Philippine Folk Dance History

Philippine folk dance history is a fascinating example of a culture that incorporates influences from immigrants and conquerors while at the same time maintaining their own national identity.

Ancient Philippine Folk Dance History

There is no recorded "start" to Philippine folk dance - as long as there have been people on the islands they have been dancing. In fact, their mythology is filled with many different gods and goddesses that needed to be placated, implored, or thanked for various natural events like rain and harvests. Many of these festivals still feature ancient folk dances performed in costume of the tribal period.

Some dances such as the Palok and the Lumagen from the Kalinga, Cordillera province are performed with traditional percussion instruments such as the "gangsa" (a small copper gong), a "tobotob" (brass gong) or a "hibat" (a gong played with a soft wooden stick). For many tribal dances there are no external musicians, in fact - the dancers generate their own accompaniment. The dances were performed during festivals, celebrations of military victories in the past, and still at celebrations of births and weddings in modern times.

Idudu: A Snapshot of Ancient Culture

From the area of Abra, Cordillera comes the Idudu. It is a celebration of the family as the fundamental building block of Philippine culture. Depicting a typical day in the life of a family, the father is shown working in the fields while the mother cares for the children. However, as soon as the father is done, the mother goes into the fields to continue the work while the father goes in to the house to put the baby to sleep. A singer usually sings a well-known lullabye during this part of the dance, and it emphasizes the necessity of cooperation and mutual support in the Tingulan family structure.
Tinikling: Birds Dancing Over Bamboo

Perhaps the best-known dance in Philippine folk dance history, the Tinikling mimics the high-stepping strut of birds in the Philippine jungles over the bamboo traps the hunters would set for them. Two dancers, usually male and female, gracefully step in and out of crossed sets of bamboo poles being moved together and apart to the music. The dance gets faster and faster as it goes on, and it has been an audience favorite for the Philippine dance companies touring the world.

Later Dances in Philippine History

Many dances done in the Philippines derive from historical events such as the arrival of the Spaniards in the 16th century and the conflicts with the Moors. While certain words and movement forms from those cultures have been integrated into the dances, they remain uniquely Philipino in nature.

Maglalatik, the Dance of War

A dance from before the conversion of all the Philippines to Christianity is called the Maglalatik. It actually represents a fierce battle between the Moro tribesmen (wearing red trousers) and the Christian soldiers from Spain (wearing blue). Both groups wear harnesses with coconut shells attached tightly to their bodies which are struck repeatedly with other shells held in the hands. Originally from the Binan, Laguna province, it is now one of the most common performances in Philippine folk dance history.

Pandanggo sa Ilaw

Derived from the Spanish word "fandango," this dance is one of several Philippine folk dances designed to show off grace, balance, and dexterity of the performers. Three glasses of wine (or, in modern times, water) are held in hands and on top of the dancers' heads as they move, never spilling a drop. This is similar to the Binasuan dance from the Pangasinan Province which is done with drinking glasses.

Courtship Dances

Several dances, especially influenced by the Spanish dance forms, re-enact the courtship of a man and a woman in all its many aspects from the sublime to the ridiculous. For example, the Maria Clara is named after a character from Maria Clara - Maria Clara is the main female character in Jose Rizal's Noli Me Tangere. Epitomizing virtue and nobility in a Filipina, the dancers wear traditional Spanish-style gowns and flirt coquettishly behind fans - but the addition of bamboo castanets lend a distinctly Philippine feel to it.

As the Philippines have entered the global dance culture, their folk dances have been preserved, shared, and cherished by people all over the world. Thanks to online dance videos and other forms of media, there is little fear that it will ever be lost.

Ref. http://dance.lovetoknow.com/Philippine_Folk_Dance_History