



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**INVESTIGATING FLOW THEORY IN THE YOUNG CHORAL ACADEMY
COMMUNITY CHOIR**

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COMMUNITY CHOIR**

By

DARLYN GOH LEE EE

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

November 2018

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DEDICATION

To my supervisor and friend, Made Hood and my father, Clement Goh for always being a source of inspiration.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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By

DARLYN GOH LEE EE

November 2018

Chairman : Made Mantle Hood, PhD
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Choral education in Malaysia remains its infancy in comparison with countries such as the USA, Australia and Germany which have established choral music education, performance context and community activities. However, Malaysia's local choral industry has experienced a relatively recent increase in activity in the past decade seen through rising numbers of amateur choirs and performances. Although choral music researchers have studied the motivations and understanding of values related to choral music participation and the function of choral activities, those types of efficacy studies have yet to be implemented among Malaysian choral groups. Apart from that, the process of knowledge transfer between choral conductors and choirs tends to occur in private music institutions rather than in public schools. One such private institution that serves as a case study for this research on choral music transmission is the Young Choral Academy (YCA) which is first academy for choral music in Malaysia. Founded in 2002 and directed by Susanna Saw and Mak Chi Hoe, the Young Kuala Lumpur Singers (YKLS) is an award-winning community choir comprising of approximately forty members formed under YCA. Having produced seventeen concert productions to date, the choir members' devotion to singing suggests that the activity provides a form of gratification that engenders dedication.

This research will investigate the efficacy of the Flow experience in a local choir setting through two principal lines of inquiry which are: 1) to investigate the transmission techniques of YCA's principal choral conductors; 2) to evaluate the reception of these techniques among choir participants. A qualitative approach based on participant-observation was carried out with the objective of questioning the role of the conductors and evaluating the experiences of singers during rehearsal. It involved video documentation of choral conducting teaching methods and reflexive feedback with teacher and participants through semi structured and open-ended interviews. Three specific categories were examined including philosophical principles, musical-interpersonal skills and technical skills. The findings indicate that the conductors' animated teaching techniques during rehearsals have a significant motivational affect

upon the singers to assist them to become engaged visually and audibly. These animated teaching techniques reveal that the intersubjectivity experience of both the conductor and singers play important roles in Chi Hoe and Susanna's physical presence which is paired with effective conductor characteristics.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**PENYIASIATAN ‘FLOW THEORY’ DALAM KOIR KOMUNITI
YOUNG CHORAL ACADEMY**

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Pendidikan koir di Malaysia masih berada di peringkat awal berbanding dengan negara seperti Amerika Syarikat, Australia, dan Jerman yang telah menubuhkan pendidikan muzik koir, konteks prestasi, dan aktiviti komuniti. Namun, industri koir tempatan di Malaysia telah mengalami sedikit peningkatan sejak sedekad yang lalu dan ia dapat dilihat dari jumlah koir dan persembahan amatir yang bertambah banyak. Walaupun penyelidik muzik koir telah mengkaji motivasi dan pemahaman nilai-nilai berkaitan dengan penyertaan muzik koir dan fungsi aktiviti koir, maklumat dari jenis-jenis kajian kebersanan tersebut masih belum dapat dipraktikkan dalam kalangan kumpulan-kumpulan koir Malaysia. Selain itu, proses perpindahan pengetahuan antara para konduktor dan ahli koir selalunya berlaku di institusi muzik swasta dan bukan di sekolah-sekolah awam. Satu institusi swasta yang dijadikan sebagai kajian kes untuk penyelidikan ini berkenaan penyampaian muzik koir adalah *Young Choral Academy* (YCA) yang merupakan akademi muzik koir yang pertama di Malaysia. Ditubuhkan pada tahun 2002 dan diketuai oleh Susanna Saw dan Mak Chi Hoe, kumpulan *Young Kuala Lumpur Singers* (YKLS) adalah koir komuniti yang telah memenangi pelbagai anugerah dan mereka terdiri daripada kira-kira empat puluh ahli yang dibentuk di bawah YCA. Setelah menghasilkan 17 konsert sehingga kini, kesetiaan ahli penyanyi koir kepada bidang nyanyian menunjukkan bahawa kegiatan aktiviti itu memberikan satu bentuk kepuasan yang menimbulkan sikap dedikasi dalam diri mereka.

