

Audience's Profile and Perception Towards Contemporary Classical Music: An Exploratory Case Study of an Online International Composers' Symposium in Malaysia

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Abstract

Contemporary Classical Music (CCM) emerged from Classical Music (CM) in the early 20th century; however, it has received mixed reception from both audiences and institutions. Due to its low acceptance among the mainstream CM audience, CCM composers need to take their own initiative to boost the visibility and exposure of their creative output. In addition, more musicians in recent decades have gradually specialised in this genre and perceived it as a potential career path, in addition to the competitive CM performing market. However, there is limited research on the CCM audience, both globally and locally. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the audience profile and their perceptions towards specific styles of CCM based on social status, educational level, musical background, and interest. An exploratory case study was employed to investigate the audience profile of the first International Composers' Symposium 2021 (ICS2021), which was a collaboration between Universiti Malaya, the National Band Directors Association of Malaysia and funded by the Japan Foundation of Kuala Lumpur. An online survey was distributed to the participants at the end of the webinars. Following the analysis of the 73 surveys, it was found that respondents consisted mostly of students and young working professionals. Although many were encouraged to participate due to teacher-student relationships and other social connections, they generally held a positive and open-minded view towards CCM and viewed the event as an opportunity to experience CCM and learn new knowledge about it. The study also informed possible factors that attract the CCM audience.

Keywords: audience perception, audience profile, contemporary classical music, music consumption, music sociology, musical taste

Background of Contemporary Classical Music

According to Mencke et al. (2022), Contemporary Classical Music (CCM) emerged from Classical Music (CM) in the early 20th century. An important turning point was in 1889 when music shifted from romanticism to the development of new musical styles established by composers like Debussy and Schoenberg.

Many non-Western performing artists participated in the International Paris Exposition and the exchange initiated at the event created an exploration of sound and styles (for example, the influence of Gamelan on composers like Debussy and Mahler). From that point till 1920, tonality had been shaken up by the chromaticism advocated by Liszt and Wagner. Schoenberg followed suit and constructed his works by stressing the motivic use and textural design. Compositional language became more atonal and highly chromatic. His contemporaries continued to develop in new ways, such as Stravinsky's experimentation with innovative rhythms that created asymmetry and unsettled patterns, Debussy's focus on the exploration of sonority and use of novel scales instead of the conventional developmental formal structure and chromatic tension and resolution. Those innovative compositional approaches deviated from tonality and structural and formal hierarchy, broke the regularity of rhythm and meter, and often contained dissonance (Schwartz & Godfrey, 1993). Schwartz and Godfrey stated, "Music composed since 1900 can be described, even by its proponents, as angular, biting, and discordant. Some pieces even seem deliberately created to provoke the listener, as though the composer had set out to distort every traditional definition of music" (p. 3). Because of this, CCM is enjoyed by niche audiences (Mencke et al., 2019), which might be due to the difficulty of auditory retrieval (Schulze et al., 2012) and attaining familiarity (Prior, 2013).

According to Morgan (1991), the radical environmental changes after the Second World War also affected the musical arts. In North America, we saw experimental music by John Cage, Harry Partch, and Lou Harrison who explored the intonational possibilities, instrumental properties and performance formats that inclined towards Asian culture (Schwartz & Godfrey, 1993). French composer Pierre Boulez pointed out that early 20th-Century composers had not fully achieved the musical revolution after the loss of tonality (e.g. Schoenberg's twelve-tone theory) and started to employ other musical elements in the creative process, e.g., "rhythm, dynamics, texture, and ultimately form itself—according to strictly serial procedure" (Morgan, 1991, p. 334), which marked the start of serialism. Boulez and his contemporaries such as Olivier Messiaen and Karlheinz Stockhausen refined the idea of fragmentation of those elements to create an avant-garde music style. In the 1950s, Indeterminacy, "the intentional utilization of some degree of chance in composition" (Morgan, 1991, p. 359), amplified the ideology of serialism. The most notable composer of this genre, John Cage, believed that "each musical unit existed for itself, essentially independent of any relationship it might have with other units. A sound was not derived from the sounds that preceded it, nor did it imply those that followed" (Morgan, 1991, p. 362). His encounter with Zen Buddhism inspired Indeterminacy and this resulted in the minimal use of compositional materials. His "4'33'" prefigured the minimalism that emerged in the 1960s. Representative composers include John Cage, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass.

According to Schwartz and Godfrey (1993), there were trends influencing the development of CCM after 1945. Some composers started to value and adopt non-Western musical materials; they started to use "noise" as the sound property in compositions such as John Cage's "Credo in Us". The percussive timbre was explored among composers like Henry Cowell and Bela Bartok. Some composers also broke the boundaries of the twelve equal temperaments and explored smaller subdivisions to create particular intonations. The sound properties of the instruments were maximised to achieve "coloristic orchestration" (Schwartz & Godfrey, 1993, p. 15), as seen in works such as Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* and Anton von Webern's *Klangfarbenmelodie*. Instruments rarely seen in art music, such as cowbells, sleigh bells, mandolins, anvils, and whips; altered instruments such as prepared pianos and alternative instruments such as radios and phonograph turntables have also been experimented with for their acoustical possibilities. Experimentations also extended to dramatic or visual elements, such as the novel placement of performers or the selection of performance venues.

According to Schwartz and Godfrey (1993), compositional innovation and radicalism peaked in the late 1960s and many composers started to question the necessity of being innovative and avant-garde in their creations. They felt that so-called originality, such as dissonance, experimental intonation and instrumentation and complex coding (i.e., serialism), had become predictable. Therefore, a new trend emerged that went back to the tonal past and linear musical textures. However, Schwartz and Godfrey continue, this rekindled enthusiasm for tonality did not refer to the period from 1700 to 1900, but rather to the concept of using "persistent pulse, clear rhythm patterns, consonant sonorities, lyrical melodic phrasing, and diatonic scale relationships" (p. 264). Moreover, CCM extended its boundaries to incorporate other genres such as jazz, rock, and popular styles (Schwartz & Godfrey, 1993). Cultural hybridity was also embedded in CCM during the post-modern era (Adler, 1998), when economic, social, and political changes were influencing classical music (Yang, 2007). The appearance of ethnic sources was not unusual (Schwartz & Godfrey, 1993).

