

# REVIEW OF THE 24<sup>TH</sup> SYMPOSIUM OF THE ICTM STUDY GROUP ON MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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## Abstract

This short review essay is dedicated to the 24th Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Musical Instruments. This symposium took place from March 29 to April 1, 2023. It was hosted by the Music Faculty of the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** International Council for Traditional Music, Refining, Simplifying, Sustainability, Future of musical instruments

The 24<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Musical Instruments took place from March 29 to April 1, 2023, hosted by the Music Faculty of the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka (CFP for the 24th Symposium of the ICTM SG on Musical Instruments, 2020). The Study Group on Musical Instruments is one of the oldest Study Groups of the 25 ICTM Study Groups of different structures and is held every 2 years around the world, and this is the second consecutive symposium that the venue has hosted. The symposium consisted of 13 sessions, including workshops, scholarly presentations, one business meeting, and a final excursion.

The first 3 days of scholarly sessions were delivered in a combination of online and offline sessions. It is worth noting that the committee of the symposium advocated that each speaker is motivated to share the research and insights and did not set out the usual topic of “New research” as any research presented is considered as new research. Thus, the 27 scholars from 14 countries only had to focus on two topics: ‘Sound Manipulation on/through Musical Instruments: Refining Versus Simplification in Transmission and Performance’ and ‘Humans and Their Musical Instruments as Part of Nature.’ Scholars can focus on sharing the content that they specialize in. All the online presentations were prerecorded items and replayed by the local organizers. It was also a challenge for the technical team due to the constant switching between video and live streaming and missing stability in the electric power supply.

The opening ceremony was chaired by Saman Panapitiya and Ranjith Fernando (Abstracts of the 24th Symposium of the ICTM SG on Musical Instruments, 2023). A short opening ceremony was followed by a workshop on the guqin given by the Singaporean scholar Hoh Chung Shih. He discussed in detail the representative pieces, acoustic properties, and fingering of the guqin from three aspects: esthetics, technique, and the sonic-performance medium. Then he pointed out the importance of the interplay of the movement–sound–perception relationship in the context of live performance.

The first group of single presentations was moderated by Rastko Jakovljevic. The first speaker Huang Wan was speaking about ‘A Newly Emerging and Socially Inclusive ‘Pitiful’ Sound: Okinawan Ryukyu Karen in the View of Art Therapy and Musical Well-Being.’ This paper briefly introduced the form of the thirteen-stringed musical instrument, the Ryukyu Karen; after that, she cited the experimental research conducted by Japanese scholars on the instrument, indicating that the Ryukyu Karen is an easy-to-play and emotionally stabilizing instrument, which can have a therapeutic effect on music and is useful for further research in the field of neuroscience and rehabilitation. During the Q&A, Rinko Fujita raised further questions about the mass production of Ryukyu Karen as one of the teaching aids for music classes in Okinawan schools.

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The next report was about ‘The Tuvan Khöömei Throat-singing and its Igil Accompaniment as Instruments of Nature.’ Tuvan Choduraa Tumat and Bernard Kleikamp repeatedly emphasized the Tuvan relationship between singing, musical instruments, and nature, arguing that all sound is part of nature.

Saida Daukeyeva from Wesleyan University – the topic is ‘Making the Kazakh Qobyz: Musical Instrument as a Sentient Being’ – illustrated that for Kazakhs, the Qobyz is a musical instrument and a sentient being by observing the making of the instrument by Kazakh performer Tölegen Särsenbaev in an interview she conducted.

Huang Wan was the chair for the subsequent session. The first topic of this session is ‘The Future of Instrumental Sound and Instrumentalists.’ The speaker, Gisa Jähnichen, took an ephemeral look at the production and use of musical instruments and made predictions about the possible future development direction of musical instruments. She pointed out that automation and artificial intelligence cannot take over the creation of and satisfaction felt of human needs for music or any sound production.

