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Introduction

Malaysia is known for the diversity within its cultures and ethnic groups. According to the official Malaysian government portal site, the official language here is Bahasa Melayu, or the Malay language, and most Malaysians can verbalize more than one language or dialect. Grosjean (1982) in the introduction to his journal *'Life with Two Languages'* expressed that the majority of Malaysia's population is bilingual or multilingual. Bloomfield's (1933:55) definition of bilingualism ranges from 'a minimal proficiency in two languages' to 'an advanced level of proficiency which allows the speaker to function and appear as a native-like speaker of two languages'. This is the reason why the utilization of bilingualism or multilingualism is not an alien phenomenon in this country.

Although the history of musicals originates in the West, their development in parallel with the growth and change in other art genres has certainly marked a great transformation in this genre. One of the interesting issues worthy of discussion is the musicals that are produced in non-Western countries, in which other languages are used. Due to globalization and glocalization, bilingual or multilingual musicals have increased due to the content or geographical concerns. In a country like Malaysia, the issue of bilingualism in Malaysian education and society has been discussed long ago (Gaudart 1987; Solomon, 1988; Ozóg 1993, Tan 2005). However, there is a lack of research and study of this issue within performing arts, although this has been the practice not only in Malaysia but also in many countries. Recalling Weinstein's (2000:270) comment on multilingual theatre in Taiwan, "multilingualism is a necessity, not just a clever gimmick to sell more seats".

The inclusion of multicultural context in the various theatrical genres is to deliver a better understanding to an audience which comes from various backgrounds. Bilingual musicals incorporate multiple languages into a single performance, providing a viewing experience that differs for each

member of the audience, depending on their own language skills and family background. This makes the performing arts more accessible to audiences for whom English is a second language. Globalization, together with the nature of multi-ethnic and multilingual features in Malaysians today, is indirectly reflected in many genres of performing arts. Unlike drama and theatre that rely heavily on languages, a much more intriguing genre is musical theatre that involves not only dialogue but also music, the main features in this genre.

The compositional style for bilingual musicals perhaps is one of the interesting issues to discuss, looking at how a composer presents musical style in conjunction with bilingual aspects in the overall musical, taking into consideration the synopsis and background of the plot. As mentioned by Lubbock (1957), 'The individual composer's approach to "Musical" is an interesting study [...] Modern composers of "Musicals" exploit contemporary styles and rhythm'. The musical structure, specific techniques such as melopoetics (word-music relationship) and melokinetics (word-dance relationship) used in both conventional and modern musicals will also be examined. Taking into account the many techniques and literature in the music compositions in musicals, the bilingual content in a production nevertheless contributes another challenge which is worthy of discussion.

According to Bradshaw & Nichols (2004), 'not only in Malaysia, surveys showed that this genre – Musical – is one of the favoured genres by the public'. The reason is rather straight forward, as a musical involves not only a stage performance like any other concert genre, but also comprises acting, dancing, props, costume, and has a story as a backbone of a production. John Kenrick (2008) describes the musical as in all its sundry forms, 'is very much a living art form.' He defines musical as 'a stage, television or film engenderment utilizing popular-style musical compositions with optional dialogue - to either tell a story or showcase the aptitudes of the writers and /or performers'. There are many different types of musical. Indirectly, this may be more acceptable for all kinds of audience, young and elderly, even for those without a background in music. Despite the language used in both the script and lyrics, music is perhaps the most important aspect to deliver the synopsis and plot of a musical. How the architecture of the music works in musicals involves a variety of aspects relating to the concept of each individual artistic design. This addresses the problem of the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of musicals. As Banfield explained, it is 'the most complex art form ever devised' but one in which

no single medium – music, poetry, prose, dancing, acting, staging, costume and so on – has the controlling interest. Amongst these elements, the role of music certainly bears more importance. As stated by Mellers (1991) in his review on Palmer's book, 'What makes a musical *musical*; or to put it another way, what makes a *musical* musical? The answer is, of course, "the music".'