Penyelidikan ini akan menilai keberkesanan ‘*Flow experience*’ dalam persembahan koir tempatan melalui dua penyiasatan utama iaitu: 1) untuk menyiasat teknik-teknik transmisi konduktor koir utama YCA; 2) untuk menilai penerimaan teknik ini dalam kalangan peserta koir. Pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan pemerhatian peserta telah dijalankan dengan objektif untuk mempersoalkan peranan konduktor dan menilai pengalaman para penyanyi semasa latihan. Ia melibatkan dokumentasi video kaedah pengajaran koir dan maklum balas refleksif dengan guru dan peserta melalui wawancara separuh berstruktur dan terbuka. Tiga kategori khusus telah ditaksir termasuk prinsip falsafah, kemahiran interpersonal muzik dan kemahiran teknikal.

Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa teknik pengajaran konduktor yang penuh dengan hidup semasa latihan memberi kesan motivasi yang signifikan kepada para penyanyi dalam membantu mereka untuk terlibat secara visual dan pendengaran. Teknik-teknik pengajaran yang rancak ini mendedahkan bahawa pengalaman 'intersubjectivity' kedua-dua konduktor dan para penyanyi memainkan peranan penting dalam kehadiran fizikal Chi Hoe dan Susanna yang seterusnya digabungkan dengan ciri-ciri keberkesanan konduktor.



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Thank you once again for being a part of my journey.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

Choral education in Malaysia is still very much in its preliminary stages of development. However, it has experienced a relatively recent increase in the past decade seen through the rising numbers of amateur choirs. Their devotion to singing suggests that the activity provides a form of gratification that engenders dedication, not only as individuals but as committed members of a social group. Although new approaches to education and performance have been brought in to Malaysia by those who have had the opportunity to study choral music abroad, the process of knowledge transfer tends to occur in private music institutions rather in public schools. One such private institution that serves as a case study for this research on choral music transmission is the Young Choral Academy.

The Young Choral Academy (YCA) is the umbrella organization of the first academy for choral music in Malaysia. Founded in 2007 by Susanna Saw, the choir school encourages the formation and management of choral ensembles and other performing groups to provide a training platform to those interested working with children and school choirs. The academy now houses 12 internal choirs and 17 external choirs. The academy is also a part of various school choirs, where choral singing is taught to both primary and secondary school students as part of that program – becoming the first school in Malaysia with a proper syllabus for choir training. Apart from managing choirs, the academy also prepare its groups for international festivals, competitions and workshops. YCA's choral experience emphasizes honing musical skills, developing interactive relationships with other singers and increasing well-being.

In this thesis, I will discuss about the musical immersion and transmission of flow in one of the Young Choral Academy's community choir, the Young Kuala Lumpur Singers. Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) defines component characteristics of individual and shared group experiences through his theory of flow, a theory that is supported by a growing body of research in music education and performance (Custodero, 2002; Freer, 2003). The state of flow fully involves the body and mind, and its enjoyment process. This psychological phenomenon can be accessed when doing a task.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Research on choral singers in the USA, Australia, Germany and other countries suggests that choral music experiences provide “valuable opportunities to develop musical skills, heighten spiritual expression, communicate with an audience, collaborate with others and achieve artistic growth” (Hylton, 1983, pg. 9).

Simultaneously, choral music researchers have continuously studied the philosophical principles, musical- interpersonal skills and technical skills among choirs related choral music participation and the function of choral activities (Durrant, 2005). Although these case studies have been undertaken in Western choral settings, the efficacy of these factors has not been examined among Malaysian choral groups. Currently, there are no significant studies that measure through qualitative in Malaysia. Measuring and assessing the impact of approaches has the potential to influence, control and guide individuals towards a coherent group dynamic and 'flow' experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1994).

Freer (2007, pg. 9) stated that Csikszentmihalyi outlined the relationship between choral music and flow theory in an address to a convention of The American Choral Directors Association in 1994. Significant factors in flow included goal-directedness among group participants, intense concentration and intrinsic concentration. The April 2005 issue of The American Music Teacher featured a report of research with adult amateur musicians that supported nearly all of the qualities associated with flow experiences (Bloom & Skutnick-Henley, 2005, pg. 71). Many researchers have examined the relationships between students and their teachers and then measured the impact of those relationships on the experience of the students during instruction, but few have involved choral music. Far fewer researchers have documented the experience of teachers during instruction.

