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# Transforming Force and National Consciousness: the Music in Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

The Philippines is a country whose music is very much influenced from other musical traditions. The indigenous music in the country is very popular among masses. Filipino music is reflective of passions that rise amidst the ebb and flow of interests that drive political and social consciousness in the country. Filipino composers write songs and music that evoke and convey nationalistic sentiments which have enabled music to play a large role in reawakening national pride among Filipinos. The significance of music as a transforming force for national consciousness and reform dates back to the Spanish era where it played an integral part in the revolution against a foreign colonizer and is still evident in specific timelines of history, especially during the EDSA Revolution in the 1980's where Filipino composers and bands used Filipino Rock music that carried socially relevant lyrics. These became venues of communication among the people in the ensuing revolution of that time. Filipinos had been more inspired to write songs and use them to criticize discrimination, injustice, corruption and poverty. Music has become part of the Filipino way of life. The paper, through a timeline approach, chronicles how music impacted national consciousness in the Philippines and made it an avenue to become the transforming force that effected social change<sup>1</sup>.

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**Keywords:** Music As A Transforming Force, Music For Social Change, Music And Filipino National Identity, Progressive Music For The Times

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## 1 Introduction

Music has always been a tuneful force for political change. Throughout history, music has mingled with the political. Colorful tones, pulsating rhythms and meaningful lyrics have been a catalyst or soundtrack for movements of change. The Greeks were among the first people to truly realize the potential power of music. Known for creating democracy and the republic, Greek intellectuals also understood how music could help move a society to rebel against their government. "Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole state and ought to be prohibited," Plato warned. "When modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change with them" (Gavish, 2009).

In view of this, the role of music as a force for social and political transformation is something to contend with and serves as a means to serve a purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> The first draft of this paper was presented at the 33rd Annual Conference of the Ugnayang Pang-Aghamtao (UGAT), Central Mindanao University, Bukidnon, 20-22 October 2011. Abstract included in Conference Kit, page 22-23. This paper is a lecture summary for the course Introduction to Music in South East Asia. The author has taught for the past 10 years. It is educational in purpose and the sources come from various media forms the writer encountered during the years, like Filipinas Heritage Library, and many others, that makes this teaching material possible. Due to long time and historical summary in nature, some source information might be missing. Please kindly contact the author for relevant acknowledgment and apology in advance in case such an issue happens.

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## 2. The Philippine Perspective

The Philippines is one country whose history is paved with the challenges of transition and transformation. A colony of Spain for 400 years, its music is in tune with its historical landmarks of colonization, oppression and liberation. The music of its culture is very much influenced traditions and nationalistic overtones. The indigenous music in the country is very popular among masses. Influence primarily by Spanish and American colonizers, Filipino music has been a fusion of its rich culture, heritage and foreign influence. Nevertheless, there are no more beautiful words in a song than those written by Filipinos whose passions rise amidst the ebb and flow of interests that drive the national consciousness of a people in a country seeking transformation from the bonds of political and social oppression. Innate among Filipinos is their love of country and identity. In the subconscious mind of every Filipino, there lies a dormant desire for independence and freedom from all forms of oppression and this subconscious domain is easily reached by messages imbedded in lyrics and musical form that ignites the emotions within the heart of each Filipino. To this end, musical composers of the past and the present write songs and music that evoke and convey nationalistic sentiments which have enabled music to play a large role in reawakening national identity among Filipinos.

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## 3 Objective of the Study

The study seeks to explore how music became a transforming force for national consciousness among Filipinos in the Philippines.

Specifically it aims to:

- Discuss how music is used to evoke social and political consciousness.
- Present a timeline of important events in the country's history where music played a significant role in awakening sentiment.
- Recognized music/songs and artist whose compositions were instrumental to creating national awareness in the Philippines.
- Analyze the impact of music in the achievement of political and social reform in the Philippines.
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## 4 Methodology

The paper is qualitative in design and used documentary analysis culled from different sources to create a timeline approach in presenting the role that music has taken to awaken national consciousness among Filipinos and represented the pulse of a society that has clamored from political and social transformation through the years. While the treatment is limited, the paper draws significant highlights in the Philippine history that brings evident to music being a catalyst for transformation.

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## 5 Results and Discussion

The following is an analysis of the music has served timeless times in Philippine history to mark historical events where expressed sentiments of hope and love by Filipinos for the country unfold awakening national consciousness.

