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Inspiring a Regenerative Approach to Music for a Post-Pandemic World and Sustainable Future

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Abstract

Whilst University of Macao commemorates its founding under its present title some 40-years ago, Colégio Memorial Moon Chun, began its life less than a decade ago, at the start of 2013 academic year when it moved onto a newly-acquired Chinese island of Hengqin, joined by the rest of the University some twelve months later.

The island campus, a multibillion construction now all but complete, was handed over at midnight July 20 2013, as officials from Guangdong border control withdrew from the north gate of the University's campus, a gesture for which there is 'no recent precedence', New York Times, 17 July 2013.

Fast forward to first semesters 2019-20 and 2020-21, and the College saw a veritable stream of master classes and music workshops, resulting in residencies by Clare College Choir Cambridge; Austrian jazz ensemble, Michaela Rabitsch & Robert Pawlik Quartet; and Hungarian concert pianist: Endre Hegedűs.

Together with Stradivari Piano Trio, the semester was capped by a Macao SAR initiative to bring the Vienna Philharmonic to Macao. Envisioned as alfresco performances in the University's Library piazza, forecasts of severe tropical winds conspired against a wide, open-space locale and consecutive performances were moved to Centro Cultural. That the residency was conceived not by flagship cultural industrialists but as a collaborative venture says much about the organic nature of association between town and gown.

Formal table with Lusophone music performed by undergrads contributed to a rich cultural environment with College ensemble; Tetrad - comprising fellows and young musicians at Salon Clube Militar - a venue which provided formative performance experience. 2020 semester culminated with College freshmen Henry Che's professional début with Macao Orchestra, as soloist in Mozart's Violin Concerto No 3 in G. That there were visits by Shanghai Conservatory and Tsinghua University during the same period says much about the College's cultural standing.

How has such a journey been possible in a time of neo-liberal capitalism, aggravated socio-political tension and radical violence, when curricular content is driven by employment relevance and hyper-competition; a period of pandemic and economic crisis deeply affecting Gen Z and impacting on music education across the world? One in which universities reeling from aftershock have migrated towards blended learning and intensive campus testing, yet where all-too-scant time has been given to cultural EQ, increasing transformative learning modalities, acknowledging the sensory, regenerative value of arts and music as part and parcel of wrap-around pastoral, mental-health and restorative well-being.