

## **Creative music making through composition workshop for higher education educators: An experiential learning**

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### **Abstract**

This study looked into a way experiential learning was incorporated into a music course by having students participate in a workshop led by a subject matter expert. In the workshop, *Passepartout Duo*'s role as subject matter experts in the music field ensures an ideal experiential learning environment for composition music students to immerse themselves in order to develop new skills and knowledge. *Passepartout Duo* is a piano and percussion duo based in Germany, who performs and composes contemporary music. *Passepartout Duo* members are Nicoletta Favari (piano & keyboard) and Christopher Salvito (drums and percussion). The music composition workshop which ran for two consecutive days was presented in an informal group context introducing contemporary music. Participants and observers of the workshop included Malaysian music students of higher education institutions and professional composers. Participating composers composed original music pieces and worked together and were directly involved with *Passepartout Duo* in the creative processes required in creating their own music composition and the culmination of the workshop was a concert featuring music compositions from participating composers performed by the duo. Students attending the workshop were found to better grasp musical concepts, be more creative, and have a peek into the career as a composer. Implementing workshops into the music course also maximised learning for students and ensured the efficient development of the course.

**Keywords:** Experience based learning, experiential learning, music composition, music workshop, *Passepartout Duo*

## **Introduction**

Music programs and subjects are offered and taught at many public and private tertiary educational institutions in Malaysia. In recent years, an undergraduate degree in music has become an option for Malaysian students to further their studies in universities and colleges. The area of music composition in particular has become an integral part of the music degree curriculum in tertiary institutions. Music composition can be described as the act of conceiving music, or the art of creating music. Composing music involves processes consisting of musical theories and techniques of the composer in creating a new piece of music (Collins, 2016). Therefore, a musical work or music composition usually refers to an original piece or work of music.

At the Department of Music of Universiti Putra Malaysia, the music composition course subject is offered in the Bachelor of Music program for a semester and named as Basic Composition. The Basic Composition course is described as covering the basic skills in composition which include all the elements of music such as pitch, harmony, rhythm, form, and texture. The aim of this course would be for students to be able to determine the various basic compositional techniques and to produce and compose music using basic compositional techniques. Students are also required to possess the ability to explain and justify the structure and technique of composition used in their musical work.

According to Lewis & Williams (1994), experiential learning is fundamentally learning by experiencing and doing. Experiential learners immerse themselves in experiences in order to develop new skills and ways of thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994). The prospect of simulating real world learning is the way to an experiential classroom (Wurdinger & Marlow, 2005). There are several methods of experiential learning. However, the two main categories are, field-based and classroom-based learning. Internships, and service learning are field-based learning, while case studies and role playing are belonging to classroom-based learning (Lewis & Williams, 1994).

Because of the constant dynamic change in the music arena either in the industry and academic world, educational institutions such as universities should teach and guide their students to overcome and be aware to the changing trends in the world after their tertiary education and training. Experiential learning or learning through experience and through reflections of their doing (Kolb, 1984), is the most effective way for music students to grasp a deeper understanding of musical concepts and new musical knowledge. Experiential learning shows significant advantages for music students undergoing music courses such as music composition as it entails hands-on learning and hands-on training of applying their knowledge and skills in a real working world experience thus, making it a more involved way of learning that moves beyond the classroom and helps to focus on the learning process of the individual student.

Workshops are theoretical and practical sessions usually run in a limited prescribed time led by professionals or experts in the field specified. Workshops are specific in its content and presentation where they are specifically designed as short educational programs to disseminate practical skills, techniques, and ideas according to disciplines (Higgins, 2008). Because of its participatory nature, workshops are very ideal to run with music subject as content. Music studies and music composition in particular require much hands-on learning from students whereby students creative output are the product of their learning. Music students' original music compositions are the result of their grasp, understanding and synthesis of knowledge acquired during their musical learning process. Through active participation in an informal atmosphere, music workshop participants engage in interactive and constructive discussions with fellow composers and professional music performers on composing ideas and methods. The controlled number of participants of not more than 40

allows everyone some personal attention and this intimate setting is generally required in musical learning. For music students, learning is not so much based on printed text books but in contrast it is almost entirely organized around theory and practice. In music lectures for example, majority of the time tend to be spent on individualized attention or with small number of students in each class. The music composition workshop is meant to stand on its own, supplementing the basic composition course projects and lectures.

As mentioned before, experiential learning can be split into two major categories of field-based and classroom-based. For that reason, workshop can be seen as an advantageous combination of these two categories whereby it is a bit of role playing where the students have to engage in role-play as a professional in a real life career situation in the attendance and critical view of experts as in during an internship. Therefore, choosing to run a music composition workshop is foreseen as highly relevant and beneficial towards music students' learning of the music composition subject. These music students will have the opportunity to experience through engagement in experiential activities with experts.

