Technical Specification of Traditional Music Ensemble Recordings as Means of Preservation

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Abstract

The audio engineers are tool to preservation who can implement the affordable technologies and technical process to distribute the audio data so it will accessible to future generation. Thus the audio engineers role not only to perform recording session but create metadata for archiving and preservation for future needs.

At present, traditional music ensemble recordings, contains cultural evidence in a form of audio or visual whom are at risk such as obsolete replay devices, deterioration of the binders, CD erodes or even when natural disaster (floods/tsunami/landslides) happens to the materials. No information with regards on how to migrate these recordings to a stable condition. Related literature explain that a format which can be retrieve in an apparatus which does not alter its originality. Bradley, K. ed. (2009) has formalized a guideline of production and preservation of digital audio objects. Meanwhile Walters’s et.al (2009) has also discussed the importance of distributed digital preservation, technical adaptability, economics, and benefits of using cooperative networks in preserving the vast array of at-risk digital content produced. The preservation of information becomes a reference for other social scientist such as sound engineer, archivist, field recordist, musician’s future use.

Keywords: preservation, recordings, technical specification, traditional music ensemble

Introduction

Technical procedure on sound recording and mixing of traditional music ensemble in Malaysia are scarce. Content as well as the historical part of it were given much attention by researcher. But details on the technical specification of audio recording and reproduction of these early recording is unavailable, and it is to be regarded as not important at all to most people. For example, microphone, mixer, recording machine, audio formats, materials, tape speed and types was not available. No suggestion, specification or information with regards on how to migrate these recordings to a stable condition.

Hence, technical methods of popular music have been adapted into traditional music ensemble in Malaysia for recording thus creating imitative in originality of sound. This research will serve as preservation of information that includes technical specification of audio recording and reproduction as metadata, as well as starting point for other musical recordings of traditional instruments to preserve their technical specification as means of archiving.

Making it useless as a guide or reference for other social scientists such as sound engineers, archivists, field recordists, musicians as to no proper information found in these recording that can benefit to these scientists for future use.

“Audio engineers are urged to take community responsibility with help of the digitisation technology, to preserve our heritage musical and folk songs to be presented to the future generation. Thus the audio engineers also can develop metadata standards for archiving.”

(Hart, 2001).
Objectives

1. To document, describe and conduct technical audio studies of traditional music ensemble recordings in Malaysia.
2. To derive sound views that support a technical specifications of metadata as means of preservation in an effective way to prevent losses of key elements in sound.
3. To assemble recorded traditional music ensemble repertoire and its technical specification descriptions into an archive characterized by technical comment for recommended microphones approach for reproduction and preservation.
4. The metadata would help sound engineer, archivist, field recordist, community member, and the musicians in the field of preservation and reproduction of sound creation for future generation.

Significance of the Study

This study serves as a pioneering approach to recognition, perception and construction of technical specification of audio recording and reproduction information in traditional music ensemble as metadata for preservation. Data collected leading to knowledge on factors of technical information processes within the object itself (the instruments), the way of functioning (process of sound production from diverse perspectives) and as sound culture within a community allows for enrichment of a theory based on facts. This study will document the sound of Gamelan Melayu which is regarded as the sonic transmission of high intangible heritage values in Malaysia.

Limitations of the Study

1. The research is limited within Malay gamelan practice only, however data or source from other regions will be used as references and guidelines to achieve the research target and aim.
2. The environment of the setup (Acoustic, Studio, Live Room, Close Spaces or Open Spaces).
3. Availability of microphones types and patterns intended to use during the recording process period. Recording console that could do multi-track recordings simultaneously that could take dynamic peaks and distortions.

Literature Review

It is important to understand why the archiving and preservation is important, the literature is looking at what other people is doing and how much that can become a sufficient as metadata for preservation.

1. John Roberts has criticized the idea of archival theory that cannot be developed for what a useful impression. He notes that archival theory is "save what is historically valuable-there." His comment on the archives, 'it is the content to be exploited or to be the content of information in describing a context'. (Roberts, 1987)

2. John Roberts argues that archival literature is and should be solely concerned with matters of technique and procedure. In the course of his arguments, he presents the kernel of his own theory. Because the work of the archivists is all about preserving sources for the study of the past, the market for sources determined by past research use of archives drives the processes of acquisition and selection. He sees archives as consisting of either content to be exploited or context to be elucidated as an aid to understanding the meaning of content. (Roberts, 1990)

From the perspective and the requirements of an archivist, an archive is not the source of historical materials but…
a. A form of the document or archival record.
b. Of archives discipline, i.e. building knowledge of archival documents.
c. A scheme or procedure to protect it.
d. Creating a protocol or suggestions.

