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Notes on the Musical Score in Nineteenth
Century Travel Accounts of the Philippines**

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TRAVEL, MUSIC, BOOKS: NOTES ON THE MUSICAL SCORE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY TRAVEL ACCOUNTS OF THE PHILIPPINES

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, the travelogue, a genre of travel writing, provided European readers with glimpses of the culture and art of exotic people from colonial outposts in far-away lands. Books printed in Europe were made available to a European audience hungry for information about its colonies and other exotic locations. These books often included lithographs of plants and animals, prints and photographs of native inhabitants, costumes, and occasionally musical scores representing traditional folk music. Scores from these books provide us with the earliest transcriptions of traditional musical forms from the Philippines. These samples of music allow us a glimpse into the past and give 21st century musicologists the ability to piece together a history of Philippine music forms that existed in the Spanish colonial period. Comparison between these samples and present-day traditional musics still persisting alongside newer, more familiar contemporary forms and styles.

Keywords: kumintang, travel writing, traditional song, awit, kundiman

My introduction to the travelogue arose from an academic need. In the 1980s, I had embarked on a personal research project that involved the ethnomusicological mapping of the song repertoire of the towns in the southwest portion of Batangas province in the Southern Tagalog region of Luzon, Philippines (see Illus. 1).



Illustration 1. Map of Batangas province¹

Collecting samples of traditional song in the heartland of what is called Katagalugan (the Tagalog homeland), I had stumbled across a number of unfamiliar musical repertoires consisting of forms and genres that eluded my classification. It led to the realization that simple collection and formal assessment of music samples would not provide enough insight to evaluate the way these samples had come into being. The decision was made to undertake a historical excavation that would, hopefully, reveal the traces of a history of these forms. Well-meaning friends had warned me that building a history of my Tagalog repertoires from the bits and pieces of debris from a musical culture that had been unmapped, underreported, and subjected to decades of neglect and forgetfulness would be almost impossible. Ignoring their advice, a personal decision was made to satisfy my own curiosity. To my delight, there was enough to be able to make some tentative conclusions on a few forms. The paper that follows is an attempt to show how a small collection of notes and comments and a handful of musical transcriptions found in unlikely sources such as travelogues, can lead us to a greater understanding of the Filipinos and their music. The essay is, therefore, an exploration of historical references to the *kumintang*, the so-called chant nacional

(the phrase is from Mallat, which is in French) of the Tagalog, as found in printed books associated with travel, in an effort to show how they can be used to answer questions about what it was, how it functioned, and how it can be related to later song forms in Philippines history.

The base of the research was my field collection of the song form called the *awit* as it was practiced in Batangas in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Below is an example (Illus. 2) of a fragment from an *awit* from Batangas, as performed in 1983 by Donato Mendoza, *mang-aawit* (singer), and Periano Caringal, *gitarista* (guitarist), of San Vicente, Bauan, Batangas.

Illustration 2. Awit as performed by Donato Mendoza and Periano Caringal in 1983.

Awit sa Krus Donato Mendoza, tinig
Periano Caringal, gitara

The musical score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of four systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (tinig), a guitar line (gitara), and a bass line (paa). The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

System 1:
 tinig: (no lyrics)
 gitara: (no lyrics)
 paa: (no lyrics)

System 2:
 tinig: (no lyrics)
 gitara: (no lyrics)
 paa: (no lyrics)

System 3:
 tinig: Krus na ya-ong Ka-ho y Do-o-n
 gitara: (no lyrics)
 paa: (no lyrics)

System 4:
 tinig: na-fa-ta-ya
 gitara: (no lyrics)
 paa: (no lyrics)

The musical score consists of five systems, each with three staves: Treble Clef (T), Guitar (G), and Piano (P). The vocal line (T) has lyrics in Tagalog. The guitar line (G) shows chords and melodic lines. The piano line (P) shows a complex rhythmic pattern with various time signatures (3/4, 1/4, 3/8, 1/2, 3/4).

