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## NATIONALISM AND INDIGINIZATION IN PHILIPPINE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC; AN ACCULTURATED RESPONSE TO WESTERNIZATION

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RAMÓN PAGAYON SANTOS  
University of the Philippines

Cultural and historical dynamics in the Philippines for the last five hundred years has been one long series of continuous impingement from the outside on the most vital aspects of social life – religion, economy, politics, and education. From its indigenous and colonial pasts, different cultural traditions evolved. Among some 8 to 10 percent of Filipinos who were not initially reached by the early Christianization movement of Spain<sup>1</sup>, a variety of traditional practices that are distinctly Asian in character have survived. On the other hand, varying degrees of acculturation and assimilation of influences from the west, both imposed and freely accepted or adapted resulted in greater diversification, developing new and interesting forms of social practice and artistic expression. Among the urbanized communities in principal cities and provincial capitals and towns, life has been essentially influenced by electronic technology, industry and modern systems of education and communication. Although people in these major centers of population come from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds, they have developed a common penchant for foreign commodities and a concept of life largely measured by materials markers and foreign aesthetic symbols.

A social order has been spawned by the introduction of western mores and ideologies to generate cultural needs which in most cases have been induced by a high regard for western life and civilization.. In the field of artists practices foreign-made music, just like its counterpart commodities in food, clothing, and machinery, has become a necessary luxury, a source not only of entertainment and leisure, but also of social prestige, based on the idea that western music represents not so much western humanism, but rather a superior quality of life.

A conditioning of values nurtured for centuries by cultural emblems of western civilization in turn bred a reaction among the more literate and informed sectors of society. In time, this reaction assumed the form of nationalistic sentiments that proliferated in all aspects of social and political life from the nineteenth century through the remainder of the American colonial period.

Philippine nationalism has manifested itself in two seemingly irreconcilable and incompatible streams of thought: one is a perceived pride in one's capability to compete with the dominant culture for equality in all realms of intellectual, physical and materials pursuits; and the other is a concept of self-identity as a people, the attainment of which could serve as the ultimate measure of liberation from the fetters of colonialism and cultural subservience.

It is within the context of the historical and cultural crises of the Filipinos as a people, as well as the broad concept of nationalism that Philippine contemporary music achieved its present<sup>6</sup> character. As reference in viewing the larger phenomenon of culture change, the present writing focuses its discussion on this particular aspect of Philippine culture, its origins, evolution and present directions, as well as its implications as an acculturated response to westernization.

Philippine contemporary music which in this context refers to art music-conceived compositions written or realized within the last fifty years, emerged through several stages of development in musical thought as well as a widening perception of socio-historical conditions and the rise of post-modernist attitudes on cultural diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> Although American missionaries were later able to “penetrate<sup>4</sup>” upland territories and continued to evangelize in local communities, a more accommodating approach to the treatment of traditional expressive practices was applied. This is partly due to the over-all agenda of the American imperial dispensation of allowing, if not encouraging, Filipinos to develop a national or cultural identity.

- 1) Its beginnings are closely related to the twentieth century development in European and American music, in which new idioms, styles and direction as defined by new techniques in performance practice, theory and aesthetics, as well as philosophical thought emerged in the wake of post-romantic music. It represents a more recent phase in the Filipino musicians' string aspiration to master the technique of composing western art music. Awareness of modern directions in western music was introduced by foreign artists and pedagogues as well as a few local musicians who were able to pursue advanced studies abroad. Jose Estella, pianist, composer, and conductor was able to study in Spain. He later earned the distinction of being the Philippines' "king of waltz".

**ANG MAYA**  
(LAS MAYAS)

Poesía Tagala de  
S. REYES

Musica de Maestro  
JOSE A. ESTELLA

Vals de la Zarzuela "Filipinas para los Filipinos"

Estella's "Ang Maya"

Federico Elizalde who later made a name as the conductor of the radio station-based Manila Little Symphony Orchestra, studied with the celebrated French composer Maurice Ravel. The composers who trained in the United States in the 1920's through the 30's include Francisco Santiago, Rodolfo Cornejo and Nicanor Abelardo. The late works of Abelardo show a strong influence of the Expressionist School of Schoenberg. His compositions like the Violin Sonata and Sinfonietta, both written in 1931, are characterized. By ambiguous tonalities, extreme chromaticism and unconventional rhythms. (Santos 2005)

