

DANCE EDUCATION THROUGH POETIC NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Dance has been described as poetry of the feet. An image created by dance paints a thousand words. Dances tell stories of cultural origins and fuse meanings to the young generation, helping keep them rooted on solid grounds. This paper explores the power of poetic narratives in presenting the life ways of indigenous people groups in a dance production entitled “*Hugnay: Katutubong Sayaw, Modernistang Galaw*” (Fusion: Indigenous Dance, Modern Movements).

This stage performance attempted to trigger resonance between neo-folklore and modern sensibilities. It aimed at bridging the gap between the Filipinos’ rich traditional culture and the contemporary culture using storytelling through music and lyrics, modern symbols, and creative movements evoked by rhythmic beats and a soulful poetry reading.

An alternative approach to teaching dance, the *Hugnay* production raises the viewers’ level of consciousness about dance, Philippine culture, and the possibility of merging modern sensibilities with the traditional/indigenous. The desired outcome is a significant step towards integrative learning – the enhancement of the artistry of movement by introducing the dimension of poetic rhythm.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry, stories and music may be communicated and expressed through the language of movement that is dance. According to Hava-Robbins (2002), “when poetry strays too far from music, it atrophies. When music strays too far from dance, it atrophies. There is no reason for not combining poetry, music, and dance . . . all of these art forms are portrayals of human existence, experience, expression, and perception expressed in the different languages of the arts where one form inspires the other – they are interrelated”.

However, with the rapid cultural changes accelerated by globalization, most traditional art forms are nearly dying. People are starting to see folk dance as a subculture, a residue of the past. Thus, today’s generation may not appreciate folk dances as a part of its (Filipino) identity because it is no longer familiar with the background and description of these dances (“Hugnay” playbill, 2008). Teaching dance has been mostly limited to the conventional methods, where learning is confined to the classroom. In performing Philippine folk dances, it has been a tradition to compartmentalize the dances into suites. The repertoire usually presents the Cordillera suite, the Maria Clara suite, the Mindanao suite and the Rural suite- and normally in this order.

This paper attempts to express the idea that dance is not just movement set to music. As a visual art form, images are created in dance, and as a wordless language, it is a sensual one; a language of felt experience. “Dance is the hidden language of the soul,” reflected Martha Graham, a pioneer and legend in modern dance and contemporary dance forms and a choreographer of interpretative dancing (Robbins, 2002).

It presents a collaborative work among different disciplines, enabling a glimpse of the power of poetic narratives and storytelling in dance appreciation through a dance production entitled, “*Hugnay: Katutubong Sayaw, Modernistang Galaw*”. The dance production fuses the narrative (through poetry in the prologue and epilogue, poetry in the contemporary dances and the neo-Filipino dances and narration in between suites) with the visual and bodily movements of dance. It was presented at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) on March 4 and 5, 2008 and July 22, 2008.

The challenge for dance choreographers and culture advocates is to teach and inspire the young generation to appreciate and value the Filipino tradition and heritage through dance using as many approaches as possible. One way is to highlight poetic narratives and storytelling as an integrating factor that holds together the various elements in a performance.

The *Hugnay* production features selected folk dances from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao presented in five suites: the Cordillera suite; the Maria Clara suite; the Lumad Mindanao suite; the Muslim Mindanao suite; and the Rural suite. The production also introduces the genre of neo-Filipino dances inspired by the contemporary dances today’s youth prefers. Neo-Filipino is the new dance hybrid fusing traditional folk dances and modern contemporary movements.

One way to revive the dying traditional dances or indigenous dances is to bridge the gap between the rich past culture and the present without discarding the context and the background of both. The integration of poetic narratives is one such way, serving to inspire the performers and to educate the viewers.

METHODOLOGY

The power of poetic narrative and storytelling was employed in the *Hugnay* production by reinforcing the meanings of movements to a narrative (purposely a form of dance education), therefore making this performance an effective experience in teaching and appreciating the traditional Philippine folk dances through the lens of modern performance. As a result, a lyrical dance is created, where there is a blending of ballet, modern, and jazz dance styles, -- interpretative in nature and lending itself to a liturgical dance. Lyrical dance in itself is poetry in movement using different dance patterns usually performed with slow and rounded movements.

