

Southern Philippine Culture: Exotic Southern Dances and Songs

Dances from the Muslim regions of the Philippines, the non-Christian groups of Luzon, and other Philippine minority groups have very striking and interesting characteristics.

The background music for these dances consist of chanting, the rhythmic beat of drums, the heavy striking of gongs, and the clapping of bamboo poles.

The dances of the Muslim group are, for the most part, ceremonial. They are performed according to a definite pattern, the movements are full of meaning, and they might be related to religious and historical events. A strong Indian influence is evident in the *La Sultana*, *Singkil* and *Sagayan*. The dances skip nimbly in and out of rhythmically clapped bamboo poles which provide the musical accompaniment to the dance.

These Muslim dances are a treat to the eyes because of the rich, colorful and glittering beaded costumes. The woman dancer manipulates two bejeweled fans as an attendant holds a beautifully embroidered and heavily decorated umbrella over her head in the *Singkil*, which is the best known of these dances.

The *Sagayan* is a ceremonial dance in memory of religious and legendary historical events. This dance is found among the Maguindanaos and Maranaos. The dancers are dressed for battle, in impressive battle gear. the movements of the dancers are abrupt and sudden and follow rhythmic patterns. The dancers thrust their swords sharply and loudly against the shields of their enemies, thus providing exciting musical accompaniment to the vigorous movements of the dancers. This dance recalls memories of the story of their great warrior, Bantugan.

The *Lunsay* is a community song and dance found among the Jana Mapun of Cagayan de Sulu. It is generally performed at weddings; consequently. it is light and gay, and frolicsome in nature. It is accompanied by loud stamping of the dancers' feet on the bamboo floor. It is considered communal in nature because, for the most part, it consists of the graceful, coordinated movements of the dancers forming a circle, each one holding on to another's hand.

A Tausug wedding dance is the *Kantingan*, which is found in Jolo, Sulu. the dancers have to assume strange unnatural attitudes and for these they have to be trained to perform correctly. The dancers keep their knees bent with their feet turned outward, a position difficult to hold. The fingers are held stiffly together and bent from the base, as far back as possible, forming an acute half moon arch. the thumb is kept sharply away from the fingers.

The *Tahing Baila* is an interesting folk dance among the Yakans of Basilan. The dance must have been inspired by the occupation of the people, which is fishing. The dance movements show that it is addressed to their gods to whom they pray for a bountiful catch. The dancers twist their bodies and squirm in imitation of the movements of the fish to be caught and the dying motions of the fish when caught.

Filipino songs, as well as Filipino dances, show distinct local characteristics and reflect outstanding regional traits. The hard, harsh life of the Ilocanos is revealed in such songs as *Itarok Ko Di Bobo* and *Piddig*. The Ilocano's fondness for travel and adventure is voiced in *Pamulinawen*.

The Tagalog songs stand out because of their light, carefree, and even humorous content. *Doon Po sa Amin* is a satire on people with physical defects. *Chitchiritchit* tells of follies of women, and *Paru-parong Bukid* exposes the flirtatious nature of women.

The Badjaos of Sulu are said to be so fond of music that all day long they play the *gabbang*, a musical instrument consisting of wooden sticks laid across a frame. They play it even at night, young boys and girls coming and going to add their fresh young voices to the music. On moonlit nights the music of the *gabbang* is particularly active and persistent. Its slightly muffled sound gives one of the impression that it comes from the bottom of the sea. The *kulintang* is another popular musical instrument, which consists of a set of graduated gongs and a drum. Its music is generally accompanied by the chants of old men. To unfamiliar ears the music may sound strangely monotonous, but it seems to melt into the darkness, the restless sound of the water against the shore, the flickering radiance from the oil lamps and the soundless movements of the houseboats.

-J. Serrano and M. Lapid

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