



Review Article

Volume-03|Issue-03|2022

The Secrets of Hope and Faith: Resilience in Philippine Music as the Country's Unique Culture

Almighty C. Tabuena

Graduate Student, Institute of Physical Education, Health, Recreation, Dance and Sports (IPEHRDS), College of Graduate Studies and Teacher Education Research (CGSTER), Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines

Article History

Received: 16.02.2022

Accepted: 23.02.2022

Published: 31.03.2022

Citation

Tabuena, A. C. (2022). The Secrets of Hope and Faith: Resilience in Philippine Music as the Country's Unique Culture. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 62-67.

Abstract: This lecture and review article aims to share the secrets of hope and faith, the resilience of Philippine music and music education as the country's unique culture in celebration of National Arts Month 2022, its artistic excellence and pay tribute to the uniqueness and diversity of Filipino heritage and culture. In line with the theme, *Sining ng Pag-asa*, it seeks to recognize the arts as a source and expression of hope, as demonstrated by the creative ways in which we respond to the effects of the pandemic, natural disasters, and other social realities, as well as the arts' role in improving our community life as Filipinos. This article answers three significant questions. How does Philippine music, or music in general, give hope amidst the pandemic? What is the most evident characteristic of Philippine music that portrays hope? What could be the factors that Filipinos are encountering in their daily lives that cause them to have these kinds of characteristics in their music? Clearly, our musical heritage reveals a lot about who we are. Learning about Filipino music cultures is the first step to gaining a deeper understanding of the Filipino people. The pandemic taught us a lot of things. Whatever the case may be, we have always recovered and survived. It has taught us to rethink the value of life, health, and even leaders. Some may believe there is no hope. But, as we fight COVID-19, let us not forget our two most powerful weapons—faith and music.

Keywords: Culture, Faith, Hope, Philippine Music, Resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

Before we proceed to the lecture, I would like to share a particular quote from one of the prominent Filipino song composers who was given a Cultural Achievement Award in Popular Music (Tabuena, 2018). He said, "You may be forgiven for lack of knowledge, but not for lack of courage" (Samson, 1976). This was said by Miguel "Mike" Velarde, Jr. during his interview with Professor Helen Samson, published in 1976.

"You may be forgiven for lack of knowledge, but not for lack of courage". But how do we strive for courage? In such trying times, music and art have been our salvation.

Over two years have passed since the Philippines imposed strict community quarantines, until today. There is still concern that COVID-19 will spread and threaten the lives of thousands of workers. The healthcare system will collapse once a percentage of its employees are infected. Authorities say thousands of OFWs are still in quarantine and some are still on cruise ships docked in Philippine ports. Years ago, a repatriated foreign worker hanged herself in a state facility. Another recently jumped off a building in another country (Calleja, 2020).

Brought about by this pandemic, it has caused poverty and mental distress. Of course, music is a major source of inspiration and strength. When the world

needed a little love, many people were quick to offer a song. And it appears that there is one for every situation (Castill & Castillo, 2020).

Listen to the music titled "Umagang Kay Ganda" (*translation: Good Morning*) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_j-hAdB7BA. The Tillie Moreno original already conveys a strong message of hope. A beautiful sunrise, and arguably the most breathtaking one, marks a good morning (Castill & Castillo, 2020).

But again, what nourishes the Filipinos, especially those living in the slums? What continues to drive a nation forward even when its future is uncertain? So here we are, I am sharing with you my lecture titled "The Secrets of Hope and Faith: Resilience in Philippine Music as the Country's Unique Culture."

Context

As we begin, Presidential Proclamation No. 683, issued by then-President Corazon Aquino in 1991, declares February of each year as National Arts Month to celebrate artistic excellence and pay tribute to the uniqueness and diversity of Filipino heritage and culture (NCCA, 2022).

This year's theme, "*SINING NG PAG-ASA*" (*translation: Art of Hope*), seeks to recognize the arts as a source and expression of hope, as demonstrated by the

creative ways in which we respond to the effects of the pandemic, natural disasters, and other social realities, as well as the arts' role in improving our community life as Filipinos.

In keeping with the theme, our topic will open your heart, soul, and mind to the fact that Philippine music is incomparably rich. Most Filipinos, however, are unaware of this wealth. There is an essential need to bring Philippine music closer to our people; a strong identification with our own music is one important factor in bringing our people together or unifying the nation (Leon, n.d).

FAITH AND MUSIC

From the questions earlier, what nourishes the Filipinos, especially those living in the slums? What continues to drive a nation forward even when its future is uncertain? Another scenario is World War II, when bombs utterly destroyed the country. Our homes and churches have been torn down. But the war never destroyed our nation's faith.

