Ryan B. Osal is a registered occupational therapist (OT) in the United States and Philippines. He is working for pediatric and geriatric clients. He has interests in singing and songwriting as well as in the keyboard, ukulele, kazoo and percussion instruments. Ryan is a member of the Ukulele Underground Philippines and runs an occupational therapy group for children with special needs, using live music-making activities as a medium. He also has a podcast and has written an article for The Eclectic Guitar (http://theeclecticguitar.com/), a resource website for music therapy students and professionals. This year, he will be relocating in the US to pursue a degree in Music Therapy at Berklee College of Music and to become a board certified music therapist. He plans to return to Asia and establish music therapy clinics as well as advocate and advance public awareness on music therapy as evidence-based profession and approach with a focus on underdeveloped and developing countries.

Introduction

The Philippines is located in Southeast Asia and is an incredibly diverse nation in terms of language, religion, ethnicity and geography. The Philippines is the third largest English speaking country in the world with a population of more than 90 million people and an annual growth rate of around 2%, making it one of the most populous and fastest growing countries on Earth. Ethnically, the Philippines is a melting pot. The Filipino is basically of Malay stock with a sprinkling of Chinese, American, Spanish and Arab blood. More recent immigrant groups also live in the country, including the Spanish, Chinese, American and Latin American people. A long history of Western colonial rule, interspersed with the visits of merchants and traders, evolved a people of a unique blend of east and west, both in appearance and culture. The official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and English (Szczepanski, 2012).

Of all the arts, music is regarded as the most universal in its appeal and acceptance. This universality, however, does not mean that music is without individual character. Each country has its own kind of music that embodies the total experience, the collective consciousness of its people. Music, therefore, is the collective expression of the musical genius of a particular people. Such is the case of Philippine music which today is regarded as a unique blending of two great musical traditions – the East and the West. Being innately musical, the Filipinos, from the earliest to contemporary times, have imbibed these traditions and have woven their musical creations along these mainstreams musical thoughts. Through time, Philippine society has witnessed the evolution of music expressed in different forms and stylistic nuances. A people gifted with a strong sense of musicality, the Filipinos turn to music to express their innermost
Filipino Folk Music

feelings. Hence, every song they sing, every instrument they play, every piece of music they make is a direct, almost spontaneous reflection of their hopes and longings, frustrations and fulfillment, and failures and triumphs. The native arts have suffered a great deal of transformation and fundamental ideas but thanks to a patriotic spirit of renaissance and to the enthusiasm of scholars, something is now done to preserve the few remnants of the old and truly Oriental civilization (Yamio, 2011).

Philippine Music is divided into four eras or traditions, namely the Ethnic, Spanish Colonial, American Colonial and Contemporary tradition. The majority of Philippine Music revolves around cultural influences from the West, due primarily to the Spanish and American rule for over three centuries. Oriental (ethnic) musical backgrounds are still alive, but mainly thrive in highland and lowland barrios where there is little Western influence (Pantig, 2007).

Ethnic Tradition

The diversity of ethnic musical traditions arises from several significant historical events. The Philippines had proto-Malays as the first inhabitants, followed by settlers from mainland and insular Southeast Asia. In essence, the separate regional settlements in the country were a result of this wave of migration (Anupol, 2007).

The Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Arab merchants started dynamic trading with the people of Mai (now Mindoro). With the trading, the merchants not only traded goods but also religious and social ideas. Indian culture was very much evident and had a strong imprint on the culture at that time. Islam was introduced in the 14th century in the island of Sulu. Various communities adopted this new religion, which very much influenced their culture and music (Anupol, 2007).

Musical Characteristics

Indigenous music can be instrumental or vocal and this musical tradition marked rites of passage and life-cycle events for the early Filipinos. In celebrations, instrumental playing is common whereas solo instrument playing is done for courting or self-entertainment. The Islamic music tradition, which is part of the ethnic tradition, is largely based on the practices of the pre-Islamic cultures of the southern part of the Philippines (Anupol, 2007).

Ethnic music in the Philippines was started by different groups and is premised on an admiration of native instruments which are used in the various ritual and worldly activities of these peoples. These native instruments are generally grouped into: wind instruments; chordophones or stringed instruments; idiophones or percussion instruments that are struck with a hammer, against each other, or against another object like the hand, and membranophones or percussion instruments using animal skins or membranes. Nevertheless, the ethnic music was not only made by playing instruments but also by using the voices of the people. Like the instruments, vocal music expresses and transmits in a concrete and vivid manner a great variety of the thoughts, beliefs, lifestyles, character and way of life of the native peoples. Singing is a central component of life among the people. Historically, people sang solo or in groups.
according to the composition of the song with or without accompaniment or lyrics. Improvisation was very prominent and music was made with very little knowledge of music theory (Anupol, 2007).

