Many competent concert pianists do not live in Malaysia as performance opportunities are few and far between. Muzaffar Abdullah is another example of a Malaysian concert pianist who resides in Paris, returning to Malaysia on occasions to perform and conduct masterclasses. Hence performing for a living does not present itself as a viable career option in Malaysia. Although one may be trained as a performer, parents place greater value on a musician’s ability to teach and this is measured by the outcome of their children’s music examinations rather than their performing ability. This supports the notion that one does not necessarily need to perform regularly in public in order to teach well. Therefore, it is not unusual for parents, students and teachers to discount the need to perform in public or to attend concerts as part and parcel of a music education since these activities have not contributed significantly to the ‘lived experiences’ of the community.

5.7.4 Permits to perform

Bureaucratic limitations contribute to the lack of public performances in Malaysia. Permits from various governmental departments are required when a public gathering is intended. Foreign musicians require immigration clearance before they are allowed to perform or teach in Malaysia. The rationale for the action stemmed from complaints by local bands that foreign musicians were hired to perform in public thus depriving local musicians of a living. As a result stringent guidelines were issued to organisers of public events. The authorities do not differentiate between what is generally considered as ‘high art’ music and popular music. Interviews with the police are imposed on anyone wishing to organise concerts. This is to further ensure that political agendas are avoided. Paul shared his experience:

I remember, I had to organise a recital in Penang recently. I had to go to the Fire Department, the Police Department and a host of governmental organisations securing different permits. They wanted to know that the songs being performed are not political in nature and it’s not against the government or anything subversive in that sense... I really fail to see what that has to do with the concert because the concert hall is an approved public venue... Then there’s the inland revenue department for entertainment tax clearance before tickets are sold and the immigration department deposits for foreign performers. These are the kinds of bureaucracy that put people off from organising events (MPR11).
These constraints serve to deter the organisation of public concerts. This is especially so when there is generally no profitable gain to be made in the organisation of art events. It is argued that such conditions indirectly support the existing music education system as presented in the macro-analysis of findings. Paul further commented:

And when we do organise concerts, it's so difficult to get people to attend, yet there are so many music teachers and music students... Many times I attend piano concerts and I see the same faces sitting in different places... Teachers and parents complain that there are not enough concerts to create greater musical awareness but when we do organise one, we can't even fill a hall like 'Komtar', which has six hundred seats... My question is, where are the music teachers and students? (MPR12).

Paul believed that there should be greater support of the arts from the corporate sector. Here, the public perception of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) is examined. Although the MPO has received accolades for its frequent and outstanding performances, some Malaysian musicians regard it as a 'foreign' orchestra since the majority of its players are non-Malaysians. A Japanese visitor, Shoji Sakamoto wrote to the press:

Recently, I went with great excitement and expectation to see the Philharmonic Orchestra from Malaysia but was disappointed to see a European orchestra. We in Japan have seen many European orchestras and it was nothing unusual for us. My friends said the orchestra was really from Malaysia. Is it really representing Malaysia? (The Star, 6.12.01).

Then, there was the issue of the dress code for attending the concerts in the orchestra's prestigious concert hall. A concert attendee, calling himself/herself MAT MPO, wrote:

We are so fortunate to have this excellent world-class orchestra resident in Kuala Lumpur, courtesy of Petronas... However, I do feel that the orchestral performances are made too formal and elitist by the imposition of a dress code requiring lounge suits or national dress... On a recent Saturday evening, I observed a group of some 50 students who had not been briefed about the dress code. They were made to wear ill-fitting jackets and shirts supplied by the management. They looked untidy and I am sure they felt uncomfortable. I wonder whether any of them will come again (The Star, 28.11.01).

There appears to be a deliberate message that Western classical music is 'high art' and elitist in nature. The orchestra is funded by the national oil company and housed in a prestigious shopping mall. Attendance at its concerts is presumably aimed at portraying an image of a social activity befitting those in the upper echelons of society.
One might even comment that some Malaysians watch in awe as foreign musicians demonstrate how Western classical music is best interpreted whilst ‘others participate’ in practising Western art music making by playing the piano. Ramona Tahir provided a plausibly explanation:

Perhaps it would not be too far fetched for one to conclude that the sense of elitism, which surrounds classical Western music today in Malaysia has its roots in the days of British colonialism (Ramona Tahir, 1996, p.36).

5.7.5 Religious sentiments

One of the complexities that appears to hinder the promotion of music on a national scale is the issue of the musical performance and the practice of music per se under extreme Islamic teachings. This undercurrent of caution was felt by Paul when he visited the state of Kelantan which is governed by an fundamental Islamic political party, PAS. Paul commented:

Now there’s an additional issue of religious sentiments fanned by the Islamic fundamentalists, particularly in PAS run states. There are those who regard music as being haram [forbidden] because it encourages negative influences such as drinking and dancing... So this nationwide music education tour told us a lot of what’s still happening (MPR13).

Issues concerning the role of music in an Islamic nation such as Malaysia was the subject of a major research study by Ramona Tahir. She stated that:

music education is permissible provided that it occurs in contexts and under conditions sanctioned by Islam... there is a need for an alternative term for ‘music’ because of its negative connotations in the Islamic world (Ramona Tahir, 1996, p.iv).

Ramona Tahir was also of the opinion that:

Malaysia’s status as a Muslim country has caused the controversy to have a major impact on music education in its schools. The controversy has led to an unfavourable opinion towards music by Muslims and has contributed to a troubled situation for music education in Malaysian schools (Ramona Tahir, 1996, p. 270).
Furthermore, there was an issue as to why the minority of non-Muslim students outshone the majority of Muslim students in local universities. Kadir Jasin wrote:

As for the absence of a sufficiently high number of Bumiputeras [Muslim ‘sons of the soil’] among the high achievers, the reason cited by local universities were that the best Bumiputra students are sent abroad... a Universiti Kebangsaan professor gave a more alarming reason... [he said that] they spent too much time on religious activities (New Sunday Times, 19.7.98).

5.7.6 Summary of key points

In the course of the interview, Paul expressed various concerns. Firstly, he believed that Malaysian music teachers in general had limited knowledge of repertoire. There seemed to be a lack of understanding of musical styles other than those relating to music examinations, comparing his own experience of musicians in the United States where he was trained. Secondly, he felt that music teachers, parents and students were focusing excessively on music examinations. He was concerned that music publications have become increasingly examination orientated in meeting market demands. Thirdly, he felt that the government could do more to support music education in schools and likened the system of examinations in music to that of the general education system of the country. Lastly, he believed that bureaucracy hindered the promotion of public performances. Also, religious sentiments held by some Muslims did not support public music-making nor the promotion of music in schools. This indirectly contributed to the limited efforts in organising public performances by concert promoters which in turn thwarts attempts by some music educators who wish to promote a culture of performing in public and concert attendance as a means of inculcating a more holistic understanding of the meaning of an education in music.

5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter comprised the analysis of data from survey questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data was analysed and explained through charts and tables whilst the analysis of qualitative data was described in narrative form. In addition, the outcomes of the survey questionnaires returned by piano teachers, parents and students were further summarised into key points. This was followed by extracts of thirteen interviews which were conducted with assessment providers’ representatives, music school administrators, music lecturers and undergraduate students as well as a piano importer and a music publisher’s representative. Its purpose was to highlight the most succinct aspects of the primary data collected upon which selected techniques of protocol analysis were applied.
The main points were then highlighted at the end of each set of interviews. To summarise, these emergent key points may be collectively grouped as information pertaining to:

(i) the comparative views on musical practices and experiences sourced from piano teachers, parents and music students.

(ii) the issues associated with the over-focus on music examinations as highlighted by representatives of the main assessment providers operating in the country.

(iii) the business perspectives of two music school administrators.

(iv) feedback from undergraduate music students as they review the ‘usefulness’ of their early musical training.

(v) the narrative of a piano importer whose recollections of his father’s piano retailing business during the early days of the piano industry, represented an important contribution in the documentation of oral history.

(v) the state of the music education system as viewed by a music publisher’s representative who has had considerable contact with a network of music teachers and music book retailers throughout the country.

This chapter thus represents the analysis of data that was solicited from the private domain. In the following chapter, data acquired from the public domain will be presented and analysed.
CHAPTER SIX

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA ACQUIRED FROM THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

6.1 Chapter overview
This chapter analyses data acquired from six public events and two media releases that were identified as being significant to the phenomena studied. The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part is represented by two occasions of participant observation where I was an invited member of both panels of speakers. The first occasion was a public music education forum, which was attended by about two hundred music teachers, parents and students. The second occasion was a current events programme broadcast on national television. The television programme was called ‘Global’ and the topic of the discussion was ‘Music and Society’. These two events highlighted several major issues that were pertinent to the study. In addition, relevant/similar issues published in the press interject the narration of events.

The second part comprises four critical incidents. Three of the incidents were graduation ceremonies organised by different music examination boards. The fourth incident was the announcement of the results of a national piano competition. These incidents were deemed ‘critical’ to the investigation as they revealed paradoxes that illustrated the phenomena being studied. The third part examines the social significance of two vignettes. The first vignette is a press photograph of a ‘graduation’ ceremony held by a kindergarten and the second vignette is an advertisement by an institution of higher learning published in a national daily newspaper.
6.2 Music Education Forum

On 21 November 1998 a Music Education Forum was held in Penang. The panel comprised Mark Oysten (MO), conductor of the Penang Symphony Orchestra and Choir, Jason Tye (JT) and Cynthia Joseph (CJ), two lecturers from University Sains Malaysia and myself (VR). The moderator was Wilson Quah (WQ), a representative of music publisher, Rhythm Publications, the organiser of the forum. The aim of the forum was to examine the state of private music education in Malaysia. The following sections present an analysis of the main issues discussed with extracts of pertinent comments, quoted in the first person's voice and coded by acronyms in numerical order of occurrence.

6.2.1 Learning the piano: a symbol of social status and a cultural heritage

The custom of learning the piano appeared to have evolved into a 'status symbol' within Malaysian society, so much so that the popular practice of children being sent to piano lessons at a young age had become a 'tradition' in many Malaysian upper-class and middle-class families. Jason said:

> I think that the piano is a favourite instrument because it is an easy instrument to start with. The child does not have to 'create' the notes but just depress the keys and instantly the child can make music. The piano is a symbol of standard for a lot of families. The instrument has become a furniture piece. However, I believe that parents know that there are other musical instruments that their child can take up but they select the piano — I still think that it's mainly cultural (JT1).

On the issue of culture and practice, Wilson Quah, the forum moderator, brought up the common 'misconception' that learning music necessarily meant learning the piano. He remarked:

> In Malaysia and in Asia, I notice that we have this very funny thing about us. The first thing we have in mind when we think of learning an instrument is the piano. Somehow, there seems to be a misconception that to learn music, one should learn the piano and then end up being a good music teacher (WQ1).
Furthermore, the notion that students practised the piano without really understanding the context of the composition was debated. Jason observed:

Many students play Bach, Mozart and Haydn but they have little idea of the context in which the music was written. There is a lack of interest in the historical background of the music... at times not even the title of the piece or the name of the composer is known, simply that the piece belonged to List A, B or C in the ‘red’ ABRSM music examination book... Students are told to learn and reproduce the notes correctly. Most of the time the focus is to get the notes right, get the fingering right and play in the right time (JT2).

Jason shared his own experience as a child learning the piano lessons. He reminisced:

I remember my own childhood... the piano was put in front of me. I was told to practise and practise for the exam and that was what I did. One day I decided to test my mum to see how much she knew about music. I sat down and opened a page but not playing the piece in front of me but something else. She was happy going around thinking that I was practising my exam piece... Years later, I tried to figure out why I did that and I now realise one thing, I didn’t know what else I was supposed to do other than do what I was told. I was going through the motions... My teacher said, ‘one hour a day’, so we did it! I still remember this neighbour of mine, she repeated the same piece from 5 pm to 6 pm daily, playing it again and again and again (JT3).

Some members of the panel were of the opinion that this behaviour seemed congruent with the teaching-learning culture of Malaysian students in general. It was argued that the lack of critical thinking among students was attributed to the examination focus of the public education system. For example, this over emphasis on examination results have been echoed in the press:

The objective of schooling must shift from being taught to pass exams to learning for knowledge and acquiring skills. The nation’s reservoir of creative and knowledge-loving people will soon be depleted if we continue to maintain an exam-oriented education system... the emphasis on exams is potent. It has created a vicious cycle that has got the entire society worshipping grades (Norrizan Razali, 22.4.00).
This had resulted in the widespread practice of ‘spoon-feeding’ by teachers who in turn blamed this approach on the system of education in Malaysia, which is largely centred on an objective rather than a procedural style of assessment, focusing on rote learning rather than the application of knowledge. Whilst the Ministry of Education has acknowledged the need to address the shortcomings of the education system, many educationists and teachers questioned the pace, structure and content of the reforms and also the manner in which they had been implemented. Zakiah Koya of the New Straits Times reported:

Radical changes to the education system are being put in place to prepare young Malaysians for the next millennium, but those in the profession feel there is still much fine-tuning to be done... Educationist Omar Salahuddin, for instance, thinks the present system is still focused on termly assessments to the exclusion of anything remotely process orientated... Teachers say they have little option but to bow to demands and spoon-feed students so they can pass these examinations. They acknowledge that they are part of a system which is only interested in seeing students pass with flying colours instead of helping them become functional individuals... Without some form of consistency in the formulation and development of a really functional system, the ‘winds of change merely stir the dust, which will then settle back again, after the breeze has gone, into very much the same places as before’, says Omar (Zakiah Koya, 14.3.99).

Returning to the forum, the panel deliberated on the limitations of the Malaysian education system and how this examination culture had permeated through the fabric of society in shaping general attitudes towards the purpose of learning. Cynthia added:

I can’t comment on specific aspects of music, being a child psychologist by training... however, we all know that our education system places too much emphasis on examinations. I feel that the joy of learning and teaching is lost in the whole process. The way that a child starts to love a subject is affected by its early teaching... by all your comments it appears that music education is not spared (CJ1).
Thus, with regard to the issue of a lack of critical prowess amongst students, the same could be said for the existence of limited interest in acquiring a critical understanding of the style and interpretation of musical pieces studied. The panel then discussed the aesthetic benefits of learning music for its own sake and inevitably the focus returned to the habits of Malaysian parents where students are ferried to piano classes as a matter of routine. At times, parents appeared to be preoccupied with equipping their children with numerous forms of co-curricular activities, many of which also adhere to graded levels of learning and testing. Jason conjectured:

I believe that parents in Malaysia and Singapore suffer from a kiasu syndrome [popularly understood by Malaysians as ‘keeping up with the Joneses’]. Friends of mine send their children for all sorts of conceivable tuition — ballet, computer, music and art classes... Parents are getting paranoid, preparing their kids for the adult world (JT3).

Much like piano lessons, large numbers of Malaysian children undertake graded ballet examinations validated by the Royal Academy of Dance, London, but curiously, there are few public dance performances by these students (several similarities can be drawn between the ‘examination culture’ of ballet students and music students but perhaps this is within the scope of another study). Thus, this ‘fear’ of being less competitive at school has resulted in a mushrooming of various tuition centres all over the country. Such tuition centres profit from parents’ concern that their children may be left behind at school. Norrizan Razali reported:

At the home front, parents are not good enough parents if they fail to place their children at tuition centres. At tuition centres the schools’ emphasis on exams is meticulous replicated... Preparing for exams is big business indeed. Exams are lauded for their financial value to those who make a living out of exams and for the pride and joy they bring to parents and schools whose children and students pass the exams with innumerable A’s (Norrizan Razali, 22.4.00).
Back to the forum, there was a debate on the teaching-learning culture of Malaysian students and further reference was made to the national education system which was originally inherited from the British during the colonial period. Thus, the examination-orientation of the school system appeared to have manifested in several teaching-learning practices in Malaysian society and this included the teaching and the learning of the piano.

Discussions on the issue of historical practice evolving into a form of ‘culture’ emerged. There was a deliberation on whether the learning and teaching of Western music had developed into a ‘traditional identity’ for many modern Malaysians as a result of its ‘inheritance’ from common practice since the colonial days. Perhaps the acquisition of Western piano repertoire had become a ‘cultural heritage’ for many upper and middle-class Malaysians.

Mark Oyster provided a valuable perspective from the point of an expatriate musician. Engaged to train one of the very few youth orchestras in the country, Mark had gained valuable insights into the music education system in Malaysia. He observed that students seemed nonchalant in equating their knowledge of repertoire with the number of examinations that they had taken. Mark commented:

I’ve been in Malaysia a number of years now… my job is to get different people together and play music but when I ask a Malaysian child, ‘how much music have you played?’—she’ll say quite innocently, ‘Oh, I’ve been learning for four years so that makes twelve pieces’ (MO1).

Mark was concerned with the ‘meaning’ and ‘purpose’ of learning to play a musical instrument, comparing the attitude of Malaysian students to music students in ‘Western’ countries. Mark remarked:

When wc talk about learning and playing an instrument we should really be speaking of the same thing. Hard work and play is not so distant… the difference between east and west is that the western concept of learning is learning for the sake of learning – I’m not sure if that’s the case here (MO2).
On the ‘use’ of music examination, Mark appeared disturbed that several former British colonies had adopted a system of musical assessment that seemed contrary to the original aim of this system. He was of the opinion that such inappropriate use had changed the scope and purpose of learning Western classical music from the sheer joy of playing a musical instrument to a ‘paper chase’ for many candidates. Mark expressed his concerns:

Speaking as an expatriate musician, I think Malaysians need to address a particular issue, that is, you need to know what you want with Western classical music. I think that presently Malaysia and a number of other countries have taken up an exam system that has grown up in a different culture in a different part of the world. I think that you aspire to compete with us but don’t often understand what it means to us... certificates mean different things to different people. I have worked in the UK for over 20 years and was never ever asked for the piece of paper (MO3).

Jason then described Malaysians as ‘creatures of habit’ who lived in a society which needed to be rewarded for every effort made. The reward, preferably packaged as a ‘tangible’ asset, represented a form of justification for time spent and financial expenditure incurred. Thus, in the case of music studies, recognition of work successfully completed in the form of certification of musical attainment seemed apt to many parents. The panel debated why numerous parents, students and music teachers supported the system of music education as exists. Jason cogently termed the action of parents as a ‘contingency plan’ for equipping their children with a possible vocational career and expressed his views on such ‘indulgences’. Jason commented:

Unfortunately, a lot of students who have passed grade 8 can only play their three pieces a year... thus I ask this question, to what extent have we indulged ourselves in this examination culture? For many parents music lessons are seen as a contingent plan for their children. If they fail to become doctors or lawyers, teaching music is seen as a ‘way out’, and why not? It is a good way of earning a generous income, plus you are your own boss... Many parents seem to have a whole programme worked out for their children’s future, from age 4 or 5, they are sent to piano lessons. If their children fail in ‘academic studies’ they can always go back to music — I call it society’s ‘fall-back-plan’. I think the whole mentality has to change (JT4).
Mark on the other hand attempted to explain the purpose of music examinations, at least from a ‘European’ perspective, to the audience. He implied that Malaysians had misunderstood the role of musical assessment, saying:

Exams attempt to provide a broad curriculum and at least a first check that children are having a broad education... you need use it properly. Why don’t you work out a role of what these exams mean to you in Malaysia? Is it just to get into university or can it enrich you culturally?... In Europe we see music as that which serves to enrich a person and society (MO4).

Further to Marks comments, Wilson offered his views as to why the ‘culture’ of attending concerts was not prevalent among members of the public. He stressed that the number of music students was not commensurate with the number of concert activities in Malaysia and there appeared to be a general lack of interest in attending concerts. Furthermore, music teachers seemed ‘pressured’ by parental expectations that their children passed regular music examinations. There also did not seem to be a perceived correlation between the importance of attending concerts and passing music examinations. Wilson commented:

We don’t have many concerts outside Kuala Lumpur. Here you have to search for a concert to go to... overseas you’ll find posters at every corner telling you about concerts... There are thousands of music students in this country and hundreds of music teachers alone in this area but you don’t see them going to concerts... when we do organise concerts by visiting international performers, we only manage to get an audience of about six hundred, often less... we see many of the same faces sitting in different places of the concert hall. The layman on the street doesn’t seem to be interested... Furthermore, piano teachers tell us, ‘we are feeling the pressure, it’s a paranoia, getting the students to pass exams... some parents are not so approachable. They’ll say, ‘I know what’s best for my kids when it comes to their welfare, so I want them to take exams. My friend’s children passed and they didn’t even practise much’. The problems surrounding the use of exams have been around for sometime now (WQ2).
The panel agreed that Malaysians seem comfortable with emulating social
behaviours which are perceived as good practice and that the system of music
examinations will continue to gain wide acceptance as a reliable measurement and
as an international recognition of musical ability. The forum ended on a positive
note in that music educators are becoming increasing aware of the issues
surrounding the (mis)use of music examinations. The forum concluded that music
educators had the task of ‘educating’ the public in that music examinations
represent a form of a ‘status check’ as to the technical and musical development
of a student rather than an end in itself.

6.3 Music and Society on ‘Global’: a current affairs programme

On Sunday 16 April 2000 at 9.30 pm, Television Malaysia Two aired its weekly
current affairs programme entitled ‘Global’. Each week, professionals in selected
fields receive invitations from the programme producers to discuss various topics
of public interest. Razak Baginda (RB) hosted the evening’s programme with the
following opening statement, aired ‘live’ and with a studio audience:

Good evening viewers. Welcome to ‘Global’. Tonight’s topic
is ‘Music and Society’, the educational value of music being
the main thrust of the evening’s programme. I am Razak
Baginda, your host for tonight. We have with us this evening a
distinguished panel of music professionals. They are Mr. Aziz
Bakar [AB], managing director of DigiMedia who just last
night organised the highly successful Malaysian Music
Industry Awards, Dr. Jeffrey Rowlands [JR], Associate Dean
of Curriculum, International College of Music, Mr Bill
Thompson [BT], the Regional Consultant of the Associated
Board of the Royal Schools of Music for South East Asia and
Ms. Valerie Ross [VR], Dean of Academic Affairs of the
International College of Music [RB1].

In the course of the programme several aspects of music and its relationship with
society were discussed. The following section highlights the various emergent
issues upon an analysis of a video recording of the programme. Extracts are
quoted in the first person together with cross-references to relevant media
publications that may have influenced or ‘supported’ various public perceptions.
6.3.1 Music as a reflection of society and a mirror of culture

Each member of the panel was first asked to define his/her understanding of the roles and functions of music and society in the educational context. Jeffrey Rowlands was of the opinion that there was ‘too much’ music around, resulting in people hearing rather than listening to music. He believed that there was a close correlation between the social habits of a society and the types of music that emerge from that society. He further referred to Western classical music as his ‘traditional identity’ and thus Western music education was ‘traditional’ in relation to the musical heritage of many European people. As an expatriate musician working in Malaysia, he was of the opinion that Malaysia was passing through a ‘nationalistic phase’ and that its musical development was still in its infancy. Jeffrey said:

I think that music is an enriching experience — rather like literature, it can open up the world for you. But a lot of the problems with music in society now is that there is too much music available and thus having a tendency to diffuse people’s sensitivity to music...I think that there’s always been a link between the social structure of society and the sort of music it produces. Certainly in the case of Western classical music we are talking about our traditional identity... There’s a very good reason for this in music education in that what we do today is determined from what we did in the past — we inherited a tradition from our predecessors...I think Malaysia will go through its nationalistic phase like so many other countries have gone through, much like ‘getting it out of its system’, then join the international music scene (JR1).

Bill Thompson was of the opinion that music mirrored cultures around the world and in many cases, the music of a country was a ‘reflection of its society’. He cited the example that in olden times when many people could hardly read and write, and certainly before the advent of technology, young people grew up in a community surrounded by music. He believed that for the young developing mind, music enhanced the physical and intellectual development of a person and he was concerned about the erosion of traditional musical cultures due to the globalisation of mass media music. Bill stated:
My contention is that nowadays it is difficult for young people to identify with their own music; they are surrounded by media, if you like the hype of radio and music in the supermarkets...so it is important for music educators to make young people aware of the music of their own cultures as well as those of other cultures around the world (BT1).

Aziz Bakar, on the other hand, strongly believed that music produced from any country should stem from its own culture but he was of the opinion that it was sadly not the case in Malaysia and thus music educationists had an important role to play to address this problem. Aziz lamented:

I think that there are many factors that have contributed to the failure of some people who tried to push this form of [traditional] music...I think that the commercialisation of music is very important. At the end of the day it is what attracts the majority of people. We need to give our kids a good foundation to understand one musical level at a time and the various types of music that are available...I still believe in the commercial aspect of music and that music educationists have a responsibility to meet the needs of the industry (AB1).

When it came to my turn to speak, 'I', as a 'complete' participant observer, defined the meaning of music and society by first examining the two keywords, 'music' and 'society'. I explained that music may be described as a set of organised or structured sounds that is usually produced on instruments including the human voice. Its place in society concerns the manner in which it is conceived and recreated, the various ways and modes in which it is perceived and enjoyed as well as how it may contribute to the cognitive and affective aspects of human development. I stated that culture and tradition should be evolving entities as societies tend to react to what they hear, see and believe, and as such:

If a traditional culture is to be brought to the times, it must be relevant to the people...there are now many researchers who study ethnic music of their 'own' culture as opposed to music of 'other' cultures in the hope that new traditions will emerge, for example, the combining of eastern and western musical elements in intercultural compositions...so the point that I'm trying to make is that, for any music to thrive, it must be relevant to the times and meaningful for the people...Music in society often reflects an evolving development of musical tastes and practices, thus its education should aim towards
creating new traditions particularly for a young country like Malaysia in order that it is ‘accepted’ rather than imposed on society... I suppose we can look at life as a musical journey, picking up various styles, tastes and forms (VR1).

6.3.2 Issues and public response: cultural affiliation versus cultural alienation

In the course of the one-hour programme, the public was invited to ‘phone-in’ to express their views. Five telephone calls from viewers (coded as C1 to C5) were aired and each caller highlighted a different issue. In addition, the comments of two members of the ‘live’ studio audience (coded as SA1 and SA2) have also been included.

Caller 1 (C1) questioned the manner in which music was taught to young Malaysians. He voiced his disagreement of the current ‘approach’ to music education, presumably referring to the teaching of Western classical music, which he described as ‘teaching the music of some distant culture’. He further referred to the approach somewhat symbolically as teaching from the ‘outside’, saying:

I believe that we are talking about education and education means teaching from the concrete to the abstract, from the known to the unknown... but the educational focus in Malaysia, both formal and informal, including the higher institutions, appear to teach the music of some distant culture of a few hundred years and our children appear to start their music education from there. I’m a person who disagrees with this approach. Being a retired educationist I feel that we are going the wrong way round, going about it from the outside and hopefully getting it right eventually... I think there is a lack of music education in our schools (C1).

A member of the studio audience then voiced his experience of the British school music curriculum. He enquired if the subject of music was offered in Malaysian secondary schools. I replied:

There are already plans to introduce the subject of music in secondary schools. I believe that students from twenty of the ‘pilot’ technology-centred ‘smart schools’ have embarked on music studies and in the year 2000 several students from such schools will be taking the SPM [equivalent to ‘O’ Levels]
music examination. Hopefully, this will be extended nationwide. However there are many problems associated with this. One of the problems is the lack of qualified music teachers… then there are the high costs involved, particularly in view of the unexpected economic downturn… Therefore both the public and the private sectors should work together to foster music making. We should begin to instil in the young people, the various types and forms of music, be it classical, popular or traditional genres. Professional musicians should support and promote music education so that there is a greater appreciation of music among members of the society. This is particularly important because Malaysia has a beautiful mix of cultures so it is necessary to impress upon the young population, this diverse heritage. As such we really need a comprehensive music curriculum (VR2).

Another member of the panel commented on developments in the field of music education and assessment in Britain. Bill Thompson, took the opportunity to mention that the Associated Board, in the last few years, had decided to introduce jazz examinations for the many players who have had no formal training but ‘played-by-ear’. These musicians may test their emergent skills at creativity and improvisation through a structured programme of assessment. He announced that:

ABRSM will be providing certificates for such children and that’s to say that for the first time we will be validating that sort of musicianship for many people with such skills. This is something that’s happening in the UK and later this year in New Zealand. In the next couple of years we will be running these examinations in Singapore and in Malaysia. Hopefully, we will have many children who will be eminent musicians but who don’t necessarily want the formality of a classical piano background (BT2).

On the subject of ‘playing by ear’ (here I move away from the panellists’ comments for a moment), a Malaysian businessman-cum self-taught musician had succeeded in promoting his services by capitalising on the perceived inadequacies of the music examination system. Beverly Lim reported:
Many people didn’t believe him. Some called him a fraud. But 15 years on, and with hundreds of satisfied students behind him, Alex Leow has successfully proven that you don’t need to slog away for years to play the piano or keyboard like a pro. You can do this in six months. Leow calls the method ‘Play By Ear’... Unfortunately, students who learn to play music by notes very often end up playing like ‘playback machines’, as Leow puts it. Hence the huge number of conventional music students play perfectly with scores but can’t play a simple tune without it... Conventional music training measures up to examination requirements, but for those who would love to be able to play the piano without undergoing years of training, the ‘play by ear’ method is proving a wonderful innovation (Beverley Lim, 12.4.01).