1.3 Research Questions

Given the problem statement above, the following research questions have been formulated for this study;

- 1) Is Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow theory' (1997) drawn from European case studies applicable to Malaysian choral participants who make up principally amateur, community-based groups?
- 2) What techniques and methods do conductors employ convey philosophical principles, music-interpersonal skills and technical skills?
- 3) How do choir participant respond to goal-directedness, intense concentration and intrinsic motivation?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To investigate the applicability of Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory (1997) on Malaysian choral participants who make principally amateur, community-based groups.
- 2) To identify the techniques and methods conductors employ to convey philosophical principles, technical skills and musical-interpersonal skills.
- 3) To gauge the responses of choir participants to goal-directedness, intense concentration and intrinsic motivation.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Through identifying a gap in the research literature with regards to investigating choral music experiences, the significance of this study contributes to a body of literature on teaching and transmission in group music making. Given that choral music experiences provide valuable opportunities to expand musical skills and heighten personal expression, this study attempts to investigate these experiences through a case study of singers and conductors. Based upon these data and analysis the extent to which a choir can communicate with an audience, collaborate with others and achieve artistic growth can be obtained. This study will be a significant endeavor to amateur choirs in Malaysia which share similar rehearsal environment settings. There has been no investigation of choral music experiences in public or private groups.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The most significant limitation is this investigation can only be applied to amateur choirs rather than professional choirs. It is also only conducted within a standard amount of participants that ranges up to 60 members in an amateur choir and may produce less substantiate results. Teaching methods and approaches of the choral conductor that are not completely diverse and are confined to limited flexibility may also result in choir-specific outcomes.

1.7 Organization of Thesis

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to this research project on choral music transmission and flow in Malaysia. This includes a brief background, a statement of the problem and the scope, research questions and objectives. Filling the research gap in the significance of the study statement informs how the research will evaluate the experiences of singers and choral conductors in transmission and reception of 'flow' factors. There are limitations to this study mainly due to the methods used principally related to amateur and community based choirs rather than a study on professional groups. Chapter 2 reviews details of choral singing, flow theory, flow and musical intersubjectivity, the role of the conductor who enables flow, Durrant's (1996; 2003) model of effective choral conducting and Hektner's (2001) concept of flow. The first section introduces the attributes of choral singing and its related musical meanings followed by the next section which describes the theory of flow and its general characteristics. The third section describes the Western choral experience and the fourth section describes how a conductor contributes to the state of flow.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of the qualitative research. The study uses participant observation and discourse analysis. Chapter 4 provides an overview of flow and its relation to the musical intersubjectivity experience as well as the conductor's role. Followed by this overview are observations of video recordings of the conductors,

Mak Chi Hoe and Susanna Saw and the Young KL Singers choir during their rehearsals based on selected attributes in the three specific categories: philosophical principles, technical skills and musical-interpersonal skills. These attributes evaluates the effectiveness of the conductors in action. Chapter 5 discusses the analysis of semi structured interviews with the participants consisting of the selected singers and conductors of YKLS. The discussion of the interviews were based on goal-directedness, intense concentration and intrinsic motivation. In conclusion, Chapter 6 provides an overview of the chapters, while summarizing the main points and the conclusion to the study. It also gives recommendations for future inquiries and studies.



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BIODATA OF STUDENT

Darlyn Goh completed her bachelor's degree in music at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) majoring in classical vocal performance. During this time she played the cello in the UPM Symphony Orchestra. Darlyn obtained her Performer's Certificate in piano from Trinity Guildhall in 2005. She started vocal lessons in 2007 and currently under the tutelage of soprano, Ho Chi Mei. Darlyn performed in various public and private performances as a soloist as well as a cellist. An avid lover of choral music as well as collaborative piano, she has accompanied soloists, choirs as well as instrumentalists in showcases, wedding gigs, exams and competitions.

Darlyn was part of a female vocal ensemble, The Opera Bridesmaids under the Young Choral Academy from 2014 to 2016. Darlyn is currently a member of the Kuala Lumpur City Opera Chorus and has performed in operas such as Donizetti's L'elisir Damore (2014) and La Fille du Regiment (2017) and Puccini's La Boheme (2016). Together with the chorus, she has also performed Mozart's The Magic Flute (2017) and Rachmaninoff's The Bells (2018) with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. Besides that, Darlyn participated in the Interkultur's 'Sing'N'Joy China 2015 Choir Festival' in Shunde, China and Lanna International Choir Competition 2016 in Chiang Mai, Thailand and the 7th Bali International Choral Festival, Indonesia as a member of the Young Choral Academy Teacher's Ensemble.

Apart from performing, Darlyn teaches voice, piano and choir and has taught in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). Her interest in education expands in seeking out independent projects with aims to cultivate motivation amongst young people. Currently, Darlyn is pursuing her Master's degree in UPM in the field of choral music education.



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