System 1: T: sa ta-bi ng pang ang ka-muk-ha
G: [Guitar notation]
P: [Piano notation]

System 2: T: ay gin-to
G: [Guitar notation]
P: [Piano notation]

System 3: T: [Vocal notation]
G: [Guitar notation] (ga/pe)
P: [Piano notation]

System 4: T: [Vocal notation]
G: [Guitar notation]
P: [Piano notation]

System 5: T: [Vocal notation]
G: [Guitar notation]
P: [Piano notation]

It was not easy to come to grips with the category “awit.” Most Tagalog men and women in the street agree that it has the generic meaning “song.” After many field interviews, a realization emerged that the term was limited by my elderly informants to refer to a very specific type of song with the following characteristics:

1. It consisted of two loosely connected parts—one vocal and one instrumental;
2. The vocal part was in free meter and held together by the *plosa* verse form² which is a monorhyming quatrain with dodecasyllabic lines; and,
3. The instrumental part was primarily in triple time and used various types of *ostinato*³-like patterns with a limited vocabulary of one or two chords.

The instrumentalist was free to dislocate the rhythm occasionally while playing with either the rhythm or the ostinato-like patterns.

The first piece of writing that illumined this situation was the seventeenth and eighteenth century Spanish-Tagalog vocabularies, which friars used as an aid in their missionary efforts. In a sense, these early dictionaries served as sourcebooks for travelers unfamiliar with the terrain they had been given to administer. Not many musical terms are included in these works but what can be found in these works is helpful. In the seventeenth century, Pedro de San Buenaventura, a cleric compiling a vocabulario in Pila, a town in the province of Laguna, refers to *awit* as a type of *canta*, alongside others such as the *hila*, *sambitan*, *sambotanin*, and *hilirao* (de San Buenaventura 1613, 141). Juan Noceda and Felipe de Sanlucar, however, define *awit* as the generic equivalent of the Spanish *canta* or song (Noceda and Sanlucar 1860, 19). E. Arsenio Manuel, writing about the *awit* in the town of Tayabas Quezon in the 1940's, notes that the term *awit* is still used in both contexts, and is both a generic term for "song" and a specific term for the songs in *plosa* form (Manuel 1958, 58). As the entry "*awit*" is one of very few music entries to be found in these old dictionaries written specifically for missionaries, this explanation came as a "eureka" moment in my research.

A second problem in the *awit* study circa 1980 to 1990 arose from the use by field informants of the term "kumintang." The *awit* guitarists from Bauan performed, among others, an elegant, florid plucked guitar style and referred to it as *kumintang* or *kinumintang* (in the *kumintang* style, perhaps referring to the part of Batangas City traditionally associated with the center of an ancient province of Kumintang), as opposed to other guitar styles such as the *kinanluran* (in the western style, perhaps the original style in Bauan, which is in the westernmost part of Batangas) and the *sinilangan* (in the eastern style, more specifically identified as originating from Candelaria, Quezon, a town to the east of Bauan) (Mirano 1997, 67-69).

Music Sample 1. Kumintang guitar technique by Periano Caringal (recorded by the author in 1983; available only in eBook version of the PHR)

The *kumintang* was often referred to in twentieth century urban music circles as a long lost, archaic song of the Tagalog. To unpack this definition, it was necessary to return to the nineteenth century historical sources for an explanation. The seventeenth and eighteenth century vocabularios do not include the word *kumintang*. Sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century historical narratives of early chroniclers, however, helped provide clues (de San Antonio

1977, 80). In these works, kumintang is not referred to as a musical form, style or technique. Instead it is a place name, a “kingdom” with a center around the present day Batangas City. It is only in 1734 that an image of three people, two of them dancing and the other playing a guitar, appears in the special edition of the Pedro Morillo y Velarde map of the Philippines with the caption, “indios bailando el comintang.” Kumintang as place name and later, kumintang as musical form, therefore, become visible because of travel and travel literature.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the travelogue proper, comes into its own. Its practitioners had various motives for writing. Some were clerics, traveling to parishes under their authority; others were diplomats on official missions; while still others were businessmen surveying the territories for possible commercial ventures. There was documentation by members of scientific expeditions collecting plant and animal specimens as well as cultural artefacts, and accounts of adventurers in search of fame and fortune. But quite a number of them stop to comment on the quaint native song and dance that is, by the nineteenth century, “...no se aclimata en las ciudades, asi es que hay que buscarlo en esas perdidas casitas, ocultas tras los verdes penachos de las bongas y las cañas” (Guerra 1878, 104). By the second half of the nineteenth century, therefore, the kumintang is prominent enough to catch the attention of the traveler but also rare enough for the same traveler to note that the form seems to be in decline.

