

# The Bayanihan: How Authentic is its Repertoire?

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THERE IS an ever growing number of countries participating in the promotion of international understanding through the medium of touring cultural dance troupes. One of the most popular and influential troupes is the Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company.

The popularity and influence of the Bayanihan have been manifested in various forms: (a) the continued demand for Bayanihan performances, (b) the continually enthusiastic critiques of its performances, (c) the abundance of its documents such as brochures, film strips and recordings, and (d) the use of Bayanihan materials as a source of information by music and dance educators of many parts of the world.

The Bayanihan claims authenticity, implicitly defining its goal as well as the set of standards or norms by which we should appraise its performance. Here is the kind of guarantee the Bayanihan gives the public:

Bayanihan features authentic Muslim songs and dances as part of its program.<sup>1</sup>

The music, dance and costumes of this portion of the Bayanihan . . . performance provide an accurate mirror of the Muslim Philippine life . . .<sup>2</sup>

The Bayanihan does not describe its repertoire as a stylized version of ethnic Philippine dances based on indigenous themes. Neither does it say that the repertoire is inspired by Philippine indigenous themes, music, movement or color. The intention, however, to undertake the enormous job of staging authentic music and dance is as valid as it is praiseworthy.

The Bayanihan is supposed to be a representation of living cultures. It deals with Philippine contemporary life.<sup>3</sup>

The center (Bayanihan Folk Arts) was created (1957) . . . with the purposes of research and presentations. Teams of students and teachers were sent to all parts of the country to tape-record, photograph and learn dances, to collect authentic costumes and musical instruments . . . The dances unearthed were taught to the Bayanihan Company members . . .<sup>4</sup>

The intent is to educate, to project the real Philippine culture, to serve as a catalyst for the achievement of mutual understanding and appreciation among various Filipino cultural groups, and between the Filipinos and other nationalities.

One of the most provoking comments on the Bayanihan was given by a knowledgeable American educator. At one time, Dr. Robert A. Garfias summed up his class discussion by saying that there is no question in the way the Bayanihan interpretes Hispanic-Filipino dances, "but for dances other than that the interpretation is highly questionable."<sup>5</sup>

The people who, educationally or otherwise, make use of the Bayanihan material on the assumption that it truly represents Philippine culture are entitled to an explanation of backgrounds and relevancy. But considering that the repertoire involves numerous cultural and ethno-linguistic groups, it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the entire repertoire.

The music and dances of the Bayanihan came from at least twenty-eight cul-

<sup>3</sup> For information about a very modern approach to Philippine dance, see "Filipinism in Dance," by Mari H. Alonzo, bibliography; and for information about the first, as yet the only attempt to stage a show devoted to pre-Islamic Philippine, see De Manila and Teodoro L. Locsin in bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> 1968 Bayanihan brochure, p. 2, and 1970 brochure, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Robert A. Garfias, the head of the ethnomusicology program at the University of Washington, has done, in 1966, a voracious audio-visual documentation of Philippine music and dance.

<sup>1</sup> Record MFS 428, see discography, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Record MFS 322, see discography, 1.

tural and ethno-linguistic groups. In most cases the Bayanihan classifies its repertoire into five major categories, i.e., one category for the dances from the hill-people of northern Philippines, three categories for lowland-Hispanic dances, and one for the Muslim dances in southern Philippines. From the Muslim region alone, at least four groups are involved: (a) the Maranao people of Lanao, (b) the Magindanao of Cotabato, (c) the Yakan of Basilan, and (d) the Tausog of Sulu.

Just as the scientist investigates a moon sample, we must be content here to focus our attention upon a typical sampling from the Bayanihan repertoire. The Maranao bamboo dance has been used as the cover illustration for one of the Bayanihan records and for the 1968 Bayanihan brochure, for poster announcements in Washington State, and equally emphasized in the 1970 Bayanihan brochure. Maranao elements are involved in half of the eight "Muslim dances" included in the Bayanihan recordings. Let us examine specifically the *Malong Dance*, the *Kzadoratan*, the *Sagayan* and the *Singkil*.

