



Composer, conductor, educator and pianist, Dr Robert Casteels believes that these roles are fundamentally interrelated in the kaleidoscope of activities that is music making.

Casteels has conducted more than 50 professional orchestras in 20 countries in a repertoire of 600 works ranging from the early classics to contemporary music, from symphonic to vocal and dance repertoire. He has conducted first performances of symphonic works, ballets and operas in festivals such as: Spoleto Festival (Charleston, US/ Spoleto, Italy/ Melbourne, Australia), Ars Musica (Brussels), Brisbane Biennale (Australia), Focus (New York), Wien Modern (Vienna), Donaueschingen and Berlin Biennale (Germany).

Casteels studied composition with Fernand Quinet in Brussels and Peter Maxwell Davies in Dartington, England. He graduated from the French and Flemish Royal Conservatories in Brussels in piano and orchestral conducting, as well as from the Eötvös Institute in Hungary, the Guildhall School of Music in London and the Juilliard School in New York. His conducting mentors included Leonard Bernstein, Pierre Boulez, John Carewe, Peter Eötvös, Sixten Ehrling, Pierre Fournet, Zubin Mehta, Jorge Mester, Michel Tabachnik, Vilem Tausky and Ronald Zollman. Following his graduation from Juilliard, he was appointed staff conductor at the Brussels Royal Opera House and Head of Conducting Studies at the Brussels (Flemish) Royal Music Conservatory. At the Conservatory he also set up an opera studio that was a great success at helping young singers bridge the gap between tertiary-level training and professional life.

Casteels is the recipient of several awards, including the Bruno Walter Scholarship for Orchestral Conducting awarded by the Juilliard School for two consecutive years, as well as the First Prize for contemporary music at the International Conducting Competition of the Hungarian Radio and Television. In 2001, Casteels became the youngest recipient and the second musician ever to receive the prestigious [Christoffel Plantin Prize](#), the Flemish Government's highest award for cultural achievements, in recognition of his contribution to cross-cultural research.

Whilst continuing his conducting engagements on the international stage, Casteels shifted the focus of his activities from Europe to Australasia, choosing Singapore as his home base in 1995, and taking up permanent residency in 1996. Since then, he has contributed tirelessly to Singapore's music scene – Casteels has served as Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts at the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts (LASALLE), as a member of various competition jury panels and government-appointed arts and education committees, as Music Director of the Singapore National Youth Orchestra (SNYO), as Founding Artistic Director & Resident Conductor of the Philharmonic Winds, and as Music Director & Conductor of the National University of Singapore (NUS) Choir, NUS Wind Symphony and the NUS Guitar Ensemble (GENUS), as Conductor of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music Chamber Singers.

Casteels' achievements include producing SNYO's first cd recordings of professional quality as well as conducting SNYO's debut at the Esplanade Concert Hall, producing GENUS's first cd recording. He has premiered iconic masterpieces in Singapore, such as works by Boulez, Ligeti, Takemitsu, Stockhausen and Varèse. He champions the works of his fellow Singaporean composers by organising and conducting successful concerts entirely devoted to emerging Singaporean composers and by regularly including Singaporean works in concerts of standard repertoire. He has collaborated with more than 50 Singaporean visual and performing artists, and was co-founder of the LASALLE Gamelan Ensemble, which has performed in New Zealand, Australia and Indonesia. In 2005, he led the Philharmonic Winds to win the Gold with Distinction Award at the World Music Contest of Kerkrade (The Netherlands) with the highest mark ever scored by a Singaporean group. In 2007, Casteels became a proud Singaporean citizen, focusing his activities on composing and teaching.

Apart from organizing and performing in private concerts for embassies, galas, corporations and patrons, the focus of Casteels' activities has shifted in recent years to - wards composition. He has written a growing corpus of more than 100 musical works that cross cultures, genres and disciplines. These range from miniature to large-scale works in the European tradition, as well as multidisciplinary works which combine European, Chinese and Indian instruments, as well as the gamelan, together with computer-generated sound and images.

Casteels is one of those composers whose music makes an immediate impact on the audience. The idea of following tradition, rules and stylistic imperatives is completely foreign to a body of music which really mixes it up.

Casteels' compositions have been premiered in Australia, Belgium, China, England, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand and The Netherlands. In Singapore, Robert has been commissioned by private patrons and institutions such as, Alliance Française de Singapour in 2005 and 2009, the Asian Civilisations Museum in 2003, Banque Crédit Industriel et Commercial in 2009, the Chamber Players in 2010, the City Garden Fund in 2003 and 2009, the Contemporary Asian Arts Centre in 2002, the Institute of Policy Studies, LASALLE, the Ministry of Education in 2004, the National University of Singapore in 2002, 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2014, the Old Parliament Arts House in 2007, the Philharmonic Winds in 2010, the Singapore Arts Festival in 1999 and 2006, the Singapore Wind Symphony in 1996, and the World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles (WASBE) in 2002.