Therefore, the big theory is that certain documents are created to record facts, things, actions of all kinds of references so that they will last long for future use.

- Raffles stated in an analogy of a record,
  i. The events are not seen as produced by the record, but the record is seen as produced by the events.
  ii. The events can occur and remain unrecorded, but the record cannot occur without the events. This statement well reveals two important points. Events or actions generate records, but not all actions generate records. Only action required record generation, for further reference. (Raffel, 1979)

- Schüller (1991) discussed the ethical consideration about the procedures involved in preservation, restoration, and rerecording of audio documentation. Meanwhile Bradley (2008) suggested that the restoration of physical recording material can alter the physical characteristic of audio carrier while improving the ability of reproduction. Obviously the recording engineer’s role is not only in conducting session procedures but also in determining the quality of preservation.

- Preservations involve historical value, its content, as well as archiving these materials. A format which can be retrieved in an apparatus does not alter its originality. Bradley, K. ed. (2009) has formalized a guideline of production and preservation of digital audio objects. Meanwhile Walters et.al.(2009) has also discussed the importance of distributed digital preservation, technical adaptability, economics, and benefits of using cooperative networks in preserving the vast array of at-risk digital content produced.

- On the other aspect of preservation which involves is the sound produce and reinforce by the audio systems in a concert. As the present practice in sound reinforcement, audio system operators will make do with “one size fits all” approach, and that is as the popular music setting in a cultural event which merely touch on how the acoustical aspect and reinforcing the sound of local strings instruments. Chan and Faudzi (2010) discussed that concerns on sound reinforcement which are directed merely on its availability, mobility, a set up that to ensure that it works, but rarely on what the sound quality is like after reinforcement.

**Methodology**

Qualitative methods will be used to carry out the researcher’s intention for the data collection. The main objective of a qualitative study is to describe the variation in a phenomena, situation or attitude. In the research project the qualitative variable were measured on nominal scale, enables classification of individuals, objects or response based on a common and shared property of characteristic that represent the topic of the research project. Inductive method will used for generating new data through technical audio recording and re-production. Certain research strategies methods will be used like observation, interviews, focus group, experiments, data analysis and archives study, and mixed methods of any combination here.
Figure 1.

Expected Outcome

The main objective of this research is to contribute to ‘Sound engineering of Gamelan Melayu recordings as means of preservation’ in a form of:-

1. Documentation (Photos / Diagrams and Schematics of the sound production and reproduction).
2. High-standard audio archiving of the traditional music sound culture in Malaysia.
3. Serving as guideline, reference, suggestion, protocol and recommendation for traditional music instruments approach regardless of single instrument or as an ensemble, to support the preservation in an effective way.

The participation of technical members like audio/sound engineers are crucial in development of the metadata for preservation and archiving purpose, as their expertise in the recording or mixing and mastering will enhance the outcome and as well documenting their approach towards the purpose.

Examples of Metadata

Figure 2.
References


Chan, Cheong Jan and Ahmad Faudzi Musib.(2010). Timbre change of sape and the use of sound reinforcement device. Paper presented in the International Music Conference of University Malaya 19-20 October 2010. Dewan Tunku Cancellor, Universiti Malaya, Petaling Jaya


Biography

Muralitheran or better known in the music industry as MuraleeMS@astacfun is an AIR Awards & AIM award winning sound engineer turned producer who has numerous years of comprehensive experience leading companies from start-up, through revitalization, to turnaround, and accelerated growth - to almost the same in years of experience in the field, from live sound to studio recordings and post production. He has both recorded and engineered for several big name artiste such as Altimet, SleeQ, Reshmonu, Joe Flizzow, Aman Ra (Kraft), Sheila Majid, Ning Baizura and Ruffedge etc. Aside from music, he has also engineered for numerous TV commercials, documentaries and films. His cores of expertise are in Live Sound, Location Recording, Recording, Mixing, Mastering and Audio Pre/Post Production. Currently pursuing his Master in Science Music at Universiti Putra Malaysia to fulfil his dreams.