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A Contextual Commentary on the Philippine Audiovisual Documentaries of Robert Garfias

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A Contextual Commentary on the Philippine Audiovisual Documentaries of Robert Garfias

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In 1966, Robert Garfias came to the Philippines and documented traditional musical cultures from the North to the Southern islands of the entire archipelago. It was a rather comprehensive coverage of the different major language groups, from the Ilokans of the North, and the Ibaloi, the Kalinga, and the Tinguian from the Cordillera mountain region to the *lumads* or highland groups of the Bagobo, Manobo, and the Tiruray, and the Islamic communities both from the lowland – the Maguindanao and the Maranao – and the insular communities of the Badjao, Samal and the Tausug. The collected data was considerable in that it included both instrumental and vocal music, as well as dance. The films were shot between February and April, which attests to an intensive field work and documentation during those months. It was also in April 12–16 of 1966 when Robert Garfias presented a paper on “Melody and Mode in Japanese Court Music” at the large-scale International Music Symposium on the Musics of Asia that was organized by Jose Maceda in Manila under the auspices of the National Music Council of the Philippines in cooperation with the UNESCO National Commission and the International Music Council. Some of the luminaries in the fields of Ethnomusicology and New Music Composition were in attendance, including Mantle Hood, Harold Powers, Tran Van Khe, David Morton, Pian Rulan Chao, Liang Tsai Ping, W.D. Amaradeva, William Malm, Shigeo Kishibe, Chuang Pen Li, Barbara Smith and Robert Garfias, together with Chou Wen-Chung, Ton de Leeuw, and Iannis Xenakis, with performers Prasad Silapabanleng, Ravi Shankar, and Yuji Takahashi.

From February to March 1966, Garfias travelled extensively throughout the Philippines. In the North, he covered Ilocos Norte, Bokod and Lubuagan in the Cordillera mountains, and the province of Abra. He then went to the Palawan island and in Mindanao, he proceeded to Davao del Norte, Cotabato, Zamboanga, Lanao del Sur, and to Basilan and Sulu in the Sulu archipelago. With his student Harold Schultz, he recorded, photographed and filmed different musical forms as well as dances from more than a dozen ethnic communities from the upland, lowland, and Islamic cultures. Some of the places where he ventured are no longer as safe to visitors as before, which makes this collection truly valuable and precious.

Dealing with the music of the Philippine ethnic groups for the first time must have been a novel experience for the researchers, namely Robert Garfias and

Harold Schultz, and Jose Maceda, although the latter had already done extensive field work on some of the places that were covered. However, they were quite thorough and some of the field notes contained relevant information on the title of the genre, the location, the date, the equipment used, the ethnic groups, the names of the performers, their gender, and some description of the performance, as well as the form of the music. There were also some rough transcriptions and translations of the vocal music.

The videos as well as the audio recordings were taken out of context, in that the artists were asked to perform outside the occasions when the different musical genres were usually performed. This is understandable, since time in the field was limited and the main object of the study was to document and not really conduct an in-depth investigation of the musical cultures that were covered. Thus, optimum care was taken in the set-up so that with the best equipment available then, the highest quality and fidelity could be ensured. Moreover, the result was a plethora of the forms of expression that each language group visited was able to provide. Among the Maranao, audio recordings were taken of the *dadabuan (kulintang)* ensemble playing Inandang, Onor, Kapromayas; the *kudyapi*, jews harp *kudyapi* solo, two pieces on the *serong aganding* (a bamboo zither with flap), the *kulintang* ensemble, and three renditions of the *bayok*, a musical oratory. The films had extensive coverage, from the Cordillera gong and bamboo instrumental playing from at least three different cultural groups, to the Maguindanao and Maranao *kulintang* as well as Maranao dances, to the Bagobo, Manobo and Tagacaolo *tagunggu* and *edel* performances, to the dances of the Sama and the different renditions of the Yakan, to the instruments and dances of the Ilokanos in the North.

The communality of the musical ensembles, especially among the Cordillera region's playing of the *gangsa* (flat gongs), was one of the main focus of the study. The most characteristic instrumental ensemble in the Cordillera highlands is the flat gong called *gangsa*, and the prevailing texture appeared to be created with interlocking rhythmic patterns in what Maceda observed as one instance of the "drone and melody" structure. Gong playing represents one of the highest, if not the highest, forms of music making, usually performed for such important occasions as feasts, weddings, peace pacts called *budong*, healing rituals, and other community-wide celebrations and gatherings. The playing of the *gangsa* has two styles: the first called the *palook* or *pattung* is executed by a group of men who beat the gongs with wooden mallets while dancing. This can be seen in the film on the *talibeng* (or war dance) from the Bontoc of Sagada. What was emphasized in this film was the movements of the body rather than the gong playing. At one point the dancers executed a squatting position while sedentary in one place. The feet continue to move and then they stop playing the gongs while still moving, and then resume the gong-playing before stopping. The documentation shows the

different stances of this forceful style of performance.

