Constructing a National Identity Through Music

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The late nineteenth century in the Philippines history marks the most dramatic, if not the most dynamic, phase in the long process of constructing a national consciousness. This perception is a result of a political and social events of the period, and it is equally reinforced by the expressive cultures of an emerging Filipino society. The arts -- literature, theater, music, dance, architecture, and painting -- provided effective channels for the expression of the Filipino psyche, taste and social behavior. They serve as concrete indicators of the transformation and evolution of the values and self-awareness, as well as tools to effect change for the construction of a national identity and a distinct cultural heritage.

Today, a national Filipino identity embodies the concept of convergence and the intersection of diverse cultural elements and tradition from both Europe and the Philippine geographic borders.

The music and musical life of the Filipinos from 1870 to 1930s was a period when Filipino musicians from different social and economic environments reached a common consciousness of a music as an artform and as a distinct form of human expression. Filipino musicians began to express individual as well as collective sentiments, using related, if not common forms. It was also a period when the acquisition of a specific musical skills in the practice of Westernized music -- singing instrumental performance, composition, conducting -- reached significant levels of competence and proficiency. Music emerged as a professional undertaking, for which training and education shifted from church convents and town bands to formal academies and musical associations: e.g. the Colegio Beaterio, The Colegio Español de Educacion de Señoritas (Maceda 1979) and the Sociedad Musical Filipino de Sta. Cecilia (Santiago 1957). Religion also played a role, as Christianity appeared to have catalyzed the disparate systems of indigenous worship and social values and activities into a cohesive expressive framework.

It was also a period of intense national consciousness, realized in acts of sacrifice and patriotism against the Spanish colonial regime, and resulted in a significant body of nationalistic music, e.g. the revolutionary pieces of by Julio Nakpil and Juan Felipe. The seeds of appreciation for native and indigenous musical practices began to break ground, and unearthed a source of materials developing and creating a Filipino identity vis-a-vis the adoption of a foreign, if not colonial, culture. Different social sectors were able to relate to common musical experiences, as well as understand and relate to a common Filipino musical repertoire.

The process of developing a national respective and constructing a national identity in the musical arts can thus be viewed from two levels: first, from the evolution and development of a common set of musical constructs: and second, from the artists' conscious attempts to express nationalist ideologies by using the existing media of musical communication.

THE EVOLUTION OF MUSICAL CONSTRUCTS

The most significant musical constructs that emerged during this period are reflected in the concepts of a Filipino musician, a common musical language, and a Filipino repertoire. The evolution of such constructs maybe further viewed as a consequence of the meeting of the two cultures and the mutual accommodation of the elements from both, partly in order to achieve shared religious, social and political objectives. On the other hand, the symbolic and the structural merging of native and traditional elements and ideas into musical creations addressed a perceive prerequisite in projecting national identity.

THE FILIPINO MUSICIAN

The symbolic epitome of the nineteenth century Filipino musician is a highly versatile individual who emerged from centuries of training and practice from two main colonial institutions: the church convent and the military regiment (Santos1998b). History tells us that the Spanish clergy prioritized the teaching of music to the native converts during the early years of
In order to conduct the divine worship, they were to endeavor to have music in all the convents, by teaching the youth not only to sing but also to play the sweetest and best instruments that we use in Europe, so that the new Christians might become very fond of frequenting the sacred office. (Blair and Robertson 1957, xxii)

The literacy program of clergy toward the young natives consisted of three main areas: religion, reading and writing Spanish, and music. (Santos 1998b). Antonio Morge wrote that the natives possessed such innate artistic talents that facilitated their learning to sing the plainsong, plat the flute, guitar harp and other instruments, to dance and even perform in dramas and comedies. (Blair and Robertson 1957, xxii) At the same time, the regimental band attracted the services of ordinary youth as an institution that offered special education and a respectable place in society. It should be noted that the convents and garrison housed fine musicians and music teachers from mother Spain. Some of the leading Filipino musicians whose fame blossomed in the nineteenth century included Marcelo Adonay (1848-1928), who mastered the organ, the violin, contrabass and the trumpet; Ladislao Bonus (1854-1908), who played the contrabass, flute, cello, guitar and the violin; and Jose Canseco (1839-1902), who was a pianist, a tenor and a conductor of an orchestra, opera and an army band. While most of the widely documented names generally come from Manila, different localities also produced their own musicians of no mean caliber, as Ilocos, which Bibiano Calero, Juan Paterno and Rufo de la Rama originated (Fernandez 1978). In the field of performing arts, The Filipino musician also began to excel as instrumental and vocal soloists, conductors, as well as orchestra, band and rondalla (plucked strings orchestra) ensembles. From the ranks of these fine musicians emerged names that also gained prominence in the field of composition, such as Jose Estella, Simplicio Solis, Julio Nakpil, Jose Canseco, and Gavino Carluen. Their creative energies were concentrated on the popular music genres of the time: the sarswela and the opera, liturgical music, music for band, and short instrumental pieces. This generation of composers engendered a sense of national pride and artistic confidence in the artists' ability to replicate the creative capabilities of their foreign counterparts.