According to Norman (2002), the momentum of adopting non-Western classical music genres has continued into the 21st century. Norman says that this trend is largely due to globalisation, which has been driven by technological advancements, the promotion of pop culture and a “de-emphasis on fine arts” (p. 73). To reach wider audiences, composers and performers in the current era have incorporated elements of other music genres into their work. Additionally, composers in the 21st century are not afraid to embrace their cultural identities, which are reflected in their musical output. As a result, multiculturalism has become a significant feature of 21st century CCM (Chatman, 2010).

The current case study investigates the audience and their perceptions of CCM through the first International Composers' Symposium 2021 (ICS2021). In this study, CCM refers to the works composed by living composers whose output is not considered avant-garde and may fall into the narratives of 21st century CCM composers, as described by Norman (2002) or Chatman (2010). The invited composers presented their works covering styles such as neo-tonality, multiculturalism, and fusions of other music genres. However, it is important to note that the representation of CCM in this event did not cover all the diverse styles of CCM.

Literature Review

According to Ross (2021), 21st century CCM composers came from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds and had different compositional styles, including progressive composers who were inclined towards experimental music and modernism, as well as those who stuck to more traditional uses of harmony and forms. While recent creative output by CCM composers has been vigorous, it is unclear how they can sustain their professional stream. Ross added that institutions such as orchestras or opera houses held a reserved attitude towards adding new works to concert programs. Robin (2018) stated that, despite the conservative attitude of the public, since the 1960s, there has been an emergence of groups such as Ensemble of Intercontemporain, Bang on a Can and London Sinfonietta as well as composer-led groups such as Fires of London, Steve Reich and Musicians and Philip Glass Ensemble. Ross (2012, 2016) noted that CCM festivals such as Donaueschingen Festival, Warsaw Autumn in Europe and Big Ears in the US have also attracted thousands of younger and niche audiences. Ross (2021) observed that composers have had to find channels to promote their creative output and musicians have gradually accepted that specialising in performing new music as a viable path besides performing in the competitive CM market. Additionally, Ross said, the audience has been younger groups that “come from a cohort of intellectually curious people who are receptive to current trends in various art forms” (p. 41).

Globally, contemporary music was less accepted by most audiences (Ross, 2010). As mentioned by Schwartz and Godfrey (1993), listeners would rather stay in their comfort zone and listen to music that they are familiar with. CCM might require listeners to perceive and even participate in music differently. Music sociologist Adorno commented that when listening to Schoenberg's works, listeners had to become “compositional partners” because the deconstruction of hierarchical tonal and structural organisation engages them in “active sense-making” (DeNora, 2003, p. 19). When listening to John Cage's music, “The listener as active participant in the composition process leads to observing situated specificity of music materials” (DeNora, 2003, p. 19). This might explain why the audience for CCM are adventurous individuals who look for something “different”, “new”, “challenging”, “unexpected”, “not commercial” and “not a commodity” (Gross & Pitts, 2016, p. 16). However, according to Pitts and Price (2020), the contemporary arts only have a small audience, and they lack support from cultural champions in embracing new music. In a study by the Audience Agency, the ratio of contemporary classical music audience members to classical music ones on average was about 1:3 (Bradley, 2017). However, it is unclear what the demographics of the audience are as well as their experiences and motivations for attending CCM events. Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold (2020) pointed out that the audience for CCM concerts and festivals comprises social elites and education-driven individuals who regularly consume CCM in the initiation of knowledge exploration, experience, and involvement in the genre. Menger (2017) also reported three compounding factors that contributed to their attendance of CCM concerts and events, which includes their strong musical background, high social status, and education level.

In contrast to the younger audience of CCM, Boghossian (2021) stated that the cultural reliance of CM is limited to a small number of aging, mostly white, audience members. Due to the conservative attitude of this group, which makes up a significant portion of paying consumers, the addition of new compositions to concert programming could result in a reduction in ticket sales. However, programming new compositions may be more accepted by younger audiences. Boghossian recommends that attention should

be paid to integrating mainstream classical music and new music audiences by exploring or tailoring the “concert venue”, “format” and “protocols” for the sustainability and development of CCM (p. 44).

The activities of CCM in Malaysia, as stated by Tajuddin et al. (2021), were prompted by the establishment of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) in 1999. The organisation called for commissioned works by local composers from 2001 to 2003 and organised the MPO Composer’s Forum in 2007. Subsequently, the HSBC Young Composers Workshop and the KL Contemporary Music Festival were held in 2008 and 2009 respectively, followed by the first UiTM-klpac Malaysian Composers Series, which was launched in 2010. Besides those events at the domestic level, the Soundbridge Festival 2013 and the SPECTRA Festival 2014 reached out to their international counterparts. In addition, according to Gan (2014), there were three musical societies founded to promote CCM in Malaysia: the Malaysian Composers Collective in 2007, the Society of Malaysian Contemporary Composers in 2010 and the Classical Music Society Selangor and Kuala Lumpur in 2010. The Society of Malaysian Contemporary Composers (SMCC) hosted a variety of workshops and concerts of CCM, featuring local and foreign composers (Khoo, 2014). Moreover, Malaysian composers have been active at the international level in performance (performing works in 31 countries) and competitions (winning or becoming finalists in 20 competitions) (Tajuddin et al., 2021). The achievements of Malaysian CCM composers over the last decade demonstrate the development and maturity of CCM. However, Tajuddin et al. (2021) have noted that efforts to fund and promote CCM to a wider audience in Malaysia are largely lacking. Although the development of CCM in Malaysia can be traced back to the 1950s, the progress of development is slow compared to other Asian countries such as Japan and China (Gan, 2017). The slow growth of acceptance and popularity of CCM in Malaysia might be due to the musical features of CCM addressed in this article, which might not be easily understood and received among musicians and non-musicians. Although CCM development in Malaysia has been examined in only a handful of studies (Gan, 2014; Khoo, 2014; Gan, 2017; Tajuddin et al., 2021), to the best of the researchers’ knowledge, there has not been an investigation into the audience profile and perceptions towards CCM in Malaysia.

Globally, the audience profile of CCM is an under-researched topic. Therefore, the researchers have reviewed past studies on CM to discover possible issues applicable to CCM and to construct a feasible methodological approach to generate the required data in response to the research queries. Large-scale population surveys in the United States (Brown et al., 2002), the United Kingdom and the United States (Kolb, 2001) and the Netherlands (Meijjer & Warntjes, 2005) found that the audience of CM concerts was generally well-educated and from the higher social status population. Further research was completed by Roose (2008), validating that the audience of CM is mostly well-educated. Similarly, Menger (2017) discovered that the Parisian audience of classical music and opera was generally older, with an above average social status and had an above average education profile.