Vocal music was used long before musical instruments were invented. The beating of two pieces of wood was used to accompany the most primitive kind of song (Yamio, 2011).

Three main characteristics are exemplified by traditional ethnic music. The first is the cantata form. A cantata is a vocal composition with an instrumental accompaniment and often contains more than one movement. In singing, the groups sing in solo or by group and some songs were sung by accompaniment. Another characteristic that is exemplified is the use of acapella. An acapella song is a vocal composition without instrumental accompaniment. The groups also did this when they sang in solo or by group without using any instruments in the background. Lastly, the sonata form is used - a composition for one or more solo instruments, one of which is usually a keyboard instrument, and usually consisting of three or four independent movements varying in key, mood, and tempo (Anupol, 2007).

Ethnic Tribal Music

Ethnic music and dance are one and inseparable in the traditions of the different tribes that populated the Philippine Islands hundreds of years ago before the arrival of the Spaniards in the 14th century and their subsequent 350 years of colonization through the Cross and Sword. The first performance in the Youtube example below is from the BAGOBO tribe of Davao in Southern Philippines and the second group is the IFUGAO tribe of the Mountain province in Northern Philippines: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJJGmcqRgQc.

Spanish Colonial Tradition

Spanish musical influence is mainly intended to bring the Christian faith closer to the natives. The Spanish regime gave new form to Philippine music in particular. Songs, epics, native drums and gongs were overshadowed by the Christian chants and the harmony of new Western instruments - namely the organ, harp and the guitar (Anupol, 2007).

Since Christianity proved to be a very powerful force in the Colonial period, the influence of Church music extended to everyday living (Anupol, 2007).

Musical Characteristics

When the Hispanics occupied the Philippines, they greatly influenced its music. The music developed during this period is one of the roots for modern Filipino music. It was during this period that guitars became popular. Because of this, almost all the musical forms in this period made use of the guitar (Anupol, 2007).

Natives were not only instructed in singing but also in playing various instruments such as the guitar, violin, flute, harp, and organ (The Freshmen Music Room, 2011).
The three main forms introduced to the Filipinos were the harana, the kundiman, and the rondalla. Most of these forms were developed as a result of the fusion between tribal music styles and traditional Spanish and Mexican music. The harana is a traditional form of courtship music in Spain in which a man woos a woman by serenading her underneath her window at night. The main instrument used for the harana is the guitar. The kundiman is a lyrical song characterized by a minor key at the beginning and shifts to a major key in the second half. The lyrics depict all sorts of stories about love from broken-heartedness to unrequited love. The rondalla is an ensemble of instruments. Philippine rondallas consist of the piccolo bandurria, bandurria, la-ud, and the guitar-shaped octavina and mandola, guitarra, and double bass (Anupol, 2007). An example of Renz Merano’s Rondalla can be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2IiG6TSZa0.

American Colonial Tradition

After the 400-year reign of the Spaniards, the American colonists brought with them a new breed of music. During this era, vaudeville (bodabil), cabaret (kabaret) and kundiman became the most popular forms of music (Anupol, 2007).

Musical Characteristics

When the Americans came, they brought the blues, folk, R&B, and rock and roll. They also made music a part of the educational curriculum. This developed the musical skills of the Filipinos who used this skill to imitate Western music and to create local versions of Western music. Eventually, the Philippines promoted its own talents like Lea Salonga at a much later date. What was popular during this time though were the juke boxes, AM radio, American dance hall, vaudeville, jazz, the Broadway musical, and vinyl records where they listened to American rock bands (Anupol, 2007).

Songs became a hybrid of other forms of music that were popular then such as the kundiman. Nevertheless, the influence of the Americans in Filipino music proved to be evident during the 1960’s (during the popularity of the Beatles) and 1970’s (“disco fever”) (Anupol, 2007).

The less formalized styles of music were heard and made popular in concert halls called kabaret, vaudeville shows showcasing comic, raucous, and even lewd sketches accompanied by jazz music, and even sometimes, traditional grass-root kundiman (Anupol, 2007).

Contemporary Tradition

In the 21st century, bands such as Parokya ni Edgar, Rivermaya, and Sandwich have all made their names known in the music industry with their brand of music and style. More new forms of Filipino music are emerging and hopefully will continue to flourish in the future (Anupol, 2007).
Musical Characteristics

The popular songs of the 1970’s combined elements from the American ballad, Broadway, and light kundiman. The demand for the local popular music was further enhanced by the Broadcast Media Council when it passed Resolution B76-31 requiring all radio stations to broadcast at least one Filipino composition every hour. Original Pilipino Music or OPM flourished especially in the 1980s and the onset of the 90’s. Pinoy rock is the offshoot of the rock boom of the 1960’s, when groups were equipped with electronic instruments. After the music world was aroused by the success of rock operas, the local pop music scene saw the creation of Pinoy counterparts (Santos, 1994).