#### *The Malong Dance*

The Maranao (People of the Lake) dwell mainly around Lake Lanao, in the province of Lanao, southern Philippines. In Lanao musicians, singers and dancers start their training from childhood. They have a quite unique dance-song called *Kaganat sa Darangen*. It is always done by one dancer. One way a Maranao woman sings involves walking around. The song has no accompaniment, as the Maranao have only two types of music, instrumental and vocal. As the singer sings, she walks around before the audience to demonstrate the ideal ways of walking, one of which is *kzadoratan*. In her occasional poses she changes the position of her *malong* (tubular loose skirt), thus demonstrating the various ways it is worn. To be able to do this dance-song a woman would have to learn Maranao poetical singing, the traditional ways of walking and various ways of wearing the *malong* because all in all the *Kaganat sa Darangen* is a one-woman singing fashion show.

There can be a paradox here; the Bayanihan in its effort to "unearth" things might in the process be unknowingly burying living arts.

Notwithstanding its claim for authenticity, the Bayanihan willfully breaks down the *Kaganat sa Darangen* and discriminately picks up a few pieces to form two fictitious dances; namely, the so-called *malong* dance and the *kzadoratan*. The Bayanihan describes the former as,

The Maranao women in . . . Lanao wear a tubular skirt called a *malong*. In this dance the ladies demonstrates their colorful skirts in a court entertainment.<sup>6</sup>

In the Bayanihan performance at the Seattle Opera House, September 16, 1970, the *malong* dancers were not singing (there is no Maranao group singing) but were provided with a fabricated instrumental background. Their movements were very fast and masculine. Actually, there is no Maranao dance called *malong*.

#### *Kzadoratan*

The Maranao do not segmentalize the *Kaganat sa Darangen* because of its uniqueness which lies in the simultaneous performance of the song and the fashion dance. Like the case of the *malong*, there is no real Maranao dance called *kzadoratan*. It should be interesting, however, to see what the Bayanihan created with the *kzadoratan*. The Bayanihan categorizes and describes it:

#### *Hari-Raya*

The Bayanihan . . . faithfully reflects the music, dance and costumes of the Muslim Filipino in this suite entitled *Hari-Raya*, . . . one of the Muslim festivals.

#### *Kzadoratan*

In . . . Lanao (where the Maranao live) . . . ladies . . . perform the *Kzadoratan* . . . "a way of walking."<sup>7</sup>

Compare and contrast this with another Bayanihan description:

*Kzadoratan*, known as . . . "The

<sup>6</sup> 1968 brochure, p. 10 (see also 1970 brochure, p. 8).

<sup>7</sup> 1968 brochure, see bibliography.

princess walk," preceded by a chant; featuring the Muslim musical ensemble composed of the *kulintang* (a xylophonic set of gongs), various gongs and drums.<sup>8</sup>

The Bayanihan faithfully "reflects the music, and dance and costumes" in the former, while it features "authentic Muslim songs and dances" in the latter.<sup>9</sup> The former *kzadoratan* came from the Maranao, whereas the latter came from the Muslims. Which ethnic group? Whether or not the two descriptions are intentionally equivocal, for some strange reason, remains to be seen.

The Bayanihan uses the *Hari Raya* as a category of a cluster of dances. Actually, *Hari Raya* is, second to none, an important Muslim festival.<sup>10</sup> It is the commemoration of the fasting month. It is so strictly religious that all musical and dance activities are discouraged during the period of fasting. The only audible sounds characteristic of this period of time are those emanating from Islamic chanting and prayer. *Kzadoratan* has no place in this festival, nor has any other dance. There is no such thing as religious Maranao dance. A careless use of "*Hari Raya*" outside of its real context is bound to create inconsistency, such as the incompatibility between *kzadoratan* and *Hari Raya*.

If *kzadoratan* is a true Maranao dance as the Bayanihan claims it is, the musical accompaniment should be Maranao, too. The Bayanihan provides an accompaniment to it. It starts with the Islamic call-to-prayer chant. Whether the chanter had done the necessary ablution and whether he knows the proper time of the day to call is a big question. Despite the fact that the Maranao do not mix religious chant with other forms of music, the chanter is answered by a group of women singing nonsensical phrases in a markedly Western style.<sup>11</sup> Dr. William

P. Malm says that the Muslims do not consider the call to prayers, the intoning of prayers, and the reading of Koran as music.<sup>12</sup> Maranao women always wear a *salimot* when they pray, just as Catholic women wear a mantilla, but the Bayanihan women wear some sort of arcs carved out of cigarette ashtrays.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, when the Maranao do the prayer there is no audible sound except that of the leader.