Whereas in Malaysia, there has been a lack of research about the Malaysian audience profile of CM in general. The most recent research was Loo (2009), a case study conducted on the Malaysian audience profile in selected art music concerts: a symphony, a musical and a concert version of opera. By employing surveys and intercepted interviews at the performance venues, Loo found that the audiences were predominantly students and generally below 30 years old. The audiences were mainly students of tertiary education as well as primary and secondary schools. The blooming of student orchestras, wind bands and Chinese orchestras in the education sector cultivated the younger concertgoers. In addition to the environmental impact, it was also observed that the teacher-student social connection motivated those young concertgoers to attend musical performances. According to Loo, this phenomenon contrasts with the aging population commonly seen in the concert arena in the West. The author also examined the musical background of the audience. According to statistics, the ratio of musically trained to untrained audience members was approximately 1:1. However, for the Beethoven Symphony No. 9 concert, 64% of the audience was musically trained, while in the musical category, which was based on a Chinese folk story, 70% of the audience was untrained. The latter also attracted a wider age range of attendees, from 21 to 60 years old, which indicates that the acceptance of art music concerts was influenced by genre and familiarity with the context of music production (i.e., older audience, particularly Chinese who were familiar with the folk story). The study suggested that, even though art music is not commercially viable, the audience is the key stakeholder in the concert production. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how various genres are perceived and received by the audience. The current study holds the same rationale and attempts to conduct an exploratory investigation on the Malaysian audience's profile and perceptions towards CCM.

In conclusion, CCM is comprised of diverse compositional languages and limited studies suggest that its audience is comprised of younger generations seeking new experiences and knowledge. Despite

slow growth, Malaysian composers have achieved visibility and recognition, with local and international activities taking place. However, little is known about the demographics and reception of the audience towards CCM in Malaysia. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the audience profile and perceptions towards CCM differs from the West, given the unique cultural and social contexts of Malaysia.

This study on the audience demographics for CCM could provide readers with preliminary information about the audience's musical tastes and perceptions towards CCM. Understanding the audience's needs through this study is especially important for those who are looking to develop CCM performances and events in the country. Furthermore, the International Composers Symposium 2021 (ICS2021) is the first online symposium of international composers in Malaysia, and it provided fundamental demographic data about the audience for future research. Based on Menger's (2017) three compounding factors that contribute to CCM's audience, the current study aims to explore the audience profile through social status, education level and musical background, using ICS2021 as an exploratory case study and a starting point. The audience's musical interests towards CCM were also explored to strengthen and deepen the research findings. Through surveys, the collected data addressed two research questions: (1) Who is the audience for ICS2021, an online contemporary classical music symposium, in terms of social status and educational level? and (2) What are the audience's musical background and interests towards contemporary classical music?

Methodology

This exploratory case study aimed to examine the audience profile through demographic questions to investigate social status, education level, musical background, and interest by using an online survey. Through contextual and experiential questions, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the audience's perceptions towards CCM, such as the reasons for participating in a CCM symposium (motivation), how they are involved with CCM and how it relates to them at a personal level (experience), as well as their thoughts about CCM as a musical genre (perception). The symposium was held online for one month and therefore the researchers faced time constraints in data collection, as respondents were spread across multiple cities in Malaysia and China. An online survey was undoubtedly a convenient and efficient tool to use.

There was a lack of study and research instruments on the audience profile survey relating to specific genres such as symphonic wind bands. Besides, many studies on music audiences, such as Crawford et al. (2014), Kolb (2000), O'Sullivan (2009) and Dobson (2010), utilised a qualitative method instead of a survey. Hence, this study adopted a survey method and convenience sampling. The respondents were the attendees of the online International Composers Symposium 2021 hosted by the Music Department of Universiti Malaya, in collaboration with the National Band Directors Association of Malaysia and funded by the Japan Foundation of Kuala Lumpur. The event consisted of four webinars by different composers: Lee Feng-Hsu (Taiwan), Eiji Suzuki (Japan), Daisuke Shimizu (Japan) and Marzelan Salleh (Malaysia). In this study, the researchers collected 73 completed surveys by the end of ICS2021. The online survey was distributed to the audience at the end of each webinar and Google Forms was used as the medium for the survey questionnaires. The content of the questionnaires was adapted from the survey distributed by The Paris Autumn Festival in 2014. The Paris Autumn Festival is an annual international festival that is dedicated to multi-disciplinary contemporary arts that also hosted performances by elite CCM composers. Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold (2020) employed the Paris Autumn Festival questionnaire as part of their instrument to investigate the audience profile of contemporary art music. They discussed their findings in relation to the homology of music sociology, proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, and music consumption patterns, related to lifestyle theories by Gerhard Schulze. Additionally, the questionnaire was largely general as it was adapted to various types of concerts, such as large and small ensembles, multimedia performance, choir or vocal concerts and others. The questions were flexible, had high adaptability and supported the aims of our study. They were modified and selected based on the three compounding factors of CCM audiences stated by Menger (2017): social status, education level and musical background. Additionally, musical interest was added to understand the CCM audience's musical taste and intentions at a deeper level.

The first webinar was conducted by Lee Feng-Hsu, where he explained how he constructed and composed his saxophone pieces with creative use of motives and materials. Lee is a prolific composer with many commissioned works, and he has won numerous international composition awards. This was followed by Eiji Suzuki's webinar on explaining the orchestration techniques of his works. Suzuki has an international reputation as a world-renowned composer, especially for his contribution to wind orchestra

works. His works were premiered and performed by many major orchestras around the world. Next, the third webinar showcased Daisuke Shimizu, a specialist in wind band, who shared his inspiration for creating his well-known piece “Seas of Wisdom”. Shimizu is also a well-known composer in wind orchestra and his works were commonly performed by wind bands in Japan and other countries. In the last webinar, Marzelan Salleh talked about how he incorporated intercultural and Gamelanistic elements in his compositions. Transcultural compositional techniques are one of the unique styles that set him apart from other composers. His compositions have been performed in major music festivals internationally.