In performing Philippine folk dances, it has been a tradition to compartmentalize and introduce the dances into suites. Dance scholars and critics have questioned this convention since it purports divisions and binarism, explicitly introducing Philippine dances as ethnic and hispanized/colonized or introducing dances according to the geographical and geopolitical boundaries of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The repertoire usually presents the Cordillera suite (upland ethnic Luzon), the Maria Clara suite (lowland hispanized dances), the Mindanao suite (Southern ethnic dances), and the Rural suite (lowland ethnic dances).

The dance production "*Hugnay: Katutubong Sayaw, Modernistang Galaw*" however, presented the idea of fusing the narrative (using the poetry in the prologue, epilogue, *Deux Homo Versus Deux Machina* and the narrations written to introduce all the suites) with the visual and bodily movements of dance, in which the audience, particularly the young Filipino generation, may appreciate and learn from the performance in a holistic experience its culture, values and traditions. The production reflected the fact that Philippine dances are connected with each other, regardless of geography and boundaries, time, and ethnocultural diversity.

DISCUSSION

In the past couple of decades, Denzin (2003), as quoted by Markula (2006), has encouraged experimentation with performance and performative texts because of his belief that "performance-based human disciplines can contribute to radical social change, to economic justice, to a cultural politics." Markula (2006) says:

In his book *Performance Ethnography* Denzin (2003) visualized that a social science that resembles a performance to become a sociopolitical act is an inherently political, performative social science that "puts culture into motion. It examines, narrates, and performs the complex ways in which persons experience themselves within the shifting ethnoscares of today's global world economy".

The art of dance, therefore, is a dynamic act as it evolves along with of the society that started it. Hence, dance education must not only be consummated inside the classroom. It must be innovative and must analyze complex social relationships in a form of performance or discourse. "*Hugnay: Katutubong Sayaw, Modernistang Galaw*", as a teaching innovation, tries to bridge the traditional culture and the understanding of

today's young people about their culture and identity. One such inherent sociopolitical act is expressed in poetry in Hugnay's narrative thus: "*Paghugnayin ang katutubong sayaw at modernistang galaw, buhayin ang apoy ng lumang tradisyon sa pamamagitan ng sandatang dala ng makabagong sayaw edukasyon*" (*Fuse the traditional dance with modern movements, Revive the fire of the traditions through the arsenal of modern dance education*).

This performance created an experience that forges tradition, values, kinesthetic intelligences, as well as folk and Filipino images on stage. A dance performance remains a potent force in teaching the young generation the beauty and significance of culture. Again, as Denzin (Markula, 2006) puts it, "Performance [is] an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency [...] Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience."

That is why the contemporary rendition and the narratives bridge a seemingly cultural and generation gap produced by Western influence and modern-urban sensibilities. Poetic narratives and storytelling crafted through dance and a dance resonating images to deliver a message through storytelling are in themselves ways of contemporizing tradition, making it alive and highly-spirited for the MTV generation. In *Hugnay*, a poetic narrative is used to introduce these dances as a form of critical and evaluative labeling.

Prologue

*Sa isang bansang mabilis ang pagbabago,
Madalas nakakalimutan ng tao
ang kanyang pinagmulan
kung kaya't ang kulturang
nagbigay sa kanya ng pagkakakilanlan
ay unti-unting napag-iwanan*

*Naliligaw.
'Di matanto kung saan lulugar
sa mabilis na takbo ng buhay ng tao.
Mula sa ating mga ninuno
namana ang isang makulay na kultura
ng sayaw, musika at tradisyon-
kayamanang dapat nating ingatan
bilang mga anak ng bayan.*

*Paano kung isang araw
tumabi sayo ang kulturang alam mo
pero di mo na kinikilala;
dinadala mo nga pero hindi mo sinasama . . .*

*Papansinin mo ba?
Tatanggapin mo?
o kebs lng*

(In a rapidly changing nation
people usually forget
their beginning
thus, the culture
who gave identity to that people
is slowly being left behind

Lost.
Something is lost in this space
In the midst of rapid pacing of people.
From our ancestors
We have inherited this tapestry of culture
Of dance, music and tradition –
Riches that we should take care of
As children of this nation.