The other style is called *toppaya* which involves beating the gongs with bare hands, using different techniques such as muffling, sliding of the palm, or simply letting the gong ring. The gongs are placed on the lap of the men in half kneeling position. In the Sinuklit gong ensemble among the Tinguian from Abra, which was also shot in an open ground without any spectators, the six gongs that are played in the *toppaya* style are shown one gong at a time, and then only later as a group. The different gongs and ways of beating were closely shot individually in order to highlight the different technical actions that produced a homogenous sonic continuum. In this particular clip, the concentration was on the music and no dance was recorded even if in real situations, the *toppaya* usually accompanies a dancing couple.

The video of an old man and a woman dancing the *sinuklit* in a basketball court, is shown in a separate clip. Here, the man is holding a blanket and later on puts it on his shoulder. They keep on moving towards each other until their hands touch together. Another video is from Apayao, where one woman plays on one *gangsa* with her hands as she squats, while two women dance with their hands outstretched. This is not a typical dance, but more a re-enactment of the real dance.



Figure 1 The Ibaloi from Bokod. Photo by Robert Garfias.

In the field audio-recording of Ibaloi music, instruments were also recorded separately as the *solibao* (drum), the *kimbal* (secondary drum), the *kalsa* and the *pinsak* (flat gongs), and the *palas* (a pair of metal sticks). The players were asked to play their individual parts in the ensemble. This was followed by the combination of the *kalsa, pinsak and palas*, and then the two drums together. Then there is also the combination of *kalsa and pinsak*, and then *solibao, kimbal and palas*.

These separate recordings of the different combinations, as well as the individual playing of the instruments have a didactic value in instrumental performance as far as outsiders are concerned. However, it takes little consideration of the spontaneous interaction that these instruments carry out in the course of the performance itself.

Another important aspect in these musical traditions is the extensive use of the bamboo which flourish in profusion in the physical landscape of the Cordillera people. It is also interesting to note the variety of sound qualities and amplitudes that can be drawn from a single source in the plant kingdom with the ingenious application of acoustical technology. In these musical repertoires, bamboo instruments count in all the instrumental categories of aerophones, chordophones, and idiophones.

The video of the Kalinga *kolibit* solo played by a man in g-string, closes up on the finger movements on the strings that are carved out of the body of the bamboo tube. This could demonstrate the technique of plucking, as well as the position of the hands that hold the instrument. In the actual teaching of these instruments to non-native learners, this approach is rather useful, except when it comes to the matter of improvisation.

In another video, the *patang-ug* or the quill-shaped bamboo tubes with a thumb hole near the base, are called bamboo *gangsá*. The *patang-ug* is an example of the idiophone, as they are played by beating them against a long tree branch. The differences in hitting the tree branch are again highlighted. Today the *patang-ug* is beaten against a piece of wood that is held on the left hand of the player, so that it gives more flexibility in the movement of the players. The timbre is altered by closing or opening the thumb hole. The interlocking rhythms still follow the *gangsá* patterns.

The concept of homogeneity in playing one type or family of instruments in ensemble music may as well reflect the close kinship in Cordillera society. In spite of the limitation in pitch compass and timbral color, the music has its own system of variability which addresses different needs and functions of everyday life. The sounds produced by the different instrumental types relate to different activities, from traveling and driving away evil spirits on the way, to entertainment and celebrating important events.

In the South, different perspectives on the music encountered seemed to emerge with the presence of a “melodic” instrument in the *kulintang*. The immediate attention centered on the tuning of the instrument, how it would conform or deviate from the fixed temperament of western music, as well as define a standard of intervals for the instrument. In documenting the *kulintang* of the Maranao, two sets of *kulintang* were carefully sounded in a scalar fashion, as was also the case with two *kulintang* sets from the Maguindanao. As an ethnomusicological preoccupation, the tuning of instruments from different cultures seems to bear a deep meaning, especially for researchers coming from the West and comparing them with the well-tempered tuning that developed then. In Jose Maceda’s dissertation on the Music of the Maguindanao, he compared the tunings of eight different *kulintangs* and aside from the different ranges of tones, there are no standard intervallic properties that separate the different frequencies, except for relative distances between pitches. Later, he measured twenty different *kulintangs* with the same result (Maceda 1963). But what is perhaps missing in this investigation is why concentrate only on the *kulintang*? Why did they not investigate the tuning of the other instruments, like the *agong* or the *babandir*, and even the *gandingan* of the Maguindanao? If this was an ensemble, did it not follow that the other instruments be “in tune” with one another, just like the Indonesian *gamelan*?