What does this press article imply? Firstly, it suggests that the lack of creativity amongst classically trained pianists is public knowledge. It also suggests that the conventional methods of learning the piano took a considerable length of time of training and gears towards the primary goal of meeting examination needs. Thus, this perceived ‘lack’ in the music education system had opened a business avenue for an entrepreneur (such as Alex Leow) who catered for those who wished to play the piano after a short period of study without necessarily going through the traditional route of learning to read and write music.

Returning to the ‘Global’ programme, another panellist, Aziz Bakar, commented that the commercialisation of music was necessary in order to improve the livelihood of composers and referred to the contributions of self-taught musicians. In order to succeed as a performing musician, he believed that children should be exposed to music from a young age, preferably whilst at school. He did not appear to be too satisfied with the system of music education in place. Aziz Baker remarked:

The most important element is to teach this music from the start, at a young age, say from primary school... Students will learn to appreciate the music of Malaysia and when they grow up they will continue to appreciate, play and write music... unfortunately this is not happening so education is very important (AB2).
Another member of the panel brought up the issue of the impact of media music or ‘muzak’ on society. The programme host offered a pragmatic view that ‘there was nothing unique about Malaysia’s situation as it is a global phenomenon due to the dissemination of popular styles of music through the mass media and one could not ‘run away from globalisation’. However, it was argued that in any case, the performance of Malaysian traditional music should venture beyond superficial cultural and dinner shows. On this note a ‘call-in’ was received. This Caller (C2) complained about the ‘corruption’ of the arrangement and rendition of a traditional song by the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. He declared:

I’m 75 years old and I’m very attached to the music of my state, the _joget, zapan_ and _gazal_ [Malay ethnic music and dance forms]. In the early days, the _joget_, for example, was accompanied by only three instruments, namely, the violin, drum and the gong. Now when an orchestra such as the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra plays this music, the melody is there but the gong is missing...so it’s corrupted. Why can’t you musicians incorporate some of the traditional instruments that is associated with it?...This will bring back the old days so that the young people will get an idea as to how their grandparents enjoyed music even with a three piece band (C2).

In response to the remark, Razak Baginda suggested that the arrangement played was possibly the ‘work of a foreigner’, in clear reference to public knowledge that more than 90% of the members of the MPO are non-Malaysians and therefore, may be unaware of the traditional forms of Malay ethnic music. Razak said:

Well, we will have to ask who arranged the music and who conducted it...maybe it was a foreigner who did it [arranged the music] (RB1).

Thus, the regular reference to ‘foreigners’ in the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra implied that there were some members in Malaysian society who felt strongly about the large numbers of non-Malaysians who make up the orchestra. For example (with reference to an earlier public issue reported in the press), the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra in its opening ceremony performed a medley of Malay folk tunes which included the tune, _Terang Bulan_. This tune had been adopted as the national anthem (_Negaraku_) of Malaysia and when it was played,
a member of the audience stood up as a mark of respect. Unfortunately, some
griggles were heard much to the chagrin of several other members of the audience.
A series of letters by members of the public appeared in the press shortly after the
event, such as that by Alice Phua (New Straits Times, 16.9.98) who felt that there
was nothing wrong with including the national anthem in an instrumental medley
as practised by some foreign composers. However, another reader rebutted:

I refer to Lee Yee Cheong’s letter (NST, Sept 15) and
Alice Phua Choon Yen’s (NST, Sept 16) that it is not
disrespectful to include Malaysia’s national anthem,
Negaraku in the Malaysian overture of the Malaysian
Philharmonic Orchestra. Frankly, I don’t care very much
what Tchaikovsky, the Germans, the Russians and the
Americans do with theirs and other countries’ national anthem.
In this country, the national anthem is only played at
appropriate functions and time. Our national anthem is not a
tune or a song for entertainment... That is why patriotic
Malaysians immediately stand up when they hear the first
refrain of Negaraku being played. So Lee, do not belittle and
insult patriotic, respectful Malaysians (Mahani Idris Daim,
25.9.98).

Mahani was also intimidated by Alice Phua’s assertion that Malaysians should
be acquainted with the work of the great classical composers such as Bach,
Puccini, Chopin and Haydn lest they be labelled as being ignorant and
unintelligent by foreigners. Mahani retorted:

Sure the names you rattle off are the greats in their fields, but
they are certainly not ‘ours’. There are other greats that are not
whites, or do you really think in your small intelligent mind
that only whites have the prerogative and the distinction of
being ‘great people’ (Mahani Idris Daim, 25.9.98).

Back to the forum, on the topic of well-known Malaysian musicians, there
was a lively discussion on the social impact of contemporary popular music
and the public behaviour of performing musicians. Caller 3 (C3) asked if there
was an authority to promote a healthy development of music in the country. He
queried:
How can we systematically screen the building of music for our society in Malaysia? We have to accept the fact that there is a lot of bad music in the industry today. Is there an organisation that looks into this? (C3).

Aziz replied that there were ethics and codes of conduct in place when popular musicians perform in public. There was also strict censorship with regard to the lyrics of the songs before airplay was permitted. Furthermore, the music industry is represented by members in organisations such as Recording Industry Malaysia (RIM) and the Malaysian Association of Copyright Protection (MACP) which look after the interests of performing artists and composers.

However, on the classical front, I explained that there was, as yet, no such organisation to represent the interests of its practitioners (the Malaysian Association for Music Education was only initiated in 2002). On the other hand, there exists various assessment panels in Malaysia. These include the public music examination boards that provide assessments of graded music studies. There are also cultural centres that promote the study of traditional music in the various local universities and ‘internal’ music assessment panels in private colleges. A music curriculum department in the Ministry of Education looked after the conduct of music in public schools. However, there is yet a centralised Malaysian organisation which oversees the development and assessment of traditional, classical and popular music in Malaysia.

At this point during the programme, a member of the studio audience (SA1), offered his opinion on the role of parents in shaping the musical tastes of their children. He believed that parents played an important role in a child’s educational growth. He said that parents could contribute to the shaping of musical tastes and urged them to monitor their children’s music listening habits, saying:

Parents play a very important part. You should discourage children listening to certain types of music... I am a percussionist and my children followed me and picked up the ‘tabla’. I didn’t go to any college but nowadays, young people go to rock metal and heavy metal concerts. I really don’t understand what they are saying (SA1).
This comment suggested that some parents remained concerned about the perceived negative influence of popular music, as further evidenced by another similar response received. Caller 4 (C4) commented that popular music portrayed examples of ‘bad behaviour’, in reference to the music industry awards aired the night before, where a musician appeared to be affected by narcotics. ‘Such images’, he said, ‘portray negative effects on society as opposed to classical music’, which he felt was ‘more discerning’.

Caller 4 remarked:

Firstly, I would like to congratulate Mr Aziz Bakar for organising the Music Industry Awards 2000 yesterday... However, I observed that one of the band members looked as if he was on drugs. I would like to hear your comments as I’m sure that he was on ‘ecstasy’ pills which is a bad example for the whole society and the whole country (C4).

Another member of the studio audience (SA2) promptly responded to Caller 4’s remarks describing them as being ‘outdated and old fashioned’. He further urged for an improvement in the music education for the Malaysian public, declaring:

I would like to comment on the caller who seem to have predetermined ideas that if someone behaves in a certain way, he must be on drugs. I think that there is a certain aspect to showmanship... certain physical characteristics and movements seem to suggest to some people that the performing musician is crazy. It should be made really clear that this old school of thought of 20 to 30 years ago must go... I think that music education in society should be more emphasized (SA2).

This rebuttal brought about a slight sense of uneasiness for the programme host, who promptly thanked the member of audience and announced an advertisement break. Not long after, the programme came to a close.

The remarks and responses aired indicated the existence of diverse opinions as to the roles, meanings and effects of music. It demonstrated that the public was aware of the limitations of the music education system as exists and beckoned the promotion of a Malaysian musical identity.
Also, there appeared to be a clear public perception of the differences between the status and functions of classical music with those of popular music. Classical music was perceived as possessing more educational qualities compared to the more entertainment-focused features of popular music. Furthermore, such perceptions of the 'influence' of music are further demonstrated by authorities who have associated 'social ills' with youth who listened to certain kinds of popular music (which arguably serves to re-enforce the virtues of learning classical music). For example, the perceived 'anti-religious' and 'anti-establishment' nature of Black Metal music received considerable negative publicity, with the press publishing photographs of students using 'call signs' to identify themselves, in a quasi-masonic fashion, as Black Metal members (Sunday Star, 30.12.01). These reports sparked off a national debate on the 'dangers' of black metal music resulting in a 'witch hunt' in schools for students involved in black metal groups. The outcome of this frenzy was a series of nationwide arrests of suspected occultist 'Black Metal members' (New Straits Times, 1.11.01). The National Unity and Social Development Ministry Parliamentary Secretary, Datuk S. Veerasingam announced in the press that out of 32 people held for alleged black metal activities, 2 were females and 10 were schoolchildren (New Straits Times, 1.11.01). When asked to explain what the Ministry understood as 'black metal activities', the parliamentary secretary defined it as:

"Mainly listening to heavy metal music, wearing black clothing and devil-worshipping... thus pro-active measures taken include organising more religious programmes and counselling sessions (New Straits Times, 1.11.01)."

Such forms of action and media coverage serve to reinforce public notions about the merits and demerits of certain types of music and their innate value, or lack thereof. Additionally, opinions offered by the public suggested that Malaysians were concerned about the state of music teaching and learning in Malaysia. Some members of the public were concerned with the lack of education and promotion of traditional ethnic music. Others were perturbed by the largely foreign membership of the country's only fully professional orchestra which appeared to have acted with a lack of cultural sensitivity. Thus, programmes such as 'Global' communicate at a macro-level to large audiences throughout the nation, reinforcing existing notions, beliefs and practices.
6.4 Four critical incidents

The four critical incidents may be viewed as value-judgements of social events that have been deemed significant to the phenomena under investigation. These events were highlighted because they represented important ‘moments’ in relation to the larger socio-cultural activity of a particular community and they have been presented as a discourse of ‘language-in-action’ with an aim towards the (re)construction of social reality. All four incidents involved the participation of representatives of the music examination boards. Three of the four incidents are represented in the form of graduation ceremonies held by the Australian Music Examinations Board, London College of Music and Media and Trinity College, London. These three events were documented in narrative form and analysed. The fourth incident involved the announcement of the outcome of a national piano competition, when the three judges (one of whom is the South East Asia Regional Representative of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music), decided that the first prize and challenge trophy were not to be awarded as the standard of piano playing witnessed did not befit its award. A paradoxical situation had emerged in that a nation which had sent literally thousands of candidates for public piano examinations each year had failed to produce a single performer of the highest calibre, at least in the opinion of the panel of judges. This incident was deemed highly significant to the phenomena being investigated. These critical incidents thus provided powerful evidence of the social-cultural construction of reality and illustrated the manner in which social action and interaction served to support and manifest the state of affairs under investigation.

6.4.1 Comparing three graduation ceremonies

Congruencies and divergences were drawn from an observation of the three graduation ceremonies. The social significance of these public events was also established. A new chapter began in the history of the music examination boards in honouring their graduands from Malaysia at these ceremonies. On three occasions, I was invited as a guest of the proceedings. The following table compares the main features of the graduation ceremonies.
Table 6.4.1 Comparing three graduation ceremonies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSESSMENT BOARDS</th>
<th>Australian Music Examinations Board</th>
<th>London College of Music and Media</th>
<th>Trinity College London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>7.11.99</td>
<td>11.12.99</td>
<td>31.8.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>Subang Jaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Australian High Commission</td>
<td>Legend Hotel</td>
<td>Sheraton Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procession Leaders</td>
<td>Prof. Warren Bebbington, Chairman</td>
<td>Patricia Thompson Dean of LCMM</td>
<td>David Robinson Regional Consultant, SEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished Guests</td>
<td></td>
<td>Elaine Kang</td>
<td>H.E. Graham Fry British High Commissioner to Malaysia &amp; MPO Resident Conductor, Ooi Chean See</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of establishment</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/Ministry of Education Affiliation</td>
<td>Universities of Melbourne, Adelaide, Western Australia/Ministry of Edu of New South Wales, Queensland &amp; Tasmania</td>
<td>Thames Valley University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State reps.</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduands</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>approx. 27</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Five solo piano pieces</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 Vln &amp; Pno piece, Mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience size</td>
<td>approx. 150</td>
<td>approx. 200</td>
<td>approx. 400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Australian Music Examinations Board conducted its inaugural graduation ceremony in Malaysia in November 1999 and just over a month later the London College of Music and Media followed suit (AMEB, November 1999; LCM, December 1999). Although the Trinity College established its operations in Malaysia over eighty years ago, it was only in August 2001 that it conducted its first graduation ceremony in Malaysia upon the setting up of its Malaysian National Office (Trinity News, 2001:3, Appendix I).

The AMEB held its ceremony under the auspices of the Australian High Commission whilst the other two examination boards conducted their events in hotels in the capital city and in a suburb near Kuala Lumpur respectively. The fact that AMEB chose to hold its conferring ceremony at the Australian High Commission perhaps signified that the Australian government ‘sanctioned’ the examination board’s operations in Malaysia particularly since the AMEB comprised several Australian governmental departments and institutions of higher learning.

In terms of an adherence to tradition and ceremony, all three events were conducted in full academic regalia complete with processional and recessional parades. AMEB’s procession was led by its chairman, Professor Warren Bebbington whilst LCM’s procession was led by its Dean, Patricia Thompson Elaine Kang, a popular singer received a Honorary Fellowship from LCM. David Robinson led the Trinity College procession with two distinguished guests, they being Graham Fry, the then British High Commission to Malaysia and Ooi Chean See, the resident conductor of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. The presence of the British High Commission further endorsed the support of the British government in regard to Trinity College’s services. In his speech, Fry proudly announced that, at any given moment, there were over 90,000 Malaysians studying for a British qualification. He stressed the importance of ‘global branding’ and that the acquisition of a British qualification meant worldwide recognition. The speech by Ooi Chean See also focused on the importance of recognition by way of certification. Her opening message read:
It is truly commendable and appropriate that one of the first objectives of the Trinity National Office is to hold this Presentation Ceremony for nationwide Diploma holders, past and present. Bringing together for the first time this select community of musicians has a two-fold consequence: they are able to meet and share their mutual interests; they are being publicly recognised and acclaimed for their endeavours and accomplishments in the field of music (Trinity, August 2001).

In the respective programme booklets, all three assessment boards highlighted their historical track record as internationally recognised providers of music assessments services since late nineteenth century. For example, the Australian Music Examinations Board stated:

The AMEB originated in 1887, when a program of music examinations was initiated by the Universities of Adelaide and Melbourne, following the English Tradition of public examinations sponsored by eminent institutions (AMEB, November 1999).

Similarly, the London College of Music and Media proudly announced that its examinations were held in over 250 centres around the world and in over 50 centres in Asia. Furthermore, the programme booklet of its graduation ceremony read:

London College of Music and Media has offered graded examinations in music, speech, drama and communication for decades in Asia. Founded in 1887 as an establishment devoted to musical education, the London College of Music was incorporated as a public educational institution in 1939, and became part of Thames Valley University in 1991. Today the college is at the forefront of developments in music and media (LCMM, December 1999).

The programme booklet of the presentation ceremony of Trinity College declared that it invented the system of grades, certificates and diploma back in 1877. It further carried a message from the Chief Executive of Trinity College, Dr. Roger Bowers stating:

As individuals, we move in a constant spotlight of attention where from an early age what we say and do are noticed and recorded, measured and judged against not just national but international standards of achievement. Trinity examinations
provide proof that an individual’s performance anywhere in the world matches up to those international standards. For over 120 years now, Trinity examiners have brought their skills in assessment to performers in many countries, providing not only the objectivity that such assessment requires but also the motivation of a knowledgeable and supportive audience – albeit an audience of only one! (*Trinity*, August 2001).

The emphasis on three particular elements was evident in the business development strategy of the three assessment boards. The foremost element appeared to be the capitalisation of the historical lineage of the institutions. Furthermore, in the case of the AMEB and Trinity College, their ‘new’ associations with one or more universities, serves as a further validation of their syllabus and awards. Secondly, the issue of ‘international recognition’ was emphasised with each assessment board declaring that it conducted music examinations throughout the world or throughout the region as in the case of AMEB. Thirdly, all the three assessment boards thanked their networks of representatives throughout the country. LCMM in particular, presented its representatives on stage to honour them. From the social and behavioural perspective, the significance for the graduands of these ceremonies was visibly noted. On each occasion, there was much excitement and pomp generated by the conferring boards. What was most significant was possibly the fact that holders of the Associate, Licentiate and Fellowship diplomas were, for the first time, ‘conferred’ the award by their alma mater. The opportunity to ‘walk and graduate’ in full regalia, so to speak, was a special experience for many piano teachers in the country. *Trinity News* (2001:4) reported:

The foyer to the ballroom was a hive of activity before the start of the event... excited diploma holders chattering away whilst waiting to collect their robes, cameras clicking away at smiling children with their parents, for some, it was the *parents* who wore in the robes! (*Trinity News*, 2001:4).

Also, for many Malaysians parents, the assurance of ‘international recognition’ of the diplomas provided a further sense of confidence in the awarding body, a confidence that accompanied a sense of knowing that their offsprings’ certificates would be ‘recognised’ for years to come as well as having global market value. Also, the presence of international guests further supported this confidence. Ooi Chean See, the resident conductor of the
Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra in her opening speech at Trinity’s graduation ceremony remarked:

I am honoured to be part of this first presentation of Trinity diplomas in this country... I remember that during my time I got the diploma from the postman!... I am sure that parents here are very proud... You provided your children with the opportunity for music lessons, ferried them to classes and took them for the yearly examinations and now the joy of seeing them graduate must be immense (OCS1).

One of the most recent developments in strengthening the academic standing of the music examinations boards is their affiliation with respective universities. In this respect, the Australian Music Examinations Board in a relatively short time has impressed upon the public, its affiliations with a number of universities and various education authorities in Australia, with each of the Australian state offices operating under the auspices of the ‘affiliate’ institution. In the same vein, the London College of Music and Media emphasised its affiliation with the Thames Valley University in London. Although the Trinity College maintains ties with the University of Westminster, London, it preferred not to highlight this association but rather build upon its reputation as being the first music examinations board in the world to provide public examinations. Again these claims served to further enhance the international status of the examining institutions, much to the satisfaction of parents, teachers and students.

Regarding the management of operations, the AMEB’s office is run by a company called Market Management Services which is based in Sarawak, a state in East Malaysia. On the other hand, all of LCMM’s examination-centres in Asia are managed through Thames Valley University’s Asia Pacific Regional Office in Malaysia with a network of local representatives (LCMM, December 1999). In an effort to improve services and to provide better support to its new team of music representatives in the conduct and administration of examinations in Malaysia the Trinity College established its National Office in Kuala Lumpur (Flourish, June 2001). A national manager for music and a national consultant for language, speech and drama were appointed. At the National Office, parents, teachers and students could view and purchase Trinity books, attend seminars and obtain up-to-date information about Trinity’s services.
At its inaugural presentation ceremony, some 400 guests, which included teachers, graduands and their families as well as Trinity’s state representatives, attended the conferment of diplomas to 169 recipients. This was compared to about 150 to 200 people who attended the AMEB and LCMM ceremonies, both of which had significantly smaller numbers of graduands due to the fact that Trinity College has been the longest established provider of music assessments for the diploma level of study in Malaysia.

A check through the name list of eligible graduands published in the programme booklet of AMEB revealed that 51 out of the 52 names were of Chinese origin. Also, only two of the graduands were not pianists. Similarly, 167 names out of the 169 names found in the Trinity programme booklet were of Chinese origin indicating that the majority of graduating music teachers are pianists of Malaysian Chinese ethnicity.

In terms of exhibiting some of the graduands’ musical abilities, five of the AMEB graduands showcased their musical talents. Trinity College chose to present a piano and violin work and a piece of mime to represent its assessment offerings in the field of music, and language, speech and drama respectively. However, unlike the Australian Music Examinations Board and Trinity College, it was noted that the London College of Music and Media did not demonstrate any of its alumni’s musical abilities. Instead, it honoured each of its state representatives by calling them on stage. Thus, it was made rather obvious that the representatives were highly prized by the college since they supplied candidates to the examining board. Several of the representatives also wore robes supplied by the college.

Nevertheless, of the three ceremonies, it was clear that the most lavish was that of the London College of Music and Media. In addition to a sumptuous buffet spread, each guest was provided with a gift pack of LCMM promotional items ranging from notepads to stickers and mouse-pads. In conversation with a representative of Thames Valley University, it emerged that the LCMM enrolment had risen to 1500 candidates in each of their three examination sessions in Malaysia every year and they were expecting more candidates to enroll for the LCMM examinations. One of the main reasons for holding the conferring ceremonies, according to the representative, was to increase market share.
For similar reasons mentioned earlier, the Trinity College recently set up its national office in Kuala Lumpur after nearly a century of operations in the country. The college believed that since a large number of Malaysian piano teachers hold Trinity College diplomas, it would be wise to ‘recognise’ its alumni and in doing so, encourage the teachers to send their students to their alma mater instead of the ABRSM. Trinity’s newsletter announced:

It is you — the teachers and the students — who can help us determine what is needed... visit us at ‘Mont Kiara’. You will always find a friendly welcome... Following 80 years of activity in Malaysia, one of Trinity’s objectives, after the establishment of the National Office, is to bring together our nationwide diploma holders in a Presentation Ceremony... Will you be there for this landmark occasion? (Trinity News, 2001:3).

Thus, it may be argued that the main ‘critical value’ of these graduation ceremonies lay in reinforcing public opinion in the value and importance of certification. It signifies to parents, teachers and students that a music education is not complete without ‘proof’ of musical attainment and that this attainment should be conferred by an institution of repute. Furthermore, institutions such as Trinity College support the notion that the ‘audience of only one’ (Trinity, August 2001), that is, the music examiner, is acceptable as ‘equivalent’ to endorsement by public performance, in so far as the lone examiner is qualified to provide an objective and informed judgment on a musical performance. The social significance of such a statement by the head of a renowned music institution and the act of conferment further serves to enhance the strength and popularity of public music examinations in Malaysia. Subliminally, it also reaffirms the popular practice of sending children to piano lessons from young in order that they be trained through a system of graded levels of musical study and constant testing. Through this route, parents are assured that their children will eventually be able to participate in such graduation ceremonies and in doing so attain public recognition of professional musical ability.
6.4.2 National piano competition

On 18 March 2000 at 8pm, the Finals of a National Piano Festival was held at Dewan Bankuet, Bangunan Perak in Ipoh as part of the Visit Perak Year 2000. The first three prizes were sponsored by Sumivest Holdings Sdn Bhd (an investment holding company) which included a prize for the best performance of a local composition with the award of a challenge trophy called the Foong Seong J.P. Challenge Trophy. Yamaha Music sponsored the official piano for the festival in conjunction with its ‘100 years of piano-making’ promotion. The semi-final round of the festival-competition were held on 15th and 16th of March, 2000 with three contestants performing a recital programme of four to six pieces each evening. The adjudicators for the semi-finals were Lena Ching, Tongsuang Israngkun and John Sharpley, all noted professional musicians. The adjudicators for the finals were Muzaffar Abdullah, a Malaysian born pianist who has resided in Paris since 1983, Bill Thompson, the Regional Consultant of ABRSM, and Yu Chun Yee, the Vice-Principal of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore (National Piano Festival 2000). In the programme booklet, Chun Yee’s curriculum vitae stated:

In 1970 Chun Yee became the first non-British musician to be invited as an examiner by the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music, London. In 1971 he was invited to join the Royal College of Music... the only Asian Professor at the College. In 1998 he joined the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (National Piano Festival 2000).

Chun Yee chose to highlight his achievements by drawing attention to the fact that his professional appointment and association with the ABRSM was particularly significant for a non-British citizen of Asian origin. This implied that Chun Yee greatly valued the validation of his abilities by a British institution. Giroux (1991) cogently describes this attitude:

Within the discourse of modernity, the ‘Other’ not only sometimes ceases to be a historical agent but is often defined within totalising and universal theories that create a transcendental rational white, male Euro-centric subject that
both occupies the centres of power while simultaneously appear to exist outside of time and space (Giroux 1991, p.7).

In terms of audience attendance, the concert drew some five hundred guests. The finalists aged between 15 and 19 years of age, played substantial repertoire ranging from Bach to Granados. After some two hours of intensive competition, the judges adjourned to discuss their adjudication. Twenty minutes later, Yu Chun Yee the chief adjudicator announced the results:

After some deliberations, we have decided not to award the first prize as we are of the opinion that the interpretation of the pieces and the standard of the performances tonight was not of sufficiently high calibre to warrant the international standard of the award... The Foong Scong J.P. Challenge Trophy will also not be awarded (CY1).

There was a palpable sense of disappointment from the audience and from the various event sponsors. The much-publicised event had turned out rather unexpectedly. Some members of the audience also felt that the decision was not entirely fair because the competition was staged at a 'national' level rather than at an international level as suggested by the lead adjudicator, who presumably led a team of renowned musicians to this conclusion. The second prize and the third prize winners were subsequently announced but the disappointed looks were evident among many of those present, including parents and members of the press. This was indeed a paradoxical situation, I reflected. I looked again at the notes in the programme booklet and Yamaha Music's promotion of its music courses caught my eye:

As Malaysian society progresses towards the 21st century the increasing awareness in music education has to be addressed. Yamaha Music Malaysia (YMM) is the leading private music school with the most extensive network... it operates a total of 10 self-owned branches with music schools conveniently found in over 100 locations throughout Malaysia with a student population of approximately 30,000 and a teacher population of 750... The task of ensuring and encouraging a bigger pool of qualified music professionals has to be undertaken (National Piano Festival, 2000).
Thus, in Malaysia, there exists a situation whereby a huge number of students study the piano, yet there appears to be some difficulty in identifying even one sufficiently meritorious performer to be awarded a national prize for excellence. Either the competition had failed to attract the more accomplished pianists or simply that Malaysian pianists cannot perform well in public! This 'critical' incident further supports the notion that Malaysian students learn the piano for the sake of passing music examinations rather than for the pure pleasure of playing the instrument.

6.5 Two vignettes

Two press photographs serve as vignettes in this instance. The first vignette is represented by a press photograph of a pre-school 'graduation' ceremony held in a kindergarten in the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur. The second image is an advertisement by one of the leading private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. These two images represent powerful examples of a social reconstructions of reality in the realm of education. Both images convey mental images of symbolic significance by a capturing the fundamentals of human aspirations through picture form. Different forms of print media can shape social organisations and dominant modes of thought. Photographs not only influence but may actively encourage the development of certain modes of understanding, social action and organisation within a society, especially if it is in the interest of a particular class in that society to make use of a specific medium or set of media to further their own political or institutional ends.

The 'silent voice' (Walker 1993) of the published photographs thus provide the medium of social organisation through the formation of concepts, which are premised upon initial intuitive ideas based on the influence of imagery and social gesture. These social gestures in turn become significant symbols in the form of language and action, enabling people to receive and link personal and social experiences through a shared system of symbolic meaning as propounded by Mead (1938).
6.5.1 Kindergarten graduation

In October 2001, a kindergarten known as Tadika Sekolah Sri Kuala Lumpur organised a ‘graduation’ ceremony for the 100 children who had completed their pre-school education. The students were dressed in ‘academic dress’ complete with mortarboards, much to the fascination of the press who reported the event.

Figure 6.5.1 Kindergarten ‘graduation’

‘Othman Merican presenting the scroll to a pupil — the pupils looked regal and resplendent in their black and gold robes and hats as they lined up to receive their graduation scrolls’ (*The Star* 30.10.01).
The vignette represents an example of constant media-portrayals of the aims of education in which its success rested on forward planning. Inherent in the photograph is the social message that the goal of education is to acquire a degree (as symbolised by the ‘academic’ robe and mortar board) and that the eventual fulfilment of this goal should preferably begin from early childhood. The vignette reminded parents that they were responsible for ensuring that their children receive the best education possible and thus it was prudent to send children to a good kindergarten. The photograph was accompanied by a report of the ceremony which stated that pupils who had shown good progress were presented with trophies (*The Star*, 30.10.01). This action exemplified the common practice of assessing children’s academic capabilities right from a very young age. In this respect, many Malaysian children as young as the age of six years are already ‘prepared’ for formal educational assessments and peer competition before they enter the national education system. They are constantly tested on their ability to reproduce information provided in class at an examination. The acceptance of information as fact and the culture of not questioning the teacher and those in authority seem to be imbued from a young age.

Thus, much like going to school, Malaysian children faithfully attend piano lessons without necessarily questioning the purpose of such actions. They grow up with this ‘unquestioning culture’ and follow their parents directives since it is believed that discipline and practice are the keys to success in learning any skill and this includes the acquisition of musical skills. Recent research has also indicated the significant role that parents play in shaping the musical development of children (*Davidson, Howe and Sloboda*, 1996; *McPherson and Davidson*, in *Colwell and Richardson*, 2002).