The Bayanihan continues the *kzadoratan* with an instrumental section, performed by a "Muslim musical ensemble" consisting of *kulintang*, various gongs, and drums. Actually, there is no such thing as typical Muslim ensemble or dance. The real Maranao *kulintang* (not *kulintang*) ensemble takes its name from the melody-playing row of small gongs. The melody is supported in performance by two *agung* (larger gong) giving a fast interlocking effect, a *babndir* (medium sized gong) and one large single-headed drum called either *dbakan* or *dadabuan* both playing a flow of rhythmic patterns following the contours of the melody.<sup>14</sup> The music provided by the Bayanihan cannot be Maranao. It can be mistaken for the music of the Magindanao of Cotabato, partially because of the presence of some Magindanao instruments, except, however, that the real Magindanao playing technique is missing. Besides, there is some evidence of deliberate borrowing from the Javanese idea of colotomic structure.<sup>15</sup>

The Maranao have a definite set-up for the *kulintang* ensemble: imagine a rectangle and let one longer side represent the audience; the opposite side is the place of the melody instrument and the player sits on a chair (the *kulintang* frame is as high as the chair) behind the instrument, thus facing the audience; the left side of the player is for

<sup>8</sup> Record MFC 428, discography, 4.

<sup>9</sup> The two excerpts were written by one person.

<sup>10</sup> Just as it is remarkably true with the Maranao, Clifford Geertz concluded that *Hari Raya* is the core of the unity of the Javanese people, see bibliography.

<sup>11</sup> The Maranao highly respect their Islamic religion.

<sup>12</sup> See William P. Malm, bibliography.

<sup>13</sup> See photo, 1968, brochure, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert A. Garfias in "Some Principles of Formal Variation in the *Kulintang* Music of the Maranao," bibliography.

<sup>15</sup> Compare the Music of the *Magindanao* in the *Philippines* and *Music of the Venerable Dark Cloud*, Javanese Gamelan, discography.

the two *agung* players and the right side for the drummer and *babndir* player. For formal occasions, the melody is always played by a woman and the rest by men except the *babndir* which is played by either sexes. They are all functional to the music and its context. The Bayanihan sets the instruments this way: (a) the melody instrument is laid down on the floor when it is supposed to be framed higher, (b) the drummer with two drums is placed at the left side when he is supposed to be at the right side and use only one drum, (c) the two *agung* players are placed behind the melody instrument and in between them are four Magindanao gongs, when they are supposed to be side by side at the left of the melody player, (d) the *agungs* are hung head high when it is supposed to be waist high, (e) the *babndir* is placed at the left when it should be at the right, and (f) the players are all men as opposed to the Maranao tradition of woman for the melody and men for the rest except the *babndir*.<sup>16</sup> In brief, the Bayanihan employs an entirely out-of-context ensemble, technique, arrangement and music.

#### The Sagayan

The dance was included in two of the Bayanihan records. One annotation states:

Armed warriors perform the *Sagayan* in the province of Lanao. A chanter tells the story of the tribe . . . The dancers work themselves into frenzy as they battle imaginary foes under the influence of an 'enticeer.' A chant, drums, and gongs provide the musical background as the dancers shake their shields and swing their swords.<sup>17</sup>

The other description does not agree with the first.

In Lanao . . . The *Sagayan-Sa Kulong* is a Muslim warrior dance . . . the warriors fight a mock duel before going to battle.<sup>18</sup>

The warriors of the first record fight against imaginary foes while the warriors of the latter fight a mock duel. Nevertheless, they share some things in common: (a) both mention Lanao as the source of the dance, (b) they have exactly the same music, (c) both have identical names except for the addition of *Sa Kulong* (for the shield) to the latter, and (d) both involve warriors.

Assuming that the Bayanihan meant the two dances to be the same for the reasons enumerated above, then there is a great discrepancy between their descriptions. Granting that they are different, it is still false. There is no dance in Lanao called *sagayan-sa kulong*. The Bayanihan must have been presenting the same clown with a new name and a new outfit.<sup>19</sup> The *sagayan* of Lanao does not involve warriors. It is purely a one-man dance depicting Prince Bantugan, the hero of Maranao epic-song called *Darangan*.

