

Selected Papers from *Tawag ng Bantula**

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EDITORIAL

The essentiality of bamboo in the material culture of peoples in Asia is a generally accepted truth. This proverbial plant in its innumerable varieties, has been for centuries sustaining and protecting human life in this part of the world in the form of food, shelter, clothing, and conveyance. While mainstream knowledge is very much aware of such commonplace utilization of bamboo, its spiritual, communicative, and aesthetic value remains hidden in its presence in the intangible expressive traditions and artistic practices. In music, one of the more overt forms of human expression, bamboo instruments not only provide cultural and geographic identity to its practitioners, but also define distinct aesthetic qualities to their expressions, partly through their natural substance and partly through their acoustical technology as demanded by the performance practice itself. It is for this reason that the *Tawag ng Bantula*¹ was conceived and organized by the National Music Committee of the National Commission for the Arts under the leadership of Felipe Mendoza de Leon, Jr.

Tawag ng Bantula is a forum advanced by music thinkers and creative practitioners to explore more deeply the phenomenon of the bamboo beyond its musical performative boundaries. Cognizant of the fact that music production in Asian musical traditions relies so much on the bamboo as a primary material tool, the forum was

*A Symposium on Music and Bamboo, convened by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, September 21-23, 2005.

intended by its organizers to use the musical dimension as a reference point in situating these traditions within the larger sphere of bamboo culture in its scientific, expressive, social, spiritual, and mythological domains. Thus, the title alone encapsulates the broad intention of the entire exercise: *tawag ng bantula* or a “call of the bamboo drum” to people from outside the musical sphere to partake in a celebration of each and everyone’s bamboo experiences. The resource papers and talks that were contributed to the forum represent cross-disciplinary perspectives, conveyed in different modalities of knowledge and information sharing on the multi-dimensional significance of bamboo in Filipino life and culture. Represented in the forum were the fields of agriculture, art studies, folklore, architecture, dance, music theory, and sub-branches of musicology – organology, ethnomusicology.

The entire exercise reaped much of its success from the sense of discovery and realization of affinities that it generated among the participants. Through interactive exchange, each discipline-based understanding and appreciation of bamboo suddenly opened into a whole cosmic view of its role in the dynamics of humanism and material existence. The composite contents of the talks offered a whole range of empirical and scientific knowledge on bamboo as life-source in this part of the world, as well as theoretical insights and philosophical/critical reflections on man’s expressive-creative practices with direct or indirect allusion to bamboo either as a determining or conspiring agency.

The papers that have been selected and prepared for publication here, represent the different aspects of bamboo in its role as a conveyor of musical messages. In his preamble, de Leon offers a comprehensive overview of the role of bamboo in human life among Asians, representing the close relationship between nature and man in the latter’s expressive existence. The bamboo’s more concrete manifestation in Philippine traditional music is articulated with organological detail by Dioquino, a result of her long years of ethnomusicological partnership with Jose Maceda, world renown scholar and composer, more specifically in her pioneering work in classifying and cataloguing the instrument collection of the UP Center for Ethnomusicology. The highly bamboo-biased inventory of musical instruments of the Panay Bukidnon is highlighted in the paper of Muyco in the context of renewing memory and identity

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of its purveyors in the process of communicating with an “other” world and outside its temporal boundaries. On the other hand, the spiritual, aesthetic, social, and philosophical dimensions in the use of bamboo, in the theory and practice of music, are extensively discussed by Santos and Baes in the context of tradition and contemporary music composition. It is hoped that these writings will conjure fresh and deeper appreciation of bamboo as a determinant of character, identity, and affective distinction in the field of human communication.

ENDNOTE

¹Bantula is a bamboo slit-drum used both as a instrument for long-distance communication. Other names are “karatong” and “kuratong”.