

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Magindanao Music

Jose Maceda

Philippine Studies vol. 9 no. 4 (1961): 666–671

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Notes & Comment

Magindanao Music

Asian music is practiced in the Philippines by a minority probably constituting about 10% of the population. To the rest of the country's population, which has come under the influence of Spain during about four hundred years, Asian music is a tradition almost entirely forgotten. Only a western style of music is known to it: folk songs dance tunes, generally in major and minor tonalities, and in duple or triple meter, with melodies strongly reminiscent of Spanish or Mexican airs and of nineteenth century popular tunes.

Contrary to popular belief that "the native melody and rhythm were gradually influenced by European style," there is no evidence that in the Christianized parts of the islands there was a distinct and gradual transition from native Asian music to Europeanized folk music—from the use of indigenous pentatonic to that of diatonic scales, from the playing of gongs and bamboo percussion instruments to the strumming of the guitar and the *banduria*. The upper tetrachord of a harmonic minor scale without the second half-step may be similar to a tetrachord of the *pelog* scale, but there are no songs which show a conscious relationship of these two intervallic structures.

European music was absorbed by the westernized Filipinos and from this latter group emerged a new musical culture built on the completely new and entirely different culture from Europe rather than on the foundation of age-old native traditions. A parallel may be found in Central and South America, although there the situation is somewhat different. There was a considerable immigration of Europeans to Central and South America and their descendants cultivated European music, adding to this touches of local color. In the Philippines, it was the Filipinos themselves that absorbed

the new music. A similar phenomenon exists today in both Goa and Celebes, where Portuguese music left a decided imprint on native folk music.

One might think that this assimilation of western musical idioms by the Hispanicized groups may have made impossible a genuine musical expression. The fact is that native simplicity and sincerity is achieved even with the use of European musical tools. Characteristic moods of gaiety and melancholy can be perceived and explained by melodic flow, harmony, and rhythm. There is also a subtle difference in the style of a foreign diva and that of a country girl singing a simple *kundiman*, a difference observable in the quality and expression of the voice, the use of crescendo and decrescendo, and the pronunciation of the texts.

Today the musical styles of pre-Spanish musical cultures in the Philippines can still be studied in relatively isolated groups of people on Mindanao, Palawan, Mindoro, northern Luzon, and other islands where indigenous cultures have had little or no contact with Spain or America. While northern Luzon and the centrally located islands of Mindoro and Palawan offer interesting group and solo singing and a variety of instruments widely used in Malaysia, it is on Mindanao that old Malay music and a later music of Hindu and Moslem influences co-exist. Simple singing within a limited range, usually in a tetrachordal scale, and the use of bamboo idiochords and bamboo flutes, indicate practices common and very old in Malaysia; the chanting of long, melismatic melodies and the employment of a drone tone also show Indian and Islamic influences. The presence, mostly among the Moslem groups in Mindanao and Sulu, of horizontally-played gongs with bosses relates these islands not only to Indonesia but also to Laos, Thailand, and Burma. These southern Philippine islands are thus a focal point where Asian musical cultures meet and diffuse. Because of proximity to Southeast Asia they have had a more continuous contact with Asian civilizations than the northern parts of the Philippines which have been either isolated from the Asian cultural community or have lived under complete Spanish control.

The Magindanao are a group of Moslems, popularly referred to in the Philippines as Moros, a term first used by Spain in her contacts with the Islamic civilization of North Africa. The Moslems live on the island of Mindanao, which is the biggest island (36,906 sq. miles) in the southern part of the Philippines, lying between latitudes 6-8° North and 122-127° East. The Magindanao inhabit the southwestern part of the island, at the mouth of, and on up, the Cotabato river of the same province. This river overflows almost yearly and inundates large tracts of swamps, coconut plantations, forests, clearings and farm land.

There are altogether eight groups of Moslems on Mindanao and the adjacent Sulu archipelago. A population estimate from the 1953 Bureau of Census and Statistics gives the total number of Moslems as only 791,817 or about 3.7 of the entire Philippine population of 21,022,700. To give an idea of the different ethno-religious groups in the province of Cotabato, where most Magindanao live, the 1948 census has the following figures.