Result and Discussion of Findings

Audience Profile

The results were organised according to Menger’s (2017) three compounding factors that contribute to the audience of CCM concerts and events: social status, education level and musical background. Musical interest was added to the category of musical background to enrich this audience study. The data analysis of social status consisted of age, gender, occupation, publicity, and level of demand for CCM events. Next, the education level of respondents was presented. The final part of the presented results were the musical background and interest of respondents in the order of percentage of attendance for each webinar, intention of respondents, perspective of ICS2021, interest in attending similar future events, previous CCM experience, involvement with CCM, personal perspectives towards CCM and personal relation with CCM.

Social Status

In discussions of pluralism in musical aesthetics, Schulze (1992) and Van Eijck (2001) both discovered that education level and age of the audience might accurately predict their musical taste. As shown in Figure 1, the group aged 18 and less (35.6 %) and the one aged 30 and above (32.9%) contributed to the higher portions of respondents. The 18 and less group represented the students at the pre-college level. This was due to the student's involvement in school bands and the fact that there were two webinars conducted by two well-known band composers and conductors. The 30 and above group were working professionals, including music educators, band directors, kindergarten and day-care teachers, musicians, and IT engineers. The 19 to 23 (16.4%) group included students with a bachelor’s degree while the 24 to 30 (15.1%) group were in postgraduate study, both in music-related fields. The two groups comprise 31.5% of total respondents. We can see that over 66% of respondents were under 30. This is in line with Loo’s (2009) study in two aspects: (1) students from tertiary education and high schools make up a significant portion of participants in art music events; (2) audiences are involved in school band or orchestra. Figure 2 shows that the majority of respondents’ gender was female (62.6%) versus male (38.4%).

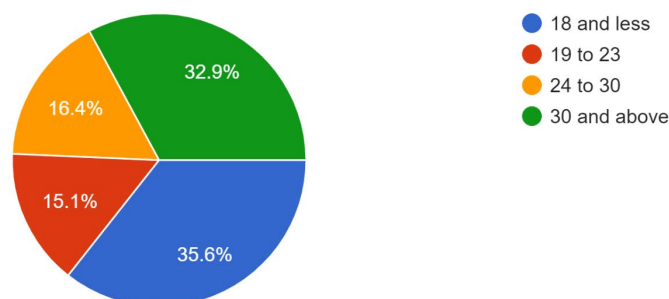


Figure 1. Age distribution of ICS2021 attendees

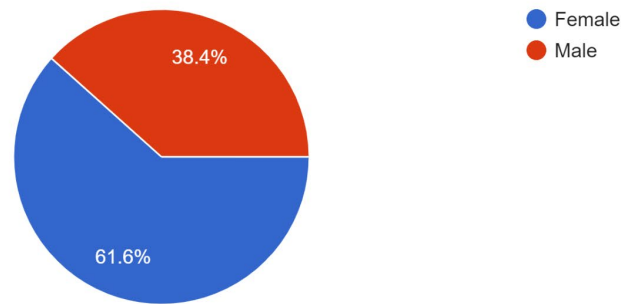


Figure 2. Gender of ICS2021 attendees

Figure 3 shows that 42.5% of respondents were students across different education levels. This, again, demonstrated that the student population was the major group in this event, which was consistent with Loo (2009). However, this contrasted with Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold (2020), where most attendees of three CCM festivals had obtained a high level of education. Bourdieu (1984) and Schulze (1992) discovered that a high level of education is a typical criterion of lifestyle and social class. Bourdieu (1984) observed that CCM was usually listened to by a highly educated and privileged elite.

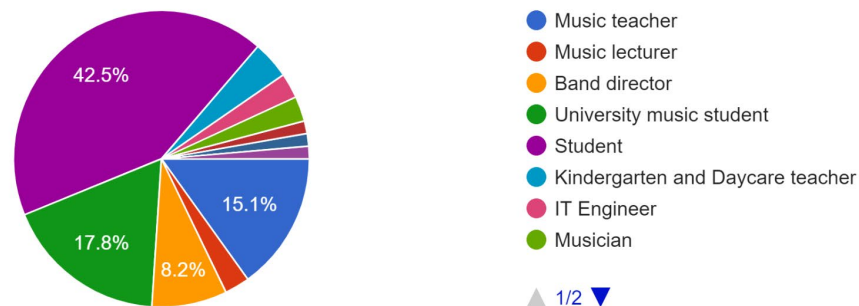


Figure 3. Occupation of ICS2021 attendees

Figure 4 shows that most respondents became aware of ICS2021 through the promotion in their school or university (53.4%) and social media (52.1%). This figure also implies that the networking of respondents can be considered as one of the factors in social status. It was not surprising to encounter a high percentage of publicity through school or university because of the lecturers and band directors who were encouraging their students to attend such events. Additionally, social media has been widely and increasingly used to promote music events (Chen & Lei, 2021). The reason may be that social media served as one of the most direct and cost-efficient ways to reach out to audiences locally and internationally. Although this event had been advertised in newspapers, it was obvious that it did not reach the target audience, because only 4.1% of respondents discovered this event through newspapers. This indicates that newspapers might not be the most effective channel to advertise CCM-related events. Oklobdžija (2015) claimed that traditional media is declining as one of the marketing strategies in the current trend. The limited effectiveness of newspaper advertising in this study has undoubtedly supported this claim.

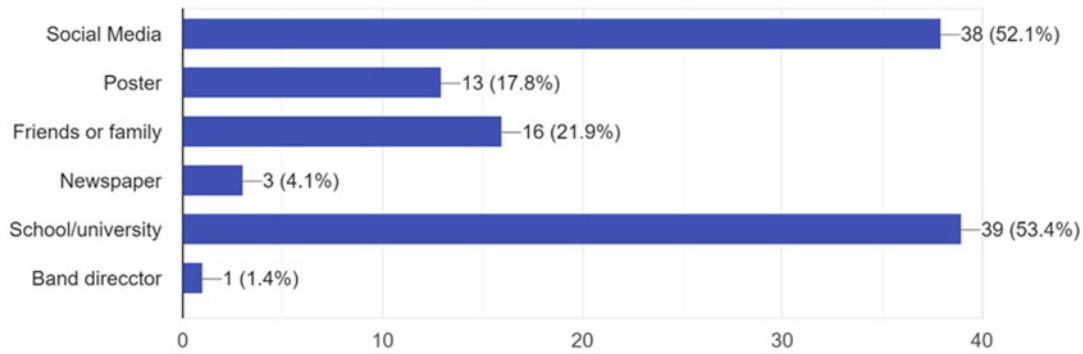


Figure 4. The publicity of ICS2021

In Figure 5, just over half of respondents (50.7%) rated similar CCM events as moderately demanded in Malaysia, whereas 27.4% reported such events as highly demanded and 21.9% felt they were very highly demanded. None of the respondents thought that they have low or very low demand in Malaysia. Rizkallah (2009) discussed classical music performing organisations in the United States, which were having difficulties in attracting concertgoers and this had a significant impact on the sustainability of the performing arts business. With the positive responses to this question, there is a high potential to attract more attendees to CCM, perhaps branching out from the conventional performance venues of CM, creating an innovative concert format or delivery, as suggested by Boghossian (2021).