Media images thus reaffirm the public of the importance of forward planning in achieving the long-term educational goals of the child. Such vignettes possess innate ‘powers’ to influence and structure the subconscious thought of particular social communities. Photographs thus re-enforce the event as the source of meaning in the visual literacy of the mind.
6.5.2 Reading the ‘silent voice’ of human aspirations

The second vignette is an advertisement by Taylor’s College (The Star, 16 June 2001), one of the most successful institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. The half-page advertisement provided both visual and literary information to its readers. This appeared to be directed at parents who may be contemplating on selecting an institution to send their children for further education studies. The perceptive manipulation of a ‘mental image’, cleverly conjured by the advertiser, deployed the concept of the universal love of parents for their offspring. Readers were provided with three ‘box-option’ statements (which they presumably ‘tick’ in their minds), that embodied human aspirations as expressed by the image of a fatherly figure, namely, (i) ‘I saved hard for their education and want it to be money well spent’, (ii) ‘I want them to be all they can be, who they want to be’ and the third option-statement, (iii) ‘Every generation must have a better life than the one before it’, as found below:

Figure 6.5.2 We’ll get you there

*The Star, 16 July 2001*
The first statement embedded in the image appears to ‘caution’ parents as to the need for care when spending their hard-earned income on their children’s tertiary education. It alluded to the high cost of private education and parents should thus carefully select the educational institution to ensure that their children’s full potential were realised. The second statement reassured the public that education was now widely available and that it was up to individuals to ‘be all they can be’. The third statement was more philosophical. It reminded its readership that education was the key to financial security and upward social mobility, thus ensuring a better quality of life. It alluded to the fact that some Malaysian parents may not have had the opportunity of acquiring a tertiary education due to financial constraints. It may be argued that this final statement embodied the philosophy held by many Malaysians of Chinese and Indian descent whose forefathers migrated to Malaya from China and India respectively, in search of a better life. This quest for a ‘better life’ as afforded by education may account for the reason for the largely Chinese Malaysian community of music students, many of whom later become music ‘graduands’ as earlier evidenced.

Hence, much like the marketing strategy adopted by the music examination boards in emphasising their ‘international’ appeal, the advertisement too, carried a literary explanation of the institution’s international affiliations with universities in Australia, Britain and the United States. In addition to the pre-university, transfer and twinning programme arrangements with its affiliates, the college also conducted external degree programmes such as those offered by the University of London.

Through such advertisements in the media, Malaysian parents have generally become more aware of the numerous types of educational arrangements with partner institutions overseas. Also, the ‘external’ degree conferred by the University of London has become increasingly more affordable when compared to other types of educational options. Readers are further reminded of the impressive track record of the advertising college with ‘testimonials’ from students who had successfully continued their education abroad. Hence, the popular criteria for selecting a private institution of higher learning and/or an ‘external’ programme often include:
(i) the element of choice and specialisation in course offerings.
(ii) international recognition through affiliations with notable partner institutions abroad.
(iii) affordability, high standards and Ministry recognition.
(iv) the track record and longevity of the institution.
(v) product endorsement by financial numbers.

It may thus be argued that parents (and music teachers) adopt similar criteria when selecting a music examination board. Education is regarded as a form of investment and thus, funding piano lessons represents one such type of investment. As the music assessment boards build on the concept of trust, reliability and quality, parents who send their children for music lessons entrust the music examination boards with the task of verifying the piano teacher’s work through the external examiners’ reports and musical certification.

6.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I interpreted data acquired from six public events and two vignettes sourced from the print media. The first two events, a music forum and a television broadcast, represented instances of participant observation where ‘I’ as a researcher acted performatively and ‘Me’ as a ‘complete participant’, acted referentially in the creation of primary data. In both instances, several issues pertaining to the existing system of music education were discussed in public. The music forum highlighted social and cultural issues associated with the learning and teaching of music. Parallels were drawn between the system of music education and the approach to general education in relation to the examination emphasis of both systems. In the television programme ‘Global’, diverse opinions regarding the roles, functions and influences of music in society were aired. Responses received from the public further confirmed the existence of conflicting musical tastes and perceptions within the multicultural nexus of Malaysian society.
In comparing the inaugural graduation ceremonies by three music examination boards, its significance may be considered from both the social and the historical perspectives. Socially, the three events served to reinforce the value of musical certification. Whilst the issue of certificates acknowledged in private, student-attainment at the graded levels of musical study, the graduation ceremonies acknowledged in public, musical success at the tertiary level. For musicians, the opportunity to participate in conferring ceremonies had been, till the actions of the AMEB and LCM, mainly confined to music graduates in Malaysian universities and even so, limited to a small number of students. In this sense it may be argued that the 'public recognition' of a musical qualification had previously not been extended to holders of external music diplomas. Thus, whilst graded certificates served to acknowledge the musical attainment of younger music students at a private level, the award of diplomas publicly recognised musical attainment at the professional level.

From an historical perspective, the examination boards have been conducting music assessments and issuing diplomas to successful candidates in Malaysia for nearly a decade. Teachers normally collect these diplomas from the various states representatives or from the Ministry of Education in the case of the ABRSM. Therefore, the symbolic act of conferring awards represented a significant gesture in the historical practice of the music examination boards which operate in Malaysia. Whether or not the act is primarily commercially motivated remains debatable but, suffice to state, the gesture serves to further reinforce and enhance public confidence in the continuity of the public music examination operations in the country.

Yet, despite the large number of students who learn the piano, a national piano competition failed to identify one performer of the highest calibre. A plausible explanation of this paradoxical situation was sought. Evidently, Malaysians do not appear to see the need to hone public performance skills but instead they seem to have substituted the wider public audience with the solo music examiner as their private 'audience of only one' (to quote Roger Bowers) in the review and assessment of their musical prowess.
Finally in selecting vignettes as a source of data, it is argued that the output and influence of media constitute integral aspects of any society’s development and the presence of the appropriate media will facilitate and foster that development. The pre-school graduation exhibited an example of the intense social desire for educational advancement. The preparation for academic ‘competition’ is socially advocated even prior to entering formal school education. Parallels were drawn between the practice of sending children for tuition and for piano lessons. The examination ethos of the Malaysian school education system appears congruent with that of the music education system. In the same vein, convergences were drawn between the marketing strategies adopted by institutions of higher learning and the music examination boards in the second vignette and the first three critical incidents.

Thus the world we live in has meaning for us because we symbolically mediate the interaction of events with people around us and we do this primarily with words, actions and images that are mutually agreed by language, thought and social or personal experience. Duncan (1968, p.5) further argued that whereas symbols may be seen, touched or heard, social relationships are ‘extra-symbolic’ in nature since they cannot be directly perceived although they are indirectly perceptible and as such society is ‘quintessentially symbolic’.
CHAPTER SEVEN

ANALYSING MICRO-MACRO INTERACTION THROUGH A SOCIdiagram OF MUSICAL INTERRELATIONSHIPS

7. 1 Chapter overview

This chapter comprises seven main parts. The first part illustrates a sociogram of musical interrelationships that was formulated to categorise the five sources of information as elucidated in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Information found in three of the five categories was sourced from questionnaires and interviews whilst the remaining two categories contain information acquired from public events and the media. The interaction of such micro and macro sources of information was further examined and triangulated. The remaining parts of the chapter thus represent the main issues that have arisen from the analysis and triangulation of information from all five categories as illustrated in the sociogram.

Part two concerns the perception of what represents a ‘complete’ music education as understood by parents, teachers and piano students. It discloses the social contract that exists between teachers, and learners as condoned by society.

Part three relates to the socio-historical and cultural practice of acquiring musical skills, primarily through private music tuition. It examines the effects of music education as an offshoot of the private enterprise. It further postulates the impact of the limitations of a school music education and its effects on the musical awareness of the general public. It briefly addresses the issue of religious sentiments towards the influence of music on social behaviour.

Part four highlights the role of the music assessment boards and examines the manner in which the commercialisation of musical assessment has shaped the teaching and learning of music. It further analyses the manner in which the business of music certification has shaped the private music enterprise with regard
to the sale of musical instruments, books and the proliferation of music schools throughout the country.

Part five addresses concerns raised by some music educators as to the state of music education in Malaysia as shaped by the system in place. It examines the views of 'new academics' who are attached to music colleges and institutions of higher learning. It further examines the response to the idea of the establishment of a Malaysian Music Examinations Board. It discusses the dilemmas and challenges that face such a local establishment should it materialise. In the meantime, the ABRSM is gaining an even firmer foothold in the country. A leading provider of music assessment services in Malaysia and worldwide, the success of the ABRSM in Malaysia is extrapolated in part six.

The final part traces the piano teaching and learning practice to a cyclical phenomenon. It examines the effect of media in the construction of reality and the manner in which society is shaped by the power of public opinion and action.

7.2 A sociogram of musical interrelationships

The different techniques of acquiring information and the diverse sources from which data was gathered have yielded a rich pool of information. Key points were drawn. These points were further analysed as stemming from five categories of information sources.

The first category comprises survey outcomes from piano teachers, parents and piano students whilst the second category contains interview outcomes from assessment board representatives, music school administrators, lecturers and undergraduate students as well as a piano importer and a music book publisher's representative. Information from the third category was acquired from participant observations at two public forums. The last two categories comprise key points drawn from observations of four critical incidents and two vignettes respectively. The following sociogram illustrates the musical interrelationships.
Commonalities and congruence were extracted from all five categories. Comparisons were made as to the validity of statements and opinions from within and across categories. In many ways this procedure represented a form of triangulation of information sourced from the macro domain (Categories III, IV and V) against the micro domain (Categories I and II). The following parts represent the outcomes of the triangulation of information sourced from the micro and macro domains as illustrated in the above sociogram of musical interrelationships.
7.3 Unveiling the social contract

Peripatetic music teaching is a common practice in Malaysia. Classes are usually held in the home environment, either at the students' home or the teachers' home. Piano teaching is also commonly conducted in many of the private music schools found throughout the country. Given the choice, some teachers expressed the view that their preference was to teach in their own homes, rather than to travel to their students' homes, whilst other teachers opted to teach in music schools.

The piano teaching profession is still very much a cottage industry with many teachers working on a part-time basis. Since many piano students comprise school-going children, the home environment appears conducive to the nature of the vocation. Parents generally find it convenient for teachers to teach in their homes although many parents seem willing to travel to the homes of established piano teachers or music schools.

Furthermore, parents have expressed the view that they were keen to keep a close eye on their children’s musical progress by music assessment outcomes. This form of approach appears to be a way of ensuring that the teachers fulfilled their teaching obligations, since many parents declared that they were less knowledgeable about classical music.

Also, many students seemed happy to attend piano lessons and they did not appear to question the routine of playing, for the most part, examination pieces throughout the year. Some students even seemed relieved at having to practise only three examination pieces per year. Thus, there seems to have been an establishment of negotiated social contracts among the teachers, pupils and parents, all of whom appear reasonably satisfied with the provision and receipt of piano lessons within the existing system of music education practice.
7.3.1 Role of piano teachers

Piano teachers play a significant role in shaping the system of music education in Malaysia. Their roles may be regarded as being seven-fold in nature. Firstly, piano teachers in Malaysia seem to be largely responsible for the music education of young Malaysians. They provide students with individual skill-based training on the piano, and in so doing, they expose students to an appreciation and performance of Western classical music. Students usually begin piano tuition at young age and continue their lessons for some six to eight years. Piano teachers, therefore, play a significant role in influencing the musical development and experience of many young Malaysians in their most formative learning years.

Secondly, piano teachers decide on the teaching and learning methods in order to fulfill their objectives. As such they tend to base their ‘curriculum’ on the assessment-requirements of the syllabuses of various examination boards.

Thirdly, teachers are indirectly responsible for the sort of books that are imported or published by distributors and publishers. Since students purchase books based on the recommendation of teachers, many of whom tend to focus on music examinations, music shops tend to stock examination-related materials that will readily sell.

Fourthly, teachers are also responsible for the growth of the piano industry in Malaysia since they successfully encouraged the learning of the instrument which provided the impetus for the large scale import and/or manufacture of pianos in the country.

Fifthly, teachers have contributed significantly to the success and international expansion of the major music examination boards since Malaysia sends one of the largest number of candidates for yearly piano examinations. Teachers also contribute to the cyclic nature of the phenomena studied by replicating a system of music education of which they were formally students.
Finally, teachers influence the perception of that which constitutes a ‘music education’ amongst members of the Malaysian society in general and Malaysian parents and piano students in particular.

7.3.2 Parents’ perception of a ‘complete’ music education

Parents play a significant role in their children’s music education from making the initial decision to send their offspring for piano tuition to encouraging them to teach piano for a living. Foremost, the decision to let children learn the piano (rather than any other musical instrument) appears to lie in the hands of parents. It is common practice for children to start learning the piano as young as the age of five. This decision seems to be influenced by friends and relatives who also send their children to piano lessons. The numerous advertisements of various brands of pianos for sale further encourage parents to invest in a piano. Some families spend large amounts of money to purchase expensive imported pianos for their homes. It is not uncommon for pianos to be kept as part of the family heritage and handed down to the next generation (Ehrlich, 1976). A child learning the piano within a household is a social indicator that the family has attained a certain level of financial status and thus able to afford an education in the arts. As the number of middle class families increase, so do the number of children who learn the piano.

Furthermore, the individualised form of teaching and learning appeals to parents, particularly where itinerant teachers conduct classes in the students’ homes under the watchful eye of parents. Parents thus engage music teachers primarily by word-of-mouth through friends or relatives. Fees and lesson times are negotiated directly with the teachers. Some parents prefer to send their children to nearby music schools, and in such cases parents deal with the respective music school administrators. The common criteria for the choice of music teachers or the music schools include, students’ pass-fail rate in their music examinations, class convenience, the fees charged and overall satisfaction with the conduct of initial classes.
As mentioned earlier, once parents have made the initial outlay for the purchase of a piano, the instrument becomes part of the household furniture that is symbolic of the decision and long-term commitment to send their offspring to music lessons. The piano is symbolic of the child’s music education and formative years. This period of music education usually lasts between eight and ten years and its success is often measured by the number of positive examination outcomes. For this reason, parents commonly refer to their children as having ‘finished their music studies’, meaning that they have successfully completed eight grades of piano examinations. In this sense a failure to pass the Grade 8 examinations represents a failure in the acquisition of a perceived ‘complete’ music education, premised on the belief that failure in music examinations was primarily due to a lack of practice rather than of musical aptitude. Also, many students have been known to terminate music lessons when they fail the examinations.

7.3.3 Going through the motions

Since students usually commence piano lessons at a young age, attending weekly piano lessons, for many of them, have become a matter of routine. From the onset of music classes they are taught to read and write music. After about two years of piano lessons, students embark on a routine of preparing for yearly musical assessments. To this end, students faithfully practise the pieces as selected from an examination text. Whilst students play compositions by Bach, Mozart and Chopin with admirable pitch and rhythmic accuracy, it is debatable if they perceive the act as a ‘cultural endeavour’. Many students play pieces without really understanding the socio-musical context in which composers created their works, although they know that certain pieces belong to different eras of Western classical music. Then there are students who do not even know the names of the composers who wrote the pieces that they play, being aware that the pieces belong to List A, B or C of the compilation of examination pieces published by the assessment board.
It is argued that the musical compositions are primarily valued for their educational and social gains. Piano works then assume a symbolic role as ‘music for examination purposes’.

Also, to further support this notion, many students seem to abhor the drudgery of practising the same pieces of music over prolonged periods of time. When students were asked to describe what they perceived as an education in music, the answers revealed that the students’ opinions were largely shaped by their experience of attending private piano tuition and preparing for either practical or theory of music examinations on a regular basis. Premised on such an experience, these students find music lessons (and thus music education) to be non-creative and burdensome. However, despite this conclusion, students still consider learning the piano as a largely positive and rewarding experience. This is because students generally welcome their parents’ actions in enabling them to acquire a formal education in music which they would otherwise not receive. They appreciated their parent’s sacrifices in time, energy and financial commitment to ensure that they received a ‘recognised’ certification of musical attainment. As they grow into adulthood, many of these advanced music students begin to teach piano, initially on a part-time basis. This decision is usually met with much approval from parents, many of whom consider the piano teaching vocation as being particularly suitable for women.

Furthermore, some students continue to pursue tertiary music studies either at the various Malaysian institutions of higher learning whilst others venture overseas to further their music studies. For those who do not pursue music as a profession, they have nevertheless acquired some degree of music literacy by ‘going through the motions’ of a socially-accepted course of action.
7.4 Music education as a private responsibility

Music education in Malaysian is largely funded by parents and in this sense the provision of an education in music is presumed to be a 'private' responsibility. Although music as a subject is part of the curriculum in primary schools, its curriculum seems limited to classroom singing with a limited focus on reading and writing music (Music Curriculum, Primary School 1995). It is generally conducted by non-specialist music teachers and even so, not all schools provide such training (New Straits Times, 4.8.02). Although the subject of music has been included in the new curriculum of twenty pilot 'smart-schools, the project being one of the Flagship Applications of Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor launched in July 1997 (www.mdc.com.my), its impact on music education appears to be minimal (Malaysian Smart School Project, 1999). This being the case, many parents continue to take it upon themselves to provide their children with an education in music.

Thus, whilst it is commonly known that there are many able musicians who are self-taught, a formal musical training ensures musical literacy and aural development in a more structured manner. As such, an education in music is often associated with the acquisition and demonstration of a musical skill at a particular level of proficiency and an ability to appreciate different forms and types of music. Many Malaysian parents thus aim to provide their children with an education in music by sending them to piano lessons. They believe that learning to play the piano is a discipline that requires regular practice, determination and perseverance. Parents also believe that musical talent can be cultivated and artistic growth is best achieved through a skill-based training that meets the needs of individual music students. For these reasons, parents opt for specialist music instruction on a one-to-one basis.

The piano has emerged as the most popular instrument or 'vehicle' for musical training. This demand has, in turn, spurred the growth of the piano manufacturing industry, the publication and retailing of music books, the piano teaching
profession, the setting up of privately owned music schools throughout the country and the establishment of private music colleges to cater to the needs of the public. Thus the growth and development of music education in Malaysia is, by and large, undertaken by private enterprise with limited support from the government.

7.4.1 Benchmarking

One of the main concerns of private education is the issue of quality assurance and social recognition of effort. Since there is no national music examination board that offers graded music examinations, Malaysian parents continue to seek assurances that their children receive a quality music education that is recognised, not only by the Malaysian authorities, but internationally as well. Generally, parents need assurance in three main areas. Firstly, they wish to ascertain that their children are being taught using materials in accordance to a set syllabus, comprising both the practice and the theory of music. Since many parents declare that they are not musically literate themselves and/or have little experience with Western classical music, they believe that music instruction that adheres to a syllabus paves the way to an education in music, which is synonymous with playing the piano.

Secondly, they desire that their children be tested on such knowledge as ‘stated’ in the syllabuses. Thus, in order to be tested, teachers will necessarily need to train their students effectively and students will need to focus on their musical studies. Parents (and many teachers) seem to regard the aim of preparing for musical assessments highly satisfactory and reassuring.

Finally, parents regard positive outcomes of such assessments as ‘proof’ that teachers have fulfilled their professional obligations and that their children have attained a satisfactory standard of musical achievement. This standard is then ‘ benchmarked’ against international standards of comparable achievement as advertised and emphasised by the various music examination boards.
Certificates of graded achievement thus symbolise standards of musical achievement in a tangible form.

7.4.2 Impact of limitations in school music education

The background of music in schools and the public dissatisfaction with the system have been addressed respectively in Chapter Two and Chapter Six. It is argued that these limitations have a significant impact on the development of the private music education system in Malaysia and on Malaysian society as a whole.

Foremost, there is clearly a huge demand by Malaysian parents for an education in music for their children. The lack of provision of such a need in public schools has resulted in the mushrooming of private music studies. Such private studies dictate the nature of the education. Thus, the social contracts negotiated among parents, teachers, students and music schools (where applicable), are premised on the acquisition of particular musical skills by the students. The level of instrumental proficiency is measured within a system of music education that emphasises assessment by individual examiners upon the (re)production of set requirements. This wholly personalised approach to the teaching, learning and assessment of musical attainment has encouraged thousands of children to learn the piano and sit for yearly piano examinations.

Conversely, the opportunities for group music making and public performances commonly associated with school music activities are lacking due to the limitations of school music education. Furthermore, since there are only limited opportunities to play together, the learning of orchestral instruments (such as the oboe) is thus less attractive, compared to mastering the independent and ‘complete’ harmonic and melodic functions provided by the piano.

Since private piano lessons last between half-an-hour to an hour per week, students do have to focus on skills such as playing scales and sight-reading in
addition to mastering the set pieces. The proportion of time spent on practising the piano is also limited, due to students’ competing activities. Therefore, by and large, students cannot be expected to have acquired a ‘complete’ music education within the relatively narrow confines of their musical training as opposed to say, playing regularly in a school orchestra and actively engaging with creative classroom music making projects and honing listening skills. Hence, it may be argued that the system of music education in existence is largely limited in its scope and purview. It does not provide (nor does it claim to provide) a music education in the wider holistic sense of the term as understood by many music educators.

The limitations of the private music education system have been recognised, judging by comments received by students, teachers, academics and members of the public. Another offshoot of the inadequacies of Malaysia’s school-based music education is its impact on society as a whole. Since private music study is mainly accessible to children of middle-class and to upper-class families, the majority of school-going children are thus deprived of an education in music, even in this limited sense. Thus, its impact on society is one that is socially demarcated, with the more privileged segment of society having the opportunities in formal musical training, whilst the majority of the population is left musically untrained.

Furthermore, since private music studies focus primarily on Western classical music, the study of the traditional music of different ethnic groups is somewhat neglected. Although there has been some concerted effort by the music departments of local universities and the National Arts Academy to revive the Malay traditional arts in the country, their inclusion within the school system is still lacking. Thus, there exists a chasm between those who are fortunate enough to receive a skill-based training in Western music and those who lack the opportunity to learn or appreciate the music of their own culture within the school environment. It is argued that the overall apathy towards the appreciation and
knowledge of art music by the general public stems from the limitations of music education in Malaysian schools.

7.4.3 Socio-historical and religious considerations
Learning the piano is a symbol of status. It acts as a social indicator of a particular family’s economic and financial standing through their ability to afford music lessons. Many Chinese Malaysian parents strive to provide a music education for their children, particularly those who did not have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument during their own childhood. This desire is traceable to the many immigrants from China who came to Malaya in search of a better living during the mid 1870’s, about the same time the piano was popularised by British expatriate families living in Malaya. Thus, the historical roots of the music education system, as it exists, stem from the British colonial practice of assessing and validating musical achievement by way of ‘external’ examinations, which were held outside Britain, primarily to cater to the needs of British families who were posted within the British Empire. Such colonial practices have influenced local tastes and perception. Much like the popular missions schools that were set up by members of the clergy, private music schools were established to offer piano tuition to the children of Malaysian parents. Thus, the learning of Western classical music has evolved into a ‘cultural tradition’ for many families.

For Malaysians, the piano is often the preferred musical instrument due to the relative ease in learning and playing the instrument. Its harmonic and melodic versatility lend the instrument much charm and aura. Liszt, for example, treated the piano as if it were a self-contained orchestra, often playing transcriptions of orchestral pieces from Bach to Berlioz. The conduct of individual lessons in the privacy of the home is an added advantage.

Furthermore, the manner of assessment in music seems congruent with the examination orientation of the national system of education. Students’ approach towards learning ‘for the sake of examinations’ is well engrained from the day
they begin school. In other words, the private system of music education complements the public education system of approach in the delivery and testing of knowledge.

However, this preference for learning the Western classical music seems to be prevalent among the middle and upper echelons of society, in particular among members of the Malaysian Chinese community. Learning the piano is seen as a form of modernisation and Westernisation which in turn leads to upward social mobility. On the other hand, there appears to be reluctance to engage with musical activities among some members of the Malay community, who make up nearly three quarters of the population. Perhaps the urge for social recognition, which accompanies financial security, is not so prevalent in this community of indigenous Muslim Malaysians. Whether this situation is due to social and cultural preferences or engendered by the political system of ‘preference treatment’ to the nation’s natives (commonly referred to as ‘Bumiputras’ or sons of the soil) remains debatable.

Also, it is commonly acknowledged that certain sects of the Muslim religion regard music as haram (or prohibited) as it appears to encourage less desirable social pursuits such as drinking and merry-making. For example, the world has recently witnessed the end of Muslim Taliban rule in Afghanistan, with the public airing of music for the first time in many years. However, the situation is somewhat different in Malaysia as music has been part of the history of Malay culture as evidenced by the myriad musical practices elucidated in Chapter Two. Why there is such a difference between the musical education preference of non-Malays and Malays is possibly the subject for another major study but, suffice to say, socio-historical and religious influences have played a significant role in shaping the music education practice as it exists in Malaysia to date.
7.5 The business of music examinations: its effects on teaching and learning

The business of music examinations appears to have played a significant role in the development of music education in Malaysia. Music assessment has become so integral to the system of music education that it may even be regarded as an 'industry' in itself. From the itinerant teacher travelling house-to-house teaching piano, to the manufacture of Malaysian-made pianos, the music education practice has evolved into a multi-million dollar industry. What drives this industry is the business of music examinations, the primary goal of which is the acquisition of musical certification as an attestation of musical proficiency by level progression. The peculiar features of this industry and its effects on the teaching and learning of music are outlined below.

7.5.1 ‘Choice’ within the system: competition is healthy, so they say

As mentioned earlier, five main music assessment boards offer assessments in Western music in Malaysia. Although each of the institutions differ in some aspects of their operations such as the frequency of examinations per year, fees charged and network of representatives, the assessment boards essentially operate on a similar musical ethos and structure of examination requirements since they all offer assessment principally in Western classical music. In this sense, there isn’t really a ‘choice’ within the system and manner of musical assessment, although different assessment boards offer their services. This apparent similarity in the manner of assessing musical skills through the performance of set works, scales, aural and sight-reading tests, seems a well received manner of measuring musical attainment as advocated by the British and emulated by the Australians. Thus, for many parents, students and teachers the popularity and wide-scale practice of such a mode of musical assessment will serve to reinforce and strengthen their belief that this manner of musical assessment is the most desirable approach to musical training and education. Malaysian students therefore continue to provide a lucrative market for music assessment services.
The resultant ‘competition’ for candidates among the various assessment boards in turn serves to further strengthen the mode of musical assessment, which incidentally has changed little over half a century since ABRSM was introduced into Malaysia. Therefore there appears to be a cycle in which the ‘market’ dictates or accepts the manner of assessment that in turn dictates the form and approach to music education as peculiar to Malaysia.

Thus, it is argued that the business of music examinations has encouraged at least seven areas of competition, namely, competitiveness among:

(i) piano teachers for students.
(ii) students to achieve high examination marks.
(iii) parents to ensure that their children pass music examinations yearly.
(iv) music schools for students.
(v) piano retailers and importers to promote a wide range of pianos to increase sales.
(vi) music book retailers and publishers to stock and/or publish examination related materials.
(vii) various music assessment boards for examination candidates.

Whether such forms of competition are regarded as being ‘healthy’ or not, depends on how one views their overall effects. Certainly from a social perspective, the acquisition of any form of musical skills promotes a more cultured society whilst the sales of musical instruments and music books will increase musical prowess and literacy. However, a closer examination of the nature of the competition, reveals that there is a crucial form of ‘competition’ that is missing. The culture of competitive public music making is missing from the ‘loop’. This missing link is indicative of the manifestation of the phenomena being investigated. The following section provides insights as to what is ‘really happening’ in the context of such ‘business-orientated’ competition.
7.5.2 What's really happening?

Several issues arise from the various forms of competition as mentioned above. Firstly since piano teachers are ‘competing’ for students, the spirit of teamwork and professional camaraderie seems to be lacking among members of the piano teaching fraternity. Many teachers prefer to work alone, teaching students on a one-to-one basis. The sharing of good practice and the exchange of pedagogical ideas appear wanting. Teachers also do not seem to encourage their students to perform in public or provide opportunities for them to do so. As a result the culture of playing in public is not engendered from a young age. Hence, while the spirit of competition in the business of teaching piano is well and alive, the spirit of musical ‘competitiveness’ is sadly lacking. Perhaps this is reflected in the outcomes of the national piano competition as described in one of the critical incidences.

Furthermore, teachers did not appear to be enthusiastic about encouraging their students to pursue music as a profession. This attitude may imply that in their personal experience they did not regard the teaching vocation as an attractive profession to pursue. Some may even regard their senior students as possible ‘competitors’ in the future. However, this may also be because teachers did not regard many of their students as being ‘naturally’ talented, and as such, they believe that these students would not likely succeed in the music profession. Thus, the competition for students has created a community of independent piano teachers who work almost exclusively on preparing students for music examinations as dictated by market demands.

Secondly, students seem willing participants in the scheme of things. Whilst many students did not enjoy taking music examinations, they did not object to the system of music education as a whole. Some students were even relieved that they only needed to focus on playing three or four pieces of music per year. As a result, many music students have little or no idea of improvisational skills, as
these are not required within the ambit of test requirements, particularly since teachers shape their teaching content in accordance with examination requirements. Thus, musicianship skills and an overall appreciation of music are generally lacking, so much so that many students equate or closely associate music education with the practice of music examinations and the attainment of high marks in these examinations. Their listening habits did not indicate a particular preference for classical music nor did students make it a point to attend concerts on a regular basis. To them, these activities appear to have little relevance to their music studies.