And what if one day
The culture you know suddenly sits beside you
But you don't recognize it;
You are carrying it but you seem to be leaving it behind.

Will you take notice?
Will you accept it?
Or simply ignore?)

The Prologue affirms the intent of *Hugnay* as a dance performance. The idea is to poetically introduce such statement, through a voice over, before the actual dance begins. Rendered in the Filipino language, the poetry takes the voice of a modern conscience questioning the present generation about its knowledge of dance and tradition. The last statement, “*Will you take notice?/ Will you accept it?/ Or simply ignore?*” powerfully questions apathy, rendered in modern Filipino lingo as “*kebs lang*”, a corruption of the Spanish *que ver?* meaning “ignore?” In itself, “*kebs lang*”, a product of post-colonial and postmodern identification, is a powerful text reinscribed in a performance. Added to it, the act reflects Denzin’s highly politization of performance as a social act, giving meaning to something in a social-scientific and performative approach or inquiry.

The prologue is followed by the suites of dances, labeled and explained (through a program and narration) for the benefit of the younger members of the audience so that they may appreciate the diverse and culturally rich tradition of the Philippine ethnicities and heritage.

Suite Description

Cordillera Suite

The dances of the people from the Cordillera are reflections of the way they have adapted to their environment - the cool air, rugged and uneven terrain -- and are expressions of their beliefs and rituals. (<http://lipaartist.tripod.com/id2.htm>). Concealed in the mountainous regions of Central Luzon, the unconquered pagan tribes who were able

to preserve their rich traditions and rituals. Music and dance play an essential part in their celebrations of war, victory, harvest, and courtship. (PFDS, 2003)

- *Tarektek* - Benguet province was once inhabited by many tarektek or woodpeckers. These wild and colorful birds gave rise to the tarektek dance.
- *Kiangan* - This is a dance from the Kiangan tribe, which makes use of snake and fowl movements.
- *Pagatut* - A courtship dance from the Bontoc tribe performed at celebrations of tribal victory band and a harvest dance in honor of a bountiful harvest

Maria Clara Suite

The coming of the Spaniards to the Philippines in the 16th century marked the conversion of the Filipinos, principally those in the Luzon and the Visayan regions, to the Roman Catholicism and the introduction of western lifestyle, hence, bringing about a magnitude of influence in the Filipino way of life (<http://lipaartist.tripod.com/id2.htm>). Named in honor of the heroine in Dr. Jose Rizal's novel, *Noli me Tangere*, the Maria Clara Suite encapsulates the sophistication and charisma of the mestiza Filipina, as well as the chivalry of the mestizo Filipino. These romantic dances are exemplified by love, courtship, and enticement (PFDS, 2003)

- *Paseo de Iloilo* - This is one of the most elegant courtship dances of the Spanish era. The gentlemen contend among each other to win the heart of a young lady, by demonstrating confidence, courtesy, and compassion.
- *Polkabal* - Youngsters perform this dance influenced by two discrete European styles, polka and walse.

Mindanao Suite

When the Spaniards came to the Philippines they encountered pockets of the Muslim religion in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. They tried to occupy and replace Islam with Christianity, but in vain for the Muslim resisted. However, the Spaniards had beautiful songs and dances, which were easily liked and adopted by the Filipino people (<http://lipaartist.tripod.com/id2.htm>).

- *Lumad Mindano* - Lumad is a Visayan term meaning "born of the earth". This suite features the rich traditions of pagan Mindanao tribes that are unaffected by neither colonization nor time. (PFDS, 2003))
- *Kadal Tahu* - This is a playful dance of the T'boli imitating the native bird *Tahu*. It tells of the happy flight of the birds, and later their mishap as they get crippled. Eventually, they help each other recover and soar the skies once more.
- *Binanog* - This is a love triangle dance from the community of Talaandig performed by two females and a male.