### I. Music: A Force for Social Transformation<sup>2</sup>

The music that is used for social criticism and cultural liberation and is variously termed alternative, protest, progressive or people's music.

The music of this genre has always been in the process of experimentation, change, and growth, since the American period when socialistic ideas began to emerge in Filipino society. It is being actively shaped today by socially committed poet-musicians who are consciously using songs as a force for social liberation, advocacy of social justice, and in the struggle for human rights. It harnesses music as an instrument of social criticism and change, taking up the issues of injustice and oppression, neocolonialism, cultural erosion due to globalization, plight of indigenous peoples, and other social causes.

Music is used as an instrument for social criticism and change, and a vehicle of proposals for more humane attitudes and values, an equitable social order, cultural creativity and diversity, sustainable development, a heightened ecological awareness, and alternative ideas and lifestyles.

Some of the well-known artists who have creatively contributed to this tradition are Asin, Patatag, Inang Laya, Heber Bartolome, Joey Ayala, Grace Nono, Kontragapi, Pinikpikan, Buklod, and recently, the Makiling Ensemble.

Nicanor Abelardo was one of the earliest musicians to compose music for social criticism in the song *Kenkoy*, with words by Romualdo Ramos. *Kenkoy* was composed in the 1930s to satirize the first generation of Filipinos who began aping American ways in superficial and ridiculous ways, often at the expense of their self-respect and dignity. It was inspired by *Kenkoy*, a whacky character created by Tony Velasquez in 1926, who is a colorful embodiment of "veneration without understanding."

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<sup>2</sup>Please refer to Filipinas Heritage Library. <https://www.filipinaslibrary.org.ph/>. Last accessed: Jul 7, 2021.

## II. Music Used in Transformation: A Timeline Approach<sup>3</sup>

### The Spanish Colonial Era

The Filipino struggle for freedom identity and dignity started in its history in the 16th century when Spanish colonization began. The Filipino's commitment to one's country and pride in being Filipino is evident since as early as that time, this devotion to national identity has always been reflected by the musical expressions of the nation of the era. Particularly worth mentioning is the music of the time which is the kundiman, a song of devotion to a selfless and noble cause. It is the kundiman that has always embodied the Filipinos' intense and lofty patriotism.

The Kundiman is done entirely in Tagalog and is a tenderly lyrical song in moderately slow triple meter with melodic phrases often ending in quarter and half note values. It is mainly a song of selfless devotion to a loved one, the motherland, a spiritual figure, an infant, a lofty cause or an object of compassion.

This musical art form came to serve as a vehicle for veiled patriotism in times of colonial oppression, in which the undying love for a woman symbolized the love of country and desire for freedom.

José Rizal, leader of the Propaganda movement and the Philippine national hero, has consecrated the Kundiman in his social novel "Noli Me Tangere". He personally wrote a Kundiman which is not of the elegiac type because its rhythm sounds the threat, the reproach and the re vindication of the rights of the race.

From 1896 to 1898 the most famous Kundiman, which fired the patriotic sentiments of the Tagalog revolutionaries in the struggle for liberation from Spanish colonial rule, was Jocelynang Baliuag. Officially known as Musica del Legitimo Kundiman Procedente del Campo Insurrecto (Music of the Legitimate Kundiman that Proceeds from the Insurgents), Jocelynang Baliuag was the favorite Kundiman among the revolutionaries of Bulacan during the Philippine Revolution of 1896 - earning it the title "Kundiman of the Revolution."

### The Japanese Occupation

Music served as a leisure activity making life bearable for Filipinos during the Second World War when the Japanese occupied the Philippines. Despite the terror and uncertainty brought by the war, Filipinos played and listen to music. The Japanese tried to force their music on the local to the point of playing them in radios and in schools but Filipinos resisted this and listen only to Filipino music instead.

The Japanese encouraged the creation and performance of music with native themes through music contests. Concerts were also a common form of amusement for Filipinos at the time and the Metropolitan Theater became an important venue for cultural events. Classical music, including opera, flourished during the war. The New Philippine Symphony, the first all-Filipino orchestra, was organized. It performed an all-Philippine symphonic program in July 1942, with Francisco Santiago as conductor.