Thirdly, parents seem generally satisfied with the manner in which music studies are conducted. Whilst some parents appreciate the limitations of the excessive focus on music examinations they also believed that there were no known alternatives for improving the system. Many parents were simply happy to be able to provide the opportunity to their children to receive an education in music. Parents have also been known to 'compete' socially with one another by declaring the graded levels of musical attainment of their offspring. They believe that the acquisition of musical skills is achieved primarily through practice rather than innate talent or musicality. Attending concerts and playing in public did not feature as significant contributory factors in passing music examinations. Thus, to many teachers, parents and students, these activities fell outside the parameters of an education in music.

Fourthly, keen competition among music schools has led to increased piano teaching opportunities. This enhances employment opportunities for piano teachers and enables parents and students to more easily secure the services of piano teachers. These music schools are usually privately owned by music teachers themselves or they are franchised schools such as Yamaha Music Schools. Music lessons are also available in the evenings and weekends at competitive rates. These schools also offer music examinations from more than one music assessment board. They are known to advertise their success by way of
music examination outcomes. Sometimes they organise concerts to boost enrolment. All these factors serve to strengthen the popularity of taking piano lessons.

Fifthly, many music schools also sell pianos and music books. Their presence and sales advertisements promote social knowledge about the availability and popularity of such goods and services. Selling pianos is such a lucrative business that Malaysia now manufactures them. The sale of a piano is closely associated with the needs of the family. For instance, the sales representative would first establish the client’s budget followed closely by the level of musical attainment. A beginner would be offered a modestly priced piano or an electronic piano whereas an advanced music student would be recommended a more expensive piano. A music teacher would be encouraged to purchase a grand piano. Attractive financing packages secured with finance companies are made available. It is quite common for music instrument retailers to offer free lessons upon the purchase of their pianos. Second-hand pianos are also widely available. Some sales representatives would pull the heart strings of parents by telling them that their children would achieve better grades if they played on a more expensive piano, due to its superior action. Indeed some of the higher priced pianos have been advertised as ‘examination models’ (Appendix I). This promotional activity also serves to inform potential customers that certain models of pianos are used during the actual practical examinations. Some music instrument retailers such as Technics Music offer their electronic pianos free of charge to established assessment boards as a form of product endorsement in addition to organising electronic piano competitions (Technics, 2000). This is to assure budget conscious parents that electronic pianos are just as acceptable during examinations although the certificates do state that the examinations have been conducted on electronic pianos.

Furthermore, these music schools being business entities, also stock music books, many of which enjoy brisk sales. These sales figures indirectly influence
the type of music books that are published or imported. Thus, the greater the competition among music schools and music instrument and book retailers, the greater the number of children take up the piano and enter the system of music education and assessment. This cycle of events ‘builds like a tornado’ from the confines of the home, to the continuation and adaptation of established practices at institutions of higher learning. Therefore, what is happening is evidence of the existence of cyclical events within the various levels of social structure. It is argued that this phenomenon is supported and fortified by social action and competition within the system and business of music education practice.

7.5.3 Music as a reflection of society
The phrase ‘music as a reflection of society’ has been understood as the way in which the actions of a particular society are mirrored or influenced by the musical compositions of its day. This is certainly true when tracing the historical development of Western classical music, whereby composers and musicians served the musical needs of people and in so doing, reflected the signs of the time. In this case, it is not the musical work that is being analysed but rather the sociology of music education practice that is being examined. Thus, in many ways, it too reflects the needs and actions of society. Take for example, the issues raised in the current affairs programme, ‘Music and Society’, broadcast on prime-time television as revealed in Chapter Six. Its significance lies in the fact that the limitations of the music education practice and problems associated with the music industry were aired to millions of viewers. Many of the concerns raised are not new. The views and concerns of the panel members were discussed openly on air. Members of the public called-in. The studio audience provided feedback in support of the concerns raised. This indicated that music educators, industry professionals and members of the public took cognizance of the issues at hand. Furthermore, if there were members of the public who were not aware of the
problems associated with the music industry, the issues highlighted in the programme would have enlightened them.

Likewise at the forum in Penang, issues concerning the approach to music education and the manner in which musical knowledge was tested were discussed in public. Participants included academics, parents, teachers and students. Problems were highlighted and debated. An expatriate music educator and conductor voiced his concerns and further compared his understanding of the ‘meaning of music education’ to his Malaysian experience. Further ‘macro-evidence’ of the key issues identified includes numerous articles that have been published concerning the (mis)use of examinations in general. The vestiges of colonial practice in the school system had been deliberated and published in the press. Public opinion about the use and influence of music has also been published. The action of arresting youths associated with ‘black metal music’, for instance, indicates the lack of understanding by those in power. Such swift and drastic action without substantiation by research would contribute to some negative attitudes towards the social influence of music in general and popular music in particular.

Similarly, the sensitivity of some members of the society to the playing of the national anthem out of its conventional social context reflects the diverse views on the roles and functions of music held by different members of the Malaysian community.

All these public displays of concerns, indifference, ignorance, preferences and diverse understanding of the purpose, forms and use of music provide evidence that the Malaysian public may be divided into three broad segments of society. The first segment comprises those who have received either formal or informal musical training. The next segment is made up of ‘music lovers’ and those who have a wide knowledge of different forms and types of music, gained possibly by their having traveled widely or studied overseas. The third, and arguably the
largest segment of society, comprises those who have a limited knowledge of, or exposure to the intricacies of music. This group of society may well be a manifestation of the limited public education in music. As a result, there is a general lack of understanding on the importance of performance arts in the social development of an individual within society. Unfortunately, there are those in authority who belong to this third group, thus making change difficult, due to religious beliefs or political and bureaucratic constraints.

7.5.4 Views from ‘outsiders’

The views and issues highlighted by four British expatriate musicians working in Malaysia were compared. Their comments provided insights as to how ‘outsiders’ viewed music education in Malaysia in relation to their personal background and experience. Foremost it was felt that, compared to the British experience, music education practice in Malaysia is still in its infancy. Although formal music training has been made available for over half a century, it has largely remained within the private domain of a small community of the nation’s population. Nevertheless, by comparison to international standards, the figure is formidable as thousands of children sit for piano examinations each year as evidenced by the music assessment boards. However, from the perspective of the expatriates, there seems to be a consensus that enrolment in piano examinations is not commensurate with the acquisition of an education in music. On the other hand, it was felt that Malaysia has adopted a system of musical assessment to ‘compete’ with the west without fully understanding the basis, purpose and relevance of this ‘competition’.

There was also reference to the notion that Western classical music belongs to Western culture or Europeans (by reference to Western music as ‘our culture’) and that Malaysians needed to establish their own culture (using the term ‘your culture’). This observation is substantiated by public opinion that the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra is not truly ‘Malaysian’, since it plays predominantly
‘Western’ orchestral music with more than 90% of the orchestra members comprising non-Malaysians.

Furthermore, it was observed that learning the piano has taken on new meanings and functions for the Malaysian people. Paradoxically, although there are diverse traditional musical forms in existence, the country appears to be still in search of a national cultural and musical identity. Meanwhile the public is impatient for training in the musical arts of ‘high culture’. Thus, the responsibility of providing an established form of music education has fallen on the shoulders of private piano teachers, many of whom teach with sole reference to their personal learning experience. This is compounded by the limitations of music education in schools. Nonetheless, the public continues to entrust this responsibility to piano teachers in return for assurance that standards have been maintained by way of musical certification that is recognised worldwide. This need is amicably met by the music assessment boards.

7.6 New academics: recognising strengths and limitations

With the establishment of music departments in the local universities and the return of music graduates from abroad, a new pool of music academics has emerged. These music educators are attached to various institutions of higher learning such as private colleges and public universities. Academic duties include the design, delivery and evaluation of courses under their jurisdiction. Assessment strategies play an important role within the purview of their job responsibilities whether in the private or public sector. In addition, academics in private colleges have to meet regulations prescribed by the National Accreditation Board (LAN). The operations of the public universities however, do not come under the jurisdiction of LAN.

Furthermore, benchmark standards are being established and professional bodies are still in the process of being set up to provide expert advice. Meanwhile, the National Accreditation Board appoints academics from public universities to
assess the curriculum of private colleges. This board also realises that there is no professional body in the field of music to advise them on matters pertaining to the content of music curriculum and standards achieved by students enrolled in tertiary music institutions in the private sector. Similarly, they have thus relied on academics from music departments in public universities to evaluate student-work in private colleges. Several of these private colleges conduct undergraduate programmes in partnership with British, Australian and American colleges and universities. Some academics in these private colleges have in turn questioned the ability of academics from public universities to judge the quality of musical work that is not within the area of specialisation of the appointed assessors (for example, tertiary programmes in popular music).

Therefore, the National Accreditation Board thus sees the need to establish a professional body comprising leading professional musicians and academics to assist them in the development and assessment of music education and musical attainment in Malaysia.

In a recent development, a pro-tem committee has initiated a national music association named the Malaysian Association for Music Education (MAME) in conjunction with the 1st National Conference for Music Education (MusEd 2002). Spearheaded by three local universities, namely, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and Universiti Institute Technology MARA, this organisation aims to address issues concerning music education in Malaysia. MAME is in the process of registering itself with relevant governmental authorities. It is argued that the prolongation of the fundamental structure as extrapolated in the next and final chapter lies in the hands of these ‘new academics’ many of whom possess postgraduate qualifications from overseas institutions of higher learning.
7.6.1 Establishing a Malaysian Music Examinations Board: some dilemmas

One of the intriguing outcomes of the triangulation of micro and macro information within the sociogram of interrelationships was the less than enthusiastic response to the idea of the establishment of a Malaysian Music Examinations Boards. This lack of support may be summarised as stemming from five areas of concern.

Firstly, there is this inherent desire for recognition or to put it less eloquently, the ‘fear’ that musical effort may go unrecognised. As mentioned earlier, one of the offshoots of private music education is the issue of recognition. Parents, teachers and students alike need assurance that the fruits of their labour are recognised not only nationally but internationally. Therefore, this ‘proposed board’ would foremost require accreditation from the Ministry of Education and the Malaysian government. It would then need to establish and maintain standards that are comparable internationally. Needless to say, the ABRSM or Trinity College would provide the bench mark for musical standards. Unless and until parents and teachers are convinced that the certificates awarded are of musical and social value, students will not be advised to embark on the Malaysian version of graded examinations. Furthermore, from a ‘competitive’ perspective, all the ABRSM (or Trinity College) would need to do (should they argue that they have found standards compromised), is to declare that they will not recognise music attainment and certification to be comparable to their own.

Secondly there is the question of the syllabus and music publications. Syllabus are normally published yearly and distributed free of charge. Several teachers have commented that they would need to study the syllabus in order to make a judgment on whether they would support the proposed local assessment board. In setting a good syllabus there would have been considerable consultation with music educators and feedback from examiners as to the suitability of the examination requirements. These would include not only the piano syllabus but
also syllabuses for various other orchestral instruments. In addition syllabuses for
different forms of assessments such as chamber playing would need to be
considered. Also syllabuses for the theory of music examinations and relevant test
papers would need to be made available as would set examination pieces. There
would need to be close collaboration between music publishers and the
assessment board to ensure that relevant materials are available for purchase at an
affordable cost. For example, the ABRSM has its own publishing arm, in addition
to working in close collaboration with Oxford University Press. One of the major
considerations of any assessment board is the issue of music copyright. Thus the
close association with an established music publisher is crucial in securing
copyright for examination music as stated in the respective syllabuses.

Thirdly, there is the question of confidentiality and potential conflicts of interest.
A Malaysian Music Examinations Board would likely comprise Malaysian
examiners. There is the question of whether there are enough qualified Malaysian
musicians to be trained as examiners, particularly for labour intensive and time
consuming activities such as practical assessments on a one-to-one basis. Also,
many of the established music educators and music teachers teach either on a full
time or a part-time basis and as such they may be regarded as ‘competitors’ in
their own right. Furthermore, should they teach for a particular music school or
even own the school, a possible conflict of interest may arise due to possible
accusations of bias or breach of confidentiality. Since a large number of students
who enrol in music examinations come from or around the capital city of Kuala
Lumpur and many of the qualified music educators are also from similar
locations, it would be logistically difficult to assign potential examiners away
from their places of practice. Furthermore, should teachers, parents or students be
unhappy with their results it would technically be possible to locate the local
examiner for an explanation or at worst, instigate a confrontation. Conversely,
some parents would send their children to certain teachers for lessons because
they are also examiners. To avoid a possible conflict of interest, local examiners
may decide to send their own students for assessment by ‘external’ examination
boards, which again would not auger well for the social perception of the local music examination board.

Fourthly, there is the issue of the quest for a Malaysian ‘cultural identity’ as pointed out by several of the research participants. Although there are diverse musical practices and young students can seek training in traditional instruments such as the Indian ‘tabla’, there is still the lack of a structure programme of training, assessment and performance that is socially and academically recognised. For example, a student who has played the ‘tabla’ for many years would find it difficult to gain acceptance into a tertiary music programme or find employment in a music school unlike someone who has a recognized musical certificate. Therefore, should there be the establishment of a Malaysian Music Examinations Board, especially if it is sanctioned by the Ministry of Education and the Malaysian government, it would also need to incorporate a syllabus for the assessment in traditional instruments so as to allay potential criticisms of ‘pro-colonial sentiments’ as voiced by some disgruntled Malaysians on the use of public funds to support the hugely expensive Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. Also there is already some discontent concerning the lack of training and education in the traditional musical arts in public schools.

This hypothetical ‘traditional-instruments’ syllabus posses further problems with regard to the insufficient number of suitably trained examiners, not to mention the lack of ‘qualified’ teachers. Non-western music has conventionally been typified by oral and aural training. Assessment is largely by public display of both solo and group performance skills, usually after considerable years of tutelage under a well-known practitioner or guru (meaning master). The teaching and learning of traditional music does not conventionally subscribe to the Western notion of music education. In the first instance, highly developed traditional musical compositions do not adhere to the Western concept of notation but rather to ‘symbolic’ references which act as structural guides to the overall form, musical nuances and timeline. This is certainly true for Carnatic music commonly heard in
Malaysia. Traditional Malay music which accompanies dances such as the ‘Mak Yong’ is performed ‘by ear’. Certainly there would not arise the issue of copyright, simply because much of the music is not notated, which makes standardisation and universal music assessment problematic. However, there are developments in the field of music notation for traditional music. For example, ‘graded’ examinations for Chinese music (or more accurately ‘for Chinese instruments’) is available from the Beijing Conservatory of Music. Nevertheless, the adoption of the ‘Western’ concept of testing musical ability by way of graded examinations through the realisation of notated music has yet been fully accepted by leading practitioners of the various traditional instruments due to differences in temperament and microtonal inflections that are inherent in the practice of the oral tradition as opposed to the ‘absolute’ nature of the written music tradition.

Lastly there is the issue of language. Music has its own highly developed communication that transcends national linguistic barriers. Many educationists (and employers) are concerned with the decline in English proficiency among Malaysian students. Some parents send their children for piano tuition as a form of English tuition since the medium of instruction is English as with the language of assessment. If a Malaysian Music Examinations Board is to be established, the language of assessment, especially for the theory of music, will likely be in the national language, or in a combination of English and Malay. Although some musical terms and signs are found in the Malay Language, the general acceptability of its usage in private music education remains debatable. Competing assessment boards may cite the language difference as a reason to deny recognition of similar grades of musical attainment. This decision will work against the success of the local music examinations board.

Thus, it may be concluded that the proposed idea of a Malaysian Music Examinations Board has met with less positive response from quantitative and qualitative feedback, with plausible reasons as cited above.
In general, there is evidence to indicate that there is an overall satisfaction with the established system of music educations among parents, teachers and students.

There is, however, increasing dissatisfaction among established music educators and academics on the exaggerated emphasis on examination repertoire, poor musicianship skills and the lack of music education in public schools. It is envisaged that a Malaysian Music Examinations Board will materialise in due course. However, the nature and scope of its operations will largely depend on the availability of resources, both musical and financial. In any case, it will unlikely be a significant ‘competitor’ to the well established international assessment boards as the present clientele for assessments in Western music seem generally satisfied with the system in place.

7.7 ABRSM’s success story in Malaysia

As mentioned earlier, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) is the largest and most successful music assessment board operating in Malaysia. The annual enrolment for its examinations is reputed to be the highest by comparison to the other assessment boards which conduct music examinations in Malaysia. The ABRSM may be regarded as singularly unequalled in its impact on the development of music education in Malaysia. In almost every interview and discussion with research participants, mention is made of the ABRSM examinations. Its success in Malaysia may be attributed to seven main factors, namely its:

(i) historical track record as a leading provider of music assessments for over half a century.
(ii) credibility as an assessment board which represents four of the world’s most renowned music colleges.
(iii) international experience and reputation as a provider of graded music assessments on a global scale.
(iv) structured syllabus and curriculum support.
(v) affordability and availability of examinations and examination support publications.
(vi) association with the Malaysian Ministry of Education
(vii) client loyalty.

7.7.1 Historical track record

The ABRSM has a sound track record of conducting music assessments for over fifty years in Malaysia. It has maintained a low profile throughout this period in time and has not been known to advertise its services. In 1948 the ABRSM began to offer music examinations in the homes of music teachers and in music schools owned by expatriates. In the late 1960’s the administration of the examinations was by taken over by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Practical music examinations are held in hotels and the theory of music examinations are held in public schools. Despite being the second assessment board to offer its services in Malaysia (then Malaya), after Trinity College, the ABRSM has emerged the most popular of among the five main music examination boards which operate in the country. It continues to enjoy strong support of its services and its musical certificates are widely recognised by members of the public and institutions of higher learning. The examinations are professionally conducted and there is overall satisfaction with examination outcomes in accordance to its mission statement, ‘Setting the Standards’.

In short the ABRSM has kept its track record as an efficient, trusted and well organised institutional provider of music assessments that are held in high esteem by music educators and the public in Malaysia and around the world.
7.7.2 Credibility: group of world-renowned music colleges

The knowledge that the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music is made up of a group of four renowned music colleges in Britain, namely, the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music (both situated in London), the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, has lent much prestige and credibility to its programmes. The Royal Charter and charity status accorded to these institutions augurs well with public perception of its high standards, integrity and kudos. Thus, whichever programmes are introduced, the curriculum content is perceived to be well researched, tested and supported by musicians of relevant academic and/or professional standing/experience. In sum, the certificates which the ABRSM confer reflect the essence of its representation and practice.

7.7.3 International experience and recognition

The knowledge that the examiners appointed by the ABRSM are well experienced in the art of assessing instrumental skills provides confidence to parents, teachers and students alike. Also, since visiting British examiners do not make a living as piano teachers in Malaysia they are not viewed by local teachers as being possible ‘competitors’. They are generally regarded as trained experts in the field of music evaluation and are trusted to provide fair assessments of musical ability from a ‘global’ perspective particularly since the ABRSM examinations are conducted worldwide. Furthermore, there is the element of confidence and a sense of security since the theory of music examination papers are set and marked in Britain. The practice of returning the theory mark sheets of unsuccessful candidates to teachers after a moderation process exhibit transparency and accountability in assessment. Parents, teachers and students can also direct their queries and concerns on examination matters by e-mail to London. This facility is cost effective, time saving and promotes dialogue between ABRSM and its clients. Furthermore the relocation of the newly-appointed
South East Asia Regional Consultant of the ABRSM, to Kuala Lumpur (from Kuching in East Malaysia) in year 2000 has provided further avenues for contact with ABRSM’s regional representative.

7.7.4 Curriculum support and contact

Although the ABRSM’s operations in Malaysia are represented by the Ministry of Education, there is a clear demarcation between administrative responsibilities, syllabus and curriculum construction as well as the dissemination of relevant information. For instance, teachers enrol and receive information pertaining to their students’ examinations from the ABRSM desk officers in each state education office. They also collect their students’ certificates from the same office. At the same time, each teacher is given an ‘identity card’ when they initially register their students for ABRSM examinations. This card presumably holds information about the teacher (for example, their address, qualifications) in the ABRSM database and acts as a source for the ABRSM mailing list. Teachers receive the yearly syllabus, details of new publications and information pertaining to the Educational Support Programme. They also receive the quarterly journal *Libretto* through the mail. Thus, the wide dissemination of the syllabus and the issue of its free quarterly journal, *Libretto*, provide regular and up-to-date information about the ABRSM’s publications and global activities as well as useful articles on teaching methodologies and problems faced by music teachers. Furthermore, the ABRSM website (www.abrsm.ac.uk) provides a host of information pertaining to its syllabus, types of examinations and courses available, examination dates and fees, bulletin and chat-rooms, contact and feedback mechanism, online purchase of its publications as well as useful curriculum support features, such as the creative online aural training programmes. Recordings of classical and jazz music can be downloaded as MIDI files through the ABRSM website (www.abrmspublishing.co.uk).
7.7.5 Association with the Malaysian Ministry of Education

The ABRSM promotes itself in Malaysia in three main ways. Foremost, it is represented nationwide by ABRSM desk officers in each of the fourteen state education offices throughout the country. This network of representation is an attractive feature in that the representatives are not music teachers but government officials. In this sense there is no competition amongst representatives either as music teachers or as music schools. Privacy of examination outcomes is assured as correspondence and examination-related matters are issued on the Ministry of Education letterhead. Also civil servants are governed by a code of ethics, which do not permit them to reveal state/official information. Therefore, the ABRSM is seen as being officially ‘sanctioned’ by the Malaysian education authorities over and above any of the other music assessment boards which operate in the country.

By far the most significant public demonstration of this collaborative partnership was the participation of several senior Ministry officials at ABRSM’s inaugural Malaysian Diploma Presentation Ceremony at a leading hotel in the capital city (Appendix J). Accompanied by the ABRSM chief examiner, Clara Taylor, the ministry officials ‘walked’ to the stage, complete with full medieval regalia, pomp and ceremony in the presence of parents, teachers and the press. The ABRSM guests included the Assistant Director of Education (Department of Examinations), two Directors of Education and three officers of the Education Department. The names of these six senior officers were published in the programme booklet (ABRSM, April 2002), an unusual occurrence as the Malaysian Ministry of Education and its Examinations Department in particular, do not normally ‘demonstrate’ their affiliation with one particular private establishment in such an overt manner. Credit for this exercise in validation is likely due to ABRSM’s new dynamic South East Asia Regional Consultant, Bill Thompson who was appointed in 2000 (Libretto, September 1999).
Thus, the ABRSM has demonstrated its close liaison with the Malaysian Education authorities ensuring that this collaboration is further strengthened and acknowledged in public. In contrast, the absence of representation from the Ministry of Education in the inaugural diploma award ceremonies held by the Australian Music Examinations Board, the London College of Music and Media and Trinity College was also significant.

7.7.6 Degree of satisfaction and client loyalty

It may be argued that three primary factors or ‘aims’ govern piano teachers in the conduct of their profession. Foremost, teachers are generally accepted as governing parents’ wishes since it has been found that parents play a significant role in providing financial support for the music education of their children. They have then to be assured that they are able, comfortable and successful in delivering the curriculum to satisfy their personal and professional needs. Finally, they must be able to accommodate their students’ wishes (in order to maintain their clients) and at the same time ensure that their students’ musical progress is at a satisfactory level.

In order to facilitate such aims teachers generally consider six main qualities when choosing a music examination board to which they prepare their students for assessment. Hence, the assessment boards should:

(i) be well-known to parents and members of the public.
(ii) be recognised nationally and internationally.
(iii) provide assessment services that are efficient, affordable, reliable and confidential.
(iv) have easily available, affordable and effective examination support materials such as examination scores as required in the syllabuses and sample past-year theory of music test-papers.
(v) provide curriculum support especially for new programmes or where there are significant changes to examination requirements.
(vi) provide a means of contact with the assessment board or its representatives when necessary and receive satisfactory feedback to concerns raised.

The success of the ABRSM in Malaysia (as possibly elsewhere) may be attributed to the assessment board meeting the above needs of its clients. By comparison, competitors such as the London College of Music and Media have sought to gain market share by emulating the qualities of the ABRSM whilst improving on areas where weaknesses have been identified.

Realising the importance of international recognition, the LCMM freely advertises their association with Thames Valley University as a provider of high-level tertiary education (*Forte*, Summer 1998). Also, several assessment boards provide opportunities for music assessments up to three times a year unlike the ABRSM which conducts the practical and theory of music examination once a year respectively. Several assessment boards have lowered their examination fees and some music teachers believe that certain examinations are also 'easier' to pass by omitting the requirement to participate in a viva voce as part of their examination. This attracts students who are less able to converse in English. Furthermore, assessment boards have established representative offices in the capital city. For instance, Trinity College has set up a national office in Kuala Lumpur, the better to serve music teachers, raise the College's profile and increase the candidacy for Trinity College music as well as for speech and drama examinations. Also, as mentioned earlier, the Australian Music Examinations Board initiated the practice of graduation ceremonies to celebrate their diplomats' success and to foster client loyalty of their alma mater, a practice which was quickly emulated by other music assessment boards including the Associated Board (*ABRSM*, April 2002).
However, it is noted that, despite such efforts to compete with the ABRSM, anecdotal evidence has suggested that the other assessment boards have yet to gain comparable market share. Furthermore, several participants of the research have recorded ‘less satisfactory’ experience with some of the assessment boards. This may be attributed to:

(i) the lack of assurance that examination outcomes will kept confidential.
(ii) occasional administrative errors.
(iii) a conflict of interest between state representatives, and private music schools and piano teachers.
(iv) insufficient and often unavailable examination support materials and publications.
(v) higher costs of examination fees and examination texts.
(vi) lack of familiarity with the syllabus and changes to the syllabus without due notification or clarification.
(vii) less conducive environment in which some examinations are conducted.
(viii) public perception of the awards/certificates as being ‘lower in standards’.
(ix) ‘non-recognition’ or lack of endorsement by the Malaysian education authorities and public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

7.8 Tracing the loop in a cyclical phenomena

The teaching and learning of the piano can be traced to a cyclical phenomena. The cycle ‘begins’ with parents sending their children for piano lessons. They locate music teachers primarily by word-of-mouth through the recommendations of friends or relatives. They may also be recommended to music schools in the neighbourhood.
At the onset, parents are charged fees that are commensurate with the level or grade of their offspring. A beginner is regarded as one who has very little or no knowledge of instrumental skills. A student who has had music lessons would be immediately asked to declare the highest music examination that s/he has taken and s/he will be charged the fee of the next grade. Thus, the grade-fee link is very much enshrined within the system of music education from the very onset of the teaching-learning cycle.

This social behaviour is seen as a ‘micro-subjective’ action in the establishment of the social contract amongst parents, teachers and students as mentioned earlier. Once students participate in the ‘loop’, they consciously or inadvertently enter into a system of training that spans approximately eight to ten years. This corresponds to the eight graded levels of musical attainment with the first two years of ‘beginner studies’. Parents and students have become part of the music education cycle that is bounded by a strong network of ‘international’ music educators who perpetuate a certain mode and approach to learning. Success and failure is controlled by the award (or non-award) of a certificate of attainment. This is regarded as a ‘macro-objective’ aim in the analysis of social action. On or near completion of this eight-year loop, some students begin to teach beginners, initially on a part-time basis. Many of those who find themselves highly musical will continue music studies at diploma level (again by taking higher level examinations from the assessment boards) and opt to teach for a living. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a considerable number of Malaysian piano teachers belong to this category of educators. The first loop of the cycle is completed (and repeated).

Some students will embark on undergraduate music studies at local universities or colleges, whilst others will seek higher music education abroad. Not surprisingly, these students will declare piano as their major instrument. Their piano playing skills are further honed. The next loop of the cycle emerges when these graduates
seek employment. Teaching appears to be the main avenue of employment. Whether they teach in schools or at an institution of higher learning, many of them also teach piano on a part-time basis. The loop is further strengthened and the cycle is rejuvenated. The following figure illustrates the phenomena.

Figure 7.8 Tracing the loop in the phenomena

From Micro-action to Macro-system

Parents/guardians
(initiating/providing piano tuition: a micro-subjective action)

more music certification
(evolving into a macro system)

Tertiary music studies
(local or foreign universities: rejoins the loop upon graduation, teaching)

Students
(the recipients: towards the micro-objective)

Students
(music schools/studios-
business, profession)

Music Certification
(examination boards)

Music teachers
(music schools/studios-
business, profession)

music teachers

parents

7.9 Role-play in rituals and photography

Rituals play a crucial role in the construction of social reality. They symbolise and capture social behaviour thus reinforcing action and interaction between actors and the audience. It is argued that rituals and media photographs are forms of role-play, the former being active in nature whilst the latter is more passive in nature. Role-play is a powerful tool that is used to influence, enhance and dictate public perception which in turn moulds social behaviour (Collier, 1967).
The critical incidences and vignettes provide evidence of such use of power and manipulation by extending the implicit authority of the written word in the form of action and image.

Take the graduation ceremonies as instances in action. What are the ulterior motives behind such elaborate rituals and seemingly extravagant spending? Is it not to prove to the public (and graduands) that the acquisition of a diploma from the conferring body is a symbol of musical attainment of international standards to be emulated and applauded? But are they really 'graduands' of an institution in the real sense? Can a thirteen year old child be conferred a diploma in full regalia complete with college gown and mortar board after successfully playing three pieces of music to a sole examiner at the end of forty-eight hours of private instruction from a piano teacher?