The tuning of the gong instruments in the Philippines is actually of little consequence. According to the Bagobo, there are two kinds of musical expressions where the different instruments are classified according to their functions. The gongs in olden times, were used to communicate to the gods and to transcend physical distances, and therefore, the tuning is not as important as the resonance or the power of the sound. On the other hand, the other instruments like the *suling* (flute), the *kudyapi* (lute) or the *saluray* (zither) are used to communicate to people and therefore they have some kind of tuning formula. This is just one theory of course. There are many other aesthetic and conceptual frameworks in the other forms of expression, depending on their social or religious functions.

Today, there is already so much data that emphasize the discreteness of the musical forms as far as musical parameters are concerned. For example, the *kulintang* music from the different ethnolinguistic groups in the South do not necessarily rely on tones and pitches but rather on sound articulations as well as colors or tonal nuances, in order to produce a meaningful performance. The melodic accents are quite important in that the art of *kulintang* playing is a discursive form of expression and that is rather specific in the intended meaning of what is being played and/or said.

There was however already an inkling of the importance of articulation in that the different rhythmic modes in Maguindanao had been recorded individually on

each of the instruments of the ensemble. The *Sirung*, *Tidtu*, *Sinulug*, *Barikata* and *Duyug* were taken one by one on the *babandir* (the instrument that sets the pace of the entire musical rendition). There is also the recording of *Sinulug*, *Barikata* and *Duyug* on the four *gandingan* gongs, *Barikata*, *Sinulug*, *Tidtu*, and *Sirung* on the *dabakan*, and *Tidtu*, *Sirung*, and *Barikata* on the *agung*. This was an initial attempt at understanding the difference between the rhythmic modes, although much more time and immersion would be needed to really comprehend the intricacy and multiplicity of the variations in each of these modes, which was already in evidence when he recorded three *Tidtu* melodies, in which three different numbered gongs were played. This way of recording would be able to show the variety of versions that are possible in playing the different rhythmic modes, as well as the different nuances in emotional content or intentional meaning that can be articulated in each of the different modes.

In the films, the virtuosity of the solo *kulintang* artist (Amul or Amal Lumuntud?) was very much in evidence in the two modes that he played: the *duyug* and the *sinulug* modes. The *binalig* on the other hand is played by an all-female *kulintang* ensemble in Nuling, Cotabato, most of whom were formally dressed. The performance was a show of the proficiency of the whole ensemble. Here, there are close-ups of the *kulintang*, the *agung* and the *gandingan*, underlying the different strokes made on these instruments. Another video taken in the same place in Nuling, Cotabato, shows another set of women playing the *duyug* mode, also with close-up shots of the *gandingan*, the *dabakan*, the *kulintang*, and the *agung*, shown to exhibit the differences in the beating of the instruments. There is no English term for this interaction and resulting texture between the instruments, as it is neither contrapuntal, nor heterophonic, nor colotomic, nor harmonic. If one were to ask the native players what they are doing, they will say that they are actually conversing with each other.

Among the vocal forms, the Maranao *bayok* stands out as one of the unique forms of musical oratory. Of the three recorded renditions, however, the third is the most complete in that the third part of the form is well documented; that is, the rhythmic singing of parts of the Darangen epic together with the tapping of a metal object. The two other recordings do not seem to have this last part, which somewhat belies the fact that different styles of the renditions have been emphasized and not the necessarily the actual forms of the entire performance. Perhaps what was being investigated is whether there are melodic patterns in the renditions, which is less important to the text as the *bayok* is a form of oratory and that the more significant aspect is the rhetoric, the metaphors and the use of archaic language (Santos 2005: 95–124).

Among the Maranao, there are films showing at least two different dances: the *kasaduratan* fan dance, and the *sinkil* which was dubbed a stick dance, though the

dancers step sideways on bamboo poles. The *sinkil* is a dance that is performed by a princess simulating the dance of the Princess Gandingan in the Maranao epic of Darangen. There are also two film clips that show the Maranao *kulintang*, which is played differently from the Maguindanaon, first with the lady performer slowly dancing with her malong to the rhythm of the *dabakan* and the *agung*, and the second, a performance of the *Kapag-onor* in which the mallets are twirled in the air while hitting the gongs at intervals.