Father Horacio de la Costa, a Jesuit historian, compared the war-torn Philippines to a pauper with two precious jewels (Calleja, 2020). In his essay "Jewels of the Pauper," he stated that the Philippines has two great treasures—faith and music.

Listen to the music titled "Ili (Hush)" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntQ7iHOHg-4>. As said in the music, "When the battle is done, how long before we recover? If the battle is won, how then do we face each other?(Castill & Castillo, 2020).

"But as poor as we are, we still have something. This pauper among the nations of the earth hides two jewels in her rags. One of them is our MUSIC. The other treasure is our FAITH," wrote the Jesuit historian (Calleja, 2020). Music is very important to Filipinos. Our songs soar higher than the number of people who died as a result of the pandemic.

The current situation has not prevented choirs and musicians from collaborating via technology to perform breathtaking compositions. Behind closed doors, we sing karaoke. Even when food and testing kits are scarce, we resort to social media to express ourselves by dancing to the tune of "tiktok" music.

Our souls are soothed by music. Our melodies not only distract our minds, which are already burdened by the loss of a loved one or the loss of a job. Our music, on the other hand, has become a powerful source of hope and good memories. It reminds us that things will improve and that we will be able to visit and spend time with our loved ones again one day.

Our hymns, on the other hand, are not just for fun. They serve as a springboard for prayer, just as our

melodies serve as expressions of faith. Faith gives meaning to all of the suffering we are experiencing as a nation right now. Churches may be closed, but we've brought them into our homes. We are praying more than we have in the past. We are thinking more about the meaning of life and death than ever before.

Listen to the music titled "Huwag Kang Mangamba" (*translation: Do Not be Afraid*) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcqGD_-z-II. Huwag Kang Mangamba is a Tagalog hymn composed by Father Manoling Francisco, S.J. about God's infinite love for man. It is a revelation that He is our Saviour, who carries us through all of life's trials and tribulations. It is also a song of encouragement and hope for us, as we face obstacles along the way (Thebluetamarind, n.d).

Our grief and anxiety are washed away by faith. It causes us to see the needs of others, encouraging us to step outside of our comfort zone. It liberates us from our egocentric tendencies.

BEING FILIPINO: MUSIC FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

These are songs that celebrate or depict our struggles, hopes, and dreams for a Filipino identity and sense of nationhood (Leon, n.d).

The Filipino struggle for freedom, identity, and dignity dates back to the 16th century, when Spanish colonization began. In 1898, the Filipinos were the first Asian peoples to fight and win a war against Western colonialism in Asia. We were also Asia's first Constitutional Republic. Though only discernible among a minority (thus, a subculture), a commitment to one's country and pride in being Filipino are as alive today as they were in the past, and this devotion has always been well-served by the nation's musical expressions, particularly the kundiman, a song of devotion to a selfless and noble cause. As in the songs Bayan Ko, Jocelynang Baliwag, and Sariling Bayan, the kundiman has always embodied the Filipinos' intense and lofty patriotism.

Listen to the music titled "Sa Sariling Bayan" (*translation: In the Homeland*) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5H-LIuq94A4>. The Kundiman is a tenderly lyrical song in a moderately slow triple meter with melodic phrases that frequently end in quarter and half note values. It is primarily a song of selfless devotion to a loved one, the motherland, a spiritual figure, an infant, a lofty cause, or a compassionate object.

All of these Filipino music cultures are not only alive and current; they are also distinct in terms of concept, form, and style. Each represents a uniquely Filipino way of life and is expressive of a subculture's

experiences. Understanding these music cultures allows us to better understand ourselves.

PHILIPPINE MUSIC AS HOPE FOR THE FILIPINO PEOPLE

In this part of the lecture, I surveyed some of my students regarding how Philippine music or music in general gives hope amidst the pandemic, and these are their responses:

"In this time of pandemic wherein I felt alone at some point during my lowest of times and my greatest of times, music was there all along with me. With the help of its lyrics, it made my spirit uplift and gave encouragement, especially when things got tough, as if it was imprinted to adjust the moods in our lives."

"Artists can create meaningful music that people can relate to, and this is how music helped people maintain hope during the pandemic."

"An ordinary person can also make music because we all have emotions and problems that we can express through songwriting. By doing so, we release negative energy from our bodies and feel relieved."