Organizing a workshop as a device to implement experiential learning into a music curriculum allows music students to make discoveries and experiments with knowledge firsthand instead of just reading about musical theories. Having professionals in the field of music composition lead a workshop ensures a directional workshop content whereby the workshop leaders are able to facilitate, ask and constructively critique students musical works by asking the right questions such as why?, what?, how?, during students presentation of their musical works in the workshop. The beneficial outcomes of experiential learning are plenty for music students. Mainly, they have the freedom and opportunity to be more musically creative as they are now collaboratively working with professionals in the field. Therefore, they are challenged and inspired to think and create more inventively and imaginatively towards their musical compositions. Furthermore, students will have the chance to directly interact with the musical career environment. Students who are interested to be professional composers or musicians will get the chance to experience being in these positions.

### **Importance of experiential learning for music education in higher education institutions**

There have been many practical applications of creative practices by music educators such as from the works of Dalcroze, Orff, and Kodaly, but music learning especially in the context of grasping the knowledge of music composition subject especially in higher education level requires a lot of students' time in honing their skills and knowledge by practice, and trial and error. For example, a music composition work would not be known to be either successful or ineffective without its proper performance and receiving critical reviews. Therefore, the running of a music composition workshop with music composition experts would bring these elements together under one roof with anticipated learning outcomes.

Music education especially in primary and secondary schools in Malaysia is still overlooked in favor of the sciences (McMillan, 2018). This situation is somewhat similar at the tertiary level. Nevertheless, there have been significant growth in numbers of music and performing or creative arts faculties and departments in the last decade or so. Along with the increasing number of music graduates each year, there is an increasing need to produce quality music graduates to ensure good graduate employability rate. Hands-on learning through experiential learning methods such as workshops not only produces experienced well-rounded music graduates but also helps speed up students' learning processes and often leads to improved learning in higher learning institutions (Kolb, Kolb, Passarelli, & Sharma, 2014). As educators we have to be aware of our role to present creative ways in teaching music so as to continuously engage students in learning, and for them to be able to musically communicate and express themselves.

***Passepartout Duo as Subject Matter Experts (SME) in a significant part of experiential learning***

Nicoletta Favari, a pianist, & percussionist Christopher Salvito, are founders and members of *Passepartout Duo*. *Passepartout Duo* are contemporary musicians and composers composing contemporary music, whom have been performing across dozens of countries including Europe and America. Playing their role as educators, the duo also offers a variety of classes and engagements for students. For their first Asian tour, *Passepartout Duo* had chosen Universiti Putra Malaysia as their one and only destination in Malaysia. After a year of initial contact and planning, *Passepartout Duo* confirmed to hold a two-day composition workshop followed by a concert on the third day in Universiti Putra Malaysia, co-organised with Universiti Putra Malaysia’s Department of Music.

Nicolleta Favari and Christopher Salvito of *Passepartout Duo*, are both considered as the subject matter experts or SME of this composition workshop. Subject matter experts are an important part of a workshop for their high proficiency in the subject, coming from their educational background and professional experience. As SME, *Passepartout Duo* provide accurate content, knowledge, as well as expertise in the specific subject of composition. Upon discussing through prior emails, the objectives of this workshop were established which were, encouraging and engaging students’ critical and creative thinking skills towards music, as well as offering a platform and a chance for students to showcase and develop their creative abilities and talents in music composition. After confirmation, *Passepartout Duo* themselves devised the workshop’s style and mode of approach thought most appropriate to disseminate knowledge and their experience to higher education students. As a result, the workshop was constructed for two days and divided into two sessions, morning and afternoon, per day. Morning sessions involve *Passepartout Duo*’s presentation of their musical works through discussions and performances of their own works. They share and delve into their preparation, compositional processes as well as technical aspects of creating music compositions and commissions with the students. The table below (Table 1) shows the pieces by *Passepartout Duo* in both morning sessions.

Table 1. List of compositions presented and performed by *Passepartout Duo*

Name of Composer	Name of Composition	Instrumentation	Duration	Day/Date
Passepartout Duo	Hvalur (from their album Olafsforour)	Piano, Drums, Electronics	5 minutes	Day 1, 15 April 2019, 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 p.m.
Marta Forsberg	Gentle Acts	Percussion, Keyboard, Electronics, LED lights	15 minutes	Day 2, 16 April 2019, 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 p.m.

