

Full Notes on Composition: Variations on Semoga Bahagia

This work was written for my group Re:Cinta Wind Symphony, which is a youth wind band formed recently in 2023. For their debut concert in September 2023, this work was commissioned by my fellow conductor of the band and personal friend, Dylan Lim, as their finale piece. Seeing how the concert revolved around promoting new but accessible music to younger band members, I was inspired to base this work around the theme "Semoga Bahagia" - a Malay folk song which is commonly associated with Children's Day and by extension, the young in Singapore.

The work opens with a chorale-like treatment of the main material, before proceeding with seven sets of variations. The first variation is march-like, featuring many of the common tropes in GENERIC wind band marches. The second variation invites the listeners into a new harmonic exploration - first a cantabile exploration of the material, followed by a dreamy development, before turning resolutely back to the tonic key.

The third variation brings new life into the theme. One word to describe this section would be that of intense vigour: with irregular metrical cycles, hypermetric syncopations, punctuations and rips. The fourth variation begins much tamer and serenely, as if the music takes a brief respite from the immense energy of the previous variation. This peace is then shattered, when the music gradually builds up to a climax.

A transition then occurs, as if the music gradually begins to unwind down. Eventually, the music reaches it's fifth variation, which features strong soloist-accompaniment textures and salient jazz influences. Here, I encourage everyone to think about the collaborative aspect in jazz, and to be really laid back in this section. The sixth variation brings us back to the idea of a chorale, albeit a much texturally simpler one. This section should feel like an emotional reminiscence to one's childhood, and the ensemble should focus on bringing out the warmth of the music.

As if by surprise, the music transits suddenly to the seventh variation. This variation is a series of harmonic twists and turns, with numerous false climaxes. A particularly salient technique I used would be the superimposition of the same melodic material at different points of time to create a complex quasi-canon-like texture. The music eventually reaches it's final climax before bursting in jubilation at the last measure.

This work is dedicated to all the many young people in Singapore, who are filled with immense energy for the many diverse things they are passionate about.