There are four musical transcriptions of kumintang found in these travelogues: one in Jean Baptiste Mallat’s *Les Philippines* (1846, 247);⁴

Illustration 3. *Comintang de la Conquista* on Finale

Comintan de la Conquista

from Mallat

The musical score is presented in three systems. The top system is for Voice, the middle for Guitar, and the bottom for Piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Voice part consists of four measures of whole rests. The Guitar part begins with a series of chords and a melodic line, starting with a G4 note. The Piano part consists of four measures of whole rests.

First system of a musical score. The guitar part (Gtr.) is written in a single treble clef staff and features a continuous eighth-note melody with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piano part (Pno.) consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) which are currently empty, indicating a rest for the piano accompaniment in this section.

2

Comintan de la Conquista

Second system of the musical score. The guitar part continues with its eighth-note melody. The piano part begins to play in the second measure, with the right hand playing a sequence of eighth notes and the left hand providing a steady bass line.

Third system of the musical score. The guitar part concludes with a final chord. The piano part continues with its accompaniment, featuring chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Comintan de la Conquista

3

Si - nor a un ca - ya sa san - da - ig - di - gan

Gtr.

Pno.

ang may du - sa ni - tong a - guing ca - hi - ra - pan

Gtr.

Pno.

4

Comintan de la Conquista

Di mo na ni - li - ngot pi - na - lu - ngai - lu - ngai pag - sin - ta sa i - yong va -

Gtr.

Pno.

lang ca - li - lo - han di mo na ni - lin - ngot

Gtr.

Pno.

Comintan de la Conquista 5

pi-na-lu-ngai - lu - ngai pag-sin-ta sa i-yong va-lang ca-li-lo - han.

one by Manuel Walls y Merino, the Puerto Rican musicologist who published the book, *La Musica Popular de Filipinas* after a trip to the Philippines (Walls 31-32);

Music Sample 2. Comintan from Walls⁵ y Merino on Finale (available only in eBook version of the PHR)

and a pair by Epifanio de los Santos (1914, 57), the Filipino scholar and intellectual, who was also considered one of the finest guitarists of the Manila society of his day;

Illustration 4. *Cumintang* from De los Santos on Finale (available only in eBook version of the PHR)

Cong pag sa a... can cong
 ba... sa... hin sa c... sip
 Ang na nga sa ya... ang
 a... neo nang pag sa... big
 mag hin ha... ha...
 sa... sang sa sa... de
 si... han na cog sa... siang
 na mas sud sa...
 Shang sa pang sa siang
 Ki... na... nga... ni... ban
 sa... la... ma... la...
 sa... pang... a... de...
 ang... a... na... la... bang
 higa... nga... ca... pa... la... nara
 sa... la... pang... na... la...
 na... a... a... la... a...

Oh! pag sa pang la hi
 nang ca pang ya ni hin
 sa... pang mag... a...
 i... pang na... a...
 pang... pang... pang...
 sa... pang... hi... pang...
 ha... ha... pang... a...
 pang... pang... pang...
 At... ya... sa... na... can... na
 pang... pang... pang...
 sa... la... ca... a... na...
 i... ya... pang... pang...
 ba... pang... ca... pang... na...
 na... na... pang... sa... na...
 pang... pang... pang...
 na... a... a... la... a...

De los Santos also has a set of comments on the kumintang found in Wenceslao Retana's edition of Antonio Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1910, 461). De los Santos considers the piano line of the Cohen transcription, particularly measures twenty-four to twenty-eight (24-28), which modulate away from the rather static A minor mode as "son de factura moderna," tacked on to the piece (*ibid.*). De los Santos's own transcriptions, as well as the work of Walls y Merino, feature a guitar *ostinato* that does not change. De los Santos further comments that it is the practice of Tagalog guitarists to occasionally stray away from $\frac{3}{4}$ time as they play with the rhythm during performance (*ibid.*).

These comments by De los Santos strengthen the case for the twentieth century awit from Batangas as direct descendant of the nineteenth century kumintang. All the nineteenth century texts are in *plosa* verse form. All the transcriptions, save that of Henry Cohen, who adds on the aforementioned tacked on piano part, consist of a melodic, rhythmically free vocal part and a rhythmic guitar part in triple time that is harmonically static. The former rises smoothly above the latter and there is an occasional but not infrequent harmonic clash. It is most probable that the awit from Batangas was called Kumintang by the Tagalog in recognition of the fact that it was a regional variant of the awit coming from the old province of Kumintang. Just as there were songs in Mallat's day referred to as "sinanpablo" and "cavitegan"; there were awit in the twentieth century referred to as *pinagbilao*, *hinarison*, *sinanroque* and *inatimunan*, all referring to place names (Mirano 1997, 92).

