

## From Forest to a Song; a Process of Extracting the Soundscape of Nature into Art Song

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**ABSTRACT:** The art song is a genre performed mainly by piano and voice. This paper is about the process and the inspirational factor of creating art songs based on the Malaysian urban soundscape. The composer talks about the understanding of the sound and the process of recording certain inspirational sounds, transcribing them, and creating them into a motive. The soundscape chosen by the composer is also a contributing factor to the whole structure and meaning of the song. These motives that have been interpreted based on the recordings are then expanded and made into an art song. There are a few important features that triggered the interest of the composer upon choosing a certain sound as the main inspiration. Besides that, the paper also analyzes how these sounds affected the composer's understanding of music and its surrounding. In order to write art songs inspired by the urban soundscape in Malaysia, there will be recording sounds of the surroundings and events that the composer feel is appropriate. The composer also includes the interpretation of sound from certain buildings or atmosphere. From these recordings or interpretations, notes are taken out to create a new motive or a short melody from it. The paper includes the process of creating the motives from the recording into a song.

**Keywords:** Art Songs, Composition, Urbanization, Deforestation

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## INTRODUCTION

Numerous research has investigated the possible benefits of acoustic nature in assisting individuals in recovering from mental fatigue, low mood, and daily stress. In recent years, there has been much research and discussion regarding the healing capacity of landscapes, especially those abundant with natural elements. Utilising media such as photographs, moving images, and presentation slides, these studies usually focus on the visual and spatial components of environmental interaction. Requests have been made for numerous studies, including those concentrating on non-visual features of healthy environments, such as sound, smell, and touch. This amount of work is essential to keep the study area accessible to individuals and maximise the ways virtual or augmented reality environments can be presented.

Although research on the impact of soundscape is still in its infancy, nature noises and natural soundscapes are becoming recognised as essential ecosystem services that can aid in psychological healing and overall well-being (Ratcliffe, 2021). Soundscape refers to humans' aural environment perceived, interpreted, and experienced. Positive soundscapes (which may also include natural sounds) are connected with increased health and well-being, including stress recovery, according to a study by Aletta et al. (2018). Exposure to natural noises and soundscapes has been demonstrated to have positive psychological impacts, particularly in terms of alleviating emotions of stress and exhaustion. This is because therapeutic environments usually incorporate natural elements. This paper explore the soundscape of the forest situated in the urban area. The idea of recording the soundscape in this area is to preserve the sound and nature. This is since many forests or nature areas in the urban or city are being taken down in the name of urbanisation and development. This research is done as part of developing the concept of 'Urban for art'.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Urban for art is an artistic model and the idea is reflected or taken from the soundscape of urbanization and deforestation in the nature of the urban area. Urbanforart is a concept that is based on the numerical calculation, imitation and intuitive expression. The word represents the three main idea combined and made into a concept of creating something new. Even though the word is presented from the inspirations of these three (3 ) aspects, urbanization, deforestation and art song, but the concept is bigger than that. If one looked at the concept from a bird's eye view, it is a combination of inspirations that comes from urbanization, arts and deforestation. Under the concept of Urban for art, the recording and the analysis of the soundscape in the forest area is needed (Ouzounian et al., 2017; Tajuddin & Ismail, 2022). Hence, this paper specifically focuses on the recording process in order to develop the data for the concept.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to compose the art songs, the first step as a composer is to be in the scene (Tajuddin et al., 2021). The scene has to be in a place where nature and deforestation or urbanisation takes place. From these places, I am required to record the soundscape or interpret the environment. These are the main ideas and the inspirations comes from. If the inspiration comes from the recordings of the soundscape, it is then analysed in a few ways. The analysis of the recording could be divided into a few processes; (1) it is transcribed based on the calculation of the numbers heard (if the pitch is repetitive or the same), (2) it is transcribed based on the melody, (3) it is transcribed based on the rhythm. However, if the inspirations comes from the interpretation of a scene or a place (visual), the analysis is done based on my own interpretation. The interpretation could be divided into a few processes; 1. It is interpreted based on the foundation of the place. 2. It is interpreted based on the feelings or atmosphere of the place 3. It is interpreted based on the history of the place. From these transcriptions and visual interpretations, it is then analysed and became the main musical ideas. From the musical ideas, it is made into a motive. The motive becomes the theme or the melody and later into an art song.