In line with the responses, the Metro Manila Popular Music Festival (or Metro Pop), a songwriting competition for amateurs and professionals, became the buffer for the creation of new pop songs and the introduction of emerging artists and performers in the late 1970s. Other local competitions encouraged even more musicians and composers to create new music. The Likha Awit Pambata (a children's song competition), the Himig Awards, and the Cecil Awards are among them. Around this time, the Organisasyon ng mga Pilipinong Mang-aawit (OPM) was formed to meet the needs of Filipino popular artists. OPM also stood for Original Pilipino Music, a term used to describe music composed and/or performed by Filipinos, even if it did eventually include English lyrics (Baes, n.d). In addition to the responses:

"Philippine music commemorates historical and personal events in our lives that give us reason to work hard and persevere more in life."

"Since music was composed and written with lots of emotions, it gives hope to many. Especially during this hard time, we tend to listen to different genres and relate them to our lives."

"We encounter different artists who influence our lives in a good way—somewhat through the lyrics of their songs."

"Music, in general, can be a powerful uplift of our hope during this time of difficulty and uncertainty."

Music of Social Concern and Cultural Freedom: A Force for Social Transformation

Alternative, protest, progressive, or people's music (e.g., Joey Ayala's Wala Nang Tao Sa Santa Filomena and Heber Bartolome's Tagulaylay) is music for social criticism (Tabuena & Domingo, 2021) and cultural liberation.

Since the American period, when socialistic ideas began to emerge in Filipino society, this genre's music has always been in the process of experimentation, change, and growth (Leon, n.d). It is currently being actively shaped by socially committed poet-musicians who are consciously using songs as a force for social liberation, advocacy of social justice, and human rights struggle. It uses music as a tool for social criticism and change, addressing issues such as injustice and oppression, neocolonialism, cultural erosion as a result of globalization, indigenous peoples' plight, and other social causes.

Music is used as a social critic and change agent, as well as a vehicle for proposals for more humane attitudes and values, an equitable social order, cultural creativity and diversity, sustainable development, increased ecological awareness, and alternative ideas and lifestyles.

Asin, Patatag, Inang Laya, Heber Bartolome, Joey Ayala, Grace Nono, KontraGapi, Pinikpikan, Buklod, and, most recently, the Makiling Ensemble are among the well-known artists who have creatively contributed to this tradition as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Well-Known Artists for Social Transformation

In the song Kenkoy, with words by Romualdo Ramos, Nicanor Abelardo was one of the first musicians to compose music for social criticism. Kenkoy was written in the 1930s to satirize the first generation of Filipinos who began imitating American

culture in superficial and ridiculous ways, often at the expense of their self-esteem and dignity. It was inspired by Kenkoy, a bizarre character created by Tony Velasquez in 1926 who represents "veneration without understanding." Listen to the music titled "Kenkoy" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iKep05bnLk>.

PORTRAYING CHARACTERISTICS OF HOPE IN THE PHILIPPINE MUSIC

"What is important for the Filipinos? What do Filipinos value at present?" The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA, 2020) conducted this research as part of the government's Filipino Values Formation Program, with the goal of determining different values upheld across the country so that Filipinos can continue to embody these values to strengthen Filipino society through widespread implementation in collaboration with educational institutions.

The following are the nineteen (19) values that the Filipino people hold in common: Family, Education, Faith, Health and Wellness, Basic Needs, Self, Work and Livelihood, Peace and Development, Honesty and Integrity, Resilience, Life and Purpose, Human Rights, Environment, Love for Country, Happiness, Kapuwa, Culture, Arts, and Sciences, Governance, and Creative Excellence.

Traditional Filipino values have remained consistent: family-centered, faith and virtue-based, sympathetic for others (kapuwa), and education-oriented. Filipinos emphasize the importance of societal values such as good governance, patriotism, honesty, and integrity. Personal values include self-esteem, life and purpose, resilience, and happiness.

As you can see, faith and resilience are mentioned, so it is natural for us Filipinos to value our spirituality and perseverance in relation to others and to our music. I also did a survey with my students on the topic being discussed, and I am sharing their responses with you.

Faith (Religiosity)

"One of the characteristics of Philippine music is the same characteristics we have as Filipinos, and one of them is being religious. This influenced the Filipino composer to write a song that will inspire many to keep fighting and never lose hope."

"Philippine music's religious side is probably its most evident characteristic, and it portrays hope. Because Filipinos are religious, our music may give us hope, particularly in this time of pandemics."

"Philippine music is mostly religious; it gives us hope and light in the midst of darkness."