- 2) Concurrent with the modest diffusion of knowledge of modern art music, a need was felt to articulate in serious musical terms the nationalist sentiments prevailing in the times. Philippine nationalism in the 20's and 30's focused on the movement for independence from American rule and its institutional markers. In music, it was reflected as a reaction against various forms of American popular music. Classical musicians expressed strong reservations on the aesthetic values of entertainment music, and intensified their quest for the establishment of a national idiom in the field of art music. The collection of folk music and dance materials from various parts of the country was undertaken between 1934-1938, as a flagship project of the University of the Philippines under the presidency of Jorge Bocobo. The substantive output of this field research provided the materials to develop the folksong and folkdance literature that could be taught in the entire public school and thereby mitigate the "colonial mentality" being infused on future generations of Filipinos partly through the teaching of foreign songs. The same materials provided the composers the main structural elements to "Filipinize" their compositions. Practically all important works were either based on a Filipino folk melody or bore quotations of such structures as

thematic materials. However, a lack of a much deeper perception of native musics in relation to their specific cultural and social environments as well as their functional and linguistic contexts, produced only a peripheral view of their usefulness and musical significance in the compositions. Some examples of this category of works are *Panoramas* (1931) by Abelardo, *Sonata Filipina* (1922) and *Concerto in E-flat minor* (1924) by Francisco Santiago, and *Philippine Suite* (1937) by Ramon Tapales. Even the “modernist” idiom of Eliseo Pajaro in the 1960’s, characterized by chromatic parallelism combined with modal counterpoint, derived its main thematic substance from folksong quotations. It was only Nicanor Abelardo who may have hinted on the exploring deeper the “nativist soul” imbedded not only in the melodies but also in the forms and modal constructs of the traditional materials; e.g. the *comintang*, *avit*, etc.

- 3) The impact of avant-gardism in the next two decades further enhanced the space within which the seminal methods of grafting old melodies to modern musical framework could expand and germinate into other forms of musical exploration. Various concepts endemic in the avant-garde movement, such as those engendering freedom from conventional parameters of western music, provided impetus for dealing with elements other than melodies in the process of music creation. The use of different scales and modes outside the western heptatonic models, fusing the different timbres of western and non-western instruments, experiments on unconventional and unusual playing techniques, together with the adoption of compositional principles from the different schools of thought established by European and American composers, offered new areas of interest to the Filipino composers of the 50’s, headed by Lucrecia Kasilag. Writing along the formal syntactic mould of the Neo-Classic school, Kasilag combined different scales and tuning temperaments, instrumental timbres, melodic and rhythmic patterns derived from Asian and European music, with a dominant accent on Philippine indigenous and folk materials including thematic and programmatic reference to Philippine folklore. Some of these works are *Toccata* (1959) for oboe, clarinet, piano, kulintang and tiruray gongs; *Dularawan* (1969)<sup>1</sup>, for actors, singers and an orchestra of Asian instruments, and the *Legend of Sarimanok* (1963) for chamber orchestra, in which she combined both 12-tone and pentatonic modes.

In spite of this highly unorthodox method of composition that has yet to define its own aesthetic parameters, Kasilag’s works have chanced upon some unique sonic regions, at the same time representing an atypical thinking that is part of a whole process of indigenizing a modern Filipino musical expression. Her music as well as the music of some of her colleagues<sup>2</sup> with similar stylistic orientation, points to an expanded view of Philippine national and cultural identity as one related to a larger Asian heritage, at the same time existing within the framework of a universal global order dictated by western musical tradition.

One work that is highly representative of the eclectic incorporation of various Asian elements in one composition is the choral-dance work entitled *Fil-asiana* (1965) scored for mixed voices and Asian instruments. Its five sections represent different music traditions in East and Southeast Asia, with its finale focused on the Philippines. Different scales, microtonal intervals, melodic materials played on mixtures of different instrumental timbres serve as the main ingredients in the construction of this musical kaleidoscope.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dularawan* is the magnum opus that was composed for the inauguration of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> This particular style of compositional eclecticism has been shared, although to a lesser and less consistent degree, by Antonino Buenventura, Felipe Padilla de Leon, Rosalina Abejo, Alfredo Buenaventura, and Manuel Maramba.