“A motif is a short musical idea – shorter than a phrase – that occurs often in a piece of music. A short melodic idea may also be called a motif, a motive, a cell, or a figure. These small pieces of melody will appear again and again in a piece of music, sometimes exactly the same and sometimes changed.” Lumen, [3] *Music appreciation*.

There are times that the outcome of the composition or song may sometime come from the intuition and from my background as a pop composer and a modern pianist.

For the composition, data were collected based on recording of the soundscape. In order to collect the data for these songs, we need to be in the nature. These data were divided into 2. The first data was collected based on the soundscape. The second data was collected based on the visual interpretation. The soundscape data was recorded using a handphone, Huawei p9. The sound is a guide to get the basic idea and feel of the environment. The visual interpretation is more of an experience based. This data (visual) is not recorded by any device. But, we do have a certain picture of certain places to remind me of the feeling and the environment felt while being at the place. These soundscapes are then being extracted into a melody, phrases or numerical scale, while the pictures are used as a reminder of the feelings felt at the time.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are 18 recordings taken and analyzed and transcribed. The analysis of the recording requires me to lay it out in a few ways. There are certain recordings that sounds very repetitive, has the same exact pitch. The only difference in the recording sound is the phrases and the number of times (the birds chirping, etc.) Below are the data collected from the recordings.

Table 1: The soundscape recording list

Recording	Location	Soundscape	Duration of recording	Date	The musical idea extracted from the data
1	Bukit Cerakah	The sound of crickets, birds and monkeys	23 seconds	31/12/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bird motive</li> <li>• The cricket accompaniment</li> </ul>
2	Bukit Cerakah	The sound of crickets (loud)	6 seconds	21/1/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cricket motive</li> </ul>
3	Bukit Cerakah	The sound of the monkeys	42 seconds	24/2/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The monkey motive</li> </ul>
4	Bukit Cerakah	The sound of monkeys	43 seconds	24/3/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The monkey motive</li> </ul>
5	Tasik Cermin	The sound of the birds	32 seconds	3/3/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The imitation of the bird</li> </ul>
6	Tasik Cermin	Sound of the birds & cars	1 min 22 seconds	9/4/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imitation of the bird</li> </ul>
7	Bukit Gasing	Sound of the river	34 seconds	25/6/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The imitation of the water</li> </ul>
8	KLCC	Soundscape of KLCC	37 seconds	17/12/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interpretation of KLCC</li> </ul>
9	Bukit Saga	Sound of crickets and monkeys	31 seconds	19/12/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The numerical scale</li> </ul>
10	Bukit Saga	Sound of crickets (loud) and birds	30 seconds	19/12/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The crickets motive</li> </ul>
11	Bukit Saga	Sound of crickets and ambulance	18 seconds	19/12/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The imitation sound of ambulance</li> </ul>
12	Bukit Saga	The sound of ambulance	14 seconds	19/12/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sound of ambulance</li> </ul>
13	Bukit Wawasan	The sound of Waterfall	27 seconds	11/1/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The motive of a water</li> </ul>
14	Bukit Wawasan	The sound of crickets and birds	30 seconds	16/1/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The numerical scale</li> </ul>
15	Bukit Wawasan	The sound of crickets	35 seconds	16/1/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The motive of the crickets</li> </ul>
16	Bukit Wawasan	The sound of the river	21 seconds	16/1/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The motive of water</li> </ul>

17	Bukit Gasing	The sound of the crickets and the birds	16 seconds	28/6/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The motive of the birds</li> </ul>
18	Bukit Gasing	The sound of the crickets	33 seconds	2/9/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The motive of the crickets</li> </ul>

*Recording 1:* The repetitive sound of the bird. In the background, there's a sound of crickets. There's also a sound of the bird tweeting every now and then. The bird motive is extracted based on the repetitive sound of the bird. The cricket accompaniment sound is extracted from the background sound of the crickets as recorded in the recording 1.

*Recording 2:* This is mainly a prominent sound of the cricket. From this recording, I extracted the cricket motive as recorded in the recording 2.

*Recording 3:* This a recording of the monkeys, trying to woo their partner or other contemporaries. There are also some sound of crickets in the background and birds recorded. From this recording, I have extracted the monkey motive.