Original Pilipino Music (OPM) is written in Filipino, English or Taglish, sung and performed by Filipinos. OPM first referred only to Philippine pop songs, especially those in the ballad form, such as songs popularized in the 1970s through the mid-1990s. Through the years, different artists emerged and established a different style of OPM music. Consequently, other genres of OPM were released. OPM rock is an example of the genres that came out through the years. Philippine rock musicians added folk music, and other influences which lead to the 1978 breakthrough success of the artist Freddie Aguilar (Anupol, 2007).

Aguilar’s Anak (meaning “child” in English), his debut recording, is the most commercially successful Philippine recording, was popular throughout Asia and Europe, and has been translated into numerous languages by singers worldwide. Anak, the single, was an immediate smash success, gaining double platinum certification in a matter of weeks. This was followed by an album that contained both the Tagalog and the English versions, but it was the Tagalog version that carried the album and brought international success. Anak climbed to the top ten charts in Japan and Europe; over six million copies were sold and the song went on to generate 55 conversions in 26 languages. International opportunities followed and Freddie recorded an album in Los Angeles in English. An example of Freddie Aguilar’s Anak can be seen following this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-2IPzH7Do/.

The 1990’s saw the emergence of a superstar pop-rock group, the Eraserheads, which is considered by many Philippine nationals as the number one group in the Philippine recording scene. OPM rock today is the most dominant style of music inside the Philippines. Various artists and bands have extended the popularity of OPM rock. OPM rock today is sung in Filipino or English. Yet, a number of other genres are growing in popularity in the Philippine music scene, including a number of alternative groups as well as tribal bands promoting cultural awareness of the Philippine Islands. These kinds of music are accompanied by various instruments to further showcase the music (Anupol, 2007).

Ang Huling El Bimbo (The Last El Bimbo) is a rock ballad by Pinoy rock group Eraserheads from their 1995 album Cutterpillow as well as their international album Aloha Milkyway. Aside from the usual band instruments the group used, the song features a synthesizer along with a piano. The song, narrated in the first person, tells the story of a man's unrequited feelings for his childhood friend, whose life came to a tragic end. A Youtube link to this song is as follows: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laijnSjZpl34.
Various musical forms and styles are used today. The music culture in the Philippines is so wide that many groups and individuals have their own style in music. Filipinos are very religious such that one form of music is exemplified while praising the Lord is called the “Mass.” In this style, praise is the main focus of the music. This form sets the fixed portions of the mass such as the Kyrie, Gloria, etc. Another characteristic of Filipino music is the chorale. In this form, group of singers sing altogether. Different variations of tones are being used while singing a piece together. Most individuals and bands perform on-stage singing songs while different instruments accompany them. Likewise, the sonata form is still present. Even if Filipinos do not recognize this form in some music, the form is present especially in instrumental music. Lastly, for special events, the oratorio form is exhibited in the country but very seldom. In this form, an orchestra, a chorale and a soloist are joined together to perform music. The Philippines has several musical forms today and is continuing to flourish in the future (Anupol, 2007).

Filipinos as Musicians

Most Filipinos possess knowledge of more than one instrument and many are now in other countries to acquire a broader education in music. The Filipinos in the countries of Southern Asia are generally the musical leaders. In the United States, many Filipinos have organized circles which feature musicians who have graduated from the conservatories with honors and provide excellent music for important. Stringed instruments and pianos are popular instruments of the rising generation while the use of harp has decreased (Yamio, 2011).

Development of Music in the Philippines

The Filipinos have been said to be very quick at comprehending music coming from outstanding artists, composers, musicians. Today, music is a part of a well-rounded education for the Filipino youth. Both public and private higher-level educational institutions are adequately providing for its development through its separate department or college and on the category of the courses of instruction. Thus there are musical conservatories in leading colleges and universities in Manila and other principal Philippines cities. This is in recognition of the importance of music in modern education (Yamio, 2011).

Music Therapy Training Programs

Presently, there are no academic institutions that offer a music therapy program in the Philippines. One must study overseas for a degree in music therapy. However, Filipinos who can afford to study abroad are also making their name in the music therapy profession by graduating summa cum laude at well-known universities and colleges including the Berklee College of Music and are now practicing as music therapists or clinical supervisors overseas. In the
Philippines, there is only an elective course for those who are interested. One such course is a music therapy class at University of the Philippines Conservatory of Music. Even though music therapy is not set to be a major subject at an academic institution, some health professionals are incorporating music in their psychological, speech and occupational therapy practices with goals pertinent to their discipline. With the developing economy and increased public awareness, it is hoped that universities and colleges in the Philippines will establish a program in music therapy as well as a regulatory body for this profession to safeguard the welfare of the consumers and so that more medical professionals will refer clients for music therapy.
References


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