In the afternoon, students get the opportunity to be involved and lead the composition workshop by having their piece ‘workshopped’ by *Passepartout Duo*. In music this means performers and composers (in this case *Passepartout Duo* and student composers) will for the first time meet and together work on, improve, and perform the participating students’ composition pieces. At the same time, these compositions are discussed and critically commented by subject matter experts, *Passepartout Duo*, allowing participating student composers to receive constructive feedback towards their artistic growth and musical

creativity. Issues and topics included in these discussions covers music composition curriculum and beyond, such as music theory, music aesthetics, notation and instrumentation. A list of participating student composers and their works are listed in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2: List of participating composers and their compositions

Slot No.	Name of Participating Composer	Name of Composition	Instrumentation	Duration of composition	Day/Date
1.	Wong Chee Wei (Malaysian Institute of Art)	Dream Interpretation Op. 30	Piano & percussion (tam-tam, timpani)	5 minutes	Day 1, 15 April 2019,
2.	Vanessa Choke Yuan Teng (Malaysian Institute of Art)	The Woodcutter's Song	Piano	4 minutes	2.00 - 5.00 p.m. (each slot lasting 45 minutes)
3.	Elisa Woong Yin Ching (Participant)	Gossips	Body percussion	3 minutes	
1.	Yii Kah Hoe (SEGi College)	My Spirit is Playing Again	Piano & percussion	6 minutes	Day 2, 16 April 2019,
2.	Liew Kok Tong (Universiti Putra Malaysia)	Marimba	Marimba	3 minutes	2.00 - 5.00 p.m. (each slot lasting 45 minutes)
3.	Elisa Woong Yin Ching (Participant)	Love Whisper (unspoken conversation)	Piano	2 minutes	

Between two to three months before the start of the workshop, technical support such as audio and visual facilities as well as musical instruments and venue preparation and arrangement were defined and requested accordingly by *Passepartout Duo* to the purpose and direction of this workshop. The running of the workshop was lead fully by *Passepartout Duo* as others may not have expertise of the subject area. Subject matter experts such as *Passepartout Duo* know their topic well and were full of explanation, so as to make sure they are understood by the audience targeted which are higher education music students.

The music composition workshop with *Passepartout Duo* was organized to achieve certain key aims in regards to Universiti Putra Malaysia's music students and the Department of Music. The workshop encourages a creative culture among students especially in the field of arts engaging students' critical and creative thinking skills towards music. This seminar and concert also offers a platform and a chance for students to showcase and develop their creative abilities and talents in the arts toward a higher standard. All these can only be achieved with the guidance and valuable feedback from professionals and experts such as *Passepartout Duo* whom are established and experienced musicians and composers. Furthermore, the workshop organized will create and establish an international and industrial network for Universiti Putra Malaysia's music department under the Faculty of Human Ecology. Also, the Department of Music looks forward to promoting Universiti Putra Malaysia's Bachelor of Music program to the public and future potential students.

As explained above, a workshop is valuable in the field of music. Therefore, the dates of the workshop, 15 – 16 April 2019 in week 9 of the second semester, were chosen to coincide with the Basic Composition course running during the semester as part of the training and method of learning this course. *Passepartout Duo's* music are chiefly contemporary music,

demonstrating new concepts in the field of music composition. With the intent to expose music students and especially UPM's music students to exciting new ideas and techniques of composing, the Department of Music felt it important to bring in *Passepartout Duo* to conduct a workshop for music students with UPM as the venue. *Passepartout Duo* is particularly an expert in the subject of contemporary music. Therefore, it was appropriate to invite and pay for their presence to travel long distances to present in the workshop to music students of UPM and Malaysia.

## **Methodology**

### ***Scope of topic – contemporary music***

During the full two-day workshop, composers and students had the opportunity to fully participate and be involved in the compositional processes and decisions exclusively with *Passepartout Duo*. The core idea of having the music workshop is to talk and discuss about the topic and processes of composing music. The workshop is highly interactive and participatory. *Passepartout Duo* have good command of what they were presenting and highly confident with most questions and issues that came up. The duo were also able to help fellow participants fit the knowledge into the context of students' and composers musical works.

The compositional scope focused primarily on contemporary music. Contemporary music is the current extensive area of music composition and performance in the musical world nationally and internationally. Contemporary music is describing musical style written after the 1940s up to music written now and the recent past. Commonly, the characteristics of contemporary music are, short, fragmented melodies and motives, with freedom of dissonance, flexible tonality, and complex rhythms (Baur, 1985).

The running of this composition workshop clearly shows its relevance in the arena of Malaysia's contemporary music especially when supported by the Society of Malaysian Contemporary Composers SMCC, through its acknowledgement and publicity through their website, [www.smccomposers.com](http://www.smccomposers.com), by their president, Dr. Chong Kee Yong (Figure 1).