A FILIPINO MUSICAL LANGUAGE

The Filipino musicians in the Christian communities across the archipelago learned a common musical language. It was the language of counterpoint and harmony, partly absorbed through the solfeggio exercises of Helarion Eslava, and suites to the religious music for voices and orchestra, which consisted of masses, motets, litanies and other adopted liturgical forms. It was also a language that provide sonic dimension to such secular forms as the awit and corrido (metrical romances), the comedia (stage dramas with incidental music), the sarsuela (musical theater) and the many dance forms which the Filipino later adopted as a structural schema in the transformation of local song forms and folk tunes, e.g. the danza/habanera, fandango, valse, jota and polka. The proliferation of a common inventory of musical instruments across the nation, such as plucked strings, band and orchestra instruments, reinforced and accelerated the process of adoption of tonal linguistic properties of Western music. Popular dance tunes such as the Visayan curacha was played by improvised ensembles such as a trio of clarinet, trumpet and guitar, or a rondalla band (different sizes of banjo-type instruments).

The "Filipinization" of the Western musical language did not only materialize on the structural and the textural levels (such as the distinctive ways of utilizing harmonic structures), but more significantly on the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of musical performance. Distinctive musical inflections, a non-linear time concept (cyclicity and repetition), emotional lyricism that is expressed in deliberate slowness, the unpredictable manipulation of tempo and phrases, improvisation, and the strong rhythmic influence of the text prosody, all contributed to the uniqueness of both orally realized and composed music of the period.
A FILIPINO MUSICAL REPERTOIRE

In the nineteenth century, a repertoire of musical forms reflected a common expression of a Filipino spirituality, social awareness, national consciousness and patriotism. These musical forms evolve in three somewhat differentiated processes of syncretism: (1) European forms assimilated and adopted into local practice; (2) hybrid forms that grew out of the fusion of pre-existing intercultural elements; and (3) indigenous forms and practices that underwent transformation through the accommodation of Western elements.

The first type of repertoire consisted of forms introduced from Spain. Liturgical music consisting of the mass, the motet and the other hymn types (salve, osana, etc.) served as one of the principal tools of evangelization. In practically every major parish, Filipinos learned not only to perform, but also to compose, church music using locally-derived tunes e.g. the music composed for the services in the Baclayon church in Bohol, or the Pakil and Lumban churches in Laguna.

Outside the church, various secular forms for public and social entertainment were likewise introduced by visiting artistic groups. These forms were initially intend to provide familiar entertainment to the resident Spanish gentry. At the same time, they also served as an effective media in changing the aesthetic and moral orientation of the local public by replacing indigenous literature (such as epics which proliferated with ancestral and nature divinities) with stories and theatrical shows that taught Christian virtues and morality.

The early secular forms introduced in the islands were the metrical romance narratives that were later localized as awit and korido and dramatized in the Filipino komedya, the adaptation of the Spanish comedia which was introduced at the turn of the late seventeenth century. Although more dialectically literary than musical, romance narratives were recited on pre-existing tunes while instrumental interludes and action accompaniments lent variety and color to the over-all dramaturgy of comedia. The komedya enjoyed so much public acceptance that it spread through out the archipelago. Major language communities like the Bicolano, Pampango, Ilocano, Panggalatoc, Ilongo and Cebuano communities adopted the form into their local literature, imbuing them with distinctive linguistic, topical, stylistic and musical character. It is significant to note that while these forms began as poetry of clergy and educated class, their local adoption by narrative writers and playwrights led to their integration into the folk life and semi-oral traditions of the Filipino society. Quotations from the romance narratives, for example, were committed to memory and recited extemporaneously in popular poetic jousts such as the duplo. On the other hand, the local comedia became the principal form of public entertainment during town fiestas and other public occasions.