The rise of musicals started in the 1940s, through the famous works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, *South Pacific* and *Oklahoma!* and later on in the 80s and 90s "mega-musicals" brought big-budget shows such as *Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables*. Unlike films, musicals can run in theatres for decades. The best musicals have three essential qualities; brains for astuteness and style, heart for genuine and tenable emotion, and courage for the guts to do something ingenious and exhilarating. Among the few early bilingual Broadway musicals that were successfully performed are *Les Miserables*, *West Side Story*, *The King and I*, *Dream Carver*, *Mariachi Girl* and *The Light in the Piazza*. A musical associates the relationships between producers, composers, librettists, choreographers, actor, designers and others, and involves singing and dancing in addition to acting to further the development of the plot.

It is not clearly documented when the first ever bilingual musical was produced here in Malaysia, but increasing bilingual local musicals seems to show that Malaysians have the ability to respond and adapt to an ever-changing context and its diversity in terms of form, style, and structure. Examples of the bilingual musicals in Malaysia are *Rose Rose I Love You* (2007) by *Integrated Expressions*, *Butterfly Lovers* (2006) and *Empress Wu The Musical* (2012) by *Dama Orchestra*, *Paper Crane* (2012) by *The Actors' Studio*, *Malaysian Girls* (2011-2012) and *Kaki Blue* (2009) by *Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre*, *The Secret Life of Nora* (2011) by *Enfiniti Vision Media*, *ADAM The Musical - An Uncommon Love* (2009) – a collaboration by the Actor's Studio and Malaysian AIDS Council, and the recently staged *Xuan Zang: Journey to the West – The Musical* (2014) by *Han Production* and *Mimpi Artilla* (2014), produced by *My Performing Arts Agency (MyPAA)* in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MoTaC), and the National Department for Culture and Arts (JKKN).

This article is a preliminary study of bilingual musicals in Malaysia. The bilingual musicals described in this article are not limited to the above structure, here it refers to an act of singing, dancing and acting involving two different languages simultaneously or in complement. While

bilingualism is complex and has been studied widely in different fields, this study aims to look into how this concept is used in local musicals. Successful bilingual musicals with truly original stories are few and far between in Malaysia. This article reports on and – in this context – highlights some issues regarding the music, style and structure employed in local bilingual musicals from different productions. From the many bilingual musical productions, three are chosen for discussion.

Paper Crane - The *Musical* (2012)

Written and composed by Teng Ky-gan and Lim Chuang Yik, *Paper Crane* tells of life in a Cantonese opera troupe. The musical was originally written in English and was intended to be performed as an English language production. However, since the subject matter deals with Chinese opera, the director, Joe Hasham (2012) believed the play would be more relevant if it were performed in Cantonese. While The Actor Studio Seni Teater Rakyat never had any production in other languages, *Paper Crane* was a brave move because it is a bilingual musical production incorporating Cantonese and English dialogue and songs in the style of American Broadway musical, with Chinese Acrobatics and Martial Arts elements in its choreography. The simple stage sets were impressively built to portray the back of an opera stage. The main characters in *Paper Crane* are Ah Kit and Fei Mui or “Fat Girl”, although she is not fat but pretty and sweet, followed by Fui Koh, the opera troupe’s superstar incumbent, Siu Ngau or “Little Cow” in English, Ah Kit’s mother Ah Mah, Fei Mui’s father Lou Pan or “Manager” and Siu Ngau’s mother, Fanny Jie.