SMCC

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### ***Passepartout Duo - Music Seminar and a Composition & Performance Workshop***

The Department of Music, Faculty of Human Ecology, UPM is pleased to organize a **Music Seminar and a Composition & Performance Workshop with *Passepartout Duo***, on 15th & 16th April 2019.

Piano and percussion duo, **Nicoletta Favari (piano) & Christopher Salvito (percussion)** are touring through most of Asia for 2019 and would be in UPM for seminars, workshops and a concert. *Passepartout Duo* has extensive educational experience with composition and instrumental departments, and with music and ensemble management workshops throughout the US and Europe.

The screenshot shows the SMCC website header with navigation links: HOME, ABOUT SMCC, OPPORTUNITIES, EVENTS, ARTICLES, NEWS, MORE... Below the header, the event details are listed:

Details of the event as below:

[Passepartout Duo Seminar and workshop](#)

Date: 15th April 2019 & 16th April 2019  
Time: 10.00 am - 5.00 pm  
Venue: Experimental Theatre,  
Arts and Cultural Centre Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah,  
43400 UPM,  
Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTER SULTAN SA  
Fees: RM 30 – for observers  
RM 100 – for participants\*

\*Participants are to bring own compositions/performance pieces (no more than 6 minutes duration) for composition or performance workshops.  
Certificates are given to participants.

Refreshments and lunch provided.

Figure 1. Publicity of seminar and workshop in SMCC website

### ***Consideration of participants***

The participants of the workshop were all the music students and composers from the first years right up to the final year from Universiti Putra Malaysia. Music students from other tertiary education institutions in Malaysia whom were interested were also invited to join the workshop. They were not any criteria or requirements for participation but nonetheless, expected participants were most likely to be familiar with and have musical backgrounds and musical experiences. Eventhough all were music students, there were also a few first time composers in the workshop who were still willing to discuss their reactions and thoughts. Therefore, the materials presented were designed and prepared for the musically knowledgable. In addition, the materials presented, even if new, should both make sense to the participants, and not too far out of context and beyond the topic of the workshop, which is contemporary classical compositions. The discussions and issues were related to the context and questions of composition and *Passepartout Duo's* creativity in bringing the participants to an understanding of composition topics and processes were succesful.

Most of the students comprised of Universiti Putra Malaysia's music students, therefore most of them knew each other and the external participants came in fewer numbers. For most of the music students in Universiti Putra Malaysia, contemporary music is a new concept and method with their previous training in music and with what they've been doing. In the meantime, some composers participating from outside Universiti Putra Malaysia were slightly more familiar and have prior experience with contemporary music. However, there were no problems of integration as everyone came in with a positive and receptive attitude towards the workshop, which was to accept the offering of new materials of contemporary music by *Passepartout Duo* during the course of the workshop. From the first day, there seemed to be no skepticism or hostility from participants and composers but rather what was observed was more of everyone's attitude of openness of looking into new solutions towards composing contemporary music. *Passepartout Duo's* presentations of something new in composing, so that participants will consider it is measured as achieving one of the aims of the workshop. Change and new ideas were initially uncomfortable to agree with but in the

course of the workshop participants and composers creativity were stimulated because of these.

### ***Workshop time and duration***

The music composition workshop ran for two full days, with a morning session from 10am to 12 pm followed by an afternoon session from 2pm to 5 pm Lunch breaks were provided for participants in between both sessions. The same timetable was carried out as well on Day 2 (Figure 2). These times were pre-determined as suitable to meet the goals of the workshop. The times allocated matched the presentation content and amount of material *Passepartout Duo* will cover. Especially for participants, when new content is first introduced and in order to understand it, they will need more time for clarification and questions. Also a workshop of this length, 2 – 3 hours per session, will give opportunities to both presenter and participants to address ideas and concepts in some depth, and for presenters to teach some skills.



**Passepartout Duo  
Seminar and Workshop**

**Department of Music, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)  
15 - 16 April 2019**

**Day 1 (15 April) - Venue: Experimental Theatre UPM**

9.30am	Registration/Breakfast
10am -12 pm	Passepartout Duo seminar: A demo-lecture 'Composing for Piano & Percussion (& electronics)'
12-2pm	Lunch
2-5pm	Workshop 1: Composition workshop

**Day 2 (16 April) - Venue: Experimental Theatre UPM**

9.30am	Registration/Breakfast
10am - 12pm	Passepartout Duo seminar: A demo-lecture 'Percussion Performance'
12-2pm	Lunch
2-5pm	Workshop 2: Performance workshop

\*Observers and participants are welcome to attend for the whole day (10am-5pm)  
\*Participants are to bring/attach own compositions/performance pieces (no more than 6 minutes duration) for composition or performance workshops when registering.  
\*Please RSVP by 10th April 2019

Figure 2. Timetable of workshop (poster by author)

The 2-day workshop was broken into two parts, morning and afternoon. The morning session consisted of a seminar by the presenters, *Passepartout Duo*, which includes a demo-lecture. Demo-lectures are important procedures in teaching and learning music especially in composition and performance. A demo-lecture requires the presenter to physically demonstrate or illustrate the theories, practices, knowledge and ideas included in the lectures accompanying the demonstrations. Here, *Passepartout Duo* performed and presented their musical works, and also explaining and describing their compositional processes of each of their works.

