

# THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF PERFORMING ARTS

## 與人共樂

### Sharing Joy Through Music

Professor Clarence Mak

Head of Composition and Electronic Music, School of Music



(Translation of Chinese Transcript)

My topic today is “Sharing Joy Through Music.” The Chinese character of “Music” has at least two meanings in Chinese. First is “Music” and the other is “Joy.” So my topic can be interpreted into sharing both “Music” and “Joy” with people.

#### Piano

There are many people playing piano in Hong Kong. Many of them have played the Beethoven’s piano sonatas. From 1795 to 1822, which is exactly two hundred years before now, Beethoven have completed 32 piano sonatas. We seldom have the chance to listen to the performance of the full series of 32 sonatas. From what I recalled, some years ago, there were several performers from overseas who have held recital performances for several days at the Academy’s Concert Hall and played all 32 sonatas. It was really memorable to me.

Prof. Gabriel Kwok, Head of Keyboard Studies, made a great move last summer. Collaborating with Radio Television of Hong Kong (RTHK), he gathered 32 students, alumni and teachers of the Academy, all excellent and outstanding performers. Each of them performed one sonata and participated in shooting and recording production. They also appeared on screen for live performance and shared their experience with the audience. Through television and radio relay, the audience could enjoy the wonderful performance of 32 pianists playing at the Academy’s Concert Hall. It was the first time in Hong Kong.

As we were producing the programme, we had alumni who made great effort in flying back to Hong Kong. At that time, because of the pandemic, visitors had to be quarantined for 21 days. Even though this performance was not paid at all, they were all very willing to participate in this very special and meaningful music project. I believe it’s because they hold strongly to the faith which we had 32 performers joining hands together to share their joy of interpreting Beethoven’s sonatas and to appreciate each other’s performance. Really, they enjoyed both the music and the joy.

#### Opera

When I was still a student, opera wasn’t the kind of music performance that Hong Kong people could enjoy easily. There weren’t a lot of opportunities to listen to *bel canto* way of singing. The School of Music runs “Opera Scenes” regularly each year. We work with other Schools of the Academy to produce a full-scale opera performance on stage. We also had worked with art groups from overseas in the past such as inviting musicians including those from Italy where opera was originated to conduct the Academy’s Orchestra.

For last year and this year, we even have Prof. Nancy Yuen, Head of Vocal Studies, to coach the students as the director of the opera and Mr Wei-en Hsu, Associate Professor (Repetituer), to conduct the Academy Symphony Orchestra. We presented Mozart's Idomeneo last year. This year we have two opera scenes presented side by side. They are the masterpieces of realism in music, *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Palgiacci*. In the performance, students of our School sang, played and acted. Students from School of Theatre and Entertainment Arts helped to design the stage, the sound and the lights. We also have students of other art media such as dance and drama to perform on the same stage. They were all keen to participate in the opera and cherished the annual chance of sharing joy through music.

Over the years, Prof. Yuen has led the instructors and students of the Vocal Department to visit different schools in Hong Kong under the promotional initiative called "Opera Scenes." In the halls of secondary schools, students sang and acted. Before and after the performance, they introduced the opera scenes and demonstrated to the teachers and students. They have held workshops to strengthen our effort of bringing the art of opera from Europe to local schools and the community and to facilitate public appreciation in opera performance.

### Chinese Music

Hong Kong is a place where East meets West. Here we can reach out to Western music such as opera and Beethoven sonatas which are elegant and delicate. We can also enjoy Chinese music with long-standing traditions. It's even more exciting that we can have artists bringing the cultural spirits in music of the past and present together and integrate the essence of Eastern and Western art to develop our own local music styles.

"Two-shoulder carrier" is a belief that Prof. Qiwei Yu, Head of Chinese Music and Maestro of Cantonese Music, has strong faith in. We can even say it's the mission statement of Cantonese music development in Hong Kong. In short, "Two-shoulder carrier" means on one shoulder, we inherit and pass on the spirit and essence of Chinese music. We also preserve and promote this spirit and essence. On the other shoulder, we are responsible for developing of Chinese music with reference to the current trends and for exploring new music styles and genres with local characteristics.

Nowadays, modern large-scaled ensemble such as Chinese orchestra has already become an important mode of performance. Each year, the School of Music also collaborates with Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra to organise international music activities. Nonetheless, the society still strongly urges to preserve rural traditional music. HKAPA believes that contemporary performers should have the abilities to perform in both modern large-scaled ensembles and small-scaled traditional rural ensembles.