MUSIC AS IDEOLOGY

The advent of the Spanish zarzuela and its eventual adoption as a more relevant form of entertainment spelled the decline of the komedya in popularity and thereby, as a practical artistic venture, especially its sub-specie called moro-moro (identified for its stereotypical plot based on the Muslim-Christian conflict). Moreover, the Filipino sarswela not only offered dramatic realism (as opposed to the imaginary fantasy of the komedya) to the creative imagination of the authors and the theatrical experience of the local audiences (Fernandez, 1996). It also allowed the schooled Filipino musicians to exercise their artistic and creative potentials by providing them with greater opportunities to compose music for the finest literary and dramatic outputs of high caliber writers and poets. The Filipino Zarzuela, described as a mix of moro-moro and the Spanish zarzuela (Samson 1972), likewise became a national artistic medium among the major language communities. Nationalist playwrights later utilized the zarzuela as a tool to express patriotic sentiments and critique the oppressive ways of ruling power. Works such as Tanikalang Ginto (Gold Chain) and Mabuhay ang Pilipinas (Long Live the Philippines) of Juan Abad, Pagibig sa Lupang Tinubuan (Love or the Motherland) by Pascual Poblete, and Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas (Yesterday, Today and Tommorow) by Aurelio Tolentino are but a few of the works whose authors and producers were severely punished and censured
by the American colonial government. (Santos 1998b)

The Filipinos' widespread familiarity with both the Spanish Sarswela made inroads to the European opera (starting in the 1870s) and into the local arts scene as a natural sequel to the proceeding years of flourishing local theater local tradition. Filipino performers easily adopted to the more rigorous musical demands of the opera in terms of singing, instrumental playing, conducting and composing. The first Filipino operas written by Ladislao Bonus and Alejo Carluen marked a high point in the Filipinization of the European musical theater as well as allowed the Filipino musical artist to feel that he was part of a global musical community. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Filipino composers scored various first in the art music field--the first Filipino opera Sandugong Panaginip [Dream Alliance] by Ladislao Bonus with libretto by Pedro Paterno 1902); the first piano concerto {Piano Concerto in Bb minor by Nicanor Abelardo 1923}, the first symphony (the Filipinas Symphony by Jose Estella) and the first sonata using local themes ( the Sonata Filipina in Db major by Francisco Santiago1922).

The second form consists of genres that were characterized by the fusion of Christian elements and pre-colonial music. This repertoire was mainly embodied in the extra liturgical practices that not only supplemented the liturgical rites of the Roman church, but also drew the spiritual and mystical fervor of indigenous worship into the Filipino version of the Christian religion. This musico-poetic repertoire consists mainly of the pasyon, the lenten chanting of the life and passion of Jesus Christ, as well as song performed on the different major events of the liturgical calendar, e.g. the aleluya at Easter, the alay for the May flower festival, and the pastores and daegon for christmas. Although the pasyon and the other extra-liturgical song were based on written texts with the imprimatur of the church, the musical structures used pre-Christian tunes embellished through the Christian communities, assuming a myriad of vernacular texts, tunes and styles of performance.

The third form from the Filipino repertoire emanated from indigenous forms that assumed new structural features and aesthetic framework. Practices such as the sanghiyang (a form of trance ritual) from Cavite and the "old" subli {worship through dance and drum music} of the Tagalog from Batangas were some of the newly "discovered " musical forms that clearly shows pre-Western origins. In their present state, they remain as sacred rites although now anchored to Christian teachings and religious symbolism.

Outside the realm of religious worship, some genres evolved from their oral beginnings to more contemporary practice, such as the subli, which was transformed into a folk dance in the 1930s with strong balletic orientation and a highly Westernized musical accompaniment. An even more classic example is the kundiman, which is regarded today as a principal Filipino art song-form. The origin of the kundiman is popularly traced to an older form called kumintang. Among other definitions, the kumintang has been known as a courtship and/or bridal song-and-dance form in olden times, originating from the Tagalog province of Batangas. Santiago describe as it follows:

Among the Christianized Filipino groups, the comintang is the oldest and most popular song, which is better than any other express the history, character tradition of the people. Its rhythm is that of the songs of Malaya, especially Java, with reminiscences of Indian, Arab and even Andalucian songs not only in the song itself but in the musical phrasing (Santiago 1957).

The extensive study recently done by Elena R. Mirano (1997) that the kumintang as documented (with musical transcriptions) by nineteenth century historians and writers (Jean Baptiste Mallat de Bassilan, Pedro Paterno, Wenceslao Retana, Manuel Walls y Merino) is partly characterized by improvised tune formulas based on a hemitonic mode. Just like other indigenous song-forms, they were used to render varying texts, both extemporized and written such as the romance narrative awit.