The image displays a page of a musical score titled "V FIUASIANA (Folk)". The score is written for a vocal line and several instrumental parts, including strings and woodwinds. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The score is presented in a standard musical notation format with a key signature and time signature.

EXAMPLE: Fil-asiana

The recent proliferation of various modes of scientific inquiry into the different aspects of social life has had a strong impact on the direction of evolving musical thought in the Philippines. With fresh perspectives achieved through modern methods of research in the social sciences, including ethnomusicology, previously unknown or incomprehensible properties of native musics were uncovered. These new parameters of musical practice created the stimulus to the indigenization of modern musical expression.

Folk music traditions in highland, pre-hispanic cultures, coastal and lowland Islamic communities as well as rural Christianized villages and towns, were regarded with renewed interest for their diversity and distinctiveness, not only from the point of view of their structural uniqueness but more importantly for their semantic properties, social functions and cultural significance. Their continued survival through purely oral transmission, without the benefit of written theories on their systems of practice (unlike a number of Asian classical musical traditions), suggested new concepts of music making. Mirroring their almost unadulterated surroundings and uncomplicated flow of life, music in these villages is expressed through natural vocal timbres, instruments of simple design, simple musical structures and un-metered musical time. In spite of traditional norms and conducts of artistic behavior, the music remains highly flexible and spontaneous. Instruments are made according to the temperament of each individual performer or artist without the artificial limitations imposed by a single standard tuning temperament or fixed sets of intervals and scales. A concept of harmony exists not so much among the musical tones but between people, the music and the environment. An instinctive respect for the natural acoustical surrounding is observed as festivals and other group rituals are celebrated with gongs and drums, while intimate feelings are expressed by flutes and zithers. In their rich myths and epics, ritual ceremonies and other life events, an almost indistinct line separates the human world from that of the divine.

In the barrios and outlying provinces, a rich variety of Christianized folk music and dances have also survived, especially among the older members of the communities. Although the forms of practice have undergone a process of hybridization and thus are structurally different from those of indigenous communities, their functions similarly enhance the material and spiritual life of the people. Their folk arts express the same attitude and respect for work, religion and nature. Communion with ritual life with all its unpredictable permutations is very much reflected in their almost unlimited capacity to improvise and modify acquired musical forms according to the people's temperament and life styles.

A shift of aesthetic preference from the supremacy of harmonic and contrapuntal sound complexes, precise intonations, variable sound amplitudes, metric time, and a whole notion of classicism and elitism turned into an awareness and sensitivity for simple structures, specific timbres, spontaneity and communality of musical performance, and a concept of time that is not artificially measured, but rather perceived in the unfolding and cyclic permutations of nature, related

to a concept of infinity and unity with the mystic world.. The rhythmic parameter in Asian music is a topic of profound interest in the studies of Jose Maceda, representing a concept of time which could be a key to the understanding of the philosophical and behavioral aspects of Asian peoples and cultures. In his article “A Concept of Time” (1986), Maceda discussed the difference between structured and non-structured time as a reflection of the opposition between material logic and a metaphysical concept of life. A prominent scholar and National Artist, Maceda was mainly responsible for initiating a profound and comprehensive study of Philippine and other Asian music traditions which served as principle sources of musical thought in his compositions.

In 1966, Maceda wrote *Agungan*, the first piece to use exclusively (?) Philippine native instruments, specifically families of gongs (flat gongs, gongs laid in a row, suspended gongs, etc.) Although the compositional concept of sound densities and mass structures in *Agungan* may have been influenced by European avant-gardism at the time, it nevertheless achieved a new sound environment resulting from the heterogeneous combination of sound nuances only possible in these Asian instruments<sup>1</sup>.

In his later works, Maceda underscored the idea of music involving community interaction and mass participation. As a commentary on the rise and use of machine-oriented technology in order to create highly controlled sound spectra, his compositions required instead large numbers of people in order to generate sound environments that are imprecise but spontaneous and animate. He introduced this concept in his work *Pagsamba* for 200 performers and later in his *Udlot-Udlot* which needed some 500 to 800 school children to chant simple melodic patterns and play native instruments in a manner of a collective ritual act. A later composition based on a similar setting is entitled *Ading*, based on a Kalinga vocal form of the same title. In this work, Maceda also projected a concept of timelessness in Asian village life though the slow permutations of long-drawn repeated structures.