Nevertheless, role-play and rituals represent important 'tools' in the marketing and the branding of products and services. For example, the two vignettes in Chapter 6 illustrate the influence of the media in shaping mental structures. Such powerful images capture the imagination of parents, preparing them mentally for the realisation of natural aspirations through private education means. The media thus plays a significant role in shaping the social construction of reality. The 'silent voice' (Walker, 1996) of photographs yields dynamic and long-lasting imprints on the subconscious mind. Therefore, acts of 'public recognition' re-enforces social values and beliefs about the efficacy of a system.

The meeting of standards and international recognition is constantly emphasised by assessment boards. However, there seems to be some discrepancy between music diplomas awarded by international assessment boards and those awarded by Malaysian colleges. For example, the National Accreditation Board of Malaysia or LAN requires private music colleges to provide up to fifty credit-hours of instruction in order to be awarded a Certificate in Music (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara, 2002). The award of a diploma in music requires even greater
credit-hours of instruction by qualified staff with teaching permits at Malaysian colleges. What then is the parity between the ‘external’ diplomas and those conferred by local institutions of higher learning? How will parents equate such qualifications? Is it really necessary then for aspiring musicians to enrol in institutions of higher learning as these graduates will likely join the teaching ‘loop’ just like the diploma graduands?

It is argued that such rituals conducted by the assessment boards serve to reinforce public notion that the awards conferred by the assessment boards are indeed worthwhile, time saving and cost effective. This will further encourage parents, students and teachers to support the system of graded music studies to which the end is not merely the attainment of a Grade 8 certificate but a Diploma in Music. In this sense, the photograph of the boy practising the piano raised on a steel stage (as illustrated in the preamble page) is, ironically, really ‘playing it safe’.

The piano is thus symbolic of the child’s musical and artistic achievement, and the instrument must be carefully guarded at all times. Practising the piano is a task that is part and parcel of the child’s education and there must be no distractions (even under the treat of the ‘El Nina’ floods). Such is the devotion and dedication to the pursuit of piano playing by the whole family-unit under the guidance of the piano teacher who is entrusted to deliver the desired outcomes. What drives this act is the very reason for this research. It is more than about playing the piano, more than just passing piano examinations — it is about the Malaysian psyche, the vicarious interaction between members of a community who seek education for a better life and, music education is part and parcel of this symbolic search.
7.10 Chapter summary

This chapter analysed key points that had emerged from Chapters Five and Six. A sociogram of musical interrelationships was formulated to facilitate the analysis of data from the private and the public domain. The outcomes derived from the five categories of information sources, as illustrated in the sociogram, were classified under five main areas of observation.

The opening section provided an overview of the piano teaching and learning practice. By exploring the musical interrelationships amongst music teachers, parents and students, the analysis of interaction unraveled the implicit social contract that exists amongst these three parties.

The next section then extrapolated the manner in which music education in Malaysia had evolved as a private enterprise, arguably spurred on by the limitations of music education in public schools. It is argued that the activities of private enterprise have contributed to the public desire for verification and recognition of musical achievement by way of music examinations. The socio-cultural and religious sentiments amongst different communities of the society with regard to the learning of music were then explored.

Factors that had led to the flourishing demand for musical assessments were identified. This had resulted in stiff competition amongst various examination boards which operate in the country. It examined the commercial nature of music examinations and extrapolated the positive and negative effects on the teaching and learning of music from various perspectives.

The idea of the establishment of a Malaysian Music Examinations Board was discussed. It offered insights into the dilemmas of such an establishment particularly in light of the numerous existing British and Australian music assessment boards which operate in the country.
The success and popularity of the ABRSM in Malaysia was then analysed. Areas discussed included the ABRSM's historical track record, credibility and experience, curriculum support and its close association with the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate and the Ministry of Education.

Finally, the music education practice in Malaysia was traced to cyclical phenomena. This analytical position was drawn by triangulating individual and group interaction within the socio-cultural and historical nexus of musical interrelationships from both the private and the public domain.

The next chapter unveils nine emergent themes which are meta-analysed into macro-micro and objective-subjective findings and presented in a metatheoretical schema.
CHAPTER EIGHT

UNFOLDING FINDINGS THROUGH A METATHEORETICAL SCHEMA

8.1 Chapter overview

This final chapter represents a synthesis of the entire research endeavour. It begins with a presentation of emergent themes that have evolved from the analysis of information from the micro and macro domains. This micro-macro approach to data collection, categorisation and analysis is taken a step further by metatheorising emergent themes within the prescribed analytical model. The theories of Mead and Schenker are recapitulated. Mead’s idea of the duality of the self is reflected in social action and interaction. Schenker’s theory of the fundamental structure, middleground and foreground of musical events is applied in the treatment and analysis of emergent themes. However, unlike Schenker’s idea of the non-changing nature of the fundamental structure, it is argued that the fundamental line (or Urstaz) of a social system can alter by the force of change.

Paradigms are integrated by the application of metatheoretical principles as expounded by George Ritzer. Emergent themes are finally metamorphosised and juxtaposed onto a metatheoretical schema. Findings are presented as belonging to the macro-objective, macro-subjective, micro-objective and micro-subjective realms within the fundamental structure, middleground and foreground of musical events. They are then briefly summarised into nine outcomes. Finally, the limitations of the research are expounded, followed by the conclusion and some recommendations on the way ahead.
8.2 Emergent themes

Nine themes have emerged from the analysis of micro-macro information within the sociogram of musical interrelationships as explicated in the previous chapter.

The following figure illustrates the thematic outcomes.

Figure 8.2 Emergent Themes

The nine themes may be summarised as follows:

(I) The musical heritage of Malaysia and the continuance of historical practices are direct outcomes of British colonial presence in the country.

(II) The desire for international recognition, verification and certification is an offshoot of privatisation, globalisation and standardisation of musical training.
(III) The cyclical nature of the piano teaching career is re-enforced by the liberalisation of education.

(IV) The quest for improved social status and the fulfillment of missed opportunities shape the actions of the family unit.

(V) Peculiar cultural attitudes towards teaching, learning and testing are inspired by personal and social goals, and rewards.

(VI) The media plays a powerful role in the social construction of reality.

(VII) Effective marketing strategies contribute to the business of music assessment services.

(VIII) Bureaucratic constraints and political agendas contribute to the music education system.

(IX) There is widespread recognition of the limitations of the system of music education. The call for change is a process of empowerment.

By applying the ideas of Mead, Schenker and Ritzer, the emergent themes are analysed, triangulated and juxtaposed onto a metatheoretical schema as elucidated further on in the chapter. Meanwhile, the ideas of Mead, Schenker and Ritzer are recapitulated.
8.3 Revisiting Mead and Schenker

The three basic premises of symbolic interactionism as expounded by Mead and his proponent, Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), are structure, methodology and process. For symbolic interactionists, structure is represented by the various forms of social interaction between individual people rather than the roles that they assume. Social structures include performance roles, status positions and rank orders as well as bureaucratic relations between institutions and authorities.

Structures, however, do not necessarily determine behaviour and in this sense the more unstructured the situation, the more likely that symbolic-analysis is significant to its understanding. The Median methodology thus analyses the structure of role-interaction by examining the processes by which individuals define the world from within and at the same time define their world of external objects. The meaning of 'roles' as understood by symbolic interactionists is not that which is specified by its culture but as action that is characteristic and expressive of the particular personality that happens to occupy that position at a point in time. In this sense there are both interactive roles and social roles within any historical time frame.

Hence, where there is an appropriate choice to be made by the actor, the decision will be influenced by the norms and values of that society. The larger collective forms of action are further fitted together by the lines of behaviour of the separate participants in joint actions and trading actions. Each participant occupies a different position and acts from that status. The engagement of separate and possibly distinct acts, together with the 'fitting together' of such acts (rather than the commonalities of those acts), constitute joint action. In this way, there is an attempt to understand actions and behaviour from the point of view of the actor.

Furthermore, the benefits of such common actions are seen to inspire further similar actions and 'trading' is initiated. Uncertainty, contingency and
transformation are part and parcel of the process of joint and trading actions. In this sense problematic situations or situations that demand new meanings are the foci of analysis for symbolic interactionists. Hence, the scientific approach of symbolic interactionism is premised from a problem with the empirical world and thereafter seeks to clarify that problem by examining that empirical world through observation or action. Schenker too based his analytical perspectives on the significance of symbolic meaning. He believed that life's path is influenced by one's origin, experience and state of being. By utilising a system of musical symbols, Schenker demonstrated motion in time by the use of signs in interrelating the past as it transforms into the present. Mead and Schenker thus appear congruent in their aesthetics of approach and philosophical stances.

Both theorists applied the observations of life's events by the use of symbolic references. Mead through the analysis of the 'selves' and Schenker by a network of signs in which the fundamental structure represents the lifeline of human interaction. In this sense, Schenker's theory is similarly embodied in structure, process and methodology which he coded in an analytical framework termed as the background (or fundamental structure/line), middleground and foreground of musical activity. In this manner, both theorists were highly motivated by the components of meaning and the understanding of such meanings by an analytical framework that is largely procedural in its process and symbolic in its construct. Utilizing a system of symbols, Schenker regarded the fundamental structure as the framework which supports the movement and development of musical events (Forte and Gilbert, 1982). Thus, as Schenker perceives musical analysis as a means of interrelating the past with the present, so too are emergent themes, seen through the lens of the historical-colonial past of Malaysia as she meanders through post-colonial transmutation, in the analysis of historical practices between the imperial past and its legacies in the present.
8.4 Integrated paradigm and metatheory

To recapitulate, George Ritzer’s integrated paradigm is conceptualised under four interactive levels of macro-micro and objective-subjective interrelationships. The macroscopic-microscopic continuum views the social world as a series of entities ranging from those ‘large-in-scale’ to those ‘small-in-scale’. This is premised on the simple idea that social phenomena vary greatly in scale, scope and dimension. At the macro end of the continuum there may exist large scale phenomena such as peculiar education systems adhered to by specific social groups. At the micro-end of the continuum, gestures by actors are influenced by individual thought. Yet, in between the two ends of the continuum, there exists a range of group and individual actions which may not necessarily belong specifically to either macro or micro realms. There are no clear-cut lines dividing macro and micro features as one relates connectively to the other.

Additionally, at each end of the macro-micro continuum further differences can be made between its objective and subjective qualities. At the macro end there are objective structures such as governments and bureaucracies as well as subjective elements such as values and preferences held by the society. At the micro end there are objective patterns of action and behaviour whilst subjective elements include features such as the mental processes and perceptions of individual actors. Macro-objective realms are thus contrasted with the macro-subjective realms in that the former relates to structural formulations such as political systems whereas the latter encompasses the norms and values of a society.

On the other hand, the micro dimensions embody more action related considerations such as behavioural pattern that influence perceptions and beliefs. Thus, the macro-microscopic and objective-subjective continuums range from the constructs of societies and world-systems to the identification of individual thought and action.
Following Ritzer, the components of these two continuums are fused into an integrated paradigm and developed into a schema. Multiple meanings and theoretical positions are dissected, resulting in the emergence of different viewpoints. In doing so, both complementary and controversial perspectives are extracted and examined. Metatheorising thus acts as a prelude to theory development. It aims to better understand extant theory in the creation of new knowledge. A chief feature is the identification and analysis of symbolic structures within a society. Social actions and behavioural patterns are compared and contrasted with everyday language creating frames of minds in which new knowledge is realised. The process incorporates the task of comparing, expanding, summarising and analysing thematic outcomes with an aim to fit social ‘reality’ into concepts for advanced analytical purposes. Nodes and junctions are marked-out in the network of socio-musical interrelationships for further analysis.

8.5 Analysing themes

An inductive approach was utilised in the interpretation of individual and group human behaviour. In the first instance, meanings were induced from the mass of data. Interrelationships between people’s everyday procedures for solving practical problems through the construction of commonsense accounts were examined in relation to the individual’s adaptation to society based on communication and the analysis of symbolic meaning. Microscopic and macroscopic perspectives were taken into consideration. The subjective views and opinions of research participants sourced from the private and public domain were closely correlated. Multiple theories formed the theoretical framework. Parallels were drawn between Schenker’s concept and Mead’s theory of action. Stages were set against the conceptual levels of the foreground and, middleground and background of events in relation to symbolic understanding that surrounded action and interaction.
As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Schenker’s analytical framework is premised on two main levels of stratification, namely the fundamental structure or background, and the middleground and foreground. Schenker regarded the fundamental structure as the principle of origin whilst the principle of development and continuity is represented by the middleground and foreground. In the analysis of a pre-composed musical composition, Schenker’s fundamental structure, being a structural formation, is non-changing.

On the other hand, the middleground and foreground are non-structural formations, hence change is envisaged. However, unlike Schenker’s analysis which is premised on a fixed fundamental structure (arguably since it is the analysis of a pre-composed work), the ‘fundamental structure’ in this case of social analysis may alter as a result of social change. Here it is argued that the fundamental structure takes on a double-role of being both a changing and a non-changing structural formation. The fundamental structure interrelates closely with the middleground and foreground levels of event. Both are affected by subjective and objective action and interaction. The fundamental structure may also change by events in the middleground and foreground in which the prevailing ‘system’ may take on a different identity, form or function.

Furthermore, events that develop in the middleground and foreground may in turn affect the transformation of the fundamental structure itself. Thus, a post-modern adaptation of Schenker’s theory is the possible prolongation of the ‘fundamental structure’ in social analysis. In other words, it is argued that existing systems of practice may change by force or by natural persuasion. The following schema illustrates the outcome of thematic analysis within the framework of the metatheoretical model created.
8.6 Metatheoretical schema

Figure 8.6 Findings presented in a metatheoretical schema

FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE / BACKGROUND

Macro-Objective
i. Vestiges of colonialism
ii. Politics of education, religion and cultural bureaucracy
iii. Examination orientation of the education system
iv. Nationalism versus internationalism
v. New opportunities

'Modes' interrelating in time

MIDDLEGROUND & FOREGROUND

Micro-Objective
a. Behavioural patterns
b. Action and interaction
c. Symbolism
d. Deconstructing meaning

Macro-Subjective
i. Heritage of musical practices
ii. Music education preferences
iii. Public music examination system
iv. Issue of recognition
v. Goals and Rewards

prolongation of the fundamental structure: deconstructing Schenker

A juxtaposition of socio-musicological concepts in theory building
The meta-analytical process undertaken placed much emphasis on the importance of meaning, the source of meaning and the role of meaning within the macro-micro and objective-subjective continuum of socio-musical interrelationships. In this way, the emergent themes were triangulated at the macro and micro levels of both objective and subjective realms.

In the final analysis, findings are categorized as belonging to the fundamental structure (or background), middleground and foreground of socio-musical events. The fundamental structure encompasses the macro-objective and macro-subjective findings whilst the middleground and foreground levels incorporate the micro-objective and micro-subjective findings.

As illustrated in the metatheoretical schema, ten macro-objective and macro-subjective findings are presented within the fundamental structure whilst another eight micro-objective and micro-subjective findings are presented in the middleground and foreground of the analytical structure. The following expounds the findings.

8.7 Macro-objective findings

The macro findings evolved from a further analysis of the emergent themes as elucidated in Figure 8.2. Elements in five of the nine emergent themes, namely Themes I, V, VII, VIII and IX are found to be macro-related. The outcomes of this meta-analysis are then categorised as macro-objective findings, pertaining to the residues or vestiges of colonial practices, the politics of education and cultural bureaucracy, the examination orientation of the Malaysian education system, the tussle between nationalism and internationalism and the emergence of new opportunities as an outcome of the liberalization of educational policies. Each of the findings is extrapolated as follows.
8.7.1 Vestiges of colonialism

The music examination system as it exists in Malaysia is essentially a continuance of an historical practice begun by the British in Malaya in the early twentieth century. With British policies that encouraged large-scale migration into the country, multicultural musical practices emerged alongside the development of a pluralist society. While religious, cultural and linguistic differences prevailed, there was at the same time an urge to adopt ‘Western’ social practices. The process of urbanisation and modernisation appeared intricately linked to Westernisation.

Learning to play the piano was one such emulation. The development of the Malaysian piano import-export industry and the establishment of privately-owned music schools and studios as well as the robust music books retailing business represent ‘spin-offs’ of such early interests in learning the piano. Thus, from the humble beginning of the lone music examiner making ‘house calls’, the business of providing music assessment services over three-quarters of a century has grown into a multi-million dollar industry with teams of external assessors in Malaysia for months on end examining candidates from as young as five years of age.

However, its clientele has changed dramatically. Rather than comprising children of expatriate families, the clientele is almost entirely Malaysian. The examiners’ nationality, however, have essentially remained unchanged. The British music examination boards maintain that their examiners have to be vigorously trained in England in order to ‘set standards’. Thus, the image of the white European music examiner ‘from England’ is firmly embedded in the minds of parents, teachers and music students alike. Other popular British external examinations include Teaching of English as a Foreign Language and London University or Cambridge University ‘A’ Levels (Advanced Levels). Thus, British qualifications continue to be keenly sought after by Malaysians.
Essentially the content of these music programmes is taught by Malaysians but graded by assessors from the parent institution. Furthermore, numerous British twinning degree programmes are conducted in Malaysia. The courses are largely taught by Malaysian lecturers, but the awards are conferred by the parent University.

At the extreme, it may be argued that a form of ‘new imperialism’ has emerged in the wake of the liberalisation and emancipation of education. In many ways, former British colonies and protected territories like Malaysia continue to foster direct links with their imperial past and hence cannot be entirely free of its associations with the practices and vestiges of colonialism. Thus, the construction of social reality stems partly from tales of colonial experiences, practices and references to white hegemony or images of the colonial imperialists. Such discursive powers permit the effective articulation of ‘external’ or ‘international’ expertise in the name of education (or ‘culture’) with the ability to influence, transform and institutionally regulate social behaviour on a massive scale.

The evolution of culture is a process of transition rather than a site of belonging. Different colonial sites construct diverse possibilities and different processes are involved in the formation of a historical memory. Images of the past have been prolonged to fit the exigencies of the present while the present can also be made to fit the past. This global transit of knowledge and practice affects music, language and various forms of historical heritages, both at home and abroad. Thus, in another permutation, what was traditionally ‘yours’ (that is, Western music) and ‘mine’ (that is, traditional or non-Western music), have transformed into a mental object of shared possession that of ‘our music’ (in a peculiar sense). Learning Western classical music has become part of the process of ‘Westernisation’ and acculturation. In this instance, the purpose of learning Western music has taken on different meanings in meeting new goals at a different point in time and culture.
8.7.2 Politics of education, religion and cultural bureaucracy

Education is an evolving and expanding entity in many nations. It represents a product of the goals and values of a society and shapes the behaviour of its people as citizens. It belongs to a political system whose function is to make choices from among different courses of action that may be available to members of the society. These same members maintain a social system based on such choices.

The choices or decisions made by a political system are stated as rules or policies, which prescribe a relationship among people by ordering their action and behaviour not only with one another but also universally as appropriate. The features of a tax-supported education system thus reveal the products of its process, whether the choices are explicit or tacit. Therefore, the capabilities of an education system are dependent on the politics of education. This implies that education is subsumed by the welfare of the political system and constitutes a function of the economic processes that support that political system. In the case of Malaysia, many of the policies that govern the nation are based on ethnic considerations whereby preferential treatment continues to favour the Malays or ‘Bumiputras’ (meaning ‘sons of the soil’).

One of the offshoots of such policies is the polarisation of public and private education by race whereby Malay students are largely found in publicly-funded tertiary institutions and non-Malay students seek educational opportunities in the fee-paying private sector. It is embedded in the mindsets of non-Malays that education beyond that which is provided by national schools is a private responsibility. Music education, for example, is regarded as one such private responsibility.

Another barrier towards attempts at promoting public music education and musical performances is the pervasiveness of religion. As the Malays in Malaysia are primarily Muslims, there is an inherent perception of music as a purveyor of social ills. Such beliefs are held by certain bureaucrats and civil servants, most of
whom are Muslims. This is compounded by increasing numbers of powerful Muslim fundamentalists who regard music as ‘haram’ (meaning ‘forbidden’ by the Koran) since it is blamed for encouraging or being in association with anti-Muslim activities such as drinking and public merry-making between different genders. The political agenda of these Sunni Muslims is to turn Malaysia into a fundamental Islamic state. Such beliefs thwart attempts to promote the teaching and learning of music in public schools and the organisation of public music performances such as rock concerts.

In addition there are considerable bureaucratic and financial obstacles in securing permits and licences for public performances, policies that stem from the period of the Malayan Emergency in the middle of the twentieth century where restrictive regulations were imposed on intended public gatherings to combat communist insurgency (Daneels, 2002). These forms of political, religious and cultural bureaucracy inhibit the promotion and advancement of public music education. Paradoxically, such bureaucratic constraints wittingly (or unwittingly), support the form and system of private music education as exists.

8.7.3 Examination orientation of the education system

The Malaysian system of education has been criticised for its over reliance on examination results as the primary measurement of intellectual development. Rote learning is encouraged. Information is painfully memorised, ‘regurgitated’ during examinations and often quickly forgotten. Students learn from the early stages of schooling that examinations represent a major part of their educational life. In schools they are placed in classes according to marks gained at the end-of-year examinations. Throughout the year, there are monthly tests and term tests. Students, teachers, parents and the general public are acutely aware of the examination focus of the national education system.
The honing of critical thinking is underdeveloped. Obedience to the teacher and silence in class are attributes of a ‘good’ student. At the extreme, in some primary schools, teachers continue to use the cane as a symbol of authority in the classroom. Such Dickensian approaches to education are regarded as ‘tried and tested’ measures and condoned by the school authorities and parents. In some urban schools there are nearly fifty students per class. More often than not teachers struggle to complete the syllabus on time.

Many students also take tuition to supplement school work and in some cases, nearly the entire class takes tuition from the class teacher after school hours to ensure that they fair well in school examinations. The taking of tuition thus represents private initiatives which serve to supplement and augment public education.

Students take various forms of tuition, some in direct relation to their school work, others as co-curricular activities. Many students take piano tuition. They appear very at ease with the examination focus of the exercise. They do not question the methodology. They obediently follow the piano teachers’ instructions. They prepare and sit for music examinations every year, just like school. They receive a certificate and they move up a grade. Their friends in school, too, do likewise. They are generally satisfied and so are their parents. If they fail in the music examinations, they believe that they have not practised sufficiently. Many students sit the examinations again. Others declare that they have ‘given-up’ music. Such forms of educational ethos have permeated through the fabric of society in shaping the general attitudes towards the role, manner and purpose of teaching and learning.

Thus, various organisations of students’ learning behaviour formalise dominant collective beliefs about familiar actions and problems, namely, who and what shall be taught, who shall teach and who decides what shall be taught, what responsibilities shall be allocated to the custodians of learning processes,
what criteria shall be used in testing accountability for learning and who shall
finance the learning.

Education thus provides human investment in a society's economic growth.
Indicators point that the access to quality education remains fundamentally a
private responsibility thus shaping the goal of education. Malaysians treasure the
testing of knowledge through public examinations. The analysis of practice
further yields differentiated sub-systems, each having different effects on the
mode and manner in which students learn. Most significantly, it clearly exposes
the power of social recognition of knowledge acquisition, which should be
recognised and verified at every stage in a tangible form.

8.7.4 Nationalism versus internationalism
The core idea of nationalism is the doctrine of sovereignty with the people of the
nation as a whole. Malaysia is a culturally unique nation exemplified by its
distinctive history, institutions and values. Migrants from different ethnic
backgrounds were accorded equal citizenship rights in the course of
independence. The nation was transformed into a multicultural territorial political
community. The migrants shared an image of themselves as distinct from and
superior to the old world from which they came. They assumed the role of
pioneers of multicultural policies and practices.

The Chinese and Indian migrants began to recognise the important distinctions
between their own communities with regard to their size, political power, cultural
status and economic might. The process of nationalism since the country's
independence in 1957 has thus propelled the nation to establish its own currency,
socio-political and economic policies as well as to create distinctive national
symbols and practices. Malaysia has formed its own legal system premised on the
former British colonial model and instituted Malay as her national language. It
has revamped the education system although the approach and philosophy
towards teaching and learning still bears the hallmark of the former imperialist model.

Thus, the development of Malaysian nationalism has been 'master-minded' to follow a formulated political, administrative and socio-cultural master plan as embodied in the country's national economic policies. Yet, despite such actions the country believes that it is a 'third world', developing nation that has to argue for the superiority of its people and its traditions. Its path has been often associated with political movements related to struggles for self-determination, political, religious and cultural domination. Such exhibitions of nationalism have provided an important source of inspiration and aspiration for collective national goals and social behaviour. Malaysia's path to nationalism possesses direct lineages with culture and politics set against issues of human and ethnic rights within the character of her socio-political facade.

Yet problems of ethnic pluralism and the deep-ethnocentric attitudes have provided pause for reflection. The unpredictable impact of modernisation on her traditional values has been known to inspire a 'return' to or at least a recollection of the national past to rediscover social models. A (re)construction of alternative and competing models may be necessary. The path of nationalism includes efforts to 'cleanse' its territories of foreign influence especially when evidence of imperialist domination or threats of 'recolonialization' emerge. For example, many Malaysians seem unhappy with the expatriate-dominated (and generously remunerated) members of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. Such demonstrations of 'Western tutelage' and dominance engender anti-colonialist feelings. It affronts national pride, especially in a nation as culturally rich and musically diverse as Malaysia.

After more than four years of operations, the same four Malaysians hold positions in the orchestra. Is the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) symbolic of the inherent failure of the music education system? Are the abilities of Malaysian
music educators questioned, particularly since a host of universities offer tertiary
music education? Egos appear to be slightly bruised. In another example, the
MPO was accused of cultural insensitivity and ignorance by playing a portion of
the national anthem in a medley of tunes. This act sparked a heated debate on the
superiority of Western composers and compositions over Malaysian musical
talents. National pride was again dented.

The proposal to form a Malaysian Music Examinations Board by some music
educators is another example of nationalistic fervour. There is also the recognition
of the limitations and misuse of music examinations. The public call to educate
Malaysians in the traditional music of the country is yet another cry to (re)capture
and (re)create a Malaysian musical identity. It calls out to the authorities and
music educationists to instil in the next generation of Malaysians, a sense of
musical pride, and in doing so contribute to the evolution of Malaysian music
history. It is a cry for a sense of cultural nationhood.

Yet, despite such clear exhibitions of nationalistic concerns, the power of
internationalism offers opposing forces to change. Symbolic meaning is drawn
from the narratives of culture and conflict as exhibited in the actions of a segment
of contemporary Malaysian society.

The impact of secular modernization is particularly significant in societies that are
regulated by traditional practices and derived norms. English-inspired
urbanization, secular education and modern technologies support evolving
phenomena that promises a march of progress. The search for concrete
illustrations of success stimulates aesthetic and temporal development.
Membership of international bodies and alumni networks represent convincing
models for the future. It evokes inherent beliefs in the strengths of a larger
community which symbolises communal distinctiveness and achievement. The
society thus looks towards international models to emulate and to stimulate
collective purpose.
Returning to the example of the MPO, this entity thus symbolises the ‘tug’
between nationalism and internationalism. A class of society wants an orchestra
that it can boast as being world standard. The national oil company is proud to
house such an entity in the world’s tallest twin towers and shopping mall. The
promotion of Western classical music is thus wholly congruent with the image of
success, formality and discerning tastes. Such positive attributes are also good for
business and tourism. Learning classical piano music is also congruent with the
image of success, formality and discerning tastes. Parents are thus encouraged
that their children are associated with such norms of international acceptance.
Many Malaysians enjoy the knowledge that they could become equal partners
with Europeans in world progress.

Thus, politically induced secularisation can take different forms. Organic
systems are able to develop a coherent and well organised response to problems
of social change. What may seem a logical development of national identity and
kudos may be de-stabilised by the continuous dynamics of modernisation. Therein
lies the dichotomy of nationalism and internationalism. Recognising difficulties,
significant groups are mobilized into opposing collective action.

Yet, the proprietary rights of language, history and international cultures are
strengths of nationalism. The attributes of particular groups in positions of
influence are pronounced by examples of their actions and the benefits reaped in
association with the acquisition of international tastes. Among another class of
society, there is an urgent desire for a national musical identity with a set of
shared understandings within the nation about its people, values and practices that
help to constitute them as a nation. Such nationalistic beliefs have to be
formulated deliberately since conceptions of national identity often remain
grounded in everyday life, often embedded in the ‘national consciousness’ of its
people.
Therefore, the challenge is to find the intricate balance between preserving (and developing) the best of Malaysian 'traditional' identity with the 'heritage' of international norms and practices. A strongly institutionalised organisation can provide inspiration for alternatives to the established order by working with the knowledge that the processes of 'modernisation' are inherently unpredictable, political and problematic.

8.7.5 New opportunities

The liberalisation of educational opportunities in Malaysia which commenced in the late 1990's has made a significant impact on the educational infrastructure of the country. The expansion of educational opportunities was a direct offshoot of the economic turmoil experienced by Malaysia (and other Asian countries) in 1997. The country's financial stability was adversely affected by currency speculation. At the same time, there was a concerted effort to limit the flow of capital out of the country by encouraging Malaysians to study at local institutions of higher learning.