Nine audio and two video compact disks entirely devoted to Casteels' works have been published thus far.

Asian music is one of Casteels' great passions and sources of inspiration. In 2004, the University of Melbourne awarded Casteels a Doctorate for his thesis on gamelan and contemporary music. As Artistic Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)'s first music camp 'I'm Pulse' held in the Philippines in 2005, he conceived and executed an initiative which brought together young graduates from the universities and conservatories of 35 ASEF countries to perform and record each others' works. In 2008, Casteels conducted 'ASEAN Serenade', an evening of music, song, dance and poetry from each ASEAN country in homage to National Cultural Medallion winner, Mr Alex Abisheganaden. In 2009, 2010 and 2012, Casteels released four CDs and a dvd entitled 'Resonances of Asia', bringing the listener on an aural journey through Asia.

In April 2004, Casteels was appointed the first Associate-in-Residence (Special Music Projects) by the NUS Centre for the Arts. In recent years, Casteels initiated, raised funds and executed a series of special projects that combined music and other disciplines in a meaningful collaboration between international and Singaporean artists: the festival 'Magic of Music in Movies' in 2004, 'Music and Architecture' in 2006, 'Food, Plants and Music' in the Arts House at the Old Parliament and Petronas Galeri in Kuala Lumpur in 2007, 'Music and Birds' in 2009 in collaboration with the Singapore Botanic Gardens' 150th Anniversary celebrations, 'Music and Finance' in 2011, 'Music and Astronomy' as well 'Music and Medicine' in 2012. The year of 2014 marked his debut in Japan where he conducted *Semisopchnoi* his concerto for electric guitar, *Cityscape* for guitar orchestra and electro-acoustic sounds, as well as the

premiere of his symphonic poem *Kaze Ni Noru* with the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, as part of the 32nd Asian Composers League. With electro-acoustician Dirk Stromberg and art director Andrew Thomas, Casteels created an ambitious one-hour epic with newly created e-instruments engaging in a musical dialogue with electro-acoustic sounds, dance and stunning visuals. This research entitled *2014:time:space:* culminated into a mind opening performance in the FlexiSpace of LASALLE College. A follow-up *2015:time:space:* version will be presented in the ArtScience Museum in July 2015 leading to performance overseas in Japan and Vietnam.

As a much sought after chamber music pianist and vocal accompanist, Casteels has worked with many instrumentalists and singers. His latest such productions in 2009 were: the musical 'Oliver Twist', 'pOpera' part for Flip Side in conjunction with the Singapore Arts Festival 2009, 'La Belle Epoque', an evening of European operettas and art songs at the turn of the 20th century and 'George and the Music Box' on the La Fontaine's fables set to music by Offenbach.

Casteels enjoys sharing his ideas about music and has been invited to present academic papers at international conferences such as the 9th International Conference of Asia Pacific Confederation for Arts Education and the European League of Institute of the Arts. Several of his compositions have currently been chosen to be used as the subject of Doctorate theses. He believes in making music accessible to audiences and has given pre-concert talks and public seminars for the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), the Singapore Lyric Opera, the NUS Alumni House, the NUS Centre For The Arts, the Alliance Française de Singapour and l'Association Française de Singapour. Additionally, Casteels has given interactive commentaries in concerts that he conducted with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra. He has also given several public lectures in conservatories, museums and arts institutions such as at the Alliance Française de Singapour.

A passionate educationist, Casteels is noted for his pedagogical work. His private studio teaching in piano, analysis, composition and conducting includes graduates from the NUS Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, trainee music teachers enrolled at Singapore's National Institute of Education as well as postgraduate students returning from overseas.

Casteels was elected Fellow of the Institute of Physics, Singapore. He is a member of the Composers and Authors Society of Singapore, the Composers Society of Singapore, CeBeDem, the Belgian-Luxembourg-Association-Singapore and the Nature Society Singapore.

As an artist who is socially responsible and aware of the need to give back to society, Casteels has conducted, performed, and organized concerts in prisons, hospitals (such as Art For the Heart and MusicFest@SGH) or for charities and fundraising galas.

Casteels' interest and hobbies include visiting exhibitions of contemporary visual arts, reading, philately, astronomy, travelling, town dwelling, nature walks, bird watching, sky gazing and cycling.