

CLASSICAL MUSIC COMPOSERS EARN THEIR LIVING DOING MOST OTHER THINGS EXCEPT WRITING MUSIC, SAYS LECTURER

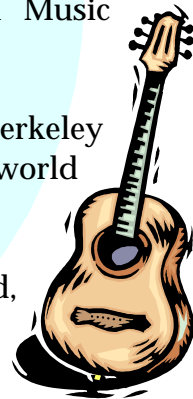
By Stephen Ng

Music composers, especially from the classical music genre, either make it big or they don't make it at all.

"This is largely due to the forces of the consumer market," said university lecturer, Juan Pablo de Zubiria, who specializes in Classical Music Composition.

Juan, who studied Classical Composition and Film Scoring at Berkeley College of Music in Boston, said it has to do with the way the world perceives Classical Music.

"I am not sure how this came about, but even from my childhood, people have always had this misconception that classical music is only for old people," he said. "This is largely the result of how some multinational labels have marketed their music."



While labels have raked in millions of dollars from marketing Pop Music, he said, music composers and artistes are making pittance out of the money their albums fetched.

“Except for a few big names, they are no richer than when they started. Most of the money goes to the labels and the producers, but the musicians, especially the composers, only get less than one per cent of the earnings,” he said.

He bemoans the fate of his fellow Classical Music composers: “That’s the way it is with this materialistic world. While people like movie score composer, John Williams earns around US\$500,000 for one movie score, most composers end up writing jingles for television commercials or even ring tones for mobile phones. Others, like me, end up teaching Music and writing Music as a hobby.”

This is reflected in the way students choose their subjects. “Of the 180 Music students we have at our School of Music, only three are doing Classical Music Composition as a minor,” he said. “They know that they cannot really earn a big living out of Classical Music Composition.”

Juan, who hails from Colombia, is currently lecturing at University College Sedaya International (UCSI), where he teaches World Music, Classical Music theory, Classical Music Ear Training, Contemporary Music Theory and Contemporary Music Ear Training.

He is hopeful that the Music scene in the country will change, especially since there is a lot more emphasis on Music education in the country. “I was pleased to read in the papers recently that the Prime Minister of Malaysia wanted Music education to begin at primary school level,” he said. “This will further enhance the appreciation of music amongst our young people.”



“While there is money to be made in both Jazz and Pop Music, Classical Music Composition is a lot more complex than writing a Pop song. It is much more rewarding.”

Currently, Juan Pablo de Zubiria is working on his compositions as well as playing in the JJ Jazz Septet. He also performs with Indian and Malay musicians in an experimental world-music band, and has recently been invited to compose songs for a cultural Chinese band.

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