

**A Review of Ramon Santos's *Tunogtugan: Twenty Essays on Musical and Sonic Traditions***

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*Tunogtugan: Twenty Essays on Musical and Sonic Traditions* by National Artist for Music Ramon Santos compels me to reflect upon the nature, limits, and possibilities of the academic disciplines to which I belong, namely speech communication, theatre studies, and performance studies. More specifically, this compendium of essays inspires me to wrestle with these disciplinary formations in ways that are critical of their Euro-American legacies and paradigms.

Traditionally, speech communication takes into account how forms of human communication generate acts of knowing and feeling, how they elicit all sorts of responses and interactions, and how they bring together different social communities and relations. Largely guided by ancient and modernist tenets such as eloquence and mastery, speech communication tends to give premium to logical, virtuous, and fluent speakers and communicators.

Moreover, theatre arts significantly involves the execution and analysis of dramaturgical decisions, the investigation of aesthetic configurations of time and space, and the examination of assorted ways of spectating and fellow-feeling that result in certain communities of belonging. In its most orthodox iteration, this discipline defines “theatre” as a contained space where stylized performances and spectacles emerge through the efforts of a slew of artists, directors, and other technical experts specifically for the consumption of all types of audiences.

Meanwhile, the more recent discipline of performance studies tries to exceed the limiting paradigms of theatre arts that privilege stage plays and theatrical productions as their primary objects of inquiry and consider enclosed spaces such as proscenium or black box theaters as their key sites of interest. Performance studies is concerned with all kinds of embodied acts and practices that transpire in everyday and ceremonial occurrences, impinge upon the social, cultural, and political order of things, and yield symbolic and material aftereffects.

In *Tunogtugan*, Santos enables me to at once recognize disciplinal limitations and come to terms with disciplinal possibilities. By underscoring “holism” and “integration” as the basic premises of art forms and musical or sonic traditions in Southeast Asia, Santos illustrates how expressive communication does not always have to conform to Western socio-aesthetic attributes such as directness, lyricism, and unity. While music as we commonly know it today is a colonial inheritance, many folk performing arts in Asia are not necessarily so. They, in fact, negate compositional logics based on melody, tonalities, and hegemonized structures. What they lay bare, instead, is a sense of simultaneity rather than straightforwardness. Their musical or sonic dimensions are diffused or atmospheric in nature, rather than centrally structured. And their musical systems and operations are communally carried out rather than individually produced.

By unraveling how music manifests in different avenues—open spaces, cultural communities, schools, conservatories, competitions, and festivals—Santos also upsets the confining conception of a theater as a demarcated area for artistic and cultural productions. In his book chapters titled “The Concept of Time and Space in Asian Artistic Expression” and “A Concept of Community in Asian Creative Expression,” he drives home the point that the making of culture through expressive forms may happen not only in highly contrived occasions and controlled locations but also anywhere and everywhere. By highlighting the trailblazing lifework of the late professor, composer, and ethnomusicologist Jose Maceda—who questioned what Santos calls “finite formal frameworks” on music and shone a critical light on the “collective volition” and the “shared labor” of artists, musicians, non-musicians, and other ordinary individuals engaged in music-making—Santos highlights the theatricality of creating a musical work or a sound environment.

If performance studies defines “performance” expansively to account for schematized modes of communication, multi-sensual social practices, and commonplace behaviors that people reiterate, recombine, and reinvent in daily life, then the essays of Santos provides important insights for the field. In particular, how Santos frames music-making as at once a performance and a performative act is salient here. As a performance, music or music-making is both the done and the doing, the product and the process. As Santos explains in chapters such as “Diversity and Change in Asian Musical Traditions” and “Philippine Music: Pluralism and Change,” music is embodied in that it is significantly produced through physical exertions and bodily enactments. Additionally, music is lived to the extent that it is personally enjoyed as much as it is communally produced and publicly presented. And music is relational because it involves relationships and interactions between musicians and listeners, between artists and their audiences, and between performances and their social milieus. More than framing music as a performance, however, Santos is

also helpful in unraveling the performativity of music. By this I mean how music comes into existence through various sources, factors, and influences; how it at once belongs to and exceeds certain regimes of knowledge and practice; and how it dynamically makes and remakes not only itself but also those who produce and delight in it.