In the afternoons, from 2 - 5 pm, the composition workshops began with participating composers having their musical pieces workshopped by *Passepartout Duo*. The composers will present their musical work explaining their compositional process and ideas before *Passepartout Duo* performs it as workshop material. Prescribing enough time on each composer's work in the workshop to ensure maximising individualised attention meant a stricter limit on number of composer participation. In total there were six composers participating, and it was only limited to three composers per day for each three-hour workshop session. So, each composer had an hour to workshop their pieces. The accessibility of the composers, performers, and participants on the same stage built a more freeflowing exchange of ideas and questions.

Breaking up the time in between 2 to 3 hours of seminar and workshop in the morning and afternoon with a lunch break ensured a smooth flow of the workshop without participants being overwhelmed and losing concentration. It also refreshes participants attention and keeps them interested. Including breaks such as lunchtime into the itinerary is very important as well as this time also gives opportunity for participants to talk and connect with one another. It is a time for them to exchange ideas and this is one of the main values of running a workshop. Good conversational learning often happens during the combinational occurrences of thinking and feeling, talking and listening (Kolb, 2002). Meaningful insights and important learning occur during conversations among participants as it provides them opportunity for reflection on experiences in the workshop. Thus, providing space for opportunities of making wholesome conversation as part of the educational process improves the efficacy of experiential learning (Kolb, Baker, & Jensen, 2002). In addition, time to talk to, getting to know the other participants, and the mutual experience can enhance and deepen the learning process that goes on, and can lead to future career enhancement and collaboration.

### ***Deadlines***

The initial contact with Nicoletta Favari of *Passepartout Duo* began in February 2018 through email correspondence with, Camellia Siti Maya, as the person of contact in Universiti Putra Malaysia. After much discussion on proposed dates, workshop content, workshop objectives and outcome, Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Human Ecology gave consent for the workshop to be held at the Department of Music. Upon confirmation of attendance from *Passepartout Duo* an official invitation letter was sent out to *Passepartout Duo* on September 2018. Publicity posters of the workshop and invitations were spread out to universities in Malaysia in the beginning of March 2019.

After announcing the date of the workshop, participating composers gave in their compositions for the workshop at least two weeks before the workshop date. The time of when the scores are due before the workshop is crucial for both the participating composers and *Passepartout Duo*. Consideration were taken into account that for most composers they are already pressed for time to complete assignments and other works for the end of term. Therefore, the sooner participating composers know the details regarding instrumentation and deadlines the better. Meeting deadlines would also ensure *Passepartout Duo* to potentially

arrive at the workshop with all composers' works rehearsed to a higher degree. Participating composers were also reminded to print out or upload their composition scores they plan to share so everyone can look at their music through their own laptop or tablet on the day of the workshop.

### ***Purpose and presentation***

There are a few identified objectives of holding this workshop. Firstly, the seminar encourages a creative culture among students especially in the field of music engaging students' critical and creative thinking skills towards music and the arts. Secondly, this seminar and concert provides a platform for students to showcase and develop their creative abilities and talents in the arts toward a higher standard. Thirdly, is to promote Universiti Putra Malaysia's Bachelor of Music programme to the public and future potential students. Also, to create an industrial network for the Universiti Putra Malaysia's Department of Music and the Faculty of Human Ecology. By determining the purpose of giving this workshop, specific methods of presentations and other details are implemented. For this instance, *Passepartout Duo* as presenters are teaching participants the skills of which they then might have to use later or in future. Furthermore, participants are getting the chance from *Passepartout Duo* to practice and receive feedback on concepts, theories and techniques they already know. This kind of workshop will be heavy on activities and light on lectures. In the course of each day, the emphasis will be on participants' action and participants actually doing what is under discussion and receiving advice and reflection on their music compositions from the presenters and other participants in the workshop.

As part of the experiential learning process, this workshop should be experiential and not a lecture. Therefore, when introducing a technique or compositional idea, *Passepartout Duo* introduces it in presentation as well as in activities. Participants then learn as much as possible and faster grasp new concepts and musical ideas. This workshop engages direct involvement of participants. Workshops are more effective this way when involving participants in discussion, and activities in small or large groups (Thomas, 1994). *Passepartout Duo* even prepared a rhythmic clapping and stomping activity between groups on the first day to stimulate participants' creativity and immersion in warming up for the coming activities of the 2-day workshop. The whole workshop included some sort of hands-on activity including both individual and group activities (Figure 3). The activities also included various kinds of audio-visual material, such as audio recordings, and LED lights. *Passepartout Duo* also performed a few of their own pieces to give participants the chance to see and hear their contemporary musical ideas.