The music provided by the Bayanihan for the dance, or dances does not even resemble the real *sagayan music*. The song sung by the chanter has but a couple of Maranao words, and the text parodies the extremely poetic Maranao epic-chant. The melody pursued by the singer is by no means similar to the way the epic is chanted. The *darangen* chanting, which takes its name from the epic, is one Maranao song-form. It is the only vocal music occasionally allowed to become a part of the *sagayan* dance; when so used, it has to be chanted by a professional singer. It should be noted that Maranao songs have no instrumental accompaniment; the accompaniment supplied in the recording is therefore artificial.

Based on the illustration given, there is no aspect of the paraphernalia used by the Bayanihan that can be identified with the *sagayan*.<sup>20</sup> The authentic paraphernalia should consist of a special kind of loose skirt, tight trousers, a long-sleeved buttoned shirt, a crisscross sash,

<sup>16</sup> Photos in the brochure have been attested by the recent Bayanihan performance at the Seattle Opera House.

<sup>17</sup> Record MFS 330, see discography, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Record MFS 372, see discography, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Apparently, the same thing was done with *asik* dance which was made into *magasik*, see Record MFS 330, 1968 brochure p. 6, and 1970 brochure p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> See photo, 1968 brochure, p. 11.

a pair of wide leg bands, two pairs of arm bands, a wooden sword with a kerchief attached to the handle, a narrow wooden shield with bells, and a wooden headgear. They are all functional to the dance. The Bayanihan photo has two dancers, each wearing fake trousers, unbuttoned shirt, a pair of peculiar shoes, a waist-sash, and one wears an Indonesian-type cap, the other a kerchief. Both use real combat swords. It is also obvious in the picture that the dancers do not know the *sagayan* movements.

The famous *sagayan* dancer of Tamparan, Lanao—he is popularly named *Kali sa Tamparan Prapir*—said it took him two years of painful training before he could claim artistic mastery, notwithstanding his affectionate exposure to the dance since childhood.

### The Singkil

The Bayanihan erroneously describes the *singkil* as, . . . In Lanao Province, every young woman of royal blood is expected to learn the 'Singkil,' a dance which takes its name from the bracelets worn by the dancer around her ankles. A unique feature . . . is the use of twelve bamboo poles . . . Throughout the dance a slave girl follows behind the Princess sheltering her with a heavily ornamented umbrella. The dance has no music except the beating of the bamboo poles.<sup>21</sup>

Anklelets or ankle-bells are not compatible with the Maranao aesthetics. There have never existed in Lanao anklelets or anything like them called *singkil*. Contrary to the Bayanihan description, *singkil* is a Maranao word for the act of getting a leg or foot entangled with an object. The name itself suggests how this dance came into being. It is purely a female solo dance—as Maranao society sanctions against male and female dancing together—and the dancer should not be sheltered with an umbrella. The Bayanihan's ignorance of that aspect of Maranao custom is explicit; it is unthinkable in Maranao society for a prince and princess to dance

the *singkil*, as shown in the brochure photographs.

The music accompanying the dance in question cannot be identified with any society. It has a great deal of gravely unacceptable features. The addition of an ear-splitting gong in the music is strongly disagreeable to the Maranao concept of music. The effect suggests rather an exaggerated version of the gong dominating Chinese opera, or, better yet, the Rank Organization's trademark in British cinema, so long as it punctuates, or is furiously beaten in rapid succession. Such absurdities are patently out of keeping with Bayanihan's ostentatiously announced policy of carefully researched authenticity.

The Bayanihan employs the ear-splitting sound-effect in most of their so-called "Muslim music." Seeing the Bayanihan musicians outrageously beating the big gongs at the rims (when they are suppose to be hitting the knobs!) is like watching a person who savagely fingers a piano keyboard. When a Maranao plays his gong, his introductory beats already reflect his grasp of the music; in fact, one can recognize his friends by listening from a distance. Probably the Bayanihan could not produce the ideal sound because of their gongs with broken knobs! The music is untruthful in terms of rhythm, melody, mode and orchestration. The *singkil* has no music, but the Bayanihan take it upon themselves to provide some. They also add a sudden *accelerando* and *ritardando* to the dance rhythm, which is out of keeping with the moderate and static rhythm of the real *singkil*. Such irregularity of tempo is quite incompatible with what the Maranao perceive as a graceful movement. The Bayanihan crudely creates a new sound which does violence to the intricate musical tradition it is supposed to represent.<sup>22</sup>

The dancer's dress ensemble can hardly be ignored. Various photos of the *singkil* appear in many circulars. The record jacket for Monitor MFS 322

<sup>22</sup> Tapes and films of authentic Maranao music and dances are available at the University of Washington Archives of Ethnic Music and Dance, Seattle, Washington.