Example 8: Ading, Music Score for 100 Music Instruments and 100 Voices

MIN UTES	20 INSTRUMENTS FOR EACH OF 5 GROUPS					100 SINGERS			AUDI ENCE
	1	2	3	4	5	20	80	ENCE	
0		o	/						
1	+	o				A1	A2	A3	
2		o	/			A2	B		
3	+					A2	B	A2	
4	+	o	/						
5	+	o				A3	C		
6		o	/			A3	C	A3	
7	+								
8		o	/			A4	D		
9	+					A4	D	A4	
10	+	o	/						
11		o				A5	D		
12	+		/			A5	E	A5	
13	+	o							
14	+	o	/			A6			
15						A6	E	A6	

MIN UTES	20 INSTRUMENTS FOR EACH OF 5 GROUPS					100 SINGERS			AUDI ENCE
	1	2	3	4	5	20	80	ENCE	
16	+	o	/						
17		o						A7	F
18	+	o	/					A7	E
19	+	o							
20	+		/					A8	F
21		o						A8	G
22	+	o	/						
23	+	o						A9	G
24	+		/					A9	G
25		o							
26	+	o	/					A10	D
27	+							A10	E
28		o	/					A10	G
29	+								

see pages: 2) instructions for music instruments  
3) music for 100 singers 4) instructions for 100 singers  
5) profile of music instruments


EXAMPLE: Ading

New works written by a younger generation of composers who were influenced by Jose Maceda’s pioneering work are similarly anchored to the different aspects of traditional musical practices and what they represent in the cultural life of the Filipinos. Themes about nature, ancient rituals, concepts of time, functionality of village musical practice, as well as direct references to the physical properties of timbres and pitch frequencies are all incorporated in varying degrees in these compositions.

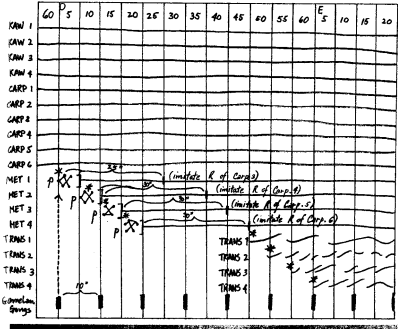
The last two examples are works which were written in the 70’s and 80’s. In 1978, Ramon Santos wrote *LIKAS-AN* or literally translated “Nature-ing”, The title is meant to suggest an environment that can generate sound forms as a result of the fusion of various forces of nature.

<sup>1</sup> *Agungan* was first performed in an international symposium entitled “The Musics of Aisa” held in Manila in April 1966. The meeting was organized by Jose Maceda himself through the UNESCO and the National Music Council of the Philippines. Its participants included some of the world’s leading scholars and composers such as Chou Wen Chung, Mantle Hood, Ton de Leeuw, David Morton, Tran vAn Khe, and Iannis Xenakis. The event made a deep impression on local musicians, educators, and students.

These forces are composed of human energies and natural causalities. Musical structures are produced by standard newly manufactured musical instruments and improvised sound sources of non-controllable nature.



The sketch below shows how the instruments are to be played during the actual minutes of the 20-minute piece. Numbers at top indicate the seconds. The Kanto-nyayaga plays throughout. The rhythm is left to the player and the instructor. The conductor also plays throughout, providing to the solo using his natural rhythm. The Metal 1 player is cued by the conductor at one second; for 75 seconds, he plays Metal 1, imitating the rhythm of Carpenter 3. In fact, the gamelan gang player goes to one (10) from Metal 1. And at 45 seconds, the electrician turns up the knob of his transistor.



EXAMPLE - LIKAS-AN

Another work is entitled *DU'A* written for a large symphonic ensemble. *Du'A* represents the highly spiritual atmosphere which permeates the life-cycle of the Yakan people from the island of Basilan in Mindanao – from birth, through childhood and the various forms of initiation, courtship and marriage, death and other ritual practices. The music reflects the intensity and color of the Yakan spiritual and materials world though the use of recurring melodic figures, highly dynamic rhythms and multi-layered textures.