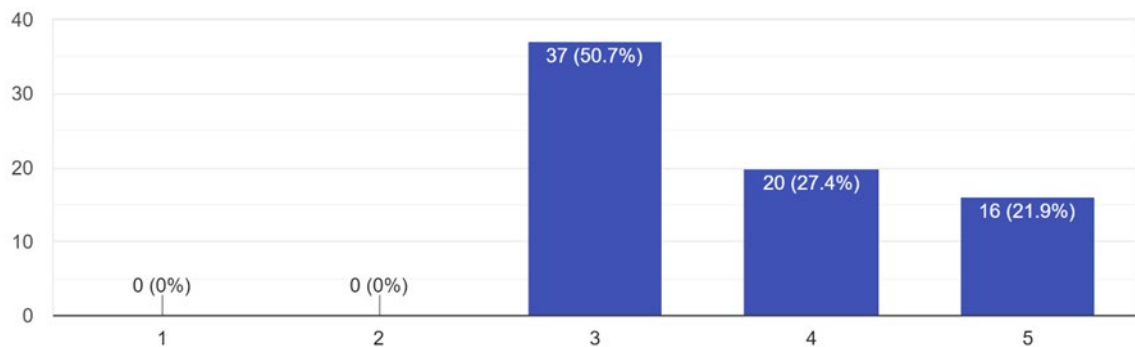


Figure 5. Levels of demand for CCM events

Note: 1 stands for 'very low demand'; 2 stands for 'low demand'; 3 stands for 'moderately demanded'; 4 stands for 'highly demanded'; 5 stands for 'very highly demanded'

Educational Level

Figure 6 shows the education background of respondents. Over half of them were students, 41.1% in high school or lower, 37% were studying for a bachelor's and 6.8% studying for a diploma, master's or doctorate. Though there was a wide distribution of education backgrounds, high school students made up a significant portion of respondents because the symposium was held in collaboration with the National Band Directors Association of Malaysia. The association helped connect the research team with the two Japanese composers and promoted the events to their respective students. The linkages between them were clear, as the student-teacher relationship was one of the main factors. On the other hand, there was a relatively high percentage of bachelor's students (37%). In addition, respondents holding a master's degree and above took up 13.6%. Over half of respondents came from a bachelor's degree and above. This result was supported by many other studies, where most of the audience of CCM had obtained a higher level of education (Zehme, 2005; Menger, 2017; Grebosz-Haring & Weichbold, 2020).

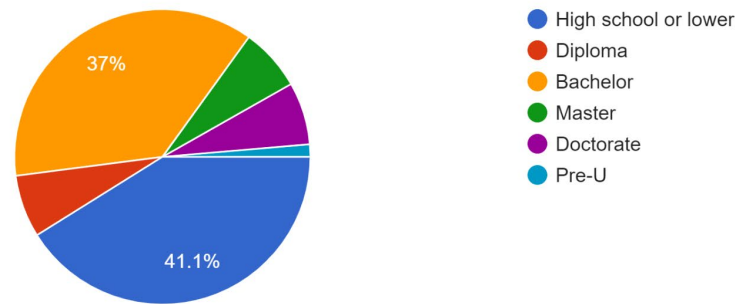


Figure 6. Education background of ICS2021 attendees

Musical Background and Interest

As shown in Figure 7, the number of attendees was significantly higher in the webinars of the two Japanese composers, which focused on band compositions. This suggested that the motivation for attending the webinars related to student involvement in music learning (e.g., participation in band or orchestra) and teacher-student social relationships (Loo, 2009).

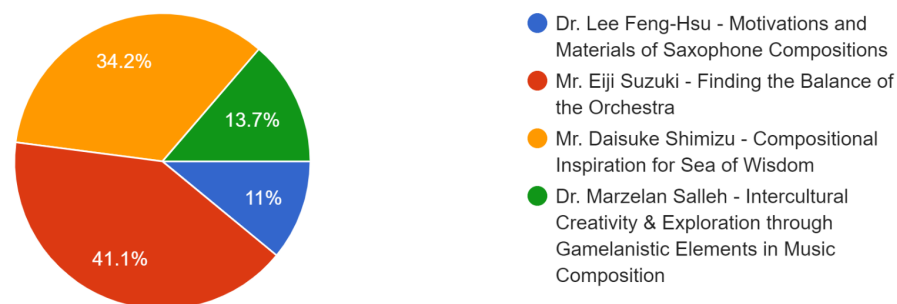


Figure 7. Percentage of attendees for each webinar

Figure 8 shows the intentions and motivations of respondents in attending ICS2021. In the multiple-choice question “What makes you come to this particular event?”, 80.0% selected “To develop/educate myself”, which aligned with Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold’s (2020) findings that the CCM audience seeks knowledge exploration. The second-highest choice was “I want to listen to both the speaker and the compositions”, which could be interpreted as a sign of teacher-student social interaction in a CCM event because the band teachers advertised and encouraged their students to attend ICS2021. In addition, many audience members were also students of the two composers from Taiwan and Malaysia. This is similar to Loo’s (2009) finding that the teacher-student social relationship plays a crucial factor in motivating concertgoers. The third-highest choice was “I want to experience something new” (63%), which was in line with Gross and Pitts (2016), which stated that the CCM audience is adventurous in exploring “something new”, “challenging”, “different” and “unexpected” (p. 16). Other popular choices were “Music-related professional reasons” (52.1%), “I want to listen to the speaker’s compositions” (46.6%) and “I am interested in Contemporary Classical Music” (42.5%) (See Figure 8).