Figure 3. Group hands-on activity (picture taken by author)

### *Learning space in experiential learning*

In music courses, majority of the time is spent on lecturers transmitting to students, ideas and skills. The teaching and learning nature of music education tends to be individualized, with small classes and individual attention (Parker, 1974). For music students, whose learning is not entirely text driven, experiential learning beyond the classroom is essential. Music students need these extended learning spaces to navigate the transitional process of from being a novice to an expert through mentoring and experience of experiential learning. Making space stimulates motivation and increases learning effectiveness. This is in contrast with other disciplines of studies which requires almost entirely organized texts as points of resource. Learning music however, mixes both theory and practice as integral requirements of its curriculum. Music education focuses on the students' projection of their knowledge through action.

The Experimental Theatre of Universiti Putra Malaysia (Panggung Percubaan UPM) was chosen as the venue of the composition workshop. This facility was specifically chosen because of its suitability in size and function. The atmosphere of being in a proper concert hall would give everyone a real sense of working as a composer or musician in a professional setting. It is a medium sized hall with air conditioning, lighting, audio, and visual facilities. It's fair condition and good location at the centre of the university, which is not far from the university's entrance determines easy access and convenience for everyone especially external participants. There is a fairly large stage at the end of the hall with ample audience sitting area on the floor. However, this workshop in particular did not need the audience sitting area. The workshop was conducted entirely on the stage. The presenters and instruments were on one side of the stage and the participants and composers on the other. Participants sitting in rows faced the presenters. Presenters and composers were free to move around in front of the participants. The stage and hall were set up the day before with the planned sitting arrangement, musical instruments, and audiovisual set-up before participants and presenters

arrived to ensure a smoother workshop. Above all, the space was set up to be welcoming and informal, and allowing everyone to be able to see each other (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

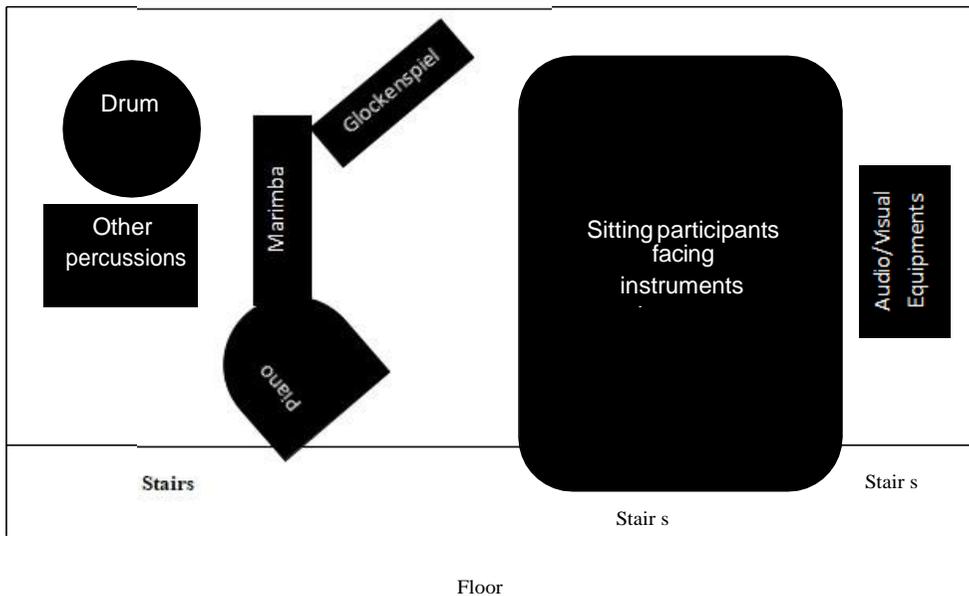


Figure 4. Arrangements on stage during workshop



Figure 5. Image of running workshop on stage with presenters and musical instruments in front of participants (picture taken by author)

### ***Others – a showcase concert***

The highlight and the added value of this two-day workshop is the concert with *Passepartout Duo* on the 17th of April 2019 from 5.30pm, the day after the end of the workshop (Figure 6). Participating composers definitely looked forward toward this concert as *Passepartout Duo* performed their compositions in a professional concert venue which is at Universiti Putra Malaysia's Experimental Theatre (Panggung Percubaan UPM). Holding a concert at the end of the two-day workshop clearly helped in giving the opportunity to composers and participants to immerse themselves in the real working world as professional composers and musicians by having it held in a proper concert hall such as Universiti Putra Malaysia's Experimental Theatre (Panggung Percubaan UPM). The initiative of this concert suitably worked really well as a culmination point of the whole workshop as participants could see the real workings and behind the scenes processes involved, either creative or physical, in holding and producing a musical concert at such a venue. Of course participating composers had the privilege of having their composition premiered and received well by the audience.