Christian (all churches)	230,470
Moslems (Magindanao)	115,162
Pagan and no religion reported	39,631
Chinese (does not include mestizos or those who have become Filipino citizens)	1,735
European and American	56
T O T A L	427,054

The different culture influences in Mindanao previous to the coming of Islam are the *Sriwijaya*, including "evidence of a Javanese colony," a "strong Indian element," and ties with Celebes and the Moluccas rather than with Borneo and Indo-China. However, Robert B. Fox believes that there is on Mindanao strong "Bornean alignment of specific traits" and cites items of similarities as follows: "The true dart blow gun, ear plugs, drinking wine from jars with reed straws, the concept of a multiple soul, human sacrifice, blood placed in a posthole during the building of a dwelling, the *begani* type of pseudo-territorial leadership, and so forth, are found in Mindanao and Borneo." Furthermore, he says, the similarities that stand out "are the result of late rather than early influences." As we will explain later, such a late influence may be found in the *kulintang* gong-melody, as against an earlier influence which may be seen in the ring-type flutes spread all over the island.

Islam was introduced into Mindanao by Arabian-Malayan explorers from Johore around the year 1475, according to Saleeby, or 1430, according to Beyer. From then on its influence grew so that around the 17th and 18th century, by the time Spain had started converting the greater part of the islands to Catholicism, Islam already had a secure foothold on Sulu and in the western and northwestern parts of Mindanao. The Moslem converts were becoming increasingly aware of their new culture, an awareness which, in part, solidified and strengthened their resistance to Spain's attempts to bring them to Christianity. They developed into groups culturally distinct from the aboriginal Malayan peoples of the rest of the island, followed an Islamic system of laws, social customs, marriage and polygamy, and practiced whatever tenets of the Islamic faith they had absorbed. The new religion provided the Moslems of Mindanao with a means of communication with the

outside world. It opened to them new vistas, a way of life, and "progress" in much the same way that the Spanish and American civilizations have affected modern Filipinos. Thus both the Magindanao and the modern Filipinos have been placed on a newer level of culture than the aboriginal peoples of the country, who did not receive the impetus of outside contacts.

According to the Magindanao genealogies, or *tarsila*, the first conversions to Islam among the Magindanao occurred towards the close of the 15th century when Kabungwan, an Arab-Malay explorer, accompanied by a large company of Samals from Johore, conquered the settlements at the mouth of the Pulnagi river. There are two large groups of tribes or divisions of Moslems on Mindanao—the Magindanao and the Irahun (Ilanun, Malanao, Maranao). Saleeby says that "the former is the greater of the two in number, in the extent of its territory and in fame." It had numerous military encounters with the Spaniards from the 16th to the 19th century. The present Magindanao are mostly farmers. Hunt has reported that those that live in towns are traders, government employees, smiths, operators of motor boats and *paraos*, along with some professional people.

The river-town of Dulawan, where I took my tape-recordings of music, is now called Datu Piang and is one of the oldest towns in Cotabato. In 1948 it had a population of 42,858. The Moslem cultural pattern here is similar to that in lesser concentrations of Moslem population in the towns of Pikit, Nuling, Dinaig, Kidapawan, Buluan and others. Hence it was a good center for studying Magindanao music, one where the music might be less adulterated than that in other areas of lesser concentration of Moslem peoples.

Once a week during market day a special activity stirs the whole town. Women and children from the neighboring barrios hike or ride boats to town to buy and sell goods. There is an air of festivity, and the people look forward to the exciting day that breaks the monotony of a whole week's work. Dulawan is a convenient stop-over for boats picking up rice, coconuts, copra, corn and other items of produce that are shipped to Cotabato city, the capitol of the province, and from there to Manila. It takes about six hours by motor launch upstream from Cotabato to Dulawan and about an hour less to return.