The dialogue and lyrics in the songs are written in both English and Cantonese. Among the bilingual songs in this musicals are “One Chance”, sung by the opera troupe, “When I Step On Stage” by Ah Kit, “How The Heavens Moved”, a duet love song by Ah Kit and Fei Mui, “I Had No Choice” by Ah Kit, and “All You Need Is In This Bowl” by Fei Mui and the opera troupe. These numbers include a catchy pop-style blend of Western and Eastern melodies and lyrics to cultivate the essence of the whole story. This proved to be a burden to local actors, particularly for those who are not fluent in English. For example, this applies to the actor Roax Tan who plays the lead role. Although English is not his main language, he was chosen for the main role due to his fluent Cantonese and acting ability.

Although using a bilingual approach, Hasham (2012) feels that there is no need for subtitles for *Paper Crane* as he finds them distracting and believes the audience may miss an interesting part of the action on stage. He feels that this issue may not bother the audience too much as it seems only natural to have the cast conversing in English with a Chinese accent. As Weinstein (2000:270) remarks, 'the intertwined issues of language and identity hover beneath the surface of the play on stage and resonate among the audience'. From a background and environment exposed so much to Cantonese and English through media, education and socialization, this also provides much freedom for both the writer and composer to express themselves in a certain, particular way that suits the storyline. Lee (2012) feels that the Cantonese part sounds more natural as the English lyrics were too simple. Memmi (1991), on the other hand, states that the English language used in this dialogue as well as lyrics is meant to provide a better understanding to both the general Malaysian and non-Malaysian audience.



Figure 1: The Poster of Paper Crane Production (open source).

Hasham (2012) says that this musical is the most challenging as the production team - Joe Hasham as the artistic director, producer Dato' Faridah Merican, music director Mervyn Peters, choreographer Lex

Lakshman Balakrishnan, costume designer Shingo Tokihiro, set designers Omar Ali and Yusman Mokhtar- are all non-Chinese educated. Meanwhile, both the writer and music composer, Teng Ky-Gan and Lim Chuang Yik are themselves non-Chinese speakers. However, theatre should be about breaking language barriers.

ADAM the Musical - An Uncommon Love (2010)

“... a record-breaking 35 performances was made for varied, yet specific reasons; most significantly, the content is so important and relevant to us that we felt it necessary to give everybody the chance to see it, to be entertained by it, and to be educated by it.” (Sourabh Malandkar & Zaki Arzmi, 2010).

A collaboration between ‘The Actor’s Studio’ and ‘Malaysian AIDS Council’, *ADAM The Musical – An Uncommon Love* (2010) holds the record as the longest-running musical ever in Malaysia in a single season. What makes this musical unique is that it has educational values, and raised audience awareness about HIV and AIDS in a non-preachy or patronizing manner. That way, the audience was not only entertained by the musical, but was also educated to treat and deal with people who are HIV-positive or have AIDS with just as much respect and equality as anyone else, at the same time embracing differences in a multiracial society.

“Adam is about the dangerous time we live in, of suspicion and fear of people and things we don’t know. It is about compassion and strength, and how these qualities can turn the bleakest days into one with light, even if it is just a faint one. Adam is about finding true love, and knowing that we can be very lucky after all.” (ibid.).

This bilingual Malaysian musical *was written* by Mark Beau De Silva while lyrics and music were composed by Teng Ky-gan and Lim Chuang Yik. *Adam the Musical* is a minimalist production: few props are used; no extensive backdrops - only projections flashed to interchange scenes; no extravagant costumes; and, definitely, no special effects. Choo (2010) states that theatre does not need these to be good; it is sufficient to build a strong core for this production with good acting, excellent singing and energetic dancing.

Although it is written mainly in English, it uses a few Malay words occasionally in its lyrics and dialogue. This is to suit the musical setting in a

Malaysian community involving a Malay family. As described by Low and Hashim (2012), it would have had a different meaning altogether if the play were wholly in English. However, Choice KL (2010) in his blog, stated that as much as he understands that the transvestites were conversing in Manglish (Malaysian English which is a style of speaking English using much of Malay accent, mainly spoken between the locals, which is an important part of the show) perhaps it would be good to consider the areas where it is used, as some of the punch lines were rendered meaningless to those who have no knowledge of Malay.