"Heaven Watch the Philippines" is a popular song by Irving Berlin, written in 1946. It was written as a tribute to Filipino resistance during the Japanese occupation in World War II. During the war, Japanese troops in the Philippines attempted to popularize self-glorifying songs such as Chichi Yo Anata Wa Tsuyokatta ("Father, You Were Brave" in English). Filipinos resisted these efforts, preferring instead to sing God Bless the Philippines to the tune of Berlin's God Bless America as a show of national pride.

Berlin himself gave the first performance of Heaven Watch the Philippines in Tolosa, Leyte in 1946, in front of an audience that included Sergio Osmeña and Carlos P. Romulo.

### The American Period

The American period saw the heightened experimentation of Filipino composers with European styles. However, the period also produced nationalistic Filipino composers who used their formal training and expertise in music by incorporating ethnic elements in their works. One of these composers is Francisco Santiago, regarded as the "father of nationalism in music," who transformed the kundiman from folk song to art song, a song that "requires advanced vocal technique and musical maturity for its performance, usually on the concert stage".

In the 1930s to 1940s, Antonino Buenaventura also used nationalist themes in his compositions like Pandanggo sa Ilaw and Mindanao Sketches which was based on Manobo themes. Other composers who made use of indigenous themes were Juan Hernandez in Mga Katutubong Tanawin and Lucio San Pedro in the Malakas at Maganda Overture.

### The Martial Law Years

The period of Martial Law (1972-1986) may have been considered by many as a grim period in Philippine history. But in the field of the arts, particularly in music, there was evidently a wave of influx of the new genre of progressive music which had ardent support that fostered the thrust towards music for social consciousness.

The martial law years was the breeding ground that led many artists to pen music and songs geared towards awakening national consciousness among Filipinos. It was a time in the country's history when music refused to be silent. People Power of 1986 paved the way for the restoration of democracy in the land and President Corazon Aquino in her landslide victory toppled the dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos. Fondly called 'Tita Cory,' her name is forever etched in Philippine history as the first woman president of the country, People Power heroine, and icon of democracy.

The period is best remembered by the songs "Magkaisa" and "Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo," among others—patriotic songs that became anthems during the 1986 People Power revolution that put an end to two decades of dictatorship. "Magkaisa" was composed by Tito Sotto in two days and presented as an oath-taking gift to then President Aquino. It was recorded by composer Virna Lisa and was frequently heard on radio stations during Aquino's first 100 days in government. As the lyrics suggest, the song evoked a sense of unity.

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Filipinas Heritage Library. <https://www.filipinaslibrary.org.ph/>. Last accessed: Jul 7, 2021.

“Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” was composed by Jim Paredes of the musical group APO Hiking Society. It was recorded by 15 singers and released in April 1986. It earned the APO international recognition and the song’s lyrics are embedded on the wall of the Our Lady of EDSA Shrine in Ortigas Avenue where the events of EDSA took place. The song speaks of the bloodless revolution of 1986—an offering of the Filipino people to the world.

Another song “Bayan Ko”, an kundiman song which was revived during the EDSA revolution expresses a nationalist sentiment which became a battle cry against colonialism and oppression at different periods in Philippine history which includes the Japanese occupation in the 1940s and in the 1970s to 80s in the rallies and protest marches against the Marcos administration. Unlike many of the popular kundimans that tell of love for someone, this is a kundiman about love for the nation, and is the only kundiman sung with clenched fists.

Because of the song’s timeless message and power to evoke patriotic fervor, Bayan Ko continues to remain relevant until today. An atmosphere of optimism and patriotism is evoked at every instance the song is performed rendering the audience with national pride that needs to be sustained at all costs keeping heroism alive among Filipinos.

### **Renewed Hope for the Future**

The administration of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is professed as another blotch in Philippine history. It is marred by irregularities of corrupt governance, graft, incompetence of government officials, questionable bidding scams, compromise of the justice system and social oppression. The nine-year rule of the former lady president was a time paralleled to the Martial Law years as perceived by many Filipinos. When the new administration came, in the person of President Benigno Aquino III, only son of Cory Aquino of EDSA fame, music played an interesting role in his inauguration which was done purposely to ignite the clamor for a renewed hope and faith in the country’s new leader.

Among the songs played then was “Bagong Pilipinas,” a song that speaks of unity, was especially composed for the occasion by singer-songwriter Ogie Alcasid. Other patriotic songs such as “Minamahal Kong Pilipinas,” “Tungo sa Pagbabago, Para sa Pagbabago,” “Ako ay Isang Mabuting Pilipino,” and “Sabihin Mo” by the APO Hiking Society, folk singer Noel Cabangon, and the Madrigal Singers (accompanied by the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra) were performed respectively.