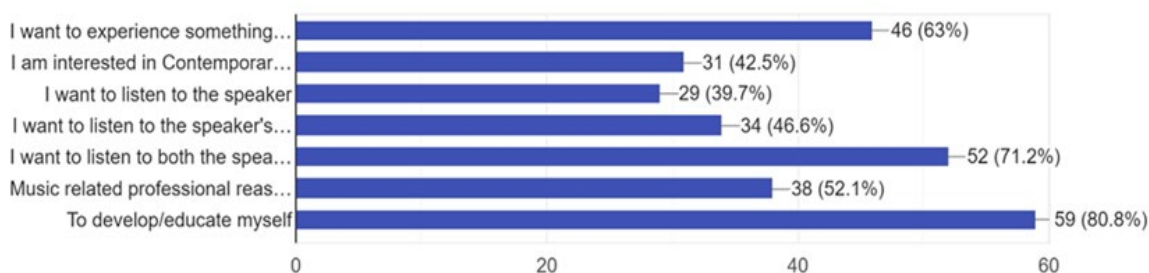


Figure 8. The audience's intentions in attending ICS2021

Figure 9 shows that most respondents strongly agreed that ICS2021 was a place for educational enrichment, served as a space to explore various compositional styles and was a platform to support national and international CCM (A, B, C, D). It was motivating to discover that respondents thought positively of ICS2021. This result also indicated that most attendees were not intimidated by this type of event, which was entirely about CCM. These results might contradict the acceptance level of CCM music reported in other research, as some CCM can be challenging to follow due to its complex tonalities and unpredictable rhythmic structure at times (Mencke et al., 2022; Schulze et al., 2012; Prior, 2013). De La Fluente (2010) discussed how CCM has not been successfully communicated to critics, audiences and sometimes even the performers themselves. However, there is a possibility that the music educators and lecturers had frequently exposed their students to CCM, which might have served as an additional support and preparation for CCM in terms of musical sound and knowledge about CCM.

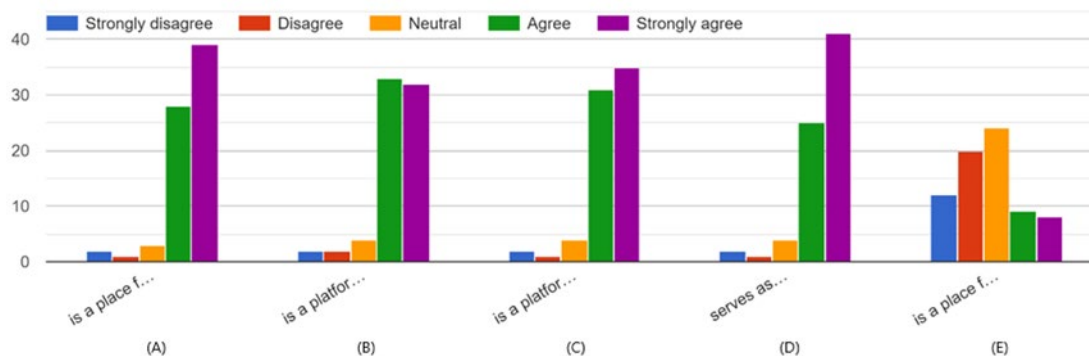


Figure 9. Audience perspectives on ICS2021

Note: (A) stands for "ICS2021 is a place for education enrichment"; (B) stands for "ICS2021 is a platform to support national CCM"; (C) stands for "ICS2021 is a platform to support international CCM"; (D) stands for "ICS2021 serves as a space for exploring various compositional styles"; (E) stands for "ICS2021 is for experts only".

Another positive sign of the audience's willingness to attend CCM event is shown in Figure 10. Most respondents stated that they will be attending similar CCM events in the future (87.7%), which was much higher than the respondents who answered "maybe attending" similar CCM events in the future (12.3%). It is an optimistic result that none of the respondents answered "No" or not interested at all in attending similar events in the future.

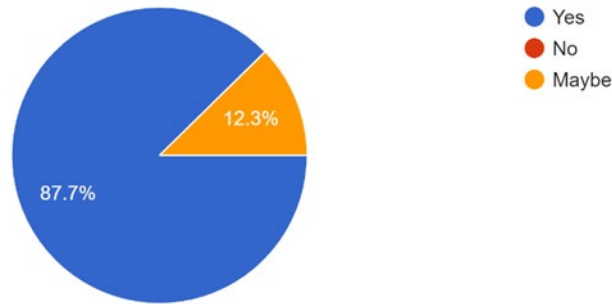


Figure 10. Audience interest in attending similar future events

In Figure 11, more than half of those surveyed reported that they had experienced CCM events through workshops (58.9%) and concerts (57.5%). Many respondents attended festivals (41.1%) and symposiums (37%) about CCM. Some attended CCM-related forums (13.7%), conferences (11%) and competitions (20.5%). Only a few (2.7%) indicated that they did not have any experience with CCM events. As a result, many ICS2021 attendees had experience and exposure to CCM events, which resonates with Mencke et al.’s (2019) claim that the CCM audience is a niche group with previous experience in CCM.

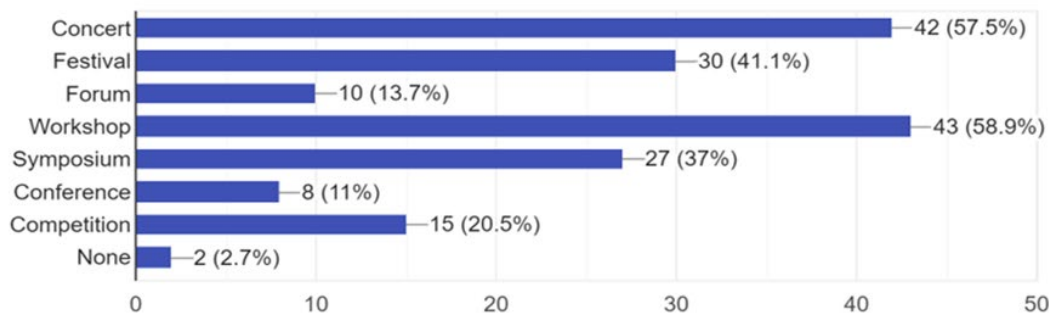


Figure 11. Previous experience of attendees with CCM events

Most respondents (45.2%) reported that they were moderately involved with CCM, followed by 28.8% who were involved with CCM (Figure 12). 6.8% indicated that they were not involved, while 6.8% reported that they were very intensely involved. These responses were similar to Sakin (2016), where a large majority of the music major students listened to CCM sometimes, which was similar to the moderately involved respondents.