The establishment of private colleges in turn fostered various collaborative partnerships with British, American and Australian universities. The aim was to turn Malaysia into a regional hub for higher education by attracting foreign students, particularly from around the region, to study in Malaysia as the cost of living and course fees were more competitive. The provision of tertiary educational opportunities in the country was thus an effort to generate income. In the same vein the aim of positioning Malaysia as a 'centre of excellence' was, in the first instance, economically motivated.

As a result, there was a boom in the establishment of educational institutions and by the turn of the century more than five hundred private colleges and institutions of higher learning had emerged. Private universities and foreign campuses were further established to cater to the growing demands for higher education. A National Higher Education Fund was established to provide financial assistance to
students. In December 2000, the government allowed Employees’ Provident Fund contributors to withdraw part of their savings to finance their own children's tertiary education. A National Accreditation Board was set up to monitor the rapid growth of educational programmes and to maintain the academic standards of private institutions. Thus, within a short period of time, education in Malaysia had become clearly divided between tax-funded institutions of higher learning and privately funded establishments, the former continuing policies of preferential treatment for the Malays and the latter catering to the educational needs of primarily non-Malays.

Tertiary opportunities in music education emerged. Private colleges offered music degree programmes in partnership with institutions of higher learning such as Middlesex University, University of Westminster (both British) and Berklee College of Music, Boston. Encouraged by such opportunities offered by the private sector, tax-funded universities followed suit. By 2002, seven public universities offer tertiary programmes in the field of music ranging from majors in performance, music education and ethnomusicology to music business and technology. Such new opportunities to acquire a tertiary qualification in music have direct implications for graded musical training.

The most significant impact is the increased 'academic value' of music certification at the pre-tertiary level. Students who possess higher grade music certificates stand better chances at gaining entry into music degree programmes. Such collective forms of institutional recognition of prior learning in turn increase the social value of musical certification. They also represent an endorsement of the methodology of approach to the teaching and learning of music per se. Also heightened is the 'academic image' of the examination boards, together with improved business for the network of examination board representatives and music teachers. These new developments provide a boost to the sale of music books and musical instruments. In other words, the advancement of new
educational opportunities consolidates and strengthens the infrastructure that supports the existing music education system.

8.8 Macro-subjective findings
The macro findings in the subjective realm evolved from Themes II, V, VII, VIII and IX. Within the macro-subjective realm, findings are categorised as relating to the country’s musical heritage and practices, the music education preferences of Malaysian society, the structure, services and influence of the public music examination boards, the issue of recognition and the goals and rewards of the system-participants. Each of the findings are extrapolated as follows.

8.8.1 Heritage and musical practices
With musical preferences and practices lingering long after independence, Malaysia appears to owe much of its musical heritage to British colonial policies. As elucidated in Chapter 2 the musical practices of Malaysia may be divided into two main streams, namely, traditional art music and Western classical and popular music. Traditional art music is largely represented by the ethnic music of the Malay, Chinese and Indian community whilst the other musical stream is represented by Western classical and popular music.

The traditional music of Malaysia occupies an intriguing position. On one hand, the multi-facets of traditional Malaysian music, in particular Malay music, has provided ample opportunities for academics to conduct research as evidenced by the review of literature. On the other hand, its practice appears to be limited to performances at cultural dinner shows, often as part of tourist promotion events. One of the reasons could be that the traditional music of Malaysia is generally associated with dance or street theatre. In this sense, the role of the music is in many ways ‘subservient’ to the visual which is often theatrical and ‘entertaining’ by nature, especially if it accompanies dance.
Traditional music is perceived to lack 'pedagogical methodology' in the Western sense and thus possess limited 'educational' value. Its practice is based largely on an oral-aural tradition. It is unlike Western music which may be studied and tested in a graduated manner, complete with certification of attainment which encourages further music education aspirations.

Furthermore, the traditional music of Malaysia tends to be 'ethnically' qualified, the various genres being divisively labeled as Malay music, Chinese music or Indian music. Classical music, on the other hand, is commonly regarded as 'Western music', thus commanding a 'neutral' (and modern) position. It has all the attributes of worldliness and its education is highly established. As music itself is a multicultural 'object', a Western music education is in many ways 'multicultural' in construct. It exudes a somewhat 'a-racial', 'a-religious', 'a-political and even an 'a-cultural' appeal.

In order words, the learning of Western classical music represents an act of modernity that embraces multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-socio-political denominations. Since music is perceived to be a multicultural object, music education is in many ways, multicultural in construct. Attendant images of traditional dance, costumes and in some cases, religious connotations are absent from the learning of Western music, in particular piano repertoire.

This phenomenon exhibits the accessibility of music. Music has the ability to transform, respond and adapt to the needs of one culture or another. Learning to play the piano in this instance is at first an educational endeavour, perceived to be an act of good practice. The repertoire learnt is secondary to the act. It represents the acceptance of Western classical music on a 'neutral ground'. It is a living example of the symbolic acceptance of a 'foreign' culture that has been internationalised. It represents the transference of culture and heritage from one geographical location to another.
Thus, the terms 'traditional' and 'heritage' have taken on new meanings in a new geographical location. The 'act' has assumed a symbolic identity that permits its relocation to different cultures at differing points in historical time. It is about confronting music on different levels. The action further reflects the needs of a group of people who lack a 'cultural identity' which they can call their own (or wish to call their own). It is about a contradiction in appearances. It represents a response to music as if it 'belonged' to one's own culture. It is the 'adopted child' of a group of people in search of a musical identity.

It further symbolizes a confrontation of a variety of contradictory privileges and struggles of a marginalized group of people. From an 'original' form with its own set of purposes and functions the act has transmogrified into a phenomenon by adopting 'man-made' benefits that a larger society upholds. The function and amoebic nature of music has assumed a new meaning. It has assumed a new social dimension by the symbolic transformation of itself. At the extreme it has even assumed an 'a-musical' persona that moulds itself to the needs and values of affected societies.

This morphology of a society evolves further kinship units of smaller groups of people who share (or aspire to share) a strong commitment to their particular goal and collective conscience. Through time, such groups become dominated and by their collective conscience whereby their actions are dictated by the very constraints of such kinship unit. Again the idea of false consciousness prevails.

Unable (or unwilling) to claim or declare their 'natural' cultural identity, some nationals posit an international stance on their cultural affiliation. They embrace an 'action' but strip it of its socio-cultural and historical reference, replacing these elements with a different purpose in the context of its manifestation.
8.8.2 Music education preferences

People grow up in particular cultural settings with the accompanying attendant beliefs, social practices and viewpoints. The process of acculturation helps define one's conviction and cultural attitudes, preferences and behaviour. Cultural patterns are nevertheless complex phenomena. Facets of music sometimes act as social accoutrement with its own particular subculture. Each culture is composed of different elements, some of which are in conflict with one another. This is exemplified in the perception of 'high culture' and 'mass culture'.

The popular argument is that high culture is not subjected to commercial pressure or 'imposed' on teenagers by the media. High culture is represented in the form of classical music. It results from the unique creative potential of the composer and a structured expression of fully notated music in accordance with performance practice. High culture is legitimised by dominant culture groups whilst popular culture is largely manufactured or 'standardized' for the mass market in accordance to popular tastes. For this reason, some critics maintain that 'artistic integrity' is compromised at the expense of financial considerations.

However, such perspectives may be challenged with the development of graded curricular and assessments in contemporary popular and jazz music education such as the those offered by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, the Australian Music Examinations Board and Rock School, UK. The 'legitimization' of contemporary popular music education as an academic discipline is further evidenced by tertiary programmes in popular music offered in institutions of higher learning such as the University of Westminster, London or Berklee College, Boston, in collaboration with Malaysian institutions of higher learning.
Nevertheless, standards for music and the arts are culturally reflective and non-rational in the sense that one cannot argue logically that one type of music is necessarily better than another. It is the perception of how each type of music fulfills the cognitive and affective needs of its recipients. Nonetheless, classical music continues to enjoy the status of 'high art' and its education remains well sought after. The perception of classical music as 'high-brow' culture further encourages the system in operation. This perception is exemplified by the large numbers of Malaysian music teachers and students who engage in the teaching and learning of classical music together with related businesses that benefit from this industry.

Therefore, although the piano teaching profession may be described as 'cottage' in character with peripatetic piano teachers travelling from house to house, the same cannot be said of the music education industry as a whole. On the contrary, the industry is an outcome of the interrelationships between small and large entities each interacting initially within the foreground and middleground of action and extending its influence onto the fundamental structure. This micro-macro dimension of interconnectivity serves to shape musical preferences. Examples of such convergences of micro-macro involvement range from the image of the solitary child playing the piano, to the participation of the British High Commissioner to Malaysia at public music graduation ceremonies. Also, institutional participation ranges from the business activities of small privately-owned music schools to the national administration of ABRSM music examinations by the Malaysian Ministry of Education.

Thus, the development of musical preferences is influenced by the role and function of music society. Social groups respond to musical activities that reward its participants with implicit and explicit values. The possession of graded music certification is further prized with increasing numbers of Malaysian institutions of higher learning accepting the intermediate levels of proficiency (for example, Grade 5 certificate) as entry qualifications into degree programmes. This accords
even greater recognition of the value of musical certification. Whether this 'lowering' of entry requirements is primarily attributed to the recognition of higher musical standards or due to the widening of music education opportunities is debatable. Nevertheless, students will need to demonstrate their ability to cope with undergraduate studies. Therefore, the existing musical preferences held by the community of musical participants have proven to be valid and justified, delivering the goals and rewards as promised by the time-proven system in existence.

8.8.3 Public music examinations

The public music examination boards have provided music assessment services to students of diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. People living in remote parts of Malaysia have undertaken these music examinations. Children from as young as five years of age have had their musical ability tested. Blind candidates have also opted for musical assessment. Various instrumental and vocal skills have been measured either on an individual or group basis. Assessments were initially available for classical music only, but since the turn of the century, assessments in popular and jazz musical genres have been made available. The theory of music examinations may also be taken in languages such as Chinese and Malay. Thus, the acquisition of a Western music education is personified by the act of playing the piano, the most popular instrument to learn. A wide range of both acoustic and electronic pianos is available for purchase, either new or second-hand. Music teachers are easily available and many peripatetic teachers are willing to travel to the homes of their clients which add to the convenience of parents and particularly those with younger children. Tuition fees are reasonable and subject to the agreement between negotiating parties as they work towards a common goal. Such examples of convenience, flexibility and focus encourage new players into the system whilst maintaining those who are already participants. The machinery is set in motion to propel and multiply itself amoebic-like. The goal becomes the end itself as participants sometimes 'forget' the purpose of the act which has been subsumed by the
efficiencies of the system. The act in turn transforms and personifies the examination system.

Nevertheless, music is a truly international language of communication. Music education has been systematically plotted and the musical development of individuals have been measured at various stages of maturation. The music examination syllabuses require candidates to demonstrate performance and listening skills that are appropriate to the level of musical development. Assessments have been acknowledged to be fair, consistent and appropriate to the level of proficiency expected. The activities of the major music examination boards have proved themselves to be credible, of acceptable standard and results have been found to be largely consistent in accordance with the level assessed. As a result, the musical certificates awarded by the examination boards are academically accepted as appropriate music entry qualifications by institutions of higher learning in Malaysia and all over the world.

ABRSM’s phenomenal success is also attributed to the organisation’s execution of astute marketing strategies. Customers are attracted by the professional packaging and ‘bundling’ of examination needs in the form of sample test-papers, examination pieces and audio recordings of examination pieces. Furthermore, teacher support is provided in the form of newsletters and professional development programmes (Libretto, 2000:3). What then are the fruits of such zealous marketing efforts?

Foremost, the music examination services in Malaysia have developed into a multi-million dollar industry that supports an entire network of participants within the system of operations ranging from the peripatetic music teacher to the manufacturer of Malaysian-made pianos. Secondly, the music examination boards have shaped the manner in which music is learned and taught from the elementary to the tertiary level. Thirdly, they have convinced a large portion of Malaysian society that the music education in place is a preferred system of
operations not only in Malaysia but throughout the world. Fourthly, the existing system of music education is supported and endorsed by the Ministry of Education. The authorities therefore do not see a need to develop another system which they may in turn have to fund, preferring instead the present practice whereby they receive commissions from the examination board. Lastly, there are no apparent efforts at training Malaysian examiners. The examination boards take advantage of the inability of Malaysian music educators to assess their own nationals and capitalize on the business opportunities that prevail as a result of this perceived inadequacy. They continue to enjoy the public perception of the supremacy in musical assessment of what is essentially the music of ‘Western’ people by Western people.

8.8.4 The issue of recognition

One of the most powerful strategies used in the marketing of education is the concept of recognition. This has been illustrated by the vignettes in which society is constantly reminded that a qualification is of limited value if it does not possess ‘recognition’. The fabric of Malaysian society sees a need to be rewarded for every effort made. This is particularly evident in educational decisions undertaken by the family unit.

Private education entities create their own brands and thereafter sell ‘recognition’ in the global market. Since social systems are products of dynamic collective sets of beliefs, values about the intrinsic and extrinsic worth of a product will shape underlying preferences that influence decision making. As the social world becomes more oriented around that which is quantifiable and measurable at the expense of that which is more difficult to calculate the product of ‘recognition’ should preferably transform itself into a tangible asset in the form of a document. Thus, the possession of documents such as music certificates represents the participation and experience of a recognized social practice. It acts as a passport to higher education if desired. It often negates the necessity to provide evidence of any other form of musical prowess.
However, the interpretation of such forms of ‘recognition’ is subject to social expectations that may not be necessarily ‘international’ or universal in nature. For example, a Malaysian student who has attained 130 marks out of 150 marks in a Grade 8 practical examination, and in this case has thus received high ‘recognition’, is not expected to be able to perform spontaneously or articulate musical understandings and knowledge other than that required by the demands of the assessment. This is compared to say another student who receives the same marks but lives in a society where musical ability (and ‘recognition’) is accompanied by the ‘lived’ experiences of music making and concert attendance. Thus, the concept (and possession) of ‘recognition’ is bounded by social and cultural environment and expectations. The meaning of ‘recognition’ and standardization is therefore determined by political, geographical and social-cultural infrastructures, subject to the time and place where training and experience are received and assessed. Nevertheless, social perception is a powerful tool of recognition. One set of beliefs may politically dominate a particular system in operation until the desire for change exceeds the desire for stability. Beliefs about the marketability and exchange value of a certain commodity shape individual and collective modes of human behaviour and recognition at different points in historical time. Continued practice and success of a system is influenced by predictions and desired outcomes as evidenced by part experiences.

8.8.5 Goals and rewards

Ethnic groups, occupations and styles of life are accorded different degrees of esteem by members of society. Value consensus is essential for the survival of social systems. From shared values derive collective goals. Power differentials are necessary for the effective pursuit of collective goals. Materialism is a major value that influences collective goals such as economic expansion. Also, higher living standards can be seen to stem from this value.
Goals thus provide various directions for specific situations. There are different types of goals such as national, institutional, family or personal goals. These aspirations interrelate differently in societies operating under different political and socio-economic circumstances. The observations of national and institutional goals serve to consolidate the meaning and construction of smaller group and individual goals. Members of society therefore possess different forms of goals and social roles provide the means whereby such goals are translated into action. Thus, the primary goal of participants in the Malaysian music education system appears to be geared towards success at music examinations.

In this respect each group of actors has its respective role to play. Parents provide the financial means and support, piano teachers ensure that the syllabus is fulfilled and students practice for the examinations. The content of roles is structured in terms of norms which define the rights and obligations applicable to each particular role. Norms are thus specific expressions of values. Norms ensure that role-behaviour is standardized, predictable and orderly. This provides the basis of social order whereby the specific conduct of groups and individuals adhere to the central or general value system. The system of music examinations has existed in Malaysia for nearly a century. Social exchange of experience creates trust between people and the rewards of participation in a system. Integrated individuals form powerful social groups. Reciprocal and expanded exchange are accompanied by a parallel growth of social trust. The formation of such trusts fosters long-term relationships. Such concepts of credibility reflect on how people and competing entities make their offers, intentions and actions credible to others. Over the passage of time, general characteristics of social networks produce recurrent patterns of behaviour. Such social groups of music participants form because their members share (or aspire) similar status situations. Recognizable aspects of social structure make it easier for people to formulate objectives, attain goals and reap rewards.
A classical music education is perceived to be socially desirable, aesthetically pleasing, recreational and most importantly educational in focus and content. Musical talent and performance ability are regarded as secondary to the discipline of practice and goal-attainment. The promise of high rewards provides the incentive to encourage people to undergo training and to compensate them for the sacrifice involved. High rewards thus build into respective positions which provide the necessary inducement and generate motivation to carry out the required performance. Fundamental norms of social reciprocity and social exchange engender general expectations of some future return, the exact nature being stipulated in advance. However, different rewards can encourage hostility, suspicion and distrust among the various segments of society. Perceived shortfalls of the system include failure to deliver the goods and to rectify identified shortcomings.

There arises a concerted effort to initiate change rather than to tear free from the system or restrict competition by policies of cultural exclusion. Power and prestige differentials play important roles in the division of groups. In this instance, the passage of time through the ‘divide and rule’ policies (or the seizing of opportunities) of colonial times has endured many vicissitudes and powerfully shaped ideologies of identities. By and large, ethnic ties are the key to social and political mobility for individuals seeking entry to the burgeoning administrative, scientific-technical and cultural apparatus. The cultural isolation of migrant groups accentuates the tendency to recapture cultural identity by intensifying each individual’s dependence on the family network for support, social interaction and a basis of social identity. Thus, in determining the goals of parents and music students, the definitions of the constituents and meaning of their action have revealed a host of inner contradictions or ‘false consciousness’ of the meaning of an education in music and the function of musical assessment.

The threat comes from a sense of resentment felt by relatively privileged societal categories whose exclusive cultural groups are not so concerned with achieving
equality but obtaining what they perceive to be their due. On the other hand, the beneficiaries of a new order are also restrained from change by a consideration of what they will lose by quitting an existing practice. Nevertheless, institutionalised patterns of discrimination will occur even in newer systems particularly with the rise of a new professional middle-class. Conflicting and complementary models emerge. In their ability to mobilise and shape a new order, agents of change become politicised in the process. Furthermore, as long as the modernisation process continues, religious and cultural resurgences will recur to feed into and at times confront economic and social advancement. Nevertheless, the processes of modernisation and education are inherently uneven and unpredictable. They can de-stabilise power relationships sometimes engendering conflicts. However, contradictions between nominal goals of equality and the reality of rewards make the legitimacy of the system problematic. The fragmentation of existing political structures increases the power of external systems. Time-honoured practices have sometimes proven to be awkward opponents to change. Yet, without a substantial aggrieved social base the cultural concerns of the intellectuals themselves will not provide cause to disturb time-tested practices.

8.9 Micro-objective findings
In the middleground and foreground structure, eight micro-findings are revealed from the meta-analysis of emergent themes. As with the macro-findings, these micro-findings are subdivided as belonging to the objective realm or the subjective realm. In the triangulation of themes, micro findings in the objective realm evolve primarily from themes III, IV, V, VI and VII. Within the micro-objective realm, findings are categorized as relating to behavioural patterns, the outcomes of action and interaction, the significance of symbolism and the deconstruction of meaning. The following extrapolates these findings.
8.9.1 Behavioural patterns

Feelings, beliefs, values and experience influence attitude which in turn shape cognition and behaviour. The construction of commonsense accounts by experiencing phenomena and observing people's everyday procedures result in actions that determine desired outcomes or solve practical problems. A cognitive and affective stance is formed.

However, due to the abstract nature that underlies the construction of attitude, its 'measurement' is open to criticism. Nevertheless, validity may be substantiated by working 'backwards' from overt behaviour. One way is by examining and understanding the social and cultural background of the social group from which the phenomena arose. For instance, early entry into the music education system enables direct participation in the network of a highly specialized community with its own methods of drawing new members into its group. Participants join a community of discourse and action. They become fluent in the language of symbols and behaviour expected of the community, each group possessing different roles and responsibilities, each acting and responding as appropriate. Sometimes responses are inconsistent but nevertheless, a balance is achieved through denial. For example, many students dislike taking music examinations but they like the certificate of attainment measured through such forms of graded assessment. Similarly, parents regard musical talent as secondary to musical ability. Music teachers realize the limitations of the system in place but they actively promote it. Overt and covert behaviour patterns are shaped by such attitudes. There are several 'push and pull' factors that encourage participation in the scheme. The push factors may be attributed to (i) responsibility, (ii) age and (iii) personal achievement. For example, parents regard the provision of music education as a private responsibility. It is common knowledge that musical skills are best honed from a young age. Parents, students and teachers have different roles and functions each with their own sets of rationale, aims and objectives. The attainment of such desires represent powerful personal achievements. The pull factors include (i) social and cultural attitudes towards teaching and learning,
(ii) attractiveness of the system in place and (iii) short-term and long-term benefits. One of the predominant factors that supports the music education system is the peculiar socio-cultural attitudes towards education in general. The teaching-learning culture supports a tax-funded system of education that is objective-based rather than process-based. The testing of knowledge is highly favoured. Learning is focused on the needs of end-of-year school examinations and/or public examinations. Information above and beyond the set syllabus is of minor importance. The critical analysis of work produced and cogent application of reasoning skills are secondary requirements in the existing scheme of learning. The degree of accomplishment lies in the students' prowess in (re)assembling and reproducing examinable information. Individual rather than team effort is emphasized. This teaching-learning culture is the offshoot of the Malaysian national education system. Any other educational system that matches such aesthetics of approach will find eager participants.

The music examination system is one such example of congruency in the teaching-learning and assessment ethos. The learning of the piano and its assessment based on specific requirements thus fit the aims of the clients and the service providers themselves. The infrastructure further supports the system in the form of music books, instruments and a highly developed network of people to administer the examinations. Musical development and achievement are carefully assessed in graded levels of proficiency, making goal-attainment in the short-term easily realized. Over a period of time each participant reaps different long-term benefits in accordance with their personal aspirations and achievement.

These push-pull factors further intertwine and propel a phenomenon that has evolved into cyclical-spirals over time, increasing in power and momentum at each turn. Thus, the social, cultural and organizational activities of small elite groups (micro-subjective actions) culminate into observable behaviour patterns (micro-objective actions), often setting the social and political agenda of mutually agreed policies and practices.
8.9.2 Action and interaction

The collective reality of the society under study is mutually constructed by the action and interaction of its members. The form of ‘reality’ that any society takes is significantly influenced by the medium of communication prevalent to that society or community that is being studied. Social roles play a significant function in ordering social structure and the nature of an individual’s subjective and objective views on life. Values and meanings are operations of the imaginative process. The life history of personal events and taking the role of the ‘other’ give rise to sustained action. Here, Schenkerian concepts are applied in the analysis of action and interaction, viewed in this instance as ‘stages’ in the foreground, middleground and background of activity.

In the foreground level there may be action or non-action. ‘Action’ here refers to participants of the music examination system whilst ‘non-action’ refers to the larger group of society who chooses not to participate or are not yet in a position to participate (example, students who do not take piano lessons or couples with no children). Such action (or non-action), nevertheless constitutes to ‘belief’ at the middleground level. This belief includes perceptions of the meaning, benefits, purpose and commitment associated with the taking of music lessons, which is generally associated with learning the piano.

Such beliefs among the action group result in the evolution of a system of practice. The non-action group are aware of similar beliefs (for example, by word of mouth or media influence) but they may or may not be sufficiently influenced or in a position to participate in the system and hence appear to be in a contradictory state. They may also belong to political or religious groups and policy makers who wittingly (or unwittingly) contribute to the system in practice. For example, as Islamic fundamentalists view the ‘effects and influences’ of music in a less positive light, the promotion of public music education is unsurprisingly, less encouraged (as evidenced by Ramona Tahir’s earlier mentioned research). Furthermore, high ranking government officials and policy
makers are, by and large, Malaysian Muslims. Also, both generalist (classroom teachers) and specialist music teachers (instrumentalists) are costly to fund and priority would be given to core subjects such as mathematics and science when there are budget constraints.

These issues add to the existing dilemmas of classroom music education. Such inadequacies in turn promote private music education. Such problematic situations demand new interpretations. Complexities within the infrastructure are compounded by the contradictions between human consciousness and objective reality. This situation produces a distorted picture of reality since it fails to reveal the basic conflicts of interest which exist in the world. This tension will ultimately find full expression and be resolved in the process of dialectical change. Until then, a state of false consciousness or denial, helps to maintain the existing systems, much as the value consensus is meant to maintain the social system.

Thus, conflicts and contradictions built into social relationships are overlooked, operating under the acceptance of partial truths rather than falsehood. Such ‘contradictions’ in turn contribute to the fundamental structure by supporting the stasis of the system. Here, the dominant ideology serves the interests of the dominant class, prolonging and strengthening the system in place.

Applying Schenkerian concepts of the structural levels of musical events, these socio-musical activities, beliefs and practices of both the action and non-action groups at the foreground and middleground levels of events also interact and contribute to the background or fundamental structure of socio-musicological interrelationships.
8.9.3 Symbolism

Symbolism in society represents the intangible, fluid and dynamic forces of social relationships. Meanings are drawn from an understanding of social action and interaction. Thus, the interpretation of symbolic meaning may be viewed as ‘reading between the lines’ within the social act, elucidating the ideas of the past, present and future, enabling the process of transformation. Symbolism interpenetrates one realm of understanding against another. In this sense symbols display a logical status that is qualitatively different from those of the social relationships that they signify. Concrete human actions are themselves a means of ‘saying’ something about the social context of their articulation. The use of Western music notation, for example, is highly symbolic as it is formulated to represent a complex system of musical expression using its own ‘lingua franca’ upon which its education is premised.

In Malaysia, the piano symbolizes the vehicle upon which a music education is acquired. The ‘act’ of piano playing symbolically articulates participation in a social system that links individual exchanges or micro-sociological variables with the macro-sociological variables upon which the underlying structure of contracts operate. Such symbolic preferences elucidate the commonalities and differences in and among social groups as well as exonerate the restraints under which different groups operate.

At the micro-sociological realm there is a close relationship between this subjective ‘act’ at the personal level and its ‘objective’ significance at the social level. Within the subjective realm of social interaction the act of taking piano tuition involves the day to day participation of four main social sectors namely, the (a) family unit, (b) piano teaching fraternity, (c) businesses that support this industry and the (d) administration of examinations by Malaysians and representatives of the overseas-based examination boards. The symbolic significance of this ‘act’ at the personal, family level is motivated by parental obligation and a desire to vicariously experience missed opportunities.
Furthermore, the experience of listening to a child play the piano and the knowledge that the action contributes to the cognitive and affective development of the child affords parents immense emotional and psychological satisfaction. In addition, an acute sense of discipline and responsibility is placed on students themselves to practise the piano in order to achieve personal, family and social goals of musical achievement as measured by the outcome of music examinations.

Also, the piano teaching profession is socially, aesthetically and financially rewarding. At the social level it provides opportunities for self-employment with a wide choice of teaching locations from the home to institutions of higher learning and the clientele is easy to manage, being largely made up of children and teenagers in pursuit of a common goal. The profession is highly regarded as one which services the needs of the middle and higher rungs of society. Aesthetically, piano teachers generally enjoy practising their craft whilst engaging in the act of teaching. In other words, work and ‘recreation’ are intricately intertwined within the ambit of the profession.

A significant objective of the ‘act’ is its rewards at the ‘end’ of the system. It is not uncommon to hear of students speak of reaching the end of their music education having reached the Grade 8 level of proficiency. Learners may choose to exit from the system and embark on teaching or continue with the system at the diploma level and at the same time teach part-time. Thus, the flexibility of the vocation/profession and the earning power of the practitioners represent some of the most attractive features of the profession especially for women who may have to juggle the demands of home-management and career fulfillment. As such, an early participation in the system promises high rewards in the long term. The ‘act’ thus signifies a ‘wise decision’ with its multiple advantages. These advantages are transposed into the objective realm.

An education in music is thus an exchangeable commodity in the form of a skill that possesses a market value when nurtured through time. It rewards the
individual with a recognition which is life-long. Thus, as music communicates aesthetically through a set of symbols within a specialized language of instruction, so too does its social communication. The actions of individuals and groups of individuals encourage the formation of support structures that invisibly govern everyday situations. Organisations have purposes for which persons fulfill responsibilities, communications are formed and incentives are provided. All organisations function in a social environment with which they interact. Business operations and decisions are based on the observation of everyday events. New business opportunities are further identified, labeled and transformed by personal and group action and interaction. Hence, the multi-dimensional quality of society evolves around the manifold causes and effects of the social phenomena necessitating the need to analyse social life in terms of a number of different interlocking dimensions.

