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Chee-Hoo Lum  
Siew Ling Chua

**Teaching Living Legends**  
Professional Development  
and Lessons for the  
21st Century  
Music Educator



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# Teaching Living Legends

Professional Development and Lessons  
for the 21st Century Music Educator

 Springer

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ISSN 2211-1921  
SpringerBriefs in Education  
ISBN 978-981-10-1481-9  
DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-1482-6

ISSN 2211-193X (electronic)  
ISBN 978-981-10-1482-6 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016942034

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This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Springer Science+Business Media Singapore Pte Ltd.

# Acknowledgements

This book is the outcome of a research study funded by the Academies Fund, Ministry of Education in 2014–2015.

- *Teaching Living Legends* is a term coined by our colleague Mrs. Joanne Yeo-Tan from the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR), and it was first used as a title of the professional development programme implemented at STAR. We thank Joanne for assisting in the research as a collaborator and for her invaluable input to the initial drafts of this book.
- We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Rebecca Chew, Principal of Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR), Ministry of Education, for her support and encouragement in this research project.
- We wish to express our sincere gratitude to Professor Graham F Welch (Chair of Music Education, UCL Institute of Education, London) and Professor Tong Soon Lee (Music Department Head, The Chinese University of Hong Kong) for their valuable insights and contribution in writing the epilogue
- We also express our gratitude to the rest of our colleagues at STAR, Arts Education Branch (Ministry of Education), National Institute of Education (NIE), National Arts Council, National Library Board, teachers, and arts practitioners in Singapore who have contributed in one way or another to the development of *Teaching Living Legends* programme which is the subject of this research study.

At the point of print, STAR is in discussion with National Library Board to upload some of the video resources from the *Teaching Living Legends* project onto their website to make them accessible to the public. Readers may refer to the websites of the National Library Board ([www.nlb.gov.sg](http://www.nlb.gov.sg)) or the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts ([www.star.moe.edu.sg](http://www.star.moe.edu.sg)) for updates.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The purpose of this book was to put together a research narrative of the development and delivery of a professional development programme for music teachers, with the objective of enhancing their teaching of different music traditions in Singapore for the General Music Classroom. It also discusses the key dilemmas and tensions in designing such a programme, as well as the key experiences and learning that participants and facilitators gathered in the process. This programme, titled *Teaching Living Legends*, which is comprised of workshops and supporting teaching resources for in-service music teachers in Singapore schools, was developed and implemented by the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts (STAR), Ministry of Education (Singapore), in collaboration with artists, practitioners, teachers, and organisations. From a wider perspective, the narrative also intends to further literature discourse on ethnomusicological perspectives in music education and professional development of music teachers in the context of the 21st Century music classrooms.

A priority for STAR, ever since its inception as an academy dedicated to the professional development of in-service music teachers, has been to grow teachers' confidence and competence in teaching different music traditions in Singapore with appropriate pedagogies for the 21st Century General Music Classroom. Many music teachers in Singapore have experiences and training in the Western classical tradition and may have less exposure and understanding of the myriad of music traditions in Singapore. STAR has observed that workshops on other music traditions, apart from Western classical music, were popular and tended to be over-subscribed. It was in this context that teacher educators at STAR mooted the idea for the *Teaching Living Legends* programme.

The concept of "living" refers to the traditions that are still existing in Singapore, and "legends" relate to the stories and narratives behind these musics that have made them enduring and given them their identity. Hence, *Teaching Living Legends* was conceived as a professional development curriculum, supported by customised teaching resources developed by the team, to guide teachers in making

existing music traditions in Singapore relevant to students via the stories and narratives behind these musics.

*Teaching Living Legends*' main aims were that of enhancing music teachers' understanding of living music traditions in Singapore and investigating how these can be taught in the 21st Century General Music Classroom at both primary and secondary school levels, for students aged between seven and fourteen. It also sets out to support the national syllabus objectives of deepening students' knowledge of music traditions, where the music has lasting impact on students' understanding, thus becoming an integral part of our developing social and cultural heritage. At the same time, the programme seeks to be informed by larger discussions on cultural diversity, ethnomusicological perspectives, and pedagogy for the General Music Classroom.

The following sections in this chapter will ground the context of *Teaching Living Legends* by introducing the socio-historical and cultural background, and considerations from research literature, on ethnomusicological and adult-learning perspectives.

## Setting the Context: Identity and Music in Singapore

At the point of independence in 1965, Singapore was made up of a majority of Chinese, Malay, and Indian immigrants due largely to historical and political factors.<sup>1</sup> With Singapore's multi-ethnic make-up, scholars have observed dilemmas and difficulties with establishing a national identity. Vadaketh (2012, 2014) viewed that:

It [Singapore] has tried to position itself as the Asian jack of all trades, a developed world hodgepodge that is both all of Asia and yet not Asia at all. While this may work economically, from an identity standpoint, contradictions abound. (Vadaketh, 2014, p. 65)

Kuo Pao Kun, the late Singapore playwright, theatre director, and arts activist, who spoke about the revival of traditional culture and arts, articulated one of the key contradictions in defining a Singaporean identity:

This is much more difficult for peoples who have long been dislodged from their mother culture. The problem is many times aggravated when the uprooting had been radical and prolonged, especially when the totally uprooted people have been taken away from their ancestral land, brought to a multi-ethnic environment... In Modern Singapore...the entire nation had been built through such a process of displacement. Even to the extent of totally giving up their mother languages, adopting the ex-colonial English for official business as well as daily living... While the supremacy of English seemingly helped much in

---

<sup>1</sup>By the end of the 19th Century, Singapore was recognised as one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Asia, attracting migrants and merchants from China, the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula and the Middle East due to its vibrant commercial success as a trading post because of its geographical positioning (Your Singapore, 2013).