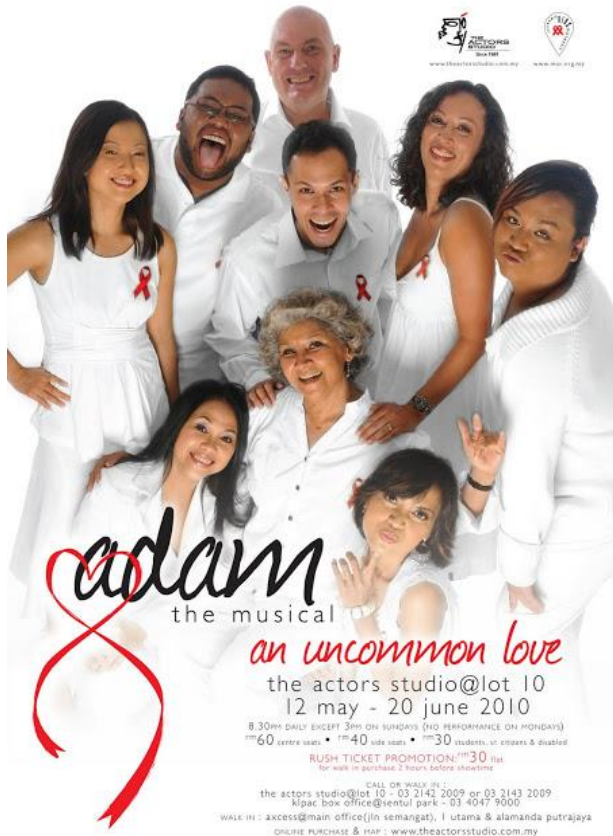


Figure 2: The Poster of 'ADAM – the Musical' Production (open source).

The cast has a mixture of Western and Malaysian names like Adam and Sylvia, which are the main leads, followed by Sylvia's friend, Elsa, the transvestites Jambu and Mangga, Adam's aunt, Aunty Noni, Mabel who is a crazy hospital patient who has died but will not leave and was nicknamed *Ke Ling A Po* and the angel Mek Mek Besar, also known as Angel Michael.

Hence, this musical introduces its cast through its opening song “I Am”. The bilingual song featured in this musical is “Bertuah” which means Lucky, sung by Elsa in a ballad style. The *syair*, a traditional Malay poem, was also introduced in this musical, which was cited by Aunty Noni when she puts Adam to sleep. This musical is mainly written in the styles of ballads, jazz and the *pop yeh yeh* with Western melodies and lyrics.

Butterfly Lovers-The Musical (2006)

Butterfly Lovers– the Musical was the first musical produced by Dama Orchestra with songs and script based on the 1963 film adaptation of *The Love Eterne* by Shaw Brothers. Set in the Eastern Jin Dynasty in Shangyu, Shaoxing City, in the third century in China, this musical is a famous Chinese folk tale which is well-known in the Chinese-speaking world. It tells of a popular Chinese legend, the tragic love story of star-crossed lovers, Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai.

In olden days of China, girls were not allowed to go outside, let alone go to school. For her to be able to do so, Yingtai disguises herself as a boy to attend college in Hangzhou. There she lives with a young male scholar, Sanbo, without revealing her true identity. Their friendship grows over the years, and she gradually falls for him. Later, Sanbo pays a visit to her family and ascertains that Yingtai is a girl. He asked for her hand in marriage but it is too late. In a society where one is determined by social status and marriage arranged by parents, Yingtai is to be betrothed to the Mandarin’s son, Ma Wencai, a man from her village. This results in Sanbo, not being able to be with Yingtai, eventually falling ill and dying. On her wedding day, Yingtai passes by Shanbo's grave to pay him respect. There, she vows to be reunited with him in the afterworld as butterflies after their deaths.