The president, himself an avowed music aficionado recognized the significant role that music played in unifying the nation to refuse any form of political and social oppression. The president is very vocal in attesting to the importance of songs like “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” and “Bayan Ko” that may sound too old for the new generation but nonetheless has played their part of the country’s history because it helped topple a 20-year dictatorship.

The new president recalled that because there was limited access to information during Martial law, Filipinos had been more inspired to write songs and use them to criticize discrimination, injustice, corruption and poverty. It did not just serve as entertainment but became a part of our life as Filipinos.

### **III. Music and Artists: Catalysts of Transformation**

Table 1 Summary of Music/Songs and Artists That Impacted History

<b>Stages in History</b>	<b>Music/Song Compositions</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Spanish colonial era	Bayan Ko, Jocelynang Baliwag, and Sariling Bayan	Constancio De Guzman, Jose Rizal
Japanese occupation	“Heaven Watch the Philippines”, “God Bless the Philippines”, “Bayan Ko” among others.	American inspired and composed by Irvin Berlin but translated by Filipinos at the time, Nicanor Abelardo
American occupation	Pakiusap, Madaling Araw and Sakali Man, Mutya ng Pasig, Pandango sa Ilaw,	Nicanor Abelardo, Antonino Buenaventura, Lucrecia Kasilag, Jose Maceda, Ramon Santos, Francisco Feliciano, Eliseo Pajaro, Ruben Federizon, and Conrado del Rosario
The Martial Law years EDSA Revolution	“Magkaisa” and “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo,” “Bayan Ko”, “Mga Kababayan” and “Tayo’y Mga Pinoy”, “Ang Bagong Lumad”, “Wala ng Tao sa Santa Filomena”, “Masdan Mo Ang Kapaligiran”, “Ang Bayan Kong Sinilangan”, “Pagbabalik” and “Balita”, “Tatsulok” and “Kanlungan”	Joey Ayala; Freddie Aguilar, APO Hiking Society, Tito Sotto, Virna Lisa Asin, Patatag, Inang Laya, Heber Bartolome, Joey Ayala, Grace Nono, Kontragapi, Pinikpikan, Buklod, Francis M., Asin
Present time (Renewing Hope for the Future)	“Bagong Pilipinas,” “Minamahal Kong Pilipinas,” “Tungo sa Pagbabago, Para sa Pagbabago,” “Ako ay Isang Mabuting Pilipino,” and “Sabihin Mo”	Ogie Alcasid, APO Hiking Society, Noel Cabangon, Joey Ayala

Table 1 shows selected music and songs of highlighted times in Philippine history and the artists of the eras mentioned. These songs depict struggles, hopes, and aspirations toward a Filipino identity and sense of nationhood.

### **Analysis**

The significance of music as a transforming force for national consciousness and reform dates back to the Spanish era where it played an integral part of the revolution against a foreign colonizer and is still evident in specific timelines of history especially during the EDSA Revolution in 1986 where Filipino composers and bands used Filipino Rock music that carried socially relevant lyrics became venues of communication among the people in the ensuing revolution of that time. All these prove that even during turbulent times, Filipinos’ love of music could

The treatment done in the paper whereby a chronological significance of music in social and political struggle is a clear example of the ability of music to raise social consciousness is in the Philippines the formation of new collective identities through the music of social criticism and national

consciousness. More precisely, it has shown to have the ability to end two decades of dictatorial oppression. The timeline approach showed how music impacted national consciousness in the Philippines and made it an avenue to become the transforming force that it has become in the lives of Filipinos.

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## 6 Conclusion

Music is probably the only medium that really does cross all boundaries and has the ability to effect change. As a transforming force, socially and politically themed music is meant not only to appeal to the oppressed but to evoke compassion to the national causes for everyone. The Filipinos love for music and how they have used music as mediums to reach the masses and awaken their national consciousness is innate in their identity to struggle for independence and shun oppression of any kind. Filipino artists realize that through their music, they have the power to inspire people into action. That is the reason music is such a force for social change and transformation in the Philippines. It has become a means to an end. Nevertheless, the social change and transformation will not come without the personal conviction for concrete action. The change is never really made by music; it has to be backed up by what the receivers of the message will do. Bottom line, music is the catalyst but it is in men's hands that true transformation can be achieved.

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