Inspiration

"The most evident characteristic of Philippine music that portrays hope is that it inspires each Filipino to be connected with one another, that we are not alone, and that hope will always come through when we have each other to lean on."

"The music in the world amidst the pandemic is being used to create such a masterpiece to interpret the lives of people during the pandemic and to give hope, light, and happiness to those people that are constantly struggling to cope with the pandemic."

Communication (Connection or Message)

"I believe that the variation of tune and the lyrics themselves portray hope, because they are the ones who truly touch the feelings of the listeners as well as convey a message to them."

"Philippine music expresses their words through songs because Philippine music has its own way of bringing people together. It takes us back to all the memories we went through together and how we strived hard to overcome each obstacle that we have come across."

"In my own perception, the music industry gives hope to people amidst the pandemic wherein it is used as entertainment to spend their time at home, hence preventing boredom and possibly losing one's sanity as well."

Determination (Pride)

"I think the most evident characteristic of Philippine music that portrays hope at this time is our pride. The pride of the Filipinos is evident since they are fighting for what is right for them to achieve a better outcome than what is happening."

Creation (Musicality and Creative Excellence)

"I think the most evident characteristic of Philippine music that portrays hope is its quality content. That is to say, the words, instruments, and other musical aspects."

"One of the most evident characteristics that Philippine music portrays is the chorale, where singers sing together as one group and create different varieties of sounds/tones."

Position (Perspective)

"They provide us with more adequate, valuable, and alternative perspectives in our lives, which will help us overcome any difficulties in life."

"Filipinos are extremely skilled, particularly in music, due to the way we show our passion. And we

simply communicate that desire through the utilization of our philosophical view of life and experiences, which people can relate to. Filipinos use the essence of music to give or express hope within that boundary, whether it's in relation to victories or failures."

DISCUSSION

How does Philippine Music or Music in General, Give Hope amidst the Pandemic?

Philippine music comforts our souls. Our melodies do more than just distract our minds, which are already weighed down by the loss of a loved one or the loss of a job. Our music has evolved into a potent source of hope and pleasant memories. It reminds us that things will get better and that one day we will be able to return to normal. In general, as to my students' responses, Philippine music or music in general, gives hope amidst the pandemic through its message, emotions, and influence, and the historical and personal events that inspire us to work hard and persevere more in life.

What is the Most Evident Characteristic of Philippine Music That Portrays Hope?

The most evident characteristic of Philippine music that portrays hope is faith. Faith in all contexts, whether as spirituality, individuality, or community. Other than faith, other characteristics include inspiration, connection, determination, creation, and position, which is its perspective to uplift our hope during this time of difficulty and uncertainty.

What could be the Factors that Filipinos are Encountering in their Daily Lives that Cause them to Have These Kinds of Characteristics in Their Music

One of the factors is our historical connection; that is, the past and the present in terms of our culture and tradition. As said before, Philippine music commemorates historical and personal events in our lives that give us reason to work hard and persevere more in life. Second, as mentioned, is our personal experiences. Our musical traditions can tell us a lot about who we are. This is the first step to having a better understanding of the Filipino music culture as well as the Filipino people.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, our musical traditions can reveal a lot about ourselves. As a matter of fact, learning about Filipino music cultures is the first step toward having a more complete and in-depth understanding of the Filipino people (Leon, n.d).

More than a pandemic has afflicted our country. We have survived wars, political and economic upheavals, and natural disasters. Nonetheless, as a nation, we have always recovered and survived. This pandemic has taught us many valuable life lessons. It

has taught us to reconsider the value of life itself, our health, and even the manner in which we select our leaders.

Some may believe there is no hope left. But, as we fight COVID-19, let us remember our two greatest jewels, our ultimate weapons in this pandemic. Faith and music unite our country. They are the souls that bind us together. They are the reason we will reinstate them as a single entity (Calleja, 2020).

Acknowledgments

This lecture article was presented to one of the Lecture Series (Philippine Music) during the celebration of National Arts Month 2022 at Manuel G. Araullo High School, Manila, Philippines. The author would like to express his sincerest gratitude to Associate Professor Glinore S. Morales, Philippine Normal University, and to the MAPEH Department of Manuel G. Araullo High School, specifically to Mrs. Grace Malabay-Lastra and Miss Abigail Untalan who supported the realization of this lecture. In addition, I would like to thank my advisory class, Grade 12 ABM - St. Margaret Clitherow, through Lorenzo Balbin, Class President on behalf of the class, School Year 2021-2022, for their responses in the surveyed part of the presentation, particularly for the first two questions. Soli Deo gloria! Happy National Arts Month!

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