In the next presentation, ‘From Folk Music to Art Music: The Evolution of Sanjo,’ Jocelyn Clark provided an overview of the development of the Sanjo by outlining the experiences of successive generations of intangible cultural bearers of the Korean ‘Gayageum, Sanjo.’

The title of Yang Chen's presentation was “Studies on Resonators of Local Wind Instruments in Southwest China.” He used a lot of audio and video recordings from field investigations and conducted acoustic measurements, analyses, and comparisons of a large number of wind instruments and resonators collected in southwest China to illustrate the effects of various resonators on the timber of wind instruments.

The second session of the afternoon was chaired by Ahmad Faudzi Musib. The first speaker Zhong Weicheng’s topic is ‘The Functionality of Instrumental Timbre in Religious Rituals.’ He analyzed the sound of each instrument by looking at the selection, playing methods, and timber of the instruments in use and summarized the relationship between musical instruments and the Zhengyi Taoist ceremony.

Nicola Renzi brought up the topic ‘Biegga, Cáhci, Duoddarat, and Other ‘Geo-Phones’: Polyorganicity of Sápmi and Environmental Accompaniments to Sami Joiks.’ It is about Sami’s use of all matter in nature as a musical element. By presenting heterogeneous samples of Sami land-based sound sources, practices, and esthetics, the notion of a musical instrument is called into question, urging it past what is humanly manageable and opening it up to more-than-human ontologies.

Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda’s topic was ‘The Mandoharp Creation of Amaradheva and its Use in the 1980s and 1990s.’ He analyzed the creation of the Mandoharp and its use by Amaradheva in the 1980s and 1990s. Then he concluded that all parts of the instrument played an important role in achieving the desired sound and that inventions like that had their specific time period.

On 30<sup>th</sup> March, the second day of the symposium, a total of 12 scholars presented in four sessions. Each of the three scholars formed a session, and the four sessions were chaired by Gisa Jähnichen, Timkehet Teffera, Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda, and Jocelyn Clark.

The first speaker was Iranga Samindani Weearkkody. Her topic was ‘The Use of Conch Shells (Hak Gediya) in the Sri Lankan Cultural Context.’ This presentation introduced the widely used conch shell as a musical instrument, known as Hak Gediya, in cultural, religious, and nationally needed situations of Sri Lanka. By referencing historical documents and examining instrument specimens preserved in museums, she has shown the evolution of the Hak Gediya instrument itself, its significance as a musical instrument within Sri Lankan traditional culture, and its relationship with social and religious aspects of a past time.

The next presentation is ‘Refining Pluralism or Over Simplification of Musical Cultures: A Case Study on Orkestra Traditional Malaysia (OTM).’ The speaker Gerald Ng Kea Chye examined the

Orkestra Traditional Malaysia, which originated from a supposed multicultural community. He provided an overview of their history, composition, operational approach, and development philosophy. Then he introduced the Malaysian Symphony Orchestra as an ensemble that incorporates traditional Malay instruments and upholds some principles of multiculturalism. However, Gerald also highlights the orchestra's challenges resulting from the utilization of a European tuning system, which has deviated from some traditional Malay music features. Furthermore, the contribution questioned whether this practice has oversimplified the various musical cultures. He concluded by recommending that greater attention has to be given to the perspectives of music practitioners. During the Q&A, Gisa Jähnichen asked whether the use of an orchestra was already a predetermination and a source of simplification. Gerald agreed and disagreed at the same time, explaining that the wind band did exist to dilute many elements to balance the various cultures, but on the other hand, this could be one of the reasons for its survival; he further pointed out that what happens to the band next is more important.

The final speaker of the 2A session, Lu Song, spoke about 'The Long Drum of Yao Lusheng in the Fuchuan Area of Guangxi.' He introduced the use and purpose of the Changgu (长鼓), a musical instrument drum used by the Pingdi Yao people in Guangxi, and its current use in various ceremonial occasions such as "Huan Panwang Yuan (还盘王愿)" and family rituals. He further explained the dance steps of the dance with the drum and the lusheng, the interaction between the musical instrument and the dance, and the role of the musical instrument in the ceremony.