Audiovisual recordings of the full concert and also of the whole two-day workshops were recorded and archived for future reference and documentation for the participants, department and faculty. For new composers, audiovisual recordings of their musical compositions are important for them to build presence online through Youtube for example, and also when applying studying programs in future. Photographs of composers, performers, and participants of both workshop and concert were taken and duly recorded for future educational or promotional purposes.



Figure 6. Concert with *Passepartout Duo* (picture taken by author)

## **Findings and discussion**

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of a workshop in experiential learning***

The quality of learning especially in higher education at tertiary level, has been a constant concern in Malaysia (Hin et al. 2018). There has been some apprehension in the age-old methods of rote learning or memorisation without giving much room for creative thinking development, especially in the arts discipline such as music. Music is a subject which is not solely and constantly determined by precise answers or formulas. In music composition for example, the same known music theory when applied in compositions by three different composers will unquestionably produce three contrasting musical works of differing outcomes. Therefore, the conventional way of transferring knowledge from teacher to student, or retention of knowledge and memorization alone cannot achieve the learning and programme outcomes of music curriculum in higher education. A change of learning methods and environment is needed for music students learning not just by changing students' way of learning but also through educator's way of teaching (Hin et al. 2018). One of the effective ways of doing this is by having regular music workshops at music departments or faculties to ensure a regular flow of exchanging of ideas and experiences among students and experts in the professional musical arena.

Unavoidably, there are however certain strengths and weaknesses encountered when holding a workshop. The pros of holding a workshop is the timelength prescribed for its run. Workshops are usually held longer than normal lecture hours and spread out into different sessions throughout a few days. So there is plenty of room for participation, to improve, and chances to try out new things and possibilities without the pressure of failing. There is no time pressure to master a certain technique, but with the pace of the facilitator and expert, the process of learning and knowledge is what's most important. Another good thing from a workshop is the experience students gain beyond the classroom and sometimes even beyond their usual understanding of the subject, thus expanding their current knowledge and skills further. And lastly, students attending workshops are actually challenging themselves in a different environment. By this way, they are heading towards improving themselves, how to improve, what to improve, and hopefully they leave feeling inspired and motivated.

The weakness or cons in a workshop are just but a few which can be highlighted to be prevented. Contents of a workshop need to be focused and presented attractively. As workshops tend to be mixed with different levels of interest and levels of knowledge, there will be those who attend to learn, and others there to only fulfill attendance requirements, or just to meet the experts. This is just a question on mentality and how do we educators navigate this kind of situations? This will directly affect the impact of the workshop and how much the students take away from the experience. And lastly, workshops tend to be irregular due to financial issues and schedulings. It could be many months or years of waiting before organising the next workshop. This irregularity will interfere on students focus, energy and application.

At the end of the two-day workshop, there was a concert held by *Passepartout Duo* on the third day performing new compositions selected from the composers who participated in the workshop. Universiti Putra Malaysia's music students who attended the workshop and concert were given a task to evaluate the workshop experience as a whole and also to evaluate the presenters and their presentation content. The main aim of this task was for them to write a criticism report. Students wrote, argued and critic about the compositions being presented by the new composers and these reports were written as what a music critic would in the real world. The criticism report includes biographical information of the composer; background information of the performers; information of time and place of the concert; reporting of the

acoustics, audio systems, and concert settings; audience reactions; critical review of the music composed in terms of melody, harmony, rhythms, form, and texture; and staging. This assignment requirement is actually putting emphasis on students' reflections towards deepening learning in the experiential learning process as learning music is developed through a more demonstration-practice-critique process (Newman, 1999).

### ***Implication for lecturers in higher education***

This workshop was run for a very specific field of music composition, and music in general.

Workshops are especially appealing for music students as it is very hands-on and its direct form of knowledge transmission from instructor to students is found very effective and impactful towards students' learning process and development in music. At the same time, workshops fill in gaps of the structured music curriculum and complement curriculum-based learning (Fatumo, Shome, & Macintyre, 2014). Learning outside in learning spaces different from their normal lecture rooms and with more realistic working environments, students feel motivated, and learn more efficiently and effectively becoming more creative. Workshops tend to be very focused on a specific knowledge or topic or skills. Therefore, with the help and guidance of experts from the specific field, workshops will provide students the chance to interact, discuss relevant topics, and learn new skills and be informed of the latest knowledge with experts directly. The constructive and positive interaction between experts and students drives students to further explore and carry on related research, and some students might feel motivated to publish and contribute in the field of education in the future.

