

Preface

Sightings in Recent Research in Philippine Dance

It is gratifying to keep a-pace with some current Philippine research in dance. In this issue, we see through the eyes of a new crop of scholars in dance.

Monica Fides Santos dwells on our folk dance research through time and reckons with the still-prevailing method and perspective of national artist Francisca Reyes-Aquino, typified by her several books. We now know that there were also regional contributors to her six-volume *Philippine Folk Dances*, which to this day folk dance researchers employ as their methodological template. Such continuous research practice is shown in the new *Sayaw Sugbu*, a “how-to” book on Cebuano dances I was asked to edit. It keeps to Aquino’s notating of steps, gestures, and formations.

Beyond those fixed perspectives, Santos looks further into conceptual and social dimensions that have broadened today’s dance research. She invites readers to see dance beyond its basics—re: Aquino: movements and “figures” or set patterns—into its resonant phenomenology and sociology. Just like how psychologist Havelock Ellis long ago thought of life as dance and, by implication, dance as its symbol.

In a specific socio-cultural analysis of dance, Bryan Viray brings us to his home in Boac, Marinduque and then to Angono, Rizal. In their celebration of the Holy Week in these communities, there is the culminating *Salubong* at Easter. In the meeting of the resurrected Jesus and his grieving mother Mary, the latter’s veil is lifted off by a flown angel-child, after which the *Bati* (greeting) is danced, a key moment that is the focus of his paper. Viray’s theoretical delineation is nuanced through layered articulations and

dimensions. The implication of his work for Philippine dance scholarship is profound and poised to be resonant.

Viray shows differences in how the *bati* is done in both Boac and Angono. Such comparative perspective is expected today, vis-à-vis earlier research in our folk dance that insisted on the purity or priority of one over another. Indeed, there remains the issue of “authenticity” here and *not* there, still insisted on in the teaching of folk dance in physical education.

After Viray’s meticulous detailing, we also see the same procedure in J. Lorenzo Perillo on a Hip-Hop dance competition in a specific time and place in Hawai’i. I must confess I am only an occasional (but awed) viewer for this dance, but I am again gratified by Perillo’s analysis and compass. He reports on this event in detail and context—on the technique and tenacity of the Filipino-Americans in a key event. His analysis is an enjoyable and informative socio-cultural walk-through for me.

Having previously seen Perillo’s study on film of the dancing prisoners in Cebu and reading him anew, once more we gain a further-*ed* understanding of dance (Interestingly, he has also written on how Aquino derived from ballet the positions of the arms and feet in our “standardized” folk dances.) From this occasion in Hawai’i, he raises issues on presentation and representation and we get to know what preoccupies “Fil-Ams” abroad in Hip-Hop in competitions. This also reminds me of how Joseph Mazo once wrote of ballet as “a contact-sport.”

Finally, Regina Salvaña Bautista has three contemporary choreographers in her study. With their varying backgrounds in dance techniques and choreographic influences, we have Alice Reyes, Agnes Locsin, and Al Bernard Garcia. All have had exposures to our folk dances in various modes and occasions. In their particular perspectives and processes, one sees how they all contribute to what we now call Filipino choreography.

From her mother’s ballet training with Leonor Orosa Goquingco, Locsin must have known of the latter’s strategy of “stylizing” folk dances for the stage, to reify her own identity as choreographer. Similarly, Reyes studied

ballet with Goqingco and Rosalia Merino Santos, and danced with her father Ricardo, also known as “Mr. Folk Dancer.” Garcia, who majored in folk dance at the Philippine High School for the Arts, had ballet, modern, and Indian dance training in University of the Philippines. Based on his fieldwork, his production thesis centered on Subanon life and rituals in Zamboanga.

At its birth, modern or contemporary dance was meant to delineate each choreographer’s technique, subject, and modality. Similarly, we see these in the three choreographers discussed by Bautista—in their theme, scenario, music, choreography, offer a fresh understanding of the Filipino body. From their respective work, distinct groundings in the dancing body that contribute to our varied thrusts in contemporary dance today emerge.

Reading these papers reveals how current research on Philippine dance has not only broadened its perspective but also deepened its analysis. To relate to today’s cultural studies in general and dance analysis, in particular. To reckon with each writer’s insight and parameter. To see how such *grounding* has propelled our dance research—to fly!

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