Decidedly, Santos provides epistemological shifts, pedagogical leads, and methodological inspirations in studying music. First, he makes us appreciate how musical and sonic traditions in these parts of the world complicate the philosophies of linearity, hierarchy, structure, unity, and closure that Western thought privileges and, even worse, imposes on the rest of the world. As Santos consistently argues, especially in his discussions on the works of Maceda, Philippine and Southeast Asian musical and sonic traditions, cultures, practices cannot be completely framed or comprehended using Western principles. Receiving ample citation from Santos are Maceda's elaborations on drone and melody as musical features that have been derived from the music of Asia and thereby capture the socio-cultural practices of local communities in the country or the region. Santos's persistence to give emphasis to such different aspects of Philippine and Asian sound systems (i.e., infinity, timelessness, unmeasured time, repetition, absence of prescribed introduction and ending) is undeniably an important scholarly contribution. Aside from broadening our understanding and appreciation of music, this commitment likewise urges us to move closer to acts, worldviews, and performances rooted in highly specific cultures and societies.

Santos is generous in sharing his wisdom as a teacher, his knowledge as a scholar, and his practical insights as a cultural worker who flexibly moves from the classroom to the university to field sites to performance venues to academic conferences to agencies of government. To be certain, Santos is always educating and educational. Not only does he shine a light on many aspects of Asian and Philippine musical and sonic traditions; he also dislodges knowledge forms and concept-works informed by the legacies of our colonial histories and educational systems. In all the chapters comprising the fourth section of *Tunogtugan*, "Music in Pedagogy and Education," Santos offers pedagogical leads in teaching Asian or Philippine musical and sonic productions beyond constraining Euro-American rubrics. In contrast to the tendencies of many Western scholars to universalize the definition of music and abstract the process of music-making, Santos painstakingly teases out the music production, dissemination, and performance initiated by various individuals and groups regardless of their specific standpoints in society.

Deeply interconnected with the epistemological shifts and pedagogical leads that Santos offers are his methodological choices in examining Philippine musical and sound productions. At one level, Santos takes a historical approach, tracking down the *longue durée* of musical systems, traditions, and operations: from their colonial roots and imperial growth, through their postcolonial manifestations and transformations, and on to their global spread. At another level, he assumes an ethnographic orientation, patiently providing dense descriptions of musical and sonic practices emanating from all sorts of communities within and beyond the Philippine capital and in the Asian region. At yet another level, he takes a critical disposition in which he interrogates fraught concepts such as “nation,” “ethnicity,” “globalization,” “tradition,” and “innovation.” For Santos, the definitions of these terms are not airtight. Nor are they in distinct opposition to and strictly segregated from each other. Rather, they are deeply entangled and mutually informing one another, albeit with countless frictions and contradictions.

Although Santos recognizes the domination of the West in structuring expressive forms such as music, and while he consistently underlines the marginalization of musical and sonic traditions, practices, and agents in non-Euro-American societies, he is also quick to emphasize the capability of Filipino and Southeast Asian artists, communities, and institutions “to be open to the possibility of synergizing with other cultures and traditions in order to create new forms of expression and communication” (168). In this scheme, acknowledging structural inequalities need not come at the cost of recognizing the will and human agency of a people to adapt, innovate, and change.

Indeed, unlike many nationalist scholars who decry foreign influences on Philippine culture and conservatives who approach the impact of technology on Philippine musical and sonic traditions with suspicion, Santos deploys critical, analytical, and historical perspectives to contextualize the entanglements of Western and non-Western musical traditions, to look beyond dual spectrums and false binaries, and, not least, to locate what he refers to as the “arena of cultural engagement” (12).

In conclusion, *Tunogtugan* reminds readers to reckon with the dynamic historical development, not the sedimentation, of music as an expressive form and practice; spotlight the agentic capacity of Philippine and Southeast Asian music and their producers to be in negotiation with ideas, influences, forms, and practices coming from Western sources; examine the diversity, plurality, and situated nature of musical and sonic knowledges and practices; and deploy a variety of perspectives and approaches in understanding music as a byproduct of specific institutional or organizational contexts, as an artistic production by artists or communities, as an

object of scholarship, and as a focus of historical/historiographic or ethnographic inquiries. Without a doubt, this book is a testament to Santos's contribution to research and scholarship, teaching and pedagogy, and public culture. Even more importantly, it is an affirmation of Santos's role as an esteemed educator, an indefatigable artist, and a committed thinker and scholar of music in the Philippines and the Southeast Asian region.

## WORKS CITED

Santos, Ramon P. *Tunogtugan: Twenty Essays on Musical and Sonic Traditions*. U of the Philippines P, 2023.

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