Due to the classical training of the main cast together with Dama’s musical style, the producers decided to have a transformation into the entire musical style but to retain the original script, main melody of the huangmei folksong and the lyrics (Loo and Loo 2012¹, Loo and Loo 2013). The amalgamation of the eastern and western musical style were highlighted in the bilingual *Butterfly Lovers*: from the costumes, music and set – [there] will be a fusion of East and West; There will be strong Oriental undertones but with a broad Western feel, blending modern stage techniques with period costumes. The musical also features contemporary Chinese folklore with the Huangmei opera genre. Although the melodies and lyrics were retained, Loo and Loo (2012²) state that the musical has a modern sounding arrangement

initiated songs and music. The musical was narrated by Edwin Sumun in English but the script and songs were recited and sung in Mandarin by the cast.

The production team was led by its director, Pun Kai Loon, followed by Khor Seng Chew as the music director, Loo Fung Chiat and Loo Fung Ying as the composers and arrangers, Wong Kit Yaw as the choreographer and Dominique Devorsine as the props and costume designer.



Figure 3: The Poster of 'Butterfly Lovers – the Musical' Production (open source).

Discussion

Musical theatre is not at all like other entertainment. Live theatre is real and the experience does not only involve the performers in front of an audience, it captivates the audience in ways that other media such as film and television cannot. Every performance allows the audience to decide which part of the show to watch. How the crowd responds to the show profoundly influences the performers' performance, and indirectly affect the demands of a particular performance in future. This genre has brought an exceptional blend and new style to musical theatre. The question is, are bilingual productions attracting more audiences to theatre? Is a bilingual musical such a wonderful experience to survive? Are there enough producers, directors, writers and composers to keep this genre growing in the future years?

Theatre definitely contributes to the growth of our country's economy. In making bilingual musicals appealing to many, endless effort is needed. Regardless of the response of the audience and critics to some productions, or whether they are small- or large-scale productions, local bilingual musicals seem to be increasing, such as the recent *Mimpi Artilla* (2014) at the Experimental Theatre (Panggung Eksperimen), Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Not only that, another recent production, *Xuan Zang Journey to the West* (2014), brings an educational experience to the audience about Master Xuan Zang, an important person who spread and developed Buddhist teaching in China and beyond. Up to the present, there have been more than a handful of locally composed bilingual musicals produced here in Malaysia since the last decade. The audiences have grown and changed as often as the seasons, such that more venues have also been opened to meet public demand.

The overwhelming response to the many productions gives a guarantee to producers that people will come and watch the shows. The industry cannot hide from criticism and being compared with other productions. However, these musicals have a different value of entertainment and definitely have a certain quality to be remembered by all those who have involved themselves and experienced the living art.

Conclusion

The context of the many cultures in Malaysia calls for the delivery of a better understanding of audiences who come from various backgrounds, so as to not only aim and focus on a particular group of audience but also to

make the performing arts accessible to audiences with English as a second language. Loo and Loo (2012¹) state that different languages in all the musical productions “reveal many aspects of localization, although it is equally important they embrace a western approach”. Although performed for the multiracial community of Malaysia, non-English musicals are mostly supplemented with English subtitles rather than subtitles in the national Malay language. A possible reason is because the majority of theatre-goers are non-Malay. Some questions remaining are: Is bilingualism really necessary in Malaysia? Is it a growing concept among creative artists and is it taken up ‘industrially’? Is it, therefore, useful to produce more of these bilingual musicals?

From the aspect of an observer it can be said that the concept is promising and the production of bilingual musicals should be promoted, not only for the matter of bilingualism or the possibility of making a story understandable to more people, but mainly for the purpose of overcoming language isolation and the great possibility to share musical and lyrical experiences with people who do not confess to only one language. Another point is to encourage the performers in adapting to a cultural environment that operates with more than one language. Any efforts to cultivate these ideas are welcome.

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