The early kundiman, on the other hand, has been described as a passionate love song with erotic underpinnings, and sung extemporaneously with the accompaniment of a guitar (Santiago 1957). The tune formula, very similar to the kumintang, later assumed more defined metric and
rhythmic structures based on Western dance rhythms. This was followed by a stage of
development when writers such as Deogracias Rosario and Jesus Balmori began to write poetic
verses in 12 syllable lines that portrayed resignation and fatalism in the expression of intense
affection and love. (One probable origin of the evolution of the term kundiman is the phrase
'kung hindi man" which means "should it not be so.")(Hila and Santos 1994) Santiago theorizes
that the kundiman adopted the sectional format of the kumintang (Santiago 1957).

The crystallization of the kundiman as a standard musical form also coincided with the Philippine
revolution against Spain. The kundiman became a popular medium for the expression of
undying love for the country. This was mediated by the piece entitled Jocelynang Baliwag later
known as the kundiman ng himagsikan (kundiman of the revolution), popular among the rebel
fighters, who "transposed" its real person object by the name of Pepita Tiongson y Lara to the
image of the Motherland. Jocelynang Baliwag is important in the study of kundiman since it
contains musical phrases that characterize its formal structure. This model, as well as other
similar tune formulas, also provided a musical identity to the "composed" classical kundiman of
the early twentieth century.

While based on the melodic configuration of the old kumintang, the classical kundiman also
adopted a formal tonal scheme consisting of an opening section in the minor mode and a
culminating section in the major mode. The process by which the kundiman came into its own as
a national music emblem, can be seen to a lesser degree in the composed kumintang (e.g.
Mutya ng Pasig), the balitaw vis-a-vis the older Visayan song-and-dance love debate called
balitao, or the dalit (sung prayer) which Julio Nakpil used a model for his Marangal na Dalit ng
Katagalugan, the national hymn commissioned by the revolutionary leader Andres Bonifacio.

CONCLUSION

The Filipino music that has emerged during this period reflects the ideological aspirations of the
nineteenth-century Filipino musical artists, as well as our present assessment of the symbolic
impact of an expressive culture that is uniquely Filipino. It is a music that amalgamated the
various regional expressions into a comprehensive musical framework that Filipinos of different
linguistic and social backgrounds could relate to, internalize and place themselves in its
historical process of being. How was this framework realized?

First, the different musical repertoires were bounded by a common language that was derived
directly from a European musical idiom, yet employed different degrees of syntactic complexity.
at the same time, the vernacular poetic texts in songs and narratives also underwent
transformation from seven syllabic lines of native literature to eight-or12-syllable poetic verses.

Second, the folk song repertory of the nineteenth century evolved from musical pre-Western
discourses, lullabies, and occasional songs, and found linguistic and structural mooring in the
Western tonal idiom as well as various dance forms such as the valse, habanera, jota and
others. These folk songs provided the musical materials in the composition of short character
pieces that became in vogue among the schooled musicians before and immediately after the
turn of the century. Written for the solo keyboard and strings, these compositions were
characterized by highly embellished melodies that partly challenged the technical competence of
the intended players. More importantly, these works were intended to be performed following a
distinct expressive style, characterized by unpredictable tempo, melodramatic lyricism, and
passionate and emotional intensity.

Finally, the art music repertoire consisting of the classical kundiman and related song forms as
well as the extended one movement of multi-part forms (the overture, tone poem, the sonata,
suite, concierto, and symphony), represents the last stage in development of a Filipino music in
late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Philippines. It represents the final stage of
convergence among disparate traditions and layers of evolving musical forms into a repertoire
that mirrors the Filipino as an expressive, creative, and multi-faceted people.
The conscious state of Filipinism was realized in the art music repertoire, which is highly descriptive [see illustration] and deliberately thematic, enhanced by the harmonic-chromatic idiom of late nineteenth century European music. Its identity and distinctiveness is derived not only from its structural reference to a pre-Western musical heritage and local way of life, as well as an underlying psyche sensitivity and emotion.

The process of attaining a Filipino identity in the musical arts in different repertoires that evolve between 1870 and the 1930s can be said to have exacted "cultural sacrifices" on the loss and transformations of the structural and formal purity of indigenous musical forms. On the other hand, one can also argue that the spiritual and aesthetic framework of pre-Christian traditions gave nineteenth century Filipino music its main source of identity and distinction. From a larger historical viewpoint, a national perspective was attained in the different repertoires that emerged from this period.

Moreover, the seeds that were planted between 1870 and the 1930s continue to bear fruit in a contemporary musical expression that seeks to further broaden its Filipino character by exploring the depth, essence and the dynamic energies of a multi-dimensional and pluralistic cultural heritage.


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