Muslim Mindanao Suite

The South is populated by many Filipinos who had converted to Islam long before the Spaniards came to the Philippines. The dances of these islands are graceful, flowing, and fluid; much like the ocean that surrounds them. (PFDS, 2003)

- *Kappa Malong Malong* - A creative choreographic presentation of an excerpt from the showcase of the 101 ways of using the malong - the tubular Maranao cloth.
- *Sua-Ku-Sua* - This is a Tausug courtship dance comparing the sua's (pomelo) gentle leaves, slender branches, attractive fruit, and fragrant flowers to the virtues of a lady. It is performed during pomelo harvest.

Rural Suite

The Filipinos are by nature lovers of arts. They have developed songs, music and dances, peculiarly their own but with a blending of three centuries of Spanish domination and half a century in American, Asian, and European influences. The rural suite is composed of dances of the Philippine countryside inspired by the rice fields, lakeshores, the birds, and other animals. The dances depict the various moods of the people, particularly the simplicity of the life in the rural areas (<http://lipaartist.tripod.com/id2.htm>). Following a hard day's work, the rural people would often get together in their barrios and perform many impromptu and spirited dances as a form of relaxation. These dances represent the countless joys of labor, nature, and life among the people.

- *Lapay Bantigue* - A mimetic dance from Bantigue, a coastal province of Masbate, featuring the lapay (sea gulls) which is bountiful in Bantigue.
- *Kuratsa* - Clearly of Mexican import, Kuratsa Zarraga (curacha is Mexican for cockroach) is one of the Iloilo's fast paced dances. Homesick and nostalgic Mexican soldiers and workers found comfort in teaching the Kuratsa to the natives and dancing with them to shake off loneliness and thoughts of home.
- *Konan* - This is a dance from Pangasinan inspired by the konan contest, a popular entertainment during weddings, wherein dancers balance old one-peso coins on their forehead.
- *Waray-Waray* - This is a dance interpretation of a song by the same title which talks about the strengths of the Waray people.

Neo-Pinoy

Neo-Filipino (or more colloquially, neo-Pinoy) fuses the traditional and the modern dance or concept. Although most purist and Philippinists avoid such attempt,

Hugnay advocates such choreography as a form of dance education. The idea is to reinscribe or reconfigure the traditional with the modern sensibilities and approaches of dance so as to inspire and influence the young generation of the possibility of dance. This segment is introduced by another poetic/narrative stressing how “machine” became part of human consciousness.

The possibility of cyborgs taking over mankind is the message of the poem *Deux Homo Versus Deux Machina* (God Machine Versus Human Machine) an ode to the evolution and movement of dance, the movement of man, and the rapid revolution of the earth. The poem, written by the co-author of this paper, discusses how people, specifically men have created machines how machines eventually create humanity. The avant-gardism in this poem as an ode and an oratorical piece is set as an interjected narrative, questioning the position of man and machine. It is interpreted through a dance using modern lyrical movements. The blending of ballet, modern, and jazz dance styles, interpretative in nature lending itself to a liturgical dance, created lyricism and poetry that made the poem more understandable to the audience.

After this performance, a series of modern tableaux-dance rendition was performed:

- Filemon - Filemmon is a dance that portrays the soft side of men. It showcases the steps from the variety shows fused with some of rural folk movements. It is playful and comical. The mag-iisda song is from the Visayas region. The costume was inspired from the fishermen combined with the common summer floral shorts.
- Ritwal - A dance interpretation of the song of the same title showing the exorcism ritual of the babaylan using movements inspired by the Lumad Mindanao
- Salidumay - A dance interpretation of a song performed by Pinikpikan's Salidumay, this neo-Pinoy dance highlights the beauty of the rich dance tradition of the people from the highlands of Cordillera as it is presented in a new face to charm more Filipino hearts and relive the passion that they once have for these Folk dances. Salidumay teases and amuses as it satisfy our ethnic craves.