In the audio selections, the Maranao selections consist of the *dadabuan* (*kulintang*) ensemble playing Inandang, Onor, Kapromayas; the *kudyapi*, jews harp and the *insi* playing Kasulisa and two versions of Kasayaw sa singkil; an *insi* solo, a *kudyapi* solo, two pieces on the *serong aganding* (a bamboo zither with flap), the *kulintang* ensemble, and three renditions of the *bayok*.

Garfias also recorded many examples of Samal and Tausug music, concentrating on the rich vocal repertoire of the Sama, for example, the *Tenis liyangkutan*, *Luala and pintasan*, *Tenis-tenis* and *kamabaya* (songs with *gabbang*), the *lugu*, the *sa'il*, and the *talagad*. While on the Tausug, he was able to document the instrumental pieces played by the *kulintang*, three *agung*, *gandang* and *tuntung*. He also recorded a few *biyula* and *gabbang* pieces with voice like the *sindil*, a signature form of expression of the Tausug.

Among the highland communities of Mindanao, the Bagobo *tagunggu* represents one of the more colourful performances, where the gong players also dance. In the film of such a performance, two ladies start to play on nine hanging *agung* and one extra-large gong, the *bandilan*, which serves as the drone on a steady unchanging rhythm. The melodic variations are done by the first player, who is actually shuffling her feet while playing, later on leaves the gongs and dances to the beat of the *bandilan*. She joins three other ladies clad in colourful Bagobo dresses, in dancing to the continuous pulse of the large gong. She does this routine five times and on the fifth time that she goes back to the gongs which she plays with greater vigor, a man comes in and replaces the lady playing the *bandilan*. A little later, the man and the lady exchange roles and this time, the man plays the *tagunggu* with greater zeal, and then leaves the gongs to dance with wider steps. This performance practice illustrates great flexibility in the art form in which dance and musical performance are executed by the same persons, and roles can be switched among different individuals acting in a community-based enterprise. In such a performance, the cameras have to move as the area of movement encompasses a large space.

Such performance is also given by the Manobo, but in a less elaborate manner. In another video, this is demonstrated by a man who plays on four large *agung* while a younger person plays on the separate drone or *bandilan*. The man sometimes leaves his gongs and dances around to the beat of the *bandilan*.

Another presentation where both dancing and playing are involved is shown in a video that has been labelled as a Manobo dance after a successful head hunting. This is most probably a Tagakaolo performance as the main instrument is the *udol* or *edel*, which the Tagakaolo are known to practice. Three ladies execute this particular music and dance, where the drone is pounded with thick wooden sticks by a kneeling lady. Another lady taps the improvised rolling sound, while girating and another lady dances around the *udol*. Later, there is a change of roles between the dancing lady who takes the long cane and taps the improvised part still stomping her feet, and the former player now dances around the instrument. A little later, the lady takes on another rod or cane and taps more fervidly with the two rods. Here, the principle of the drone being played by a stationary player, and the two improvisers moving and alternating to dance is displayed in another context, with the drone and the improvisation being performed on one instrument in a percussive way, in contrast to other musical settings where the drone is executed on one instrument, a gong for example, and the melodic structure is extemporaneously played on another set of instruments, just like the Bagobo *tagunggu*.

The videos of the Samal and the Yakan are quite fascinating. The Samal dance from Taluksangay called *kuntaw* seems to project martial arts stances. These gestures appear to be derived from Chinese *kung fu*, or perhaps the Malay version of this martial arts form. The *umaral* dance has a totally different conduct. While the hands are extended gracefully by the man, older women and two younger women, the footwork varies. The feet of the male dancer make intricate and fast lightly tapping steps, while the women use a side-stepping motion.

A variety of artistic practices have been recorded in another Sulu archipelago village in the province of Basilan. The Yakan *gabbang* is played here in *kajali* style which means two players on one instrument, as can be seen today, along with other instruments like the *kwintangan kayu* (hanging log beams) and *kwintangan* (five-gong *kulintang*). It is quite delightful to note the *lebad* or other musical units being played by one player, and the rhythmic drone by the other. The instrumental music of the Yakan has an interesting theoretical foundation. The entire musical framework is created through the principle of improvised discourse, with the pre-existing material or vocabulary in the nuclear unit called *lebad*. There are hundreds of *lebad* to be learned and each *lebad* stands for a specific idea, emotion or feeling. Thus, the process of “music making” consists of putting together different *lebad*s in a “logical” sequence that create complete musical statements. Another selection shows the *kulaing* or jews harp, while a third shows war dances by two performers, then by each performer staging his own stance. Again, the music is made up of *lebad*s strung together in continuous permutations.