*DU'A*

Kenneth P. Santos

EXAMPLE – DU'A

This most recent repertoire of musical compositions written from the 1960's to the present represent a new understanding of musical and extra-musical resources from the traditional music cultures. It also in a way represents the Philippine contribution to a whole universe of contemporary or new music literature. As an urban cultural phenomenon, notwithstanding its

competing for social space against other more deeply ingrained and more readily acceptable and easily accessible subculture emblems, it symbolizes a serious ideological reference to the present and future directions in the the dynamics of musical acculturation in Asia, as well as the rest of the non-western world. While it may demonstrated the possibility of providing alternative aesthetic values and sensibilities for future musical reproductions, it has also opened new questions as to its own intrinsic values as a form of musical communication and expression within an alien environment, including its effects on the very essence of its existence. As a medium of revival of age-old sensibilities and aesthetic perceptions, its significance is nevertheless restricted by factors deriving from its own creative process, as well as the ability of existing cultural structures to accommodate<sup>4</sup> and tolerate the rate and magnitude of this innovative condition.<sup>1</sup>

The works belonging to this style category are individualized and disparate re-articulations of separate elements from different musicultural traditions. While these elements possess specific values of their own, they are transmitted as mere extracts out of total socio-cultural environments and human experience. Thus, the entire body of literature may be perceived as merely representing another dimension in the westernization of non-western practices, where folk elements serve to enhance a modern a idiom in the field of art music composition. For this reason, it becomes a source of alienation in an already alienated urban environment, where a confrontation between village sensibilities and oral traditions on one hand, and a sophisticated process of music making on the other, produces a unique art form which seeks its relevance in an urban mass-based culture. These seemingly contradictory conditions, having evolved and still evolving from divergent socio-cultural goals, are at this point in time converging, and as a consequence, creating highly interesting signals on future directions aof musical thought and practice.

While the present situation may be felt as a purely urban phenomenon, it bearts serious implications on the rest of Philippine society, and has in fact started to affect the behavior of non-urban communities.

By virtue of conduits provided by the facilities of modern technology, cultural institutions or urban and non-urban societies have become mutually accessible to one another. However, being the harbingers of products of the dominant culture, urban mores, taste and modes of behavior have wielded the greater influence and control. The recent contemporary music movement in the Philippines, together with other urban-bred institutions such as musical contests, stylized folkloric ensembles and ethnic pop groups have introduced new concepts of artistic production to traditional cultural communities, the very root of their professed Filipino identity. Because of this some communities have begun to modify the forms of their centuries-old practices to conform to modern norms of choreography, theater, and performer-audience media; in the process weakening and even losing their original functionality and cultural significance.<sup>2</sup>

The aspiration to achieve a national identity which gave birth to the movement and other similar endeavors became synonymous in time to one that searches for a cultural identity. It progressed through different stages of conceptualization of music creation and their attendant methods of grafting, synthesis, and finally indigenization of music composition. The multiculturalism of a country like the Philippines however would appear unsuitable to such hegemonic ideology as a search for a national or cultural identity. If ever this goal is to be achieved, it sill be at the expense of all the many less dominant cultures, which will have to sacrifice fundamental philosophies, beliefs and ways of life, in order to be assimilate and synthesized into one exogenously influenced cultural mainstream.

Writing in 1974, Jose Maceda identified this mainstream as one controlled by a concept of material progress and industrialization, and mentioned that attainability of a “balance between a material and a spiritual de3velopment in a technological world”. He suggested that cities and

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<sup>1</sup> See Arden R. King (1980), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> See Roger Elbourne (1975), p. 183

countries in Southeast Asia “should integrate with their plans of construction and cultural development other means of continuing a whole tradition of folklore, music, dance and theater as the very essence of life itself, more important than all the benefits of technology”.<sup>1</sup>

This statement is microcosmically embodied in his own compositions as well as other works belonging to the latest evolutionary stage in Philippine contemporary music. As a form of urban music, it communicates through a variety of deeply perceptive impressions, alternative aesthetics and cultural values derived from Philippine non-western traditions. Its systematic dissemination could significantly influence the thinking and intuition of materially-oriented society and cause a shift in consciousness towards a more pragmatic regard for the cultures and societies that have spawned these values. Furthermore, the present character of contemporary Philippine music is merely another phase in the never-ending process of culture change. One can hope that through this new perspective, a new phase can be achieved, where an ever deepening understanding of individual cultures can lead to the strengthening of their fundamental institutions, and instead of waiting for cues from alienated sources, determine their own specific contributions to contemporary musical thought.

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<sup>1</sup> See Maceda (1974), p. 91.