In hindsight, lecturers in higher education cannot underestimate the impact of running a workshop for higher education students. Higher education students are in the category of (young) adult learners and therefore their expectations and modes of learning or receiving knowledge are different and are changing from before. They are motivated to learn and explore when they understand and experience the benefits of learning (new knowledge or enhancing current skills) firsthand. In a workshop, students are encouraged to improve their problem solving skills and this is important for them to continue on to their professional and personal development. Higher education students and music students in particular tend to enter higher education institutions with varied levels of music acquisitions and levels of qualifications thus, workshop opportunities give them space and an outlet to share and also increase their knowledge and experiences with other like-minded peers. Sooner or later higher education students are also inevitably venturing into their professional lives, so they constantly seek to learn real-life applications as can only be offered in workshops. They will learn better and if not the best during these workshops when they get the opportunity to hone their skills and at the same time receive critical feedbacks.

In view of the Malaysian education policy, innovative curriculum practice in teaching and learning such as implementing workshops into them will ensure and guarantee the efficient development and implementation of a curriculum and subsequently maximise learning for students. In view of the multiple benefits of having a workshop session for higher education students, higher education lecturers in general and, in the arts stream and music in particular should seriously consider to constantly implement a workshop session for each course taught. The curriculum in higher education courses especially arts and music courses will benefit their students by offering workshop sessions consistently. Financial and budgetary matters and issues following this implementation is understandable and encouraged to be carried into further planning and discussions at the higher authority level. Further research and deeper insight into the implementation, efficiency, and effectiveness of workshops in higher education syllabus are also welcome and encouraged to further establish running a workshop in the education curriculum and course syllabus as a profound, fundamental, and

much needed method of teaching and learning in higher education system, especially in art stream courses such as music.

### ***Innovation in teaching & learning – Putra InnoCreative Carnival in Teaching and Learning PicTL 2019***

This workshop organised by the Department of Music UPM with Passepartout Duo as experts was carried on into educational research in (PicTL 2019) Putra InnoCreative Carnival in Teaching and Learning's poster competition which was held in Universiti Putra Malaysia from 16th – 17th October 2019. By entering PicTL 2019 poster competition, this workshop highlighted the research of experiential learning of music in particular. The poster included an abstract, justifications of objectives, value of research, usefulness of research, recognition obtained, and commercialization potential of research. After two-rounds of judging, the music workshop poster entitled 'Creative Music Making – Music Composition Workshop' emerged as a Silver Award winner.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Students learn in different ways and there are various ways of teaching. For a music course such as music composition, a workshop has many advantages that makes it a good choice in these circumstances. It was a wonderful opportunity for composers, presenters, and participants to share their works and exchange various concepts/viewpoints about their craft. It is suitable in introducing a new concept, such as in this case contemporary music to music students. At the end of the workshop students are either impelled to investigate further on their own, or are now able to demonstrate their knowledge imparted to them from the workshop experience. This can be a huge opportunity for a young composer to grow in their awareness and scope. Workshops are also the best way to teach hands-on skills, as music is experiential in its own right. Mastering a skill or technique can only be done by action and doing. Thus, teaching and learning music is best through practical experience. Workshops offers participants a chance to learn new methods and sometimes fail in a safe situation. Feedbacks and constructive criticisms from presenters and other participants help the participant to learn effective solutions or overcome artistic issues which they might face in a real situation during their professional working world. A career in the artistic industry especially a musical career requires networking, and so a workshop can help foster a sense of community and common purpose among its participants which will be carried further into their working world.

This article shows the benefits of adopting experiential learning in music, and also shows the workings, organisation and running of a music workshop as an experiential learning way in an experiential learning space. Experiential learning can be achieved in a workshop setting. Music workshops are highly recommended for teaching and learning music especially at tertiary level in universities. By holding a workshop such as this along with musical experts, students are able to grasp musical concepts and ideas firsthand from experts in the field while being in a safe and encouraging environment where students do not need to fear failure as errors are only there to make them better musicians and composers. Besides that, students are able to react creatively towards their musical creations while receiving constructive criticisms from peers and professionals for the betterment of their craft. Experiencing all these different affective, physical and intellectual experiences will enhance students' proficiency in their chosen field of study, and also a most valuable familiarity into the world of a working musician and composer. During the workshop, students' came into contact with living music professionals and were subjected to undergo tasks and achieve creative outcomes to produce

a successful concert at the end of the whole session making this workshop an important component of experiential learning.

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