*Recording 4:* This is another recording of the monkeys, still trying to woo each other. The sound is similar to recording 3, but this time it is more aggressive and the sound of crickets are louder in this recording too. The monkey motive is extracted from the consideration of recording 3 and recording 4.

*Recording 5:* This recording is the sound of a bird. The bird sounded like it is singing. The bird were singing only 4 notes, but in time, the note goes one pitch higher and faster every time. From this recording, I transcribed the exact 4 notes that the birds sang. The sound of this bird is transcribed and categorized as the imitation of a bird.

*Recording 6:* This recording is the sound of 2 birds interacting to each other. There are also a sound of the car passing in the background. From this sound, I transcribed and put it as the imitation of a bird.

*Recording 7:* This recording is taken from the soundscape of a river. This sound is basically a sound of waterfall which is refreshing and calming. From this recording, I have taken out the imitation sound of the water.

*Recording 8:* This recording is taken inside KLCC. This recording is done for e to capture the atmosphere of KLCC from the soundscape perspective. As the KLCC is always the view seen for any nature area in the city.

*Recording 9:* This is a recording sound of crickets mostly with the background sound of monkeys. From this recording, I have extracted the sound of the crickets

and laid it out into numbering system and a scale. This scale is called the numerical scale.

*Recording 10:* This is a recording sound of crickets that are very loud. Then, after a while, the crickets went silent and the sound of the birds becomes prominent. From this recording, I have extracted the crickets sound put it out as the cricket motive.

*Recording 11:* This a recording of the sound of the crickets and ambulance in the background. The ambulance sound is heard mainly because the location of the jungle is close to the hospital. From this recording, I have taken out the sound of ambulance and label is as the imitation sound of the ambulance.

*Recording 12:* This is the continuation of the previous recording (recording 11). It has the similar sound of the ambulance but this time it is louder and clear that the crickets sound a little faint in the background. From this recording, I have also taken out the sound as the imitation sound of the ambulance.

*Recording 13:* This is a recording sound of the waterfall. It is louder compared to the sound of the river, as the waters are hitting more and the sound of water splash are harsh too. From this recording, I have extracted the sound of water as the motive of a water.

*Recording 14:* This a recording sound of birds and crickets in the jungle. From this recording, I have taken out and calculated the number of times the birds and crickets and laid it out in numbers. From the numbers, I have come up with a numerical scale.

*Recording 15:* This is a recording of a crickets and some other insect in the background. The sound of the crickets is very prominent in this recording. From this recording, I have extracted the motive of the crickets.

*Recording 16:* This is a recording sound of a water. The sound is very calming and relaxing. From this recording, I have extracted the motive of a water.

*Recording 17:* This recording has a repetitive sound of the bird, almost nonstop without a pause. In the background, there are some sound of the crickets. From this recording, I have extracted the motive of the bird.

*Recording 18:* This recording is mainly the sound of the crickets almost talking to each other or maybe trying to reach out for their contemporaries. There are some sound of the birds in the background, but not prominent. From this recording, I have extracted the motive of the crickets.

## **CONCLUSION**

This entire article is the process of extracting the soundscape of nature into melody. The melody is mainly inspired from the sound of nature. The results

suggest the extraction of sound to a melody or a motive becomes the main melody of art songs. Melody in the art songs could be interpreted through body movement and used as a medium of education (Ismail et al., 2021; Anuar & Ismail, 2021). Findings in the present study could assist in preserving the sound of nature in the urban area. This recording of the sound of nature becomes the basis of the composition concept that we have created which is Urbanforart. Urbanization and deforestation are both natural phenomena that become the direction of the concept while Art Song is the artistic platform to channel and express this phenomenon. The songs produced by this composition concept may be performed using online platforms as a reflection to the pandemic era that impacted the performance, the creation, the emotion and the concept of this composition. The composer needs to be able to go through the experience of being in the nature in the urban area to be able to come up with a motive and to develop the motives or calculation into a song.

#### **FURTHER RESEARCH**

The concept of Urbanforart may be extended into other phenomena such as natural disasters like flood or any other things that can be experienced and recorded based on sound and imagery or physically. We suggest experimental soundscape research to be conducted in future agenda.

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