

Mapping the Sonic Spectrum of Traditional Music and Instruments Used in Malaysian Kavadi Rituals

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Abstract : Music is as old as mankind and rituals using music such as Kavadi have been associated with social, cultural, and spiritual practices in many traditional and modern societies. Recent literature has provided scientific evidence that music affects psychological and physical changes through stimulation of brainwave. Despite such advances, the scientific study of the sonic qualities peculiar to traditional instruments and how it impacts on ritualistic activities is still lacking. This study addresses one such phenomenon. Devotees in Kavadi rituals are known to be in a state of trance state and do not experience pain nor suffer injury despite the hundreds of needles pierced through their skins. Although scientists have sought to understand how this is possible, lesser is known about the music that is used to prepare devotees to enter into the trance state. This study fills this gap of knowledge by providing scientific evidence through the identification and mapping of the sonic spectrum or sound fingerprint of the instruments and the repertoire used in these ritualistic forms in their ethnographic environment and in audio-controlled situations. The objectives are to identify and categorize the different types of traditional music used in Kavadi rituals; to record, transcribe and digitally score the musical repertoire used in the oral tradition of Kavadi rituals; to map the sonic spectrum of ritual music using spectromography and advanced music analytical software a mixed methodology will be used. This comprises ethnographic field studies using interviews, participant observation, audio-video recordings and audio-methodology using spectromography and advanced audio-technology for sonic mapping and the transcription of audio recordings into digital scores.

Keywords : sonic, traditional, ritual, Kavadi, music

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