Epilogue

*Hangga't kailan mo ipipikit
ang iyong mga mata?
Kapatid, hanggang kailan?
Kapag gusto may paraan
Kapag ayaw may dahilan . . .*

*Kung sakaling 'di mo na matukoy
Ang daan pabalik sa iyong
pinagmulan,
Hayaan mong ito ang siyang gumawa
ng paraan...*

*Magtagpo sa gitna ng malaking
pagkakaiba
Lumapit, magbukas-palad
Magpasakop sa puso ng bawat isa*

*Paghugnayin ang katutubong sayaw at
modernistang galaw, buhayin muli
ang apoy ng lumang tradisyon sa
pamamagitan ng mga sandatang dala
ng makabagong sayaw edukasyon.*

(How long can you close your eyes?
Brother/Sister, How long?
If there's a will, there's a way
If one doesn't want, there's always a reason...

If by chance, you can't find the way back
Let this road make way for you...
Meet this big difference
Go near, open your hands
Let everybody conquer each heart

Fuse the traditional dances
With modern movements, enliven again
The fire of the tradition
Through the arsenal
Of the modern generation.)

Similarly, the epilogue acts as the voice of conscience underscoring the power of dance. It captures the intent of *Hugnay* -- reclaiming dance and using dance education as a powerful cultural instrument in forging nationalism, artistry, and modern consciousness to create and discourse heritage. This dance performance presents that culture is not static, though heritage has marked us into something and someone in this era of globalized logic.

Very similar to "*Hugnay: Katutubong Sayaw, Modernistang Galaw*", is *Uwahig* (Bukidnon, a dialect in Mindanao, for "water"), a play written and directed by Dr. Steven Patrick C Fernandez, featured in the UNESCO-International Theater Institute (ITI) 31st World Congress and Theatre Olympics of the Nations at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in May 24, 2006. The play is a collaborative dance-theatre-narrative production where fire and water are the overlaying images. The play deconstructs the story of two brothers who defend the land against darkness. Interspersed in the dance-music narrative are several folktales like the flood legends adapted from the various communities of Mindanao. Images of contemporary representations of darkness (war, hunger, evacuation, environmental destruction) are shaped through digital images, puppetry and masks, music, chants, chorus, and poetry (<http://www.panitikan.com.ph/newsarchive/monthly/may2006.htm>).

In *Hugnay's* attempt to use dance as an innovative tool in discussing heritage and culture, the authors affirm Denzin's purposive use of performance as research and discourse of society and politics.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATION

The dance production "*Hugnay: Katutubong Sayaw, Modernistang Galaw*" is a fusion of poetic narratives (with the poems' lyrics inspiring the choreography) and different dance movements. Its intention was for the audience, particularly its young members, to appreciate, learn, and be educated through a holistic experience the Philippine culture and traditions.

The poetic narratives employed in *Hugnay* powerfully reinforce the meaning of movements, therefore, making this performance an effective approach to teaching, appreciation, and understanding of Philippine folk dances.

Through this dance production:

1. We forge tradition, values, dance, folk and Filipino images on stage, teaching the young the significance of history and culture through dance.
2. Contemporary rendition and narratives bridge a seemingly cultural and generation gap produced by Western influence and modern-urban sensibility.
3. The power of poetic narratives and storytelling crafted through dance and dance resonating images to deliver a message through storytelling, are in themselves a way contemporizing tradition and heritage.

The challenge for dance choreographers and cultural advocates is to teach and hearten the young generation to appreciate and value the Filipino tradition and cultural heritage through dance using many approaches as possible. One way is to highlight poetic narratives and storytelling as an integrating factor that holds together the various elements in a lyrical dance performance.

Education and learning must not be compartmentalized; instead, it must be integrated. Through "*Hugnay: Katutubong Sayaw, Modernistang Galaw*" it has been shown that alternative and innovative approaches to dance education can be effective in raising the level of consciousness of the viewers (learners) about dance, Philippine culture, and the possibility of merging modern sensibilities with the traditional/indigenous. The production is indeed a significant step towards integrative learning.

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