<sup>21</sup> Record MFS 322, see discography, 1.

shows a heavily sequined skirt of the *singkil* dancer that bears false artistic motifs. The colors chosen for the skirt are not traditional. It provides a sharp contrast to the authentic *malong* worn by the lady sheltering the dancer. The headdresses of the two dancers are artificial; it is a foreign superimposition on Maranao costumes. The attendant's sash is also questionable. The displaying of the chest and abdomen by the man sitting in the background is offensive to the Maranao sense of decency. In the brochures, the female dancer wears another headdress, this time made of the Maranao symbolic bird. The Maranao never use this object for such a purpose. Apparently the prince in the brochures is in a frenzied state! He is probably unaware of many peculiarities of dress and accessories. His shield and sword are up-side down. He wears a very short shirt, about half according to Maranao standard, and a pendant to ornament his exposed chest and belly. He should not be there in the first place as it is a female dance. A Maranao prince neither wears such over-sized pendant nor does he flaunt his muscles. Maranao society sanctions against male and female dancing together, especially when the man is brandishing a bare sword as the Bayanihan dancer does.

The Bayanihan's interpretation of the *singkil*, as seen at the Seattle Opera House, was successful in terms of applause from an innocent audience, but it completely lacked authenticity. The

dancer rode, curiously, on twined bamboo poles shouldered by two men.<sup>23</sup> In some occasion, the dancer enters the court by riding in a feigned litter.<sup>24</sup> Neither of these sorts of palanquins exist in Lanao, nor are they relevant to the dance. The male dancers wear open vests to show off their arms and chests (showing of armpits has no place in Maranao society!). Worse, on other occasions they are topless. Such things can happen in some Hollywood musical extravaganza, but they simply cannot occur in a Maranao gathering where music and dance are highlights.

So far, we have limited the analysis to the Maranao elements in the Bayanihan repertoire. One may wonder about the authenticity of the other non-Hispanic aspects of the repertoire; rest assured that they are also full of misconceptions. Nevertheless, the Bayanihan deserves due praise for its unquestionable interpretation of the Hispanic-Filipino music and dance. Actually, about half of the repertoire is very authentic, but the other half falls under the category of artistic creation. The Bayanihan should boldly qualify this fact; label the "authentic" as it is and describe the "original artistic creation" at it is. This is the way the innocent people should be guided by the "outstanding educators" of Asia.

<sup>23</sup> See photo in the *Seattle Times*, Sunday, September 13, 1970, p. G 1.

<sup>24</sup> Beth Dean's *The Many Worlds of Dance*, see bibliography.

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## POEM

1.

In the afternoon  
The burst of sun  
Frail as grass blossoms.  
A most subtle intensity  
Like the power of grass blossoms—  
When the force along the tip  
Of grass becomes inexorable  
It is time for the seeds  
In the blossoms to go.  
It is like this with sunlight  
Which, like grass blossoms,  
Renews itself in the dark:  
The sunlight in the dark of night  
The blossoms in the dark of loam.  
Then they break off  
As dawnlight and young grass.

2.

The sea is for wading, yes.  
And if your limbs are yet  
Afraid of cold water and you do not  
Wish to wait to grow before  
Thrilling to the rise and fall of sea  
Let Mama do the wading  
Let the wind tickling your toes  
Be the cold of the sea.  
But the sea cannot always be passive  
It was not meant to be.  
It sculpts on wood  
With the aid of sand and shells  
And wind and time and barnacles  
desiring  
To lay their authority on wood.  
It makes carcasses of wooden ship  
Chases old women  
Landward to make them feel alive.

3.

Shells are flowers in the sea's garden.  
Draw a girl's profile or  
What amounts to the same thing,  
a heart  
And let it be crowded with the sea's  
flowers  
Then untie your shoes and pile  
Your clothes on the cement wall and  
run  
Run, run, on sand on mud  
And think of sunburst and grass  
blossoms  
And limbs afraid of the sea and hearts  
And when you think about these  
Fiercely and long, the moon will show  
You a path across the sea.

4.

The wildness of silence  
Is only tamed by love.

—EMMANUEL LIBRE OSORIO