Nishadi P. Meddegoda named her speech 'The Production of tabla in Sri Lanka.' This paper discussed the form and method of making a tabla, traditionally an Indian musical instrument that has also been passed down in Sri Lanka, and the reasons for it. She gathered information according to previous literature on organology, instrument making, and some social musicological studies to be examined and personal interviews with artisans.

The next topic was 'Stones Can Also Be Used as Musical Instruments' from Yang Yujia. He advocated that instrument makers and musicians should discover new concepts and fresh ideas as environmental opinions and ideological goals, rather than remaining stuck in traditional methods of instrument making. The speaker used a live stone display to convey to the audience the idea of sustainability and that musicians should also join in the conservation of nature.

In the next presentation, 'The Flow of 'Han' Woong Yi Lee's Transnational 'Musicking' Research,' Xue Tong illustrates the role and significance of the daegeum as an important apparatus for the construction of dual identities. Also, he introduced Shi Ziran, a Korean musician in China, as the subject of his investigation.

'The Lithuanian Diaspora Brass Bands in the USA' from Rūta Žarskienė discussed the formation, existence, and disappearance of the brass bands of the first wave of Lithuanian immigrants to the US. The main focus was given to their activities and their significance for an awakening of Lithuanian self-consciousness and ethnic pride.

'Bamboo Siblings: The Mouth Organs in Continental Southeast Asia and China' by Liu Xiangkun introduced four types of oral organs popular in mainland Southeast Asia and China: sheng (Han Chinese), lusheng (Miao and others), naw (Lahu and others), and khaen (Lao and others), combined with videos showing how local instrument makers recreate the musical instruments.

Sahereh Astaneh's contribution, 'The Role of Spirituality and Nature in Iranian Performance Traditions,' examined the performance of Ashura, an activity of mourning by Shia Muslims and ritual traditions; she offered a descriptive account, especially the instrumental elements, which were born out of the Iranian people's mourning ceremonies and were found in various parts of the country. The speaker focused on describing the performance traditions of Ashura as characterized by mourning rituals and re-enactments of the passion plays of martyrdom.

Session 2C started promptly at 02:00 PM Sri Lankan time. The first speaker was W.M.D.A.L.B. Tilakaratna, who spoke on 'Vocalized Strings: Uniqueness in the Layers of Alice in Chains.' This

paper provided a historical overview of the development of grunge music, a case study of the band 'Alice in Chains' to understand the expressionism of using simplistic riffs and how layering is used in the band's music to create a larger sound.

The next contribution was 'Re-constructing the Azande Manza Xylophones of Northern DR Congo through Artistic Experimentation' from Adilia On-ying Yip. This paper revealed the xylophone musicians' performance, listening processes, and specific experiences of the instrument's social meaning and function through the production of replicated sound installations and artistic experiments. Analysis of audiovisual, photographic, and documentary archives as well as the hypothetical use of reproduction-sound installations to play back recorded movement patterns, body postures, and techniques was performed.

Andrew Filmer and Sulwyn Lok talked about 'A New Conversation of Viola and Zhongruan.' This paper brought together a performer-researcher with a performer-composer for a composition that explores not just the two instruments chosen for performance but also a wide range of Southeast Asian traditional musical instruments and associated traditions, from which the music repertoire gained inspiration.

The final day of the scholars' section featured a total of six contributions, split into two sessions during the morning of March 31. The chairs of these two sessions are Charudaththe Bandara Illangasinghe and Gerald Ng Kea Chye, respectively.

Chu Zhuo's presentation was titled 'On the Relationship Between Zhuang qīxiánqín and Similar Musical Instruments.' This article, completely given in Chinese language while hoping that people may use the time to read through the English slides, introduced the form and structure of the 'yazheng,' a Zhuang seven-stringed musical instrument, and its origins. The author played a video of a local artist playing the instrument, which is then used to further introduce the technique and melodic characteristics of the yazheng<sup>2</sup> repertoire. The article also showed the relationship between the Zhuang musical instrument of this type and the other circulating yazhengs as well as the relationship between the instrument and the people who use them.