One of the more extensive repertoires recorded was from the Ilocos region where the local *arpa* is a principal but unique instrument. The versatility of this instrument was highlighted with pieces ranging from folksongs such as *Ti ayat ti maysa nga ubing*, *Dung-dunguen kanto unay-unay*, *Bahay Kubo*, and *Pamulinawen* to dances such as the Jota, Chotis, Mazurka, the Waltz, Mascota and Fandango, and to songs such as *Ta nagsaway a pintas mo*, *Sampaguita*, *O Nasudi nga ayat*, *Usi usi*, *Mumuray*, *Damu nga ayat* and *Bannataran*. There was also a variety of vocal numbers with guitar accompaniment: *Ti bayat ti Tiempo* for a male duet, *Nasudi unay ni Ayat* for male and female singers, *Gameng ni ayat* for female vocal duet, *Nasam it unay a kanito*, *Raniag ti init*, *Tenga ti baybay*, *Biagco anusac* for female solo, and *Ti di agsargay nga parareksek* for solo male singer. In these selections, the artists are identified in the recorded numbers, mostly because they have undergone some form of education, and in fact some of them were teachers. In renditions by the upland and Islamic communities, some of the names are not specified although I am sure that the researchers noted them down.

In the Ilocano collection, there are selections for different combinations of instruments like *bandurrias* and guitars, snare drums with flute, and *arpa* and guitar playing medleys of Ilocano songs. There is also a selection with bamboo violin, and jews harp played very rhythmically and with melodic orientation rather than articulative as with jews harp played by the more indigenous groups. The former is represented by a duet of flute and jews harp in the audio selections.

In the Ilocano collection, there are selections for different combinations of instruments like *bandurrias* and guitars, snare drums with flute, and *arpa* and guitar playing medleys of Ilocano songs. In the video of the “Vintareño” Fandango, the harp and the guitar are the main accompaniment to the very elegant courtship dance of a man and a woman. On the other hand, another elegant Fandango – “La Cariñosa”, is sung with guitar accompaniment. This is danced by a well-groomed gentleman, a certain Mr. Emilio Alvarez who himself recorded the accompaniment. These dances show great difference from the fandango that was introduced by Spain. It shows a suaveness and elegance that is slow, refined, graceful and subtle as against the fiery and highly direct gestures of the Spanish version of the fandango.

The great musical variety is mainly due to the accumulation of western instruments into the repertoire. Folk music in the Philippines represents the oral meeting ground of eastern and western musical elements. One of the hybrid musical instruments is the bamboo violin, which is played in the film by a young lady for a famous Ilocano folksong *Pamulinawen*. The bamboo serves as the resonator of the entire instrument, on which four strings have been put in place, with the neck and pegs.

This collection from the Philippines and prepared by Robert Garfias is invaluable in that they include the very first films of native musicians and performers of Philippine musical forms. They show the first attempts at understanding the structural elements and the expressive aspects of these forms, whether they are done through the sound medium or dance or both. While most of those that were recorded in 1966 were still being done or performed in the 1980s, 1990s and the last two decades, there are differences in style and rendition. This gives us a reference as to how the forms were executed previously, while showing the dynamism and continuity of these traditions which have been handed down orally up to this day. Because of their diffusion to literate societies, new strategies and methodologies have been devised for their transmission. Methods for notation and classroom teaching have been invented by the practitioners themselves in order to bridge the gap between native and non-native learners. But for the scholars, these materials are equally invaluable in that they show the uniqueness of each musical form, from the playing of the *gangsa* as a group, the playing of the *kulintang* as an ensemble and the *tagunguan* of the upland Mindanao which combines dance with playing of the gongs. In fact, the Garfias documentation was the first to give a glimpse into the wider world of cultural expressions that have no precise intonation and the relationship of tuning system to each specific cultural group, an emphasis on timbre, different attitudes towards time, the kinetic



Figure 2 Robert Garfias and Harold Schultz carrying their equipment. Photo courtesy by Robert Garfias.

relationship of player and instrument, and the integration of dance, music making and singing. All of this can lead us to question the term “music” when referring to these expressive forms.

These realizations are a result of the pioneering ventures of Robert Garfias and other prominent scholars who took it upon themselves to unravel the hidden treasures of the musical universe, and to gain a better understanding of humanity in its diversity of human expressions.

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