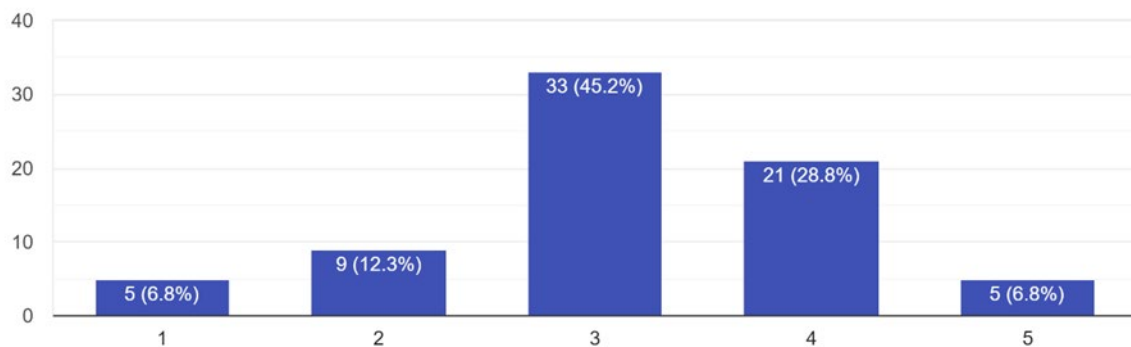


Figure 12. Level of involvement of attendees with CCM

Note: 1 stands for “not involved”; 2 stands for “somewhat involved”; 3 stands for “moderately involved”; 4 stands for “involved”; 5 stands for “intensely involved”.

As shown in Figure 13, most respondents watched and listened to recorded CCM (90.4%). 52.1% attended CCM events and 45.2% played CCM. Meanwhile, only 5.5 % composed CCM, 2.7% wrote about CCM and the same frequency was reported for respondents who were not devoted to CCM. Sakin (2016) revealed that music performance majors considered CCM technically difficult, and this was one of the factors that affected their exposure to learning and playing it.

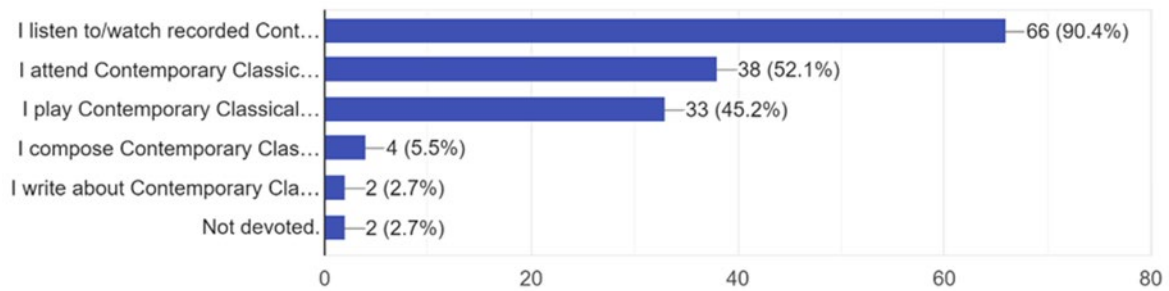


Figure 13. Exposure of attendees to CCM

In response to the statement “CCM is hard to understand”, option A in Figure 14, the majority of respondents felt that CCM can be understood moderately. Sakin’s (2016) research in Turkey demonstrated that the level of understanding of 20th and 21st Century classical music of university music major students was insufficient and that this was one of the factors why CCM was not the most preferred musical style among all the different classical music periods. Many respondents disagreed that CCM is for experts only (option B). Most also disagreed that CCM is much less important for the development of classical music prior to the 20th Century (option C). Regarding option D, the majority agreed and strongly agreed that CCM is innovative and creative and stimulates one's imagination. Respondents also agreed that CCM challenges one's musical habits (option E). Most of them strongly agreed that CCM combines elements of traditional and new music (option F). They also agreed that CCM is an art form that is mixed with other arts and media (option G). According to the personal perspective of respondents, we observed that they positively accepted CCM, considered the genre as innovative and challenging (Gross & Pitts, 2016) and perceived it as a hybrid of something traditional and new (Ross, 2021) as well as a combination with other art forms and media.

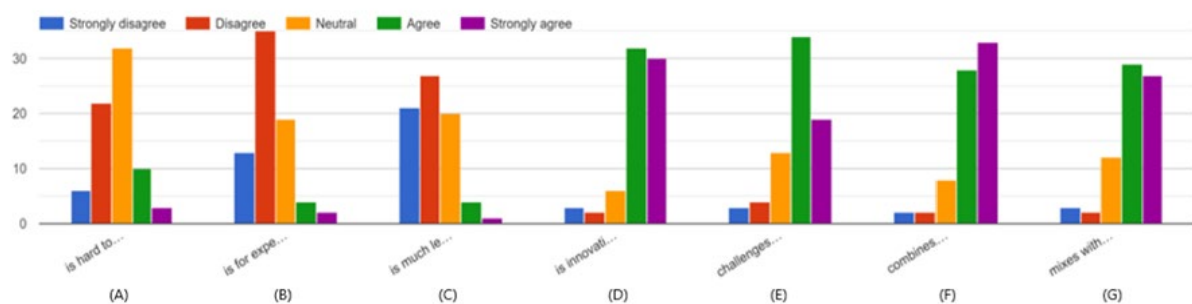


Figure 14. Personal perspectives of attendees towards CCM

Note: (A) CCM is hard to understand; (B) CCM is for experts only; (C) CCM is much less important for the development of CM prior to the 20th century; (D) CCM is innovative, creative and stimulates one’s imagination; (E) CCM challenges one’s musical habits; (F) CCM combines elements of traditional and new music; (G) CCM is mixed with other arts and media.

