

# Emerging Global Christian Worship

Student Sooi Ling Tan talks about her journey from the Malaysian interior to Pasadena to explore how worship bridges cultural boundaries.

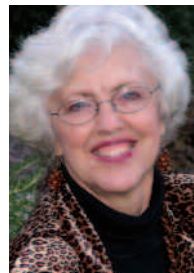
I was saved in a Brethren Church while in high school and went on to attend a prestigious university in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. While there, God challenged me to radically live for him. I dedicated my life to full-time ministry and heeded the call to go to Sarawak in East Malaysia for missions.

Ministry was not what my family had in mind for me. They definitely did *not* think that it was the best use of my university education. Malaysia was then a young and emerging country, with lots of opportunities, and expectations were high that we children would do well. My sister, for example, graduated and went on to become one of the country's foremost ethnomusicologists. So that was interesting.

Nevertheless, I went to Sarawak to work with a team planting churches among different indigenous groups. Many of these places were in remote areas where there were no churches. These people groups were steeped in animism, often with no reference to Christ or the cross. In our experience, worship was instrumental in breaking barriers down because people were drawn to the presence of God. During worship services, we would often experience God moving in a sovereign way. One man told me, "I was very against you and this foreign religion—'they shouldn't be here!' I thought." Whenever he would pass by—usually drunk—he would throw stones. The singing attracted him, however, and

once he decided to sit outside the door and listen. Eventually, he became a Christian. Now he is a leader.

However, even a great move of the Spirit isn't enough to sustain people when the winds of other thoughts and beliefs blow through. As time passed, we realized the need to train local leaders. I did the best I could to formulate a training program, but I knew I was severely handicapped in that I had no prior formal theological or missiological training. I definitely needed a deeper grounding in the word and praxis.



*"Sooi Ling's work in emerging global Christian worship is helping to identify cultural dynamics that foster transformative worship and witness to God's glory."—Roberta King*

I began to search for a place where I could put theology and praxis together and, miraculously, God opened the door for me to study at Fuller in 2001. It is interesting that I had always harbored a desire to do a PhD, a dream that I

## Worship and Witness that Go Cross-cultural

By Roberta R. King

Around the world a new song is rising in the hearts of believers as they encounter Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We live in an age of explosive growth of the Christian church in the Southern Hemisphere and of changing ways of doing church in the West. Such developments afford new opportunities to reconsider the role of music in worship, witness, spiritual formation, and the life of local churches in their diverse contexts. As believers interact with one another in new and overlapping

spheres, through travel, studies, or the Internet, there is much we can learn about God, his purposes, and his expanding Kingdom that embraces all the peoples of the earth. What does this mean for the worshipping church worldwide?

Fuller's School of Intercultural Studies' new concentration in "Global Christian Worship" provides opportunities to study, explore, research, and train in effective cross-cultural ministry and mission through music. Ethnomusicology, a field



had given up when God called me to ministry in Sarawak. It is amazing how he brings you around and grants you your heart's desire—I just keep laughing at it sometimes! There I was, working in one of the remotest areas of the world, and the next thing you know, I am in Pasadena, studying theology with Professor Chuck Van Engen.

After I finished a general master's degree, I asked Roberta King to be my mentor, because she was teaching about what I was practicing and I wanted to find the roots of that for my PhD. My study is about how worship is transforming, and how this can be translated appropriately into praxis among the people groups of Sarawak.

In Malaysia we had worship experiences that were powerfully transformative. I hope to examine these dynamics in hindsight. I do not believe that we can reproduce methods, but understanding is not contrary to inspiration.

I am very cognizant that when I lead worship, God is already there and moving at a certain pace. As the worship leader, I am called to step into the pace of God and his acts in that context. Often, there can be a focus on *forms* of worship, but I would suggest that we first understand the *essence*

of worship: that it flows from a relationship with God and that he is actively present.

One of my passions is to find appropriate expressions for worship. One particular challenge in East Malaysia is to identify music that has a local identity and yet is “heart music.” There is tension between the local and the global. If you are in the villages during a Harvest Festival, for example, you would be surprised at the different types of music enjoyed. In the morning, you could be awakened by the sound of gongs and drums accompanying traditional rituals; in the afternoon, radios would play Western rock songs; and at night, your feet would be tapping to the celebratory notes of the Indonesian *dangdut* (dance music). Interestingly, one of the ideas we've incorporated is the use of *dangdut* as praise songs, and these songs have been received well.

There is something powerful about worshipping in community. God reveals himself in a way so powerful, it is almost tangible. That's my experience. I'm not ready to say it more clearly than that. If I could put it all into words, I'd have my dissertation finished! ●

that focuses on the cultural study of music, provides the scholarly foundation for addressing many of the questions confronting today's global Christian Church in both the Western and non-Western world. What should worship and witness look like at home and around the world? How does music communicate? What varying roles do the great diversity of musics play in the lives of differing peoples? What should we change or not change as the gospel penetrates each culture? Foundational courses addressing such questions include Christian Communication through Music, Perspectives in Global Christian Worship, Communicating Christ through Narrative and Song, and

Exegeting a Musical Culture.

Bringing together theology, the science of doing mission, and ethnomusicology, the concentration in Global Christian Worship seeks to capture the profound influence of each people's music-culture for the sake of the Kingdom. This training uniquely prepares the seminary student to communicate the gospel in meaningful and appropriate ways that bring diverse peoples to encounter and engage with the living God. Our desire is that all the earth join in singing a new song unto the Lord with their whole heart, mind, and soul.

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