### Example: Wuyuetian

伍粵天(Wuyuetian) is a Cantonese music performance held last December in the Academy's Concert Hall. Five students from HKAPA's majoring in Chinese Music did their own fundraising and obtained sponsorship from the Academy and Anti-epidemic Fund from the community to establish a research centre for Cantonese music and to form an ensemble called "TroVessional."

In this music performance, the five students interpreted traditional pieces in a modern style and performed contemporary Cantonese music pieces. They look forward to exploring the performance concepts of Cantonese music and demonstrating the various possibilities of Cantonese music. From traditional ways of performance, they developed performances which

incorporated different music artistry such as Chinese opera (especially from Cantonese opera), provincial folk music, contemporary pop music and jazz. Our student performers have taken Prof. Yu's "Two-shoulder carrier" to heart and brought us this Cantonese music performance with traditional and contemporary fusion.

### Music composition

Each year our students majoring in composition create over 20 concert presentations of new music pieces. 6 - 8 new works are performed in each of these presentations which include music using Chinese and Western instruments or a mix of these instruments, Chinese orchestral music and Western orchestral music, vocal music, electronic music using modern technology and multimedia works, etc.

In order to prepare over a hundred new pieces each year, our students not only need to convert their creative concepts and inspirations into music notes, but also need to take the initiative to contact performers to discuss and examine the pieces in details and fine tune the musical presentation for the pieces. Then they need to resolve technical difficulties encountered during playing and prepare rehearsals or conduct the pieces themselves in order to ensure the performances running smoothly.

When you study composition in HKAPA, you are not just putting your musical ideas and inspiration on paper. It is a journey of working hard on delivering your performance successfully and sharing joy through music.

### Orchestral work

Let me take the example of our workshop on orchestral work. For our students studying composition, they have to finish the scoring two months before the workshop. They first need to send the full score to the conductor. Then they need to explain and discuss with the conductor, while seeking professional advice to handle parts with playing difficulties in their works. Afterwards, they need to prepare the instrumental scores and try the difficult parts with individual players of the orchestra of our School. Meanwhile, they also need to prepare for multi-track recording with our responsible instructor. We have a student this year who wrote a work for piano and an orchestra. Apart from creating the work, he also played the piano solo part for the performance recording himself.

All students majoring in composition need to attend the 3-hour workshop. Some of them will also need to facilitate the pre- and post-production of multi-track recording. In the workshop, the participants read through the full score, while paying attention to how the conductor rehearses with the orchestra and also appreciating the creativity of the musical works.

### Multimedia works

For musical works involving multimedia production, our students can work with artists from other media to share music/joy. With a variety of topics integrated into the works, students will have the opportunity to connect with professionals from different disciplines. Through a particular presentation of performing arts, they can arouse awareness of some social issues. This is a way to allow multimedia art works to be more diversified and allow artists to be more creative in presenting their ideas.

### Example: RE-CLAIM

Created by two composition students previously, RE-CLAIM was a multimedia project which included instrumental performance, sound installation, visual design, and several physical devices built by friends from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Hong Kong. Audience were invited to participate in the special performance held in the open areas on the ground floor and the first floor of the Academy which illustrated our views on the changes in time and space, and reminded us of places we used to know well but were now lost to reclamation or redevelopment through reminiscing, pondering and feeling. The audience could enjoy instrument performances from multiple angles on the ground floor and the first floor of the Academy. They could also step into differently shaped devices to experience and feel the exceptional arrangement of sound and visual effects. Moreover, there were sensors inside these devices that could incorporate the audience's voices and body movement into becoming a part of the performance.

### Example: Drawing, Music and Action

There was another project called "Drawing, Music and Action." Led and organised by Ms Karry Li, Lecturer (Academic Studies in Music) of HKAPA, it was one of our Junior Compositions, Creative and Collaborative Projects. We worked with the Jockey Club Hong Chi School in this Project. Their students created drawings of different topics. Then our composition students and alumni arranged these drawings into a story and added special effects to make it a creative video. They also created music and sound effects on site with electronic technology and traditional techniques. In the concert, they told the story while playing the music video and incorporating spontaneous interactive sound effects that corresponded with the content.

### Conclusion

All the above I've just mentioned can give us inspiration in music learning and music making. In other words, whether it is piano solo recital, opera production, Chinese music performance, or new composition presentation, music performances is no longer confined to the conventional outcome of the process with the composers only working on his own, the performers only playing on stage, or audiences only enjoying the performances sitting in the chairs. We need to explore more on the possibility of performing arts so that we can share joy and music with people even more.