

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**MUSICAL IDENTITIES  
THROUGH A MALAYSIAN  
SINGING REALITY TV SHOW:  
A STUDY OF SELECTED  
CONTESTANTS FROM BIG STAGE  
SEASON 1/2018**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
**Master of Music**

**College of Creative Arts**

**February 2024**

## ABSTRACT

Reality TV singing competition sets a platform for aspiring singers to showcase their talent and launch a professional singing career. This type of shows has been dominating television schedules in the twenty-first century with offers in the form of primetime audience and recording contracts. In Malaysia, shows like Bintang RTM, Akademi Fantasia, and more recently Big Stage have developed a trend following over the years. While plenty of studies have been done from the audience's perspective, yet research from the point-of-view of the participants is scarce. While there are multiple elements that constitute a singing performance, this research focuses on the musical identities formation of five singers through participation in singing reality TV shows within the framework of vocal identities and musical elements. Singing competitions are commonly designed with specific challenges to push the creativity and musicality of the participants outside of their comfort zone. This research involves five subjects out of the total ten participants from Big Stage Season 1 due to its unique requirements which only allows participation from singers who have an established presence in the music industry. The primary data collection involved semi-structured interviews based on the self-perception of each research subject. Interview results were then triangulated with document analysis of weekly concerts which looked into the vocal style, musical elements, judges' feedback, and total marks obtained. Post-competition career growth data were collected as an indicator of the subject's current relevance in the industry. This research presents a hybrid juncture of musicology and music psychology by analysing elements of both areas to consolidate findings that are technically concise, while still retaining the individual musical process behaviour and experience. Findings from this research observed that all subjects underwent musical identities maturity phases throughout the competition. However, the phases of identities formation differ between individuals: some were still at the discovery phase, while others went through identities self-negotiation. It was discovered that the musical challenges imposed throughout competition pushed them to re-evaluate their musical approach, while giving opportunities to experiment with different musical identities and concepts. This study does not reflect the music industry as a whole, yet it allows for findings and analysis that are deeply personalised through each individual's perceived experiences. The findings from this research aims to provide a practical reference for aspiring singers to evaluate the upside of participating in a singing reality TV show by providing an outlook on its impact on musical identities formation.

Keywords: Musical Challenges, Musical Identities, Self-Perception, Singing Competition, Singing Reality TV Show

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious and most Merciful.

Alhamdulillah, all praises to Him, for without His blessings and grace, this thesis would not have culminated into its final completion.

It is only apt for me to begin with those who have been with me from day zero. To Ayahanda, Bonda, Abang, and Adik, thank you for the encouragement. Thank you for believing in me since the very beginning, for always having my back through highs and lows, and for keeping me sane throughout this tumultuous yet gratifying Master's Degree voyage.

To my esteemed supervisor Dr Nadia Widyawati, thank you for your tireless guidance and wisdom in helping me grow as a student and a researcher at the same time.

Thank you to all the research subjects for sharing your precious time throughout the interview session, for your enthusiasm in the topic and active participation, and most of all for your willingness to open up on insights and knowledge that are personal to you.

I am grateful for all the immense support that I have received throughout this journey. From families, friends, professors, instructors, musicians, all the way to random strangers, thank you for the constant positive encouragement and prayers. With this at last, I am truly excited to share this thesis with everyone.

For all the long nights and countless dramatic crying scenes in front of the laptop, I finally made it through, Alhamdulillah. For all the moments I wished to quit and give up part way, I am grateful that I did not. And for the love of music and knowledge, I sincerely hope that this research would benefit both academia and the Malaysian music industry, for years to come.

May Allah bless.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Singing competition is an opportunity for aspiring singers to showcase their talent. In the twenty-first century culture, singing competitions in the setting of reality TV show have dominated television schedules and were believed to help talents to kick start their singing career (Gunter, 2014). Often, we see the journey of the contestants as they transition away from busking by the street and performing at small town gigs, to a bigger stage and signing recording deals.

According to Hill (2015), the act of defining reality TV is not easy. It is a moving target and there are different definitions of it by the industry and critics, scholars and audiences. Reality TV is not a self-contained genre, but rather occupies an intergeneric space between many different platforms and genres (Hill, 2019). The inter-generic space of series and formats set in created for television locations usually contain participants as contestants who are both performing as themselves and competing in a reality contest. Often these formats contain celebrities and professional dancers, singers or music producers, or there are celebrity versions of the formats that work alongside amateur versions.

Based on this definition, singing reality TV shows that involve real people checked all the defining factors of the reality TV definition. Big Stage might appear like just another singing competition, but the contestants actually spent a lot of time together throughout the weeks in preparation for the weekly concert. From a broadcasting standpoint, Studio Big Stage which showcased the snippets of activities happening behind-the-scenes throughout the weekly preparations was aired on TV. The audiences were able to keep updated on the participants' activities leading up to the weekly concert, which further built up the anticipation for the concert. These snippets did not only cover music-related activity, but also their social activities like an outing to a haunted house, to name an example.

Globally, shows based in the United States such as American Idol and The Voice which were first aired in 2002 and 2011 respectively, were widely televised all over the world. In Malaysia, there are many singing reality TV shows produced by different