Massimo Cattaneo's presentation was titled 'Timbral Manipulation of Flute Sound in Flamenco as a Process of Indigenisation.' This article examines the reasons for the importance of the flute's sound manipulation for the flute to undergo the process of localization in the tradition by comparing the flute playing methods currently developed in flamenco flute with those taught in classical and jazz schools.

Ahmad Faudzi Musib's topic belonged to the focus on 'Refining vs. Simplification in Sape players Tusau Padan, Matthew Ngau Jau, Jerry Kamit, and Tuyang Tan Ngan's Transmission and Performance on and through Sound Manipulation.' This paper uses cultural theory and means of discussing the sape as a zither of Sarawak and the stress on Jimi Hendrix and The Edge (u2 guitarist) self-experience through phenomenology.

Timkehet Teffera's topic is 'Embracing Nature and Producing Instruments: The Case of Waza Trumpets of the Bertha.' This study is the result of field research carried out by the author in 2005 in the Benishangul Gumuz region of western Ethiopia. The author provides a detailed description of the traditional process of making the end-blown trumpet known as waza, the performance, and transmission of the waza ensemble, focusing on the meaning and function of the waza sound.

Christopher A. Miller's topic was 'Pa'O Khaya Revealed: New Materialism in Ethnographic Organology.' The author examines and subsequently describes the khaya itself to varying degrees through an ontological (ooo) framework, organized primarily around the ethnography of collaborative musical practice.

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<sup>2</sup> Yazheng is written in Chinese: 轧筝.

The final presentation was about ‘Nurturing Music with the Nature: Sound construction of vaCopi timbila and cimbeveka’ by Joaquim Borges Gove. This paper uses indirect observation and focus groups to gather data. Cultural and social considerations regarding vaCopi instrument making and performance will be revealed. Comparative analysis will explore timbila and cimbeveka at different times.

In the next session, dedicated to video screenings, the organizing committee showed a research documentary on Sri Lankan drums that was recently prepared by Kamani Samarsinghe and her colleagues, which described the process of making drums; in addition, it also investigated the reasons behind the method of making them and evaluated the relevant factors, that is, ongoing cultural, ethical, therapeutic, esthetic, and scientific, by synthesizing the data collected and developing a documentarist’s view on it.



**Figure 1: A hollowed-out drum body. Produced with traditional iron tools. Photography by Geethika Abeysekara, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2023, Kurugama, Kandy, Sri Lanka.**

After that, the business meeting of the Study Group was carried out in a hybrid way in order to make participation possible to as many members as possible. It was decided to do the next symposium in New York according to an invitation made by Rastko Jakovlevic. Also, some volunteers were searched to serve on the next election committee. Further, submission details to the Study Group Publication SIMP were widely discussed. The day after, all offline attendees were taken to Kandy and into a village of drum makers where an entire process of making could be observed. After visiting the village Kurugama, the participants had the opportunity to visit the Kandyan Tooth Temple, one of the holy places in Sri Lanka, and to admire the scenery from the temple across the Kandyan lakes. The drum making was documented per video, and this video is part of the accessible materials given to the participants through a codified upload.

The business meeting also thanked all people involved in organizing and executing this 24<sup>th</sup> Study Group Symposium.

The success of the symposium was based thankfully on the support of the team from the Music Faculty of the University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo. It is worth mentioning that

the chair of the Study Group on Musical Instruments traveled to Sri Lanka to attend the whole conference, despite having undergone two bone repair operations on her left ankle. The symposium was a unified presentation of the arguments and academic results of scholars from all over the world from documentary-historical research on the history and current state of musical instruments to ecological sustainability on the future development of musical instruments.

28<sup>th</sup> April, 2023.

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