The most popular musical instruments among the Magindanao are the gong-ensembles which can be heard almost daily at practically any hour or even late into the night. Men, women, and some adept children play on the instruments. Usually, the adults perform the gong-melody (*kulintang*), while the young or less able players beat the fundamental rhythm on the other gongs. Men appear to be more interested in the faster (*binalig*) style of playing.

while women, who are more conservative, prefer the slower or older (*danden*) style. The fun of gong-playing is shared by even the very young; thus one can find some children beating the basic rhythms on one of the gongs, the drum, or some object on which they can tap with their sticks. The gongs have a recreational function in the household and are played both by family and visitors. Prestige is attached to the possession of a gong-ensemble but most own them for the genuine pleasure derived from playing and hearing these instruments. Their mere sound invites a crowd of people who will sit down or squat to listen to the music for hours on end. A more formal setting for gong-playing is found at the big wedding festivities where different *kulintang* ensembles are invited to play for the entertainment of guests. At these affairs soloists strive to outshine one another in contests that frequently last the whole night.

It is also during the wedding festivals that one can hear epic songs chanted by a few singers in remarkable feats of memory. These chants are not part of the marriage ritual itself, but they are sung for the newlyweds to remind them of the legendary heroes of the Magindanao. Some epics are so long that it takes several nights to sing them completely. Love chants are also sung at big weddings. They are usually couched in metaphor with subtle insinuations and indirect meanings that are to be interpreted by the man or woman to whom the songs are directed.

A different setting for vocal music is found in the religious activities, like the Friday-noon service, the celebration of the *Molud* or *Mawlid*, the *puwasa* or Ramadan, and the periodic commemorations of the dead. The chants are mostly prayers connected with Islamic ritual. The singers, who are trained either by visiting Arabs or other *pandita*, sing with varying proficiency in the use of Arabic texts and in the command of the melodic line. It is possible that the melody of some love chants has been influenced by an Islamic religious style.

The more delicate instruments like the *suling* and *palendag* flutes and the long, narrow boat-lute, the *kudyapi*, are performed on by a skilled musician at more intimate gatherings or as a recreation for the musician himself. They are usually not heard at big wedding festivities where the din and general merry-making drown out their faint sounds.

An altogether different kind of musical setting is provided by the rituals connected with animistic beliefs. One informant told me that gong and other music is played to induce childbirth, to ward off impending sickness, to stop an earthquake, or sometimes to prevent a storm at sea. I have not actually heard any of this music. It seems to be played less frequently now, although evidently quite common in earlier days.

Magindanao music occurs variously and in varied settings. There is the gong-playing for the casual enjoyment of the player and his family and soon of the crowd which is inevitably attracted; there are also the more formal ensemble competitions at wedding feasts; still again there is the gong music that has an animistic association. Chanting of epic or love songs surrounds and accompanies weddings; a wholly different chanting pervades Islamic ritual. The gentle and delicate sounds of the flute or the boat-lute live only in a very private, sometimes wholly personal, world.

Certain practices are changing: the boat-lute is now played more for the player's own diversion where once it was chiefly for the entertainment of visitors at the sultan's home, and music-making has gradually become a recreation rather than a part of animistic ritual. Dreams, the subconscious, and magic are not specially significant in Magindanao music. There must have been older changes, judging from what has happened in other areas in the Philippines and Malaysia. The contacts with Islam, with Christianity and with the modern world are weakening old associations with animism.

As in most unwritten cultures, musical theory though actually well-developed, exists only latently in the consciousness of the Magindanao musician. To explain musical elements concretely, a painstaking cross-examination of musicians and informants appears less fruitful than playing music recordings in numberless repetitions and notating and analyzing them. The findings of this analysis are then to be discussed and confirmed by the Magindanao musician. For example, Masil Uka at one time played only four variations of a rhythm on the *babandil*, a type of gong, but another time he played eight variations. At that time he could not always repeat them (there were no names for each tone); but when the variations were re-played for him on a tape-recorder even after an interval of two years, he was able to perform each one exactly as before. In other instances, nobody could explain what was a fundamental rhythm and what was its variation, or how each variation differed from the other; yet every one knew what significantly belongs to one fundamental rhythm and not to the other.

JOSE MACEDA

Golden Rule in Business

Running a hotel or a restaurant or both is as much a mission as a business; and, paradoxical as it may seem, the more we of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines consider it a mission, the more successful our business will be.