A final point on the kumintang concerns its relationship to the *kundiman*, the other *canto nacional de los Tagalos* referred to in the travelogues. In early twentieth century scholarship, the *kundiman* is considered the "modern" kumintang. Note that kumintang as a musical form can be dated back to 1734, while the first reference to the term *kundiman* dates to an account of the cleric Joaquin Martinez de Zuñiga (1893, 83) of a trip that brought him to the town of San Juan, Batangas in 1799, where he was entertained by performances of both the kumintang and the *kundiman*. This reference to the *kundiman*'s modernity, as opposed to the ancient character of the kumintang, is repeated in many twentieth century theses and published essays. Again, we can refer to nineteenth century samples of *kundiman* for answers. Two examples, first from Walls y Merino, and the second, a *condiman*, published in "Voyage Around the World of the Austrian Ship Novarra"⁶ are reproduced below.

Music Sample 3. Condiman from Walls y Merino (available only in eBook version of the PHR)

Music Sample 4. Condiman from the "Novarra" (available only in eBook version of the PHR)

The examples reveal a very different musical song form from the kumintang. They are in conventional Western functional harmony and move from chord to chord without much awkwardness, although the key is somewhat unstable. Both vocal and instrumental lines conform to harmonic progression and they hew closer to European sound ideals than the kumintang which may, by the norms of Western practice of the time, seem rather static, exotic and strange.

In one respect do the two song types resemble each other. They both employ the *plosa* verse form. In the light of these points, it is possible to infer that the songtexts of the older *awit* might have been grafted onto the more europeanized *kundiman*, thus the reference to the latter as the “modern kumintang.” In addition, it is also quite likely that the more urbane *kundiman* could have taken on the functions served by the older kumintang in Tagalog society.

In summary, it is quite reasonable to conclude that the “awit,” as practiced in southwestern Batangas in the closing decades of the twentieth century is probably the direct descendant of the so-called national song of the Tagalog, recorded in printed and published documents from the nineteenth century. As a corollary, it can also be added that the *kundiman*, also considered an iconic song of the Tagalog in the nineteenth century, was probably a later development that gradually took over the functions of the kumintang and reflected a growing gentrification and Europeanization of the native culture. Because of this identification with sophistication, cosmopolitanism and modernity, it was the *kundiman*, rather than the archaic kumintang that early twentieth century Philippine composers consciously trying to forge a national music, chose to develop as a symbol of the new nation.

While it is true that there are many gaps in our knowledge of Philippine music history, it is possible to use the pieces of information gleaned from travel writing to build up a history of traditional Philippine music. These can be mined for the occasional nuggets of information they can provide to answer many nagging questions about the development of this music. Nineteenth century travelogues reflect a growing interest of Europeans in other cultures and lands far away. But they also provide us, today, with tantalizing glimpses of who we were and what we might have been like in that not too distant past. There is no doubt that these accounts should be used judiciously and that the reader should employ a critical eye in evaluating the usefulness of each text. But if we tread through the works carefully and, like scavengers, pick through the texts for details hidden in the debris, we can establish a fuller picture of ourselves. For this we are profoundly thankful.

Notes

- 1 Downloaded from <http://www.batangasnow.com/citiesdistricts.html>.
- 2 *Plosa* is the term used for poetry with four (4) monorhyming lines, and 12-syllables per line. It is used in the Tagalog *awit* genre, which includes Francisco Balagtas's *Florante at Laura*. In the performance of the *awit*, the singers often break the *plosa* into two monorhyming couplets, dancing in between the two resulting pairs.
- 3 *Ostinato* is the term used to refer to a musical phrase, repeated persistently and successively over a significant portion of a musical composition.
- 4 Transcribed by Henry Cohen, presumably the French musician and numismatist.
- 5 I follow the original spelling of the title given by the author. The spelling varies from author to author.
- 6 A scientific expedition under the command of the Austrian Commodore B. de Wüllerstorff-Urbair in the years 1857, 1858 and 1859.

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