On the other hand, the significance of culture and capitalism in a social system may also be contradictory. The desire and exhibition of upward mobility is embodied in a continued voyage of discovery and triumph over distance and political limitations. Second and third generation Malaysians of Chinese descent seek to acquire ‘new’ musical identities that personify their nationality but yet they are drawn to the forces of internationalism and recognition. These new conservatives are determined to retain traditional British symbols by participating in a tried and tested system of administration and reward. Furthermore, foreign participation boosts self-image and prestige, reinforcing links with British roots. The interpretation of symbolic action and interaction deconstructs the duality between two cultural heritages, Western and ‘non-Western’. The questions as to roots and origins touch the imagination of disparate peoples across national and intercontinental boundaries. Individual histories can be mapped across different continents. Thus, the phenomenon under investigation has taken on a symbolic-transformative role, embodying amoebic qualities that tussle between the forces of change and stasis.
8.9.4 Deconstructing meaning

The dynamics of change within an established system will invariably germinate seeds of conflict, transformation and evolution. Societies have been known to produce a social world which eventually constrains their own actions resulting in change agents that reshape organizations. Such basic contradictions threaten the stability of organizations in the long term. German philosophers, Hegel (1770-1831) and Marx (1818-1883) made reference to the notion of dialectics as phenomena that contain the ‘contradictory seeds’ of their own transformation. Thus, dialectical impetus for change may develop from a conflict of internal contradictions as social actors create systems which later limit their own actions and behaviour. These constraints provide the cause for change at a higher level as new forces interact and new meanings develop. As there are clear differences in the musical interest of individuals and groups at various social levels, the process of deconstruction serves to redefine meanings. Alternative interpretations are forwarded, based on differing contexts. Implicit in the central assumption of this argument is the view that the ‘meaning’ of music is somehow located in its function as a social symbol. Different understandings abound as to what is meant by ‘having acquired a music education’.

Furthermore, the word ‘meaning’ itself creates contention because for many people it relates to something that is outside itself, such as a physical reality or an object. Therefore, to suggest that music has inherent meanings because of its ‘extra-musical’ reference may prove highly contentious. However, if such extra-musical references are presented in alternative forms, meanings that are ‘external to itself’ are plausible. In this case, music certificates appear to have been imbued with such extra-musical meanings and inherent social implications and ramifications. They have ‘assumed’ a symbolic role whereby the sociology of their acquisition and accreditation is categorised as a connection between ‘internalised’ music learning and external representations of its social value. Such a ‘meaning system’ within a socio-musicological framework embodies commonsense understandings, social interactions as well as speech actions that
take place in social planning, self-monitoring and goal-attainment. Here, the spirit of competition and collaboration is harnessed within the self and the goal rather than between fellow musicians. Instead, the spirit of music making, aesthetic enjoyment and artistic development are focused between the self and the goal. The music examiner is personified as the goal-keeper, the guardian of musical standards and expectations as set by the awarding institution. Inherent in such 'standards' are institutionalised power struggles, hidden agendas, political aims and competition for market dominance. As the process of external accreditation is constantly recreated and generalised, there arises a familiar conceptualisation of Malaysia as a quasi-personification of a young nation in need of continued musical guidance, verification and maturity within a third world setting. Such notions are charged with conflicts and tensions that generate contradictory forces which may in turn fan dynamic forces of change. Major changes in the infrastructure would produce a change in the super-structure. Such micro-macro relationships illuminate the vivid interaction between the foreground-middleground and background of socio-musical events.

Furthermore, systems are reinforced by time-honoured conventions. Forced change may inadvertently strengthen the dominant ideology as people enter social partnerships for the production and promotion of material life. Accreditation and international validation in the form of certification are significant developments in the globalization of education. Similarly, a music certification is regarded as a personal belonging that has been acquired from an accredited establishment. Such certificates signify, and at the same time, endorse beliefs and values accorded to them by a particular community. They possess both national and international recognition, and function as a 'passport' to higher music education and employment opportunities. Therefore, the social perception of musical certification has widespread meanings in accordance to its social value. It offers different meanings to different social actors. For example, the position of music examinations is highly regarded even by those who do not play musical instruments. Like any other form of public examinations, music examinations
signify formal assessment of knowledge acquisition. Attendant success signifies that the person has received a ‘music education’. Proof of such an education is by the possession of musical certificates. The process is cyclical. Over time, these certificates have gathered social recognitions that are ‘extra-musical’. They ‘live’ and possess ‘eternal’ life-spans that command peculiar commercial and social power. For example, the production of a musical certificate grants its owner an immediate recognition of musical ability. It is used to secure jobs. However, music certificates appear to command limited aesthetical value. The idealistic music teacher whose primary aim is to inculcate the ‘love’ of music in her students through public performances, music appreciation and the enhancement of general musicianship skills is swimming against the tide of a ‘show proof’ society whose priorities is premised upon a philosophy that the end justifies the means.

Completing the eighth grade as quickly as possible represents a satisfactory ‘finish’ to music studies and an exit out of the system. Others may continue to prepare for yet another practical examination (such as an associate diploma), comprising very similar requirements to graded work. In any case, a Grade 8 point of exit seems to signify that the participant has acquired a music education. S/he is deemed musically literate and able to play a musical instrument having received formal music training. It also means that the ‘graduand’ is able to teach music. Yet, some music students are aware that a music education encompasses more than that expected by society. Certainly music educators have noted the ‘misuse’ of good intentions. Some participants are aware of the limitations of the system and question the purpose of the process. Others have encountered failure in music examinations. Many of these students have opted for an early exit from the system, some harbouring distaste for classical music. Others declare themselves as musical failures. These examples indicate that this nineteenth century form of musical measurement does not cater for individual needs and may be outdated. At the extreme, the system is deemed ‘unmusical’.
George Ritzer, in expanding the Taylorist and Fordist principles of work organisation and bureaucratisation of society, terms the irrationality of standardization as the ‘McDonaldization’ of society. He argues that over regulated processes undermine human capacity for thought and creativity because these qualities are difficult to quantify, routine, predict and control (Ritzer, 1993).

Are then music examinations in danger of McDonaldization? Is the quantification and objective measurement of musical ability valid in modern society or does it (sub)consciously stifle the development of more imaginative forms of musical assessment and ability? Yet, thousands of Malaysian parents continue to send their children for graded musical training which are premised on examinations. In doing so, they hope that their children will ‘know about music’ having declared that they themselves ‘don’t know music’. Parents believe that their limited ability to appreciate or ‘understand’ music stems from their inability to read and write music suggesting that the system addresses such limitations. This deconstructive discourse has revealed a significant disparity in the understanding of the function, process, content and meaning of an education in music within both similar and dissimilar socio-cultural contexts. It demonstrates a recurring force in modern societies which purports to provide new directions when established identities are shaken by geopolitical, economic and cultural challenges. The emergence of intensive competition for symbolic and material power places increasing emphasis on the predictability and calculability of musical talent as dominated by the standardization and verification of global actions.

8.10 Micro-subjective findings
The micro findings in the subjective realm evolved from themes IV, V, VI and VII. The findings in this realm relate in many ways to those of the micro-objective realm. Both sets of findings are derived from four common themes, namely IV, V, VI and VII. Both objective and subjective realms interact within the foreground and middleground of socio-musicological activity. Elements common to both realms relate to (a) the fulfilment of personal goals and
aspirations, (b) the shaping of musical preferences, (c) symbolic acts and their significance, and (d) the (re)construction of social meanings. Micro-subjective outcomes are rechecked against micro-objective outcomes. Findings match closely between both realms. Firstly, perceptions and beliefs seem to culminate in overt behavioural patterns. Secondly, the construction of social reality appears to stimulate and reinforce social action and interaction. Thirdly, individual and group gestures evolve into significant symbols. Lastly, performative and referential actions are analysed against the duality of the ‘self’ and ‘others’ enabling a discourse in the deconstruction of ‘meanings’. The final set of findings are thus categorised as relating to (a) perceptions and beliefs, (b) the social reconstruction of reality, (c) gestures and (d) performativity and referentiality.

8.10.1 Perception and belief

Order, stability and co-operation in society are based on value systems that often derive from common perceptions and belief. Such functionalist-perspectives regard the relationship between communities in society as one of co-operation and interdependence. Since no one community is self-sufficient in meeting all the needs of its members, one group tends to exchange goods and services with other groups fostering a spirit of reciprocity. As music is a universal expression of diverse cultures, it is in essence a manifestation of human thought and imagination communicated in its own special language. It is usually expressed by the action of playing a musical instrument utilising socially-agreed sets of symbols in the form of music notation. Other cultures and genres rely on the ear. Such forms of symbolic references are communicated through the aural senses. Feelings are aroused when music is heard or played. Experience may be first-hand or vicarious. For example, a mother witnessing her six-year old daughter play ‘Happy Birthday’ to her on the piano can be an awesome experience. It arouses and heightens the emotive spirit of the entire family unit. The responsibility of sending the child to weekly piano lessons is perceived as being well worth the effort. Feedback by the piano teacher that the child is ready for her first piano
examination is an exciting moment. Sitting outside the hotel room where the assessment is taking place is equally daunting for both parent and child. A quick glimpse of the ‘examiner from England’ reinforces all round confidence. A representative from the Ministry of Education, albeit the steward, affirms recognition and boosts public confidence. The image of other parents with their respective offspring confirms good practice. A phone call from the piano teacher to congratulate the parents that their child has scored a distinction in her very first public examination is cause for celebration. Such aesthetic moments of joy conjure a deep and lasting sense of satisfaction. The family has successfully entered the ‘system’, marking a commitment that is to span at least half a decade. The piano teacher has proven her worth. Her clientele is firmly established. The investments in the purchase of a piano and music books, monthly tuition fees and examination fees have reaped ‘instant returns’. The arrival of the certificate caps the kudos, proudly framed and hung on the wall. The child senses that this whole process has pleased her parents greatly. She knows how to repeat the feat. The community knows how to repeat the feat. Thus, from the observation of action and interaction, commonsense accounts are formed and disseminated. Overt behaviour influences further action. Attitudes are constructed. Values and beliefs are formed.

As a system develops, so too does its clientele. For instance, the early clients of the assessment boards were very different from the clients of post-colonial Malaysia. Traditions have been transplanted and adopted by new societies, adding or taking away original elements. Why people attend concerts, what they understand about musical styles, the historical references to composers’ lives and their backgrounds have witnessed a process of transformation in a new society at a different point in historical time. Cultural diversity and upbringing may also be responsible for considerable differences in terms of relationships between adults and the way children are socialized. At the same time, family life cycles are affected by social, political and economic factors. These factors include personal reasons people take up a musical instrument, which particular instrument is
favoured, why the instrument is favoured, what music is played on that instrument, why such music is taught and who constitutes the audience for such music. ‘Original’ elements that have been extracted are ‘replaced’ by newer elements that make commonsense to participants. Each participating group possesses respective responsibilities that constitute towards the success of individual and collective goals. Each individual reaps different rewards from the attainment of such goals. The end result is the evolution of a system or code of practice that is well galvanised, complete, functional, efficient and robust. Institutional functions thus involve behavioural functions where the actions of the individual in the environment of the organisation interact dynamically within the larger scheme of relations and group objectives.

Once a system is socially secure, actors ensure that the system continue to serve their personal needs. The imposition of self-denial may be necessary for some actors if the end justifies the means. For example, students believe that they are ‘going through the motion’ of learning the piano and taking examinations without really comprehending what they are doing, parents believe that musical talent is secondary to practising, music teachers realize the limitations of the system in place but they actively promote it. The culture of concert attendance amongst many students, parents and piano teachers is lacking. There seems to be a consensus that music examinations have assumed supreme power in ordering the teaching agenda of teachers, even so far as to dictate the curriculum of music education.

The syllabuses for music examinations have thus taken over the need for music curriculum design. They have dominated pedagogical approaches to the teaching and learning of music to the extent that inductions to the effective delivery of new examination syllabuses are often disguised as ‘professional development’ sessions sponsored by the examination boards themselves. In other words, teachers are constantly reminded that good teaching produces good examination results and that means a close adherence to syllabus requirements. Many teachers are further
encouraged by the performance of examination pieces on cassette tapes sold by representatives of the assessment boards and a close emulation of such 'definitive' playing would ensure promising examination outcomes. Some music educators are aware of such 'dangers' but they also believe that not purchasing such well promoted products might render themselves less competitive in achieving desired outcomes. Thus, despite such obvious limitations of the system, the strength of belief and perception as to the benefits and personal advantages of adhering to the mechanisms of agreed practice outweighs its 'limitations'. Through such examples of continuous denial, the system gathers greater momentum with the participation of old and new members, shaping overt and covert behaviour by consensus and the power of group dynamics.

8.10.2 Social construction of reality

Music as a medium of communication mediates succinctly and directly between the individual and society. It informs and reflects culture-specific realities with its abstract dimensions, facilitating the transcendence of multi-cultural consciousness. Music thus sends different messages to different cultural sites. For instance, during a concert, Malaysians tend to spontaneously 'grade' a musician according to the highest level of examinations passed whilst another society may measure a musician's worth by his/her performance record. People tend to apply their personal experience and knowledge to understand reality. Priorities differ from one culture to another. Music making in some societies has been described as a way of life, a sharing of aesthetic moments or a revisiting of one's heritage, inheritance and tradition. It represents a group achievement which is demonstrated in a public fashion. In another society, music making is perceived as a private affair. Playing a musical instrument is a personal achievement carrying a personal goal. The music examiner represents the audience of one, the authority in evaluating the worth of the performance. Society participates in the recognition of such achievement by acknowledging its educational worth. In so doing, the society creates employment opportunities by providing new clients to learn the craft. Thus, the peculiar intrinsic and extrinsic powers of music tend to contribute
in distinctive ways of shaping musical purpose, identity and value. Hence, when deconstructing music's 'corporeal' or tangible realities, two interrelated states are taken into account.

The most intimate state represents one's actual or primary experience in playing or listening to music. The secondary state is represented by society's construction of reality in relation to the complex actions of individuals in their experience and perception of music. To this end, the media plays an important role in the structuring of consciousness. Educational issues that are debated in the public domain and reported by the press tend to have manifested over time. For instance, the problems associated with the over emphasis on music examinations as highlighted in a public forum are traced to similar (over)emphasis on examinations per se as practised in the national school education system. People tend to be more articulate when discussing forms of communication which evoke narratives and vision. The problems are widely acknowledged but little change is seen. Perhaps new options have not emerged as viable alternatives. Meanwhile, private and public displays of dissatisfaction seem merely to verify the state of affairs.

Hence, public debates and discussions tend to re-enforce society's notions about how music is transmitted, the types of music prevalent, its position in society and the role it plays in the education of the young. The media plays a significant role in shaping image and dispelling (or reaffirming) notion. For example, the 'call-ins' during a current affairs programme on national television highlighted public concerns with regard to the overall 'direction' of music education in the country. It also highlighted public perception of the less desirable habits of popular musicians and their perceived negative influence on young people. Indirectly, such opinions serve to re-enforce public confidence of the positive effects of practising classical music. It also provides clear evidence of the existence of diverse public opinions as to the roles, functions and effects of music on society.
Furthermore, comments by viewers on the limitations of Malaysia’s music education infrastructure in the public and private sectors demonstrate that the public is generally aware of the system in operation. The power and politics of ‘denial’ or false consciousness are again evidenced. Rather than call for change, political and cultural bureaucracy, on the contrary, seem to support the existing infrastructure. An arrangement of a traditional tune was deemed ineffective as ‘ethnic’ instruments were missing in the rendition. The composition was quickly attributed to the work of a foreign musician. Similarly on another occasion, the fragile spirit of national pride was briefly dented when a medley of tunes played by the largely expatriate members of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra incorporated segments of the national anthem. Such an act of ‘cultural insensitivity’ was quickly attributed to artistic freedom as practised in the ‘West’, only to bring about a flourish of later debates and rebuttals on the implied superiority of ‘Western’ music and the artistic liberties of its composers.

In addition, implications that Malaysian children were learning the music of a ‘distant culture’ as opposed to their ‘own culture’ confirms public notion that ‘Western music’ belongs to Europeans or Western people whilst traditional music belongs to ‘Eastern people’ or non-Western people. Such examples of contradictions in appearance demonstrate the dichotomy of ‘living between worlds’, namely, East and West, whilst seeking personal and international recognition, and at the same time searching for a national identity which is recognised as proprietary.

Nevertheless, processes of material reproduction are essential to the survival of cultural reproduction. The fulfilment of self-acts complements the mechanism of collective contemplation in the reaffirmation of everyday reality. Such a witness of realistic dialogues, narratives and spontaneous interaction in the media represents a way of establishing, involving and personalising characters for the viewers. The construction of reality thus incorporates the creation of vivid images within human events. The focus on musical personalities and their social
positions reaffirms the adequacy of the system. The media helps shape social organisations and dominant modes of thought. It actively encourages the development of certain levels of understanding, social action and organisation within a society. It is in the interest of a particular class in that society to make use of a specific medium or set of media to further their own political or institutional ends. Reality is thus socially constructed and culturally supported by individuals who understand and benefit from the rewards of such an adherence.

8.10.3 Gestures

According to Mead (1934), gestures that possess meaning are regarded as significant symbols. Mead considers a symbol as a stimulus which inspires response. Reaction to impulse as in Mead’s theory is regarded as either being symbolic or non-symbolic. Non-symbolic interaction occurs when an individual responds directly to the action of another without interpreting that action. In symbolic reaction, action is premised on the basis of meanings. Consciousness is one of the key elements in understanding meaningful actions. Such meanings are received and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things s/he encounters. Furthermore, the meaning of things arises out of the social interaction between and amongst members of society. Gestures provide clues in the interpretive process. Gestures may be symbolic or non-symbolic, the former being an ‘interpreted’ response-action whilst the latter a spontaneous response-action.

Symbolic gestures are thus created by people to cope with specific and real situations, bringing with them different meanings for different situations. Such gestures provide different meanings and solutions to different people. A different meaning in similar situations is neither wrong nor irrelevant. Thus, when people look back at a series of events, they do so by way of symbols and gestures which created the meanings.
The language of music is inherently symbolic. The interpretation of its notation is the quintessence of symbolic gesture in musical language. Schenker's analysis of musical structure by the use of extra-musical signs is a step beyond ordinary musical interpretation.

At the foreground of musical events a symbolic gesture that is grounded upon ritual is the graduation ceremony. Dominant social groups use the power of symbolic gesture to create a sense of new found loyalty to the institution. Direct and indirect participation in a ritual promotes a shared system of meanings which links the past, present and anticipated future experiences, enabling people to interconnect personal and social experiences. Participation in a graduation ceremony encourages a sense of belonging to the alma mater. It fosters a sense of duty and responsibility to ‘give-back’ to the system by way of promoting its existence. The act of ‘walking’ in the procession and recession in full regalia conjures images that are long lasting, meaningful and highly personal. They also represent well-placed persons who are in a position to give official imprint to versions of reality. By conducting graduation ceremonies examination boards are declaring a message of social significance.

Such gestures provide ‘visualizations’ of real-life values that shape action. Political symbols and ceremonies thus celebrate the success of those who participate in the system. These graduation ceremonies are novel events, having no historical precedence. They serve as an extension of celebrations to the founding events and also dramatize the history and track record in an attempt to inculcate pride and positive experiences as participants in the system. Such social gestures aim to become significant symbols in the form of language and action, enabling people to receive and link personal and social experiences through a shared system of symbolic meaning. Those who participate in such activities are symbolically influenced by dialectically interrelated concepts which are then translated into empirical operations resulting in intertwined patterns of action and
interaction that make up peculiar groups and societies. Furthermore, symbolic impressions of such rites of passage are often captured in photography.

The ‘silent voice’ of the photographs provides the medium of social organisation through the formation of concepts, which are premised upon initial intuitive ideas based on the influence of imagery and social gesture. Reflective action takes place as a result of the manifestation of this perceived mental object. They are able to make these modifications and alterations because of their ability to interact with themselves which allows them to examine various courses of action, assess their relative advantages and disadvantages. They then act upon their decisions which satisfy the original impulse thus making informed choices. Such dialectically interrelated concepts are then translated into empirical operations resulting in intertwined patterns of action and interaction that make up peculiar groups and societies. Gestures portray interlocking perspectives of both culture and actions of personalities within a social group. Similarly the image of a child ‘graduating’ from kindergarten in full regalia personifies parental aspirations and expectations. The image of a fatherly figure yearning for the educational success of his child in an advertisement for students by an institution of higher learning rides on similar emotive-marketing strategies.

Such forms of ‘silent-speeches’ in photography explore vicarious experience and convey images that serve to associate ‘recognisable reality’ with readers. The portrayal of realistic situations is cast in picture form against the social setting in which the subject lives. It honed the fundamentals of human aspirations through picture form. The strengths of images mobilise a range of interest among the various strata of society.

Thus, new situations modify the meanings of existing symbols used to denote cultural situations. The term ‘situations and symbols’ are mutually interdependent in a relationship that is crucial to the constantly changing dynamics of the social process. Social situations give rise to words that make up complex symbolic
languages. In new situations, symbols and gestures are mediated by pre-existing adjacent meanings. Symbolic gestures thus capture the complexity of the self within the social nexus of behaviour, action and interaction in a 'musical' articulation of social reality. Thus a symbol may be regarded as an occurrence or an object which carries a generally agreed meaning for members of a particular group or society. In social interaction, people learn the meaning and the symbols that allow them to exercise their distinctive human capacity for thought. Meaning and symbols are modified by people on the basis of their (re)interpretation of the situation and circumstance.

8.10.4 Performativity and referentiality

The interpretive approach to the study of culture, biography and human expressions may be viewed through symbolic statements and action. The postulation of the covert and overt significance of the 'symbol' has continued to exert its influence in postmodernist thinking. In the social and musicological deconstruction of meaning, music analyst Leonard Meyer (1956, p.2), for instance, believed that music conveyed 'referential meaning' whilst Rhett Walker (1993, p.195) concurs that music, due to its innate properties, may function connotatively or symbolically. Postmodern investigators further take the view of the 'self' to represent a duality in meaning, which according to Lacan (1977, p.64) acts both 'performatively' and 'referentially'. On one hand, the 'I' in the self is regarded as the spontaneous impulse to act whilst the 'me' or the ego of the self, represents the perspectives on oneself that the individual has learnt from others in social interaction. Here the attitude of the others' constitute the organised 'me' and when one responds with a measure of freedom, the 'I' is in action. Thus, the use of the terms 'I', 'me' and 'significant others' represents both performativity and referentiality at the individual level (social act) as well as at the social level (social process). Max Weber stressed the importance of subjective meaning and interpretive understanding (or verstehen) by placing oneself in the position of other people in order to better understand the meaning, purpose and ends to their action.
Take for instance the photograph of the boy (in the preamble page) practising the piano on a raised platform constructed by his father. This child personifies a family unit which has made a collective decision to participate in a socially condoned system of musical training that is embedded in discipline and practice. They represent a family of individuals who have internalised the norms and values generated by dominant institutions. By practising on the piano in the family living room he is acting both performatively and referentially.

Performatively, the child is stating that ‘I’ as in the self, have acted spontaneously due to the impulse to act (which may have, in the first instance, arisen from his parents, family members or his own initiative) whilst the ‘me’ or the ego of the self, represents the perspectives on oneself that the individual has learnt, referentially, from others in social interaction. In other words, the ego understands itself from outside itself whilst the “I” is linguistically and culturally determined from within the inside. Thus, in interpreting the child’s action, the attitude of the ‘others’ constitute the organised ‘me’ and the one that has responded has acted as in the capacity of ‘I’. It provides a picture of the inner and private experience of the individual that constitute the background for the emergence and existence of a given form of conduct. At the micro-subjective level, the child is participating in a social action that is deemed ‘logical’. For example, as a precaution against possible damage by flood waters, the piano, a symbol of the child’s music education and a prized furniture piece is safely placed on a raised platform in the living room on a permanent basis. Presumably at the proud invitation of the family, this image was published in the front page of a national daily.

What is the impact on its readers at the macro-subjective level? For the Malaysian public it possibly provides readers with a view of the inner and private experience that seems to constitute to the background for the emergence and existence of a lived form of conduct. There may be two response-forms, non-action or action. The first response to this image-impulse may result in non-action whilst the second realm may trigger some form of reaction to the stimuli which will in turn
serve to re-enforce the act. Either way, it is argued that such a powerful image will deliver a significant impact to its readers, further supporting a cyclical nature of the phenomena at the individual (micro) level and group (macro) level. For this researcher, the photograph represents the quintessence of the research argument. It is the symbolic gesture of the thesis. The following figure illustrates the concepts expressed.

**Figure 8.10.4 'I', 'Me' and 'Significant Others'**

**Performativity and Referentiality:** supporting a cyclical phenomena

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  Impulse-senses
  'I-Me' Image
  Perception-mental object
  Performativity and Referentiality
  Manipulation-reflective action

  Consumption

  Social impact in structuring consciousness:
influencing action or non-action among significant others

  Non-action or action
  (Supporting a cyclical phenomena)
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The reception of this image stimuli triggers analytical searches and assessments of the mental object. The construction of the mental object thus leads to the reception stage and a response to the stimuli is evoked. Taking cue from Mead's (1934) reference to the four dialectically interrelated processes of impulse, perception manipulation, consummation and reflective action, the above figure demonstrates the dynamic role of image in structuring consciousness within the micro-macro realms of performativity and referentiality.
Thus, for many families taking private piano tuition represents a form of educational supplement which offshoots of the society's problem-solving strategy to bridge the gap between perceived inadequacies in the national educational system and the fulfilment of personal (and or family) desires and aspirations. Strangely, the idea of not taking some form of tuition, appears contrary to the norm of social behaviour in the Malaysian context. Playing the piano is primarily a solitary endeavour where individuality supersedes group solidarity. This appears to complement the ethos of the participating community. Whether this preference is more spiritual, religious, cultural or ethnic-centred is open to debate and possibly within the scope of another research endeavour. Suffice it to say that there is a lack of group ethos that cuts across individual interest and communal aspects of music making whether by the existence of the system in place or by choice. Solitary aims are achieved by participation of the individual within the confines of the nuclear family group to a world community of musicians and the general listening public with its own entry and exit points according to personal tastes, behaviour and interaction. Thus, the deconstruction of meaning in music requires a eclecticism of theories and methodologies in order to conceive a way of understanding the technical and characteristcs of music as sites for the textual mediation of personal and economic power. Through the passage of time the system has formed specific territorial linkages which have become jealously guarded, having the potential and power to be divisive as much as unifying. Cultural differences and social grievances serve to mobilise populations experiencing disruptions. Thus, the development of collective values in which values shared have produced group values.

The very inequalities of these two elements serve to promote collective goals. Recurrent or cyclical patterns of interaction between subordinate and superordinate (people in positions of power in society) individuals are brought about by different ways in which the imagination meets reality. Individuals thus articulate of their roles as catalysts rather than definers of the event in order to achieve maximum participation at the community level. They present a 'horizontal view
of the group status, all with equal rights in the celebrations. They rely heavily on private initiatives, both business and professional, to ensure its success and reproduction. From the narrative of the piano importer to the voices of undergraduate students and music school administrators, the interview story is cast in narrative form against a minutely observed portrayal of the social setting in which the subjects live. Such descriptive details highlight similarities and differences in opinions colouring the imaginative process in the 'I'-‘Me’ dichotomy of explanations. Thus, within the negotiated relation of whose story is being told, the reader is provided with the ‘why’, ‘whom’ and ‘with what’ interpretations the story is unfolding and being portrayed.

8.11 Summary of findings

The ‘unfolding’ of findings in the above sections illuminate the complexity of the phenomena studied. The presentation of the nine themes at the beginning of the final chapter can be regarded as a ‘prelude of outcomes’, towards which its expansion into a schema represents the final analysis and synthesis of ideas within a newly created theoretical model. In this sense, the final outcomes of the research may be summarised as belonging to two realms of knowledge-contribution. Foremost, the research established why the learning of the piano and the certification of musical attainment are so prevalent and revered among Malaysian music students and secondly, by an application of interdisciplinary theories premised on the ideas of Mead, Schenker and Ritzer, the thesis yielded a metatheoretical model in which findings were meta-analysed and presented. The findings as presented at the macro-micro levels of objective subjective interrelationships within the metatheoretical schema are briefly summarised as follows:

(i) the musical heritage and practices found in Malaysia are direct offshoots of British colonial policies. Such vestiges of colonialism represent a major contributor to the system of music education as exists in Malaysia.

(ii) music education preferences of the social group studied are significantly influenced by the nation’s politics of education, national religion and
cultural bureaucracy that support (and at the same time limit) private music education and musical performances in the country.

(iii) the operations and assessment focus of the external public music examinations are congruent with the examination-orientation of the Malaysian natural education system. It shares similar goals and values towards the purpose and product of learning and teaching.

(iv) the social desire for international recognition outshines national sentiments, engendering a constant internal struggle between nationalistic aspirations and the social power of internationalism that is synonymous with ‘Westernisation’ and modernisation.

(v) individual and family goals and rewards enable the seizing of new opportunities in the field of music education which in turn foster personal and group social advancement.

(vi) perceptions and beliefs of those within the system of practice further influence the behavioural patterns of others.

(vii) the Malaysian mass media re-enforces the image of classical music as a ‘cultured-art’. Its ‘education’ is seen to be endorsed by an international network of assessment providers whose services are premised on trust, integrity, expertise and track record. Its ‘curriculum’ is confidently delivered by a network of Malaysian music teachers whose professional and social rewards in turn demonstrate the success and usefulness of the system.

(viii) The phenomenon studied appears to be cyclical in nature. Its social and symbolic significance lie in the interpretation of gestures that shape social action and response. At the micro level, the multiple interpretations of the
‘selfs’ and of ‘significant (or non-significant) others’ provided the key to understanding conscious and subconscious meaning. At each turn of the cycle, the system is re-enforced at the macro level.