Figure 15 shows that a majority of respondents agreed with seven descriptions about what CCM stands for them personally. They agreed that CCM enhances their personal development, entertains, and relaxes them, is a thought-provoking impulse and an expression of their way of life. They also agreed that CCM stimulates exchange with other people and is very approachable for them. Most felt moderate about CCM being related to expressing rebellion and serving as an indispensable part of their lives. The openness and willingness to accept new music supported the aesthetic pluralism discussed by Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold (2020), which noted that “aesthetic pluralism and openness” to new music can possibly lead to social class change (p. 74). The expectation was one of the key factors for listeners, who were motivated by the unexpected and surprising moments of CCM, which contrasted with classical music. The aesthetic experiences of listeners were also evident in the discussion of Mencke et al., (2022).

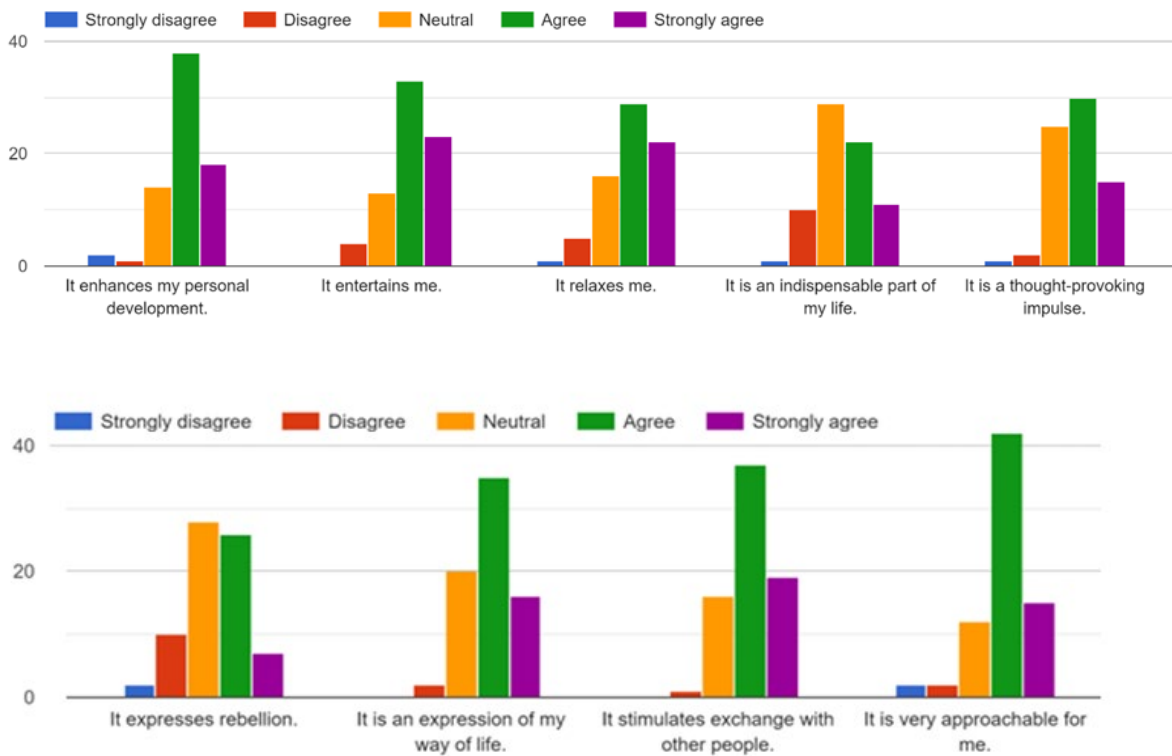


Figure 15. Personal relation of attendees to CCM

Conclusion

The current study had two main research objectives: (1) to explore the social status and education level of the audience for the online Contemporary Classical Music Symposium (ICS2021); and (2) to understand the audience's musical background and interest in contemporary classical music (CCM). The respondents were composed of two main age ranges, 18 years old or less (35.6%) and 30 years old or above (32.9%). The majority was female (61.6%) and most had a high school education or lower (41.1%) or a bachelor's degree (37%). 50.6% held a bachelor's degree and above. Regarding occupation, 60.3% were students while the rest were working professionals. The survey data collected showed that respondents had a positive and open view of CCM, with 86.3% indicating that they would recommend ICS2021 to their friends. Respondents embraced CCM music and most attended with the purpose of experiencing and learning something new from these events. They did not feel intimidated by CCM, and most were neutral when asked whether ICS2021 was for experts only. Although frequency of exposure to CCM was not explicitly asked about in this study, it was clear that a significant portion of respondents had moderate to high levels of exposure to CCM through various means such as recordings, concerts, and personal musical learning journeys. It can be concluded that the overall acceptance level of CCM among the audience in Malaysia ranged from moderate to high. Respondents also expressed a desire to have more opportunities to learn about CCM from professionals and participate in CCM events in Malaysia.

Practical Implications

The data revealed a phenomenon that could be valuable to researchers, performers, and musicians for organising and marketing future events. The study indicates that newspaper advertising was not an effective way to reach the target audience for ICS2021. Detailed consideration should be given to the choice of newspaper and the frequency of advertising when selecting newspapers as one of the publicity strategies. Social media and recommendations from teachers or friends were found to be the most effective promotional strategies for events such as ICS2021. It was also noted that respondents enjoyed events that emphasised educational value. During ICS2021, attendees expressed that they were inspired and motivated when composers shared their music and compositional techniques in real-time, which enabled them to develop knowledge and understanding. This is consistent with Gross and Pitts' (2016) observation that the audience enjoys and values being in proximity with the artist and being "part of that world" (p. 12).

Limitations and Further Research

The results and findings of this study are subject to a few limitations. For instance, the sample size that was employed was small and it was limited to one CCM event. This case study does not encompass the broad spectrum of genres in CCM, given that CCM is highly individualistic in compositional style. Hence, this study does not intend to represent the entire CCM field. Another limitation is the geographical location of the event organisation, which was based in Kuala Lumpur. Even though ICS2021 was an online event that had the possibility of foreign audience participation, due to the time difference and limitations of connectivity, it was mainly attended by a local audience in Malaysia. An additional uncontrolled factor is the possibility that some audience members were strongly encouraged to attend the event by their instructors, which may have resulted in biased opinions when they responded to the survey questions. Therefore, it is recommended that a larger sample size and more even distribution of geographical locations be employed in future studies. Physical CCM concerts, events and festivals that are on a larger scale and with greater variety could generate more specific and rich data that represents local or global views. Additionally, more research will need to be done to understand and determine audience perceptions and preferences towards CCM, which would contribute significantly to the sustainability and development of CCM locally and internationally.

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