(ix) The ‘act’ of playing the piano has assumed both performative and referential roles, personifying and strengthening the system at work.

8.12 Limitations and triangulation

As with any research endeavour and outcome, the capacity for generalisation is bounded by the scope of its limitations. Narratives and descriptions derived from the translation of an incident are never wholly transparent but involve a process of reciting or a recalling of the actual occasion. As explanations aim to represent a cultural or historical re-situation of the event, they are therefore a travesty of the ‘original’ intention. Writing is inherently problematic because it forms part of the political and ideological heritage of complex societies as well as being intricately involved with its own social structures, making it difficult to disentangle the implications of literacy from the actual event. However, narratives serve to heighten a reader’s sense of involvement by the provision of symbolic details of the subject’s life as a way of sharing validity and increasing the generalibility of data. Social research cast through ‘voices’ thus involves the piecing of segments of narratives and evidence that have been selected, ‘edited’ and deployed to border and support an argument. The researcher relies on individual actors and events to procure social interpretations of group behaviour. Perspectives may be narrated by people who have tried hard to represent themselves as ‘a-political’ or marginalized but there may have been a hidden agenda that has escaped notice. It is not a straightforward process but a question of capturing ‘the moment in time’. Fragmentary images serve to mediate important political and social questions. Reading between the lines is highly subjective and may be opened to questions of over-generalisation.
Furthermore, social divisions between groups are created by society and cultures, and they are not the inevitable products of fixed biological or racial differences. A critical aspect of racial identity is the dichotomy between 'you' and the 'other' in an intricate relationship. Humans engaged in activities are not historically determined relationships of social and cultural continuity. Their actions do not necessarily reflect socio-cultural ethnic preferences and desires, but they may be merely episodes, interactions, encounters and situations. Thus, findings based on the interpretation of such actions may not be applicable over the passage of time. An attempt to discover the fact is to discover and unlock the whole enormous history of nationalism and of racism. Racism and the issue of ethnic preferences is a structuring of discourse and representation that embodies a far greater study of culture, values and behaviour than afforded in this thesis. Furthermore, there are limited discussions on the social conditions that are in operation at specific points in time. Limited discussions on the matrix of social structure and the socio-political constraints may prove inadequate substantiation of the manner in which standardised normative-behaviour evolve and why members of society are motivated to act in accordance to social norms that contribute to the phenomenon studied. In this sense the 'source of meaning' to which the samples attached such importance could have been accorded greater attention.

The 'over-reliance' on participant observation may cloud the observer's interpretation of the scene-by-scene reconstruction of events and therefore its validity may be questioned. The issue of meaning and identity are thus highly complex relations to undercover. Furthermore, the 'voices' in the public forums may be laced with the perspectives of the dominant class. Hence, whilst the braiding of their commentary may be rich it may not have been easy to capture their 'meaning' into accurate categories of the complex analytical framework.

The categorisation of information is itself problematic as some aspects of social research are deemed more susceptible to codification and formulization than others. By dealing and participating in such samples of 'voices' the researcher is
affecting power relations. Participant bias and influence have to be taken into account. Hence, it is important to examine the power dynamics within and surrounding the space of social actors since the researcher’s stance frames the texts produced and carves out the spaces in which intellectual discourse takes place. There will always be gaps in the total picture.

Furthermore, recollections of oral history that bring the teller of the tale back to the narrative are often embodied in a variety of contradictory privileges. ‘I’ and ‘others’ are sounding collective differences within a constant flux of negotiation and change. The case study can only embody limited information as bounded by instances in action at a specific historical time. This being the case, the degree of generalisation is limited by the constraints of the case, the type and size of participants, the social, cultural and economic factors prevalent at a given point in time and hidden agendas or personal motives of the narrating voices.

Nevertheless, participant observation is by far the most suitable means for exploring the social and symbolic roles that the system play in the lives of the actors involved. It aids the extrapolation of public opinion and beliefs as evidenced by their overt (and covert) behaviour. It brings together varied views, experiences and perspectives, sometimes into disagreement and significant tensions that are nevertheless bound into a frame of reference that exposes citizens to the issues at hand and at the same time exposes the conditions of human thought towards the meaning and value of music. By categorizing and conceptualizing data from multiple sources, information is verified from diverse angles. Concepts in themselves are not theories but rather categories for the organisation of ideas and observations. They act as a means of storing information. They serve to provide a means of summarizing and classifying data whereby reality is fitted into spaces as bounded by a particular time frame, ready for the final analysis of emergent themes.
Methodological limitations are further addressed by the application of socio-musicological theories that serve to support the mainframe of the argument. Metatheorising serves to strengthen validity and discussions on methodological issues and dilemmas that relate to the amorphous nature of interdisciplinary studies have already been discussed in Chapter 3.

8.13 Conclusion and way ahead

This final chapter thus embodies the ethos of the entire thesis. The application of theoretical principles to the analysis of emergent themes resulted in a set of findings which are elucidated within the framework of a metatheoretical schema. Nine themes are unveiled at the beginning of the chapter. They pertain to,

(i) historical practice as an outcome of colonial influence and musical heritage,
(ii) the significance of certification as a verification of international recognition,
(iii) the liberalisation of education and the cyclical nature of the piano teaching profession, (iv) social status accorded to music practitioners and learners, and the vicarious experience of parents who had always wished to play the piano but were denied the opportunity, (v) cultural attitudes to teaching, learning and testing,
(vi) the power of the media in the reconstruction of social reality, (vii) effective marketing of music examination and related services, (viii) bureaucratic constraints and political agendas and (ix) the recognition of the limitations of the music education system and the desire for change. These themes were then meta-analysed in an integrated paradigm of socio-musicological constructs. By juxtaposing the theoretical principles of Mead, Schenker and Ritzer, a metatheoretical schema was created.

Findings are classified as belonging to the macro domain of the background/fundamental structure or the micro domain of the middleground and foreground levels of sociomusicological events. The macro-micro domains are further subdivided into interrelated objective and subjective realms.
Macro-objective outcomes comprise findings related to (a) vestiges of colonialism, (b) political construct and cultural bureaucracy, (c) examination orientation of the education system, nationalism and internationalism and the (d) proposition of new opportunities. Macro-subjective findings on the other hand involve outcomes related to (a) heritage and musical practices, (b) music education preferences, (c) external public music examinations, (d) issue of recognition and (e) goals and rewards.

Flanking the macro findings in the schema are the micro objective-subjective findings. The micro-objective findings relate to (i) behavioural patterns, (ii) action and interaction, (iii) symbolism, and (iv) the deconstruction of meaning. The closely related micro-subjective findings pertain to (i) perception and beliefs, (ii) the social construction of reality, (iii) gestures and lastly, (iv) behavioural elements as applied to the concept of performativity and referentiality. The findings are briefly summarised in relation to its macro-micro relationships as presented in the metatheoretical schema.

The limitations of the propositions and methodology are presented in the final part of the thesis. They include issues related to the validity of narratives, techniques of data acquisition, sampling frame and hidden agendas as well as the extent of permissible generalisation within the scope of a case study. Methodological issues in relation to the interdisciplinary nature of the research and the use of multiple theoretical frameworks are counter-referred to an earlier chapter. The categorisation and classification of data from both private and public domains within a socio-gram of musical interrelationships represent an early process of triangulation. In the analysis of emergent themes, a synchronic analysis of the interrelated unfolding of social events in the middleground and foreground levels posits social acts as episodes whilst a diachronic analysis of the fundamental structure helps delineate the meaning system with reference to the historical roots of society.
Emergent themes are then dialectically metamorphosised by a process of meta-
analysis. Validated and substantiated findings are presented in a metatheoretical
schema. Such vigorous triangulatory measures serve as a means of solidifying the
validity of findings within the process of theory building. In accordance to the
aims of the research, the findings revealed the complex social and symbolic
significance of acquiring music education through the taking of piano tuition and
public music examination. Symbolic significances associated with the 'act' of
playing the piano were unveiled.

The thesis thus revealed that this approach to music education is a manifestation
of socio-cultural and historical phenomena, bounded by political, economic and
musical needs of a particular society. The actions of the group studied support the
view that the acquisition of knowledge that does not contribute to some form of
economic growth has debatable value in terms of the economic efficiency of the
political system. For some members of society, music in the education of children
may have limited value. For others, it may be foregone completely. Meanwhile
there are those who eschew bureaucratic relationships and prefer to leave the
music education of their offspring in the hands of private enterprise. The
metatheoretical model facilitated the extrapolation of understandings within
multiple situations and meanings in the context of human action and interaction.
In the collection of empirical data, the existence of significance and its symbolic
meaning are considered problematic and uncertain, emphasizing the relativity of
cultural determinism within multiple interpretations. There are also significance
differences between forms of knowledge that shape mental structures as
influenced by the socio-political, cultural and historical environment in which the
study was situated, taking a pluralistic view of music education in this context as
being an epistemological product of social activity.
Furthermore, the spread of transport, communications, mass literacy, literary publications and media technologies have diffused a heightened consciousness of the threat of modern 'imperialism'. The instant global-outreach at the touch of a finger as afforded by the internet and the World Wide Web has helped overcome huge geographical, social and communication barriers. The selection and choice of goods and services are determined by market demands. Educational assessment services are business entities. The market decides what it wants, what is good or not good for it. A certificate of 'international value' has the ability to transform itself into a significant symbol that influences local perception, insinuating itself into existing domestic practices. The actions of individuals in turn influence the macro perceptions of the larger society offering a permanent and deep-rooted challenge to the domestic and international cycles of phenomena. The historical basis of culture, practice and successful track record are embedded in popular consciousness.

What crystallized all these elements are global influences which fuel cultural and historical bias. Internationalism has fostered the emergence of new world societies which are marked by their distinctive status anxieties. It has formulated a language of maturation that requires individuals within a society to periodically assess their own progress through time and to construct goals as galvanisers of future plans of action. It is within this ambit of social action and power relations that the system of music education in Malaysia interacts, nationally and internationally.

More research in the field of private instrumental studies, classroom music education and socio-cultural attitudes to different forms and aspects of music as well as musical preferences will pave the way forward to a better understanding and appreciation of the musical arts, whether they be Western or 'Malaysian'. Thus, the question (or 'solution') is not whether there should be a Malaysian music examination board, but rather for Malaysian educators to collaborate in addressing the encompassing issues at hand with an aim to improve music.
education and widen musical experiences for the younger generation. Forced change and the replacement of an existing system by another of similar construct are artificial actions and ineffective solutions in bringing about a social understanding of the intrinsic value of an education in music. Meaningful change can only be brought about by a re-evaluation of what Malaysians truly understand by music as a reflection and a mirror of society.

The inter-relationships between the ‘I’, ‘Me’ and ‘Others’ will dictate the social and symbolic significance of future action and response within society. By re-examining one’s own actions, desires and personal goals the true meaning of music and its aesthetic personification will reveal itself within the symbolic realms of subjective and objective consciousness.
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The Star 18 May 1999, ‘Must we cling on to colonial legacies?’, Kuala Lumpur.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Structure of Public Education System

Appendix B: Structure of Private Education System

Appendix C: Development of Private Higher Education in Malaysia

Appendix D: Survey Questionnaire for Music Teachers

Appendix E: Survey Questionnaire for Parents

Appendix F: Survey Questionnaire for Music Students

Appendix G: Some Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Appendix H: Trinity News - Malaysian Presentation Ceremony

Appendix I: Blasting Bargain!

Appendix J: ABRSM Diploma Awards
# Structure of Public Education System

## Basic Education

| AGE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Level of Education | Pre-School Education | Primary School Education (Standard 1 to 6) | Lower Secondary School Education (Form 1 to 3) | Upper Secondary School Education (Form 4 & 5) | First Bachelor Degree Education (1-3 years) | Master's Degree Education | Doctorate Degree |
| National Examination (National Curriculum) | Minimum Guidelines | UPSR (KBSR) | PMR | SPM | Post-Secondary Curriculum (STPM) | University Curriculum & Qualifications |

## Types of Primary Schools

- National Type
- Malay Type
- Chinese Type
- Tamil Type
- Technical Type
- Vocational Type
- Special Type
- Rural Area Type
- Urban Area Type

## Types of Upper Secondary Schools

- Academic Secondary School
- Technical Secondary School
- Modern School
- Normal School
- Special School

## Other Study Opportunities

- Postgraduate and Professional Level
- Certificate and Diploma Level at Government Approved Colleges
- Certificate and Diploma Level in Universities (1st and 2nd Year)
- Teacher Training College
- Apprenticeship (1 year)

## Eight Local Public Universities

- Universiti Malaya (UM)
- Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)
- Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
- Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)
- Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)
- Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)
- Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UMP)
- Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)

## Two Government Sponsored Colleges

- Technical University
- Polytechnic

## Seven Polytechnics

- Politeknik Siti Hasmah, Johor Bahru
- Politeknik Sultan Iskandar, Terengganu
- Politeknik Sultan Mizah, Perlis
- Politeknik Brunei, Brunei
- Politeknik Brunei Darussalam, Brunei
- Politeknik Brunei, Bandar Seri Begawan
- Politeknik Brunei, Bandar Seri Begawan

## One International University

- International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
STRUCTURE OF PRIVATE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Educational levels and opportunities at Private Kindergartens, Private Schools, Private Colleges and Private Universities

| AGE | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| LEVEL OF EDUCATION & CURRICULUM | Nursery | Pre-School Education | Primary School Education (Standard 1 to 6) | Lower Secondary School Education (Form 1 to 3) | Upper Secondary School Education (Form 4 & 5) | Post Secondary Education | Higher Education |
| TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS | Child Care Centres | Private Kindergarten | Private Schools |

Post Secondary Education (1 to 2 years)

- External Academic Examination
  - for the following qualifications:
    - Local
      - SPM, Malaysia
    - Internation
      - GCE A Level, UK
      - EMAM, Australia
      - WAEC, Nigeria
      - BSC, Austria

- Overseas University Access and Bridging Programme

- Bachelor's First Degree Award (By Local/Foreign Universities)
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Master's Degree
  - PhD

- Higher Education (3 to 4 years)
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Master's Degree

- Post-Graduate Programme

- Professional and Senior Professional Examinations (Local/Overseas)

- Master Degrees & Post Graduate Qualification

- By way of:
  - Distance Learning
  - Joint Programme

- Bachelor's Degree
  - Business and Management
  - Education
  - Finance
  - Human Resource Management
  - Health Technology
  - Law
  - Nursing
  - etc.
APPENDIX C

Development of private higher education in Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Courses available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Basic: Cambridge Overseas School Leaving Certificate Examinations (UK)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Entry to Universities: Cambridge Higher School Leaving Certificate Examinations</td>
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<td>(UK)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial Diplomas and Higher Diplomas:</td>
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<td>Pitmans Examinations (UK)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>London Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry (UK)</td>
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<td>Two</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Degree Level/Professional:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>London LLB External (UK)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>London BSc External (various fields) (UK)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Engineering Council (UK)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>ACCA (UK)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>CIMA (UK)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ICSA (UK)</td>
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<td>Four</td>
<td>1980's to 1990's</td>
<td>Credit Transfer to US universities</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Twinning Programmes with universities in US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand</td>
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<td>(e.g. Law, Engineering, Business and Computer Studies/Science)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>often referred to as 1 + 2 or 2 + 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Advance Standing Programmes where the foreign university conducts validation on</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the private college to determine the suitability of its facilities, human</td>
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<td>resources and management to run the programme. If satisfied with the outcome, it</td>
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<td></td>
<td>will accept that local programme as equivalent to the university’s qualification</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in the field and level concerned. This method of establishment of standards has</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>been extended to the fields of medicine, pharmacy, architecture etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>1998 onwards</td>
<td>Degree Programmes at private colleges.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment of private universities and foreign</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>University branch campuses.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: FOR MUSIC TEACHERS

This questionnaire is to be answered anonymously. Please ensure that you do not write your name or any other comment that will make you identifiable on the questionnaire. By completing the questionnaire you are consenting to take part in the research. Kindly answer the following questions and if applicable, you may tick more than one option in each question. Thank you.

1. How would you describe your teaching load?
   (a) full time    (b) part-time

2. Where do you normally teach?
   (a) at home       (b) at the student’s home  (c) at a music school

3. Where do you prefer teaching?
   (a) at home       (b) at the student’s home  (c) at a music school

4. What percentage of your students are of ethnic Chinese origin?
   (a) more than 90%  (b) more than 70%  (c) more than 50%

5. How important are music examinations to you?
   (a) very important  (b) quite important  (c) not very important
   (d) unimportant

6. How often do you send your students for the practical examinations?
   (a) usually yearly  (b) usually alternate years  (c) once in three/four years
   (d) usually don’t submit

7. How often do you send your students for theory of music examinations?
   (a) usually yearly  (b) usually alternate years  (c) once in three/four years
   (d) usually don’t submit

8. Who mainly makes the decision to submit your students for examination?
   (a) myself           (b) parents’ request  (c) students themselves
   (d) music school management
9. Please indicate the degree of importance when selecting a Board of Examinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Most</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Frequency of examination options per year</td>
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<td>(b) International recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>(c) Availability of workbooks/examination pieces</td>
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<td>(d) Cost factor: examination fees</td>
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<tr>
<td>(e) Cost factor: course materials</td>
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<td>(f) Degree of difficulty</td>
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<td>(g) Pass rate/percentage</td>
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<td>(h) Parental approval</td>
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<td>(i) Curriculum support programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>(j) Accessibility of Board's representatives</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(k) Professional development courses</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. To which examination board/s do you mainly submit candidates?
(a) ABRSM  (d) Guildhall School of Music
(b) Trinity College of Music  (e) Australian Music Examinations Board
(c) London College of Music & Media  (f) Others

11. How satisfied are you with the examinations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) very satisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) quite satisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Have you used more than one examination board?
(a) yes  (b) no

If your answer is ‘yes’, do you feel it was a wise decision?
(a) wise decision  (b) unwise  (c) unsure  (d) too early to tell

13. What percentage of your students’ parents, you think, would object if you did not send their children for music examinations?
(a) 90%  (b) 70%  (c) 50%  (d) 30%
14. What percentage of a year’s work is allocated for repertoire studies (i.e. non examination pieces)?
(a) less than 20%  (b) less than 40%  (c) less than 60%  (d) hardly any time

15. What percentage of your students do you consider ‘naturally’ musical?
(a) less than 80%  (b) less than 60%  (c) less than 40%  (d) less than 20%

16. Would you encourage your students to take up music teaching as a profession?
(a) yes  (b) no  (c) perhaps on a part time basis  (d) up to them

17. Which of the following course might you be interested in taking?
(a) Diploma  (b) Degree  (c) Postgraduate (Masters/PhD)  (d) None

18. Finally use three words/phrases to best describe what a ‘music education’ means to you.
(i) __________________  (ii) __________________  (iii) ________________
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: FOR PARENTS
This questionnaire is to be answered anonymously
Please ensure that you do not write your name or any other comment that will
make you identifiable on the questionnaire. By completing this questionnaire you
are consenting to take part in this research. Kindly answer the following questions
and if applicable, you may tick more than one option in each question. Thank you.

1. Why did you decide to send your child to piano lessons?
   to learn to play a musical instrument
   (a) to appreciate and enjoy music
   (b) to keep her/him 'occupied'
   (c) for a viable career as a music teacher
   (d) to acquire a musical training that I missed out on

2. Why did you choose piano studies for your child and not orchestral
   instruments such as the flute, violin or trumpet?
   (a) my child's choice
   (b) I prefer the piano
   (c) A wide choice of piano teachers
   (d) Lack of orchestral teachers
   (e) Don't know/can't recall

3. When choosing a music teacher, which of the following factors, in order
   of the degree of importance, do you primarily consider?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Most</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   (a) Teacher's qualification
   (b) Teacher's experience
   (c) Strength of recommendation
   (d) Fee charges
   (e) Convenience (travelling distance)
   (f) Examination results
   (g) Class enjoyment
   (h) Teaching environment

4. Would you send him/her to a teacher who does not recommend music
   examinations but rather, emphasises on repertoire and public performance?
   (a) Yes
   (b) No
   (c) Maybe
   (d) Unlikely
5. Which of the following external examination boards are you familiar with or 'have heard of'?
(a) Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM)
(b) Trinity College of Music
(c) London College of Music
(d) Guildhall School of Music
(e) Australian Music Examination Board
(f) None of the above

6. In relation to your child's school work, how important is the allocation of time for musical practice?
(a) More important
(b) Quite important
(c) Just as important
(d) Less important

7. How often do you find time to listen to your child's playing?
(a) very often
(b) quite often
(c) sometimes
(d) seldom
(e) no time

8. How would you describe your knowledge of classical music?
(a) very knowledgeable
(b) moderately knowledgeable
(c) little knowledge
(d) very little knowledge, unfamiliar

9. How often do you take your child for concerts, for example, the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra performances?
(a) regularly
(b) occasionally
(c) hardly
(d) not at all

10. How important are music examinations to you?
(a) very important
(b) moderately important
(c) little importance
(d) unimportant
11. Are you satisfied with the current practice of playing three pieces for the external music examination assessment?
   (a) Very satisfied
   (b) Moderately satisfied
   (c) Not very satisfied
   (d) Dissatisfied
   (e) No known alternatives

12. What does a graded musical certification mean to you?
   (a) that my child is up an accepted international standard for his/her level of work
   (b) that my child has successfully completed the prescribed course
   (c) that my child has ‘proof’ of musical ability/capability
   (d) measures my child’s musicality example: pass, merit or distinction obtained
   (e) doesn’t mean a lot as long as he/she enjoys playing

13. If a candidate obtains a ‘fail’ grade in a music examination, what does this result signify to you?
   (a) She lacks practice
   (b) She is not up to standard
   (c) She is not very musical
   (d) She should consider stopping classes
   (e) She should change her music teacher

14. Please use three words/phrases to best describe what a ‘music education’ means to you.

   (a) __________________ (b) __________________ (c) __________________
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: FOR PIANO STUDENTS

This questionnaire is to be answered anonymously.
Please ensure that you do not write your name or any other comment that will make you identifiable on the questionnaire. By completing this questionnaire you are consenting to take part in this research. Kindly answer the following questions and if applicable, you may tick more than one option in each question. Thank you.

1. How long have you studied the piano?
   (a) 1-3 years       (d) 10-12 years
   (b) 4-6 years       (e) More than 12 years
   (c) 7-9 years

2. How many theory of music examinations have you taken?
   (a) 1-2            (d) 7-8
   (b) 3-4            (e) None at all
   (c) 5-6

3. How many practical examinations have you taken?
   (a) 1-2            (d) 7-8
   (b) 3-4            (e) None at all
   (c) 5-6

4. Who generally decides whether you take music examinations?
   (a) My teacher     (d) Me and my teacher
   (b) My parents     (c) All of us
   (c) Myself

5. Which music examination board do you usually take?
   (a) ABRSM          (c) Australian Music Examinations Board
   (b) Trinity College
   (c) London College of Music and Media
   (d) Guildhall School of Music and Drama

6. Do you think that it is a good idea to have a Malaysian Music Examinations Board?
   (a) Yes            
   (b) No             
   (c) Maybe
   (d) No need (e.g. ABRSM, Trinity College etc. available)
7. If your teacher recommended you to take examinations from an assessment board such as the Malaysian Music Examinations Board, would you agree?
   (a) Yes
   (b) No
   (c) Maybe
   (d) Up to my teacher/parents

8. Would you like to study with a teacher who does not recommend music examinations but rather emphasizes on playing different pieces and/or public performances?
   (a) Yes
   (b) No
   (c) Maybe
   (d) Unlikely
   (e) Depends on my parents

9. How often do you attend public concerts?
   (a) Regularly (at least once every month)
   (b) Sometimes (at least once every three months)
   (c) Not very often (at least once every 6 months)
   (d) Seldom
   (e) Not once in the last two years

10. How much time in an average lesson is spent on preparing for music examinations?
    (a) more than 90%
    (b) more than 80%
    (c) 70%-80%
    (d) 50% to 70%
    (e) less than 50%
    (f) less than 30%

11. What percentage of a year’s work is allocated to repertoire studies (ie. non-examination pieces)?
    (a) less than 20%
    (b) less than 40%
    (c) less than 60%
    (d) hardly any time
12. The following are various statements concerning music lessons and examinations. Please indicate your answers by ticking the appropriate boxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy music lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like taking music exams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I learn a lot taking music exams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer practical to theory lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think music exams are very important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I prefer learning other (non-exam) pieces</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I don’t have much time to practise</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I practise regularly (more than 4 times a week)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I think the music certificate is very important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I don’t have exams, I won’t practise so much</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My parents often listen to me playing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I know quite a lot of orchestral music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

13. What kinds of music do you listen to at home?
   (a) Mostly popular music
   (b) Mostly classical music
   (c) All kinds of music
   (d) Don’t listen to much music

14. Do you think you have acquired a ‘music education’?
   (a) Yes
   (b) No
   (c) Not really
   (d) Don’t know

15. Use three words/ phrases to best describe what a ‘music education’ means to you.
   (a)          (b)          (c)          
**Some Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

*For representatives of music assessment boards*
1. How long have you been a representative of this assessment board?
2. What is 'special' about the board you represent?
3. How do you view Malaysians' passion for taking music examinations?
4. What do you think of music teachers'/students' musicianship skills?
5. How far does the 'market' demand dictate teachers' action?
6. How influential are parents in determining the direction of their children's music education?
7. Approximately how many candidates sit for your board's examinations each year?
8. How many piano teachers do you think there are in Malaysia?
9. Do you think locals will support a Malaysian Music Examinations Board?

*For lecturers/undergraduate music students/administrators*
1. What programmes do you offer?
2. How do you assess students?
3. What's your yearly intake like?
4. What do you see as the main challenges/issues facing music educators?
5. How old were you when you first attended piano lessons?
6. Can you recall your feelings/images then?
7. How many music teachers have you had? Describe your favourite music teacher.
8. Apart from the piano, do you play other musical instruments?
9. Do you enjoy the music you play?
10. What types of music do you listen to at home?
11. How important are music examinations to you?
12. Do you organise concerts? Do you encourage students to perform in public?
13. How much influence did your parents have on you with regard to your music education/musical tastes?
14. Do you think the marks awarded to you at previous piano examinations accurately portrayed your music ability?
15. What are your views on music education in Malaysia?
For music book retailers / piano importers

1. What kinds of music books do you mainly stock?
2. What percentage of the book stocks are for piano studies?
3. What percentage of the books that you sell, say per year, comprise examination materials (practical/theory)
4. Who mainly comes to your shop to buy books (e.g. teachers, parents, students)?
5. Do they come with a specific list of books they wish to purchase or do they browse around?
6. What are your customers’ reactions to the high cost of the imported music books? What are your views on photocopying music?
7. Can you recall comments by teachers/students/parents regarding the quality of the locally published music books?
8. Tell me about your nationwide tour and meeting teachers all over the country?
9. When did you first import pianos?
10. Where did they originate?
11. How many pianos did you sell per month?
12. Tell me about your family business and how your father started this business?
13. Did you know the early expatriate piano teachers?
14. How has the economic downturn affected your sales?
15. What are the most common questions asked by your customers when buying pianos?
16. Why do you think pianos sell so well compared to other instruments, say the flute or the violin?
17. Why do you think playing the piano is so popular among Malaysians?
18. How do you see the future of the music industry in Malaysia?
Malaysia presentation ceremony

The first presentation ceremony for successful diploma candidates in Malaysia was held in the Grand Ballroom of the Sheraton Subang Hotel on 31 August 2001.

Guests of Honour were the British High Commissioner to Malaysia, HE Graham Fry and Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra resident conductor YB Dato' Ooi Chean. A total of 169 students were presented with their diplomas and the ceremony was attended by more than 600 people who travelled from all over the country to Kuala Lumpur. Examinations Manager Abigail McElheron represented Trinity College London's head office.
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  - Best choice for beginners.
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  - Ideal for piano students.
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  - Associate enjoyment for the whole family.
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  - Fun and educational for music enthusiasts.
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  - High powered and for total musical enjoyment.
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YAMAHA PIANOS

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  - Made from the finest materials.
  - Price range: RM10,800 to RM12,900

- YAMAHA UX10
  - High performance.
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*While stock lasts
APPENDIX J

ABRSM Diploma Awards

Whilst visiting SE Asia, we were very privileged indeed to have Clara Taylor as the guest of honour at the ABRSM Diploma Awards celebrations in Malaysia and Singapore. These were splendid events at which academic dress was proudly worn by the Diploma holders and at which the Chief Examiner's speech focused upon the 'burning ambition to make music' which means that musicians often become high-organized individuals as they plan their lives in such a way to create a balance, always seeking to find time to pursue their abiding love of music and music making. This was inspiring and certainly struck a chord with all the young musicians as they crossed the platform to receive the Chief Examiner's congratulations to an accompaniment of rapturous applause.

ASSOCIATED BOARD OF THE ROYAL SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

MALAYSIAN DIPLOMA AWARDS

The Little Maestro Says...
Don't try to play too fast, too soon! Control is all-important.

45 awards were made for DipABRSM Performing, LRSM Performing and LRSM Teaching. VIP guests included officers from the Ministry of Education.