

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

VOX HUMÁNITAS: Navigating the Contemporary Voice as a Conduit for Social Justice  
(Portfolio of Creative Projects and Paper on Filipino Contemporary Vocal Music)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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in

Music

by

Stefanie D. Quintin

Committee in charge:

Professor Susan Narucki, Chair  
Professor Anthony Davis  
Professor Chinary Ung

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The thesis of Stefanie D. Quintin is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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## DEDICATION

To my parents and family, thank you for the unwavering support throughout the years.

To my husband, thank you for your love and encouragement.

To my wonderful and beautiful child, Ília, thank you for giving me the strength to live despite the tribulations and uncertainties of life.

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1. quintin\_tan-áw\_program\_notes.pdf
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor Susan Narucki, Chair

The following thesis explores the faculties of the human voice in advocating for social justice through three performance projects, and is divided into three parts: 1) *TAN-ÁW*: A paper on the intersectionality of tradition and innovation in Filipino contemporary vocal music, culminating in a full-length voice recital featuring works of Filipino composers; 2) *TAO PO*: A creative audio-visual project produced in collaboration with composer Vahid Jahandari, focusing on the Philippine Drug War's impact on Filipino society; 3) interpretation and performance of Georges Aperghis' *Recitation I*, centering on the performer's re-imagination of the composer's oeuvre through the creation of a new narrative.

All performance projects provide analyses of the opus of contemporary composers who dare to interrogate the degradation and regression of human life, and seek to advance society through humanistic pursuits of creativity.

## **Introduction**

In a world that favors individuality and prioritizes the economic growth of the few, systemic marginalization of the underprivileged becomes constant, and social justice somehow becomes an unattainable dream. As the number of disadvantaged people increases at an uncontrollable rate, it is inevitable for those who live above the poverty line to become desensitized to the necessities of the poor; hurryingly passing by them on the streets as they themselves struggle to keep their finances afloat to not fall into the same fate. Yet it is startling to realize the enormity of resources that should have been available to everyone but are kept controlled by those in positions of power; to which the destitute could not call out. Who, then, shall give voice to the voiceless and give them back their power as equal members of society? – It is but the artist, whose purpose is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”

In the long history of music, whether in its institutional form or folk renditions, music has represented life and expanded human creativity, most significantly, it has also challenged discrimination and inequality in society. Music as a natural resource for human expression should never be underestimated, for it has the power to change the world and create a better future for humanity. The transformative process that musicians and audience experience make a reactional chain that empowers and enables both parties to develop social communities that are grounded in mutual respect, belonging, and camaraderie. In pursuit of a just world, music serves as the best medium for challenging practices and conditions that propagate discrimination.

As a graduate student at the UC San Diego Music Department, my horizon has been undoubtedly broadened in exploring avenues for the human voice to help address issues that confront systemic inequality. Having been given the chance to have an education that seeks to uplift communities through music and art is a responsibility that an artist should never take for

granted. Having an instrument that can serve as a conduit for people's struggles and stories provides the performer an opportunity to see the world through other people's eyes and embody their life experiences. It is through the acceptance and understanding of other people's humanity that communities learn to empathize and fight in attaining a just society. It is in this light that all my projects revolve around the subject of human rights. As an artist, it has been my aim to use my instrument for defending this cause.

## **PART 1**

### **TAN-ÁW:**

#### **The intersectionality of tradition and innovation in Filipino contemporary vocal music**

The act of composition and performance requires the act of retrospection to actively generate creative output in the present. By turning into one's memory, composers conjure thoughts and ideas from previous knowledge and experiences by writing them down for posterity and permanence while performers execute these ideas in real-time. These acts confirm the inevitable intersectionality of the past and the present; and that all current actions, beliefs, and attitudes, are influenced by our own histories and traditions.

In the rich canon of Filipino vocal music, embedding Filipino cultural mores have become the norm. From the works of 20<sup>th</sup> century composer Nicanor Abelardo to the sought-after young Filipino composer Feliz Anne Reyes Macahis, their innovative works are still reminiscent of traditional forms and styles, and some are evidently grounded on indigenous musical practices. Despite being written in the western tradition of musical composition, the Filipinicity of their music remains.

Regardless of their current location, Filipino composers relive their sense of home and acknowledge their roots through their oeuvres. Evident in the works of four native Filipino composers: Chaitanya Tamayo (Brooklyn, USA), Feliz Anne Macahis (Graz, Austria), Jonathan Domingo (Tokyo, Japan), and Dave Dagta (Michigan, USA), the thematic materials and overall essence of their compositions automatically transport the audience to the composers' respective notions of home.

This paper explores the ideas behind the featured compositions created by the abovementioned composers that were presented in *TAN-ÁW* (a Master's Recital presented at the University of California San Diego in May 2022), and examines the quality of "Filipinicity" in these compositions, scrutinizes the intersectionality of tradition and innovation, investigates the processes involved in creating these innovative works for the contemporary voice that which continues and persists to honor tradition, including the interpretation and performance of these works that tackle societal issues in the Philippines.

### **Tradition and Innovation: A Historical Context**

Human evolution attests to the inevitability of innovation in all civilizations. Vast archaeological evidence shows a shift from hunter-gatherer societies to sedentism, and this abandonment of nomadic life (as seen through the pre-historic human settlements that were discovered along with their material culture) reveals a shift from the creation of portable musical instruments to heavy and immovable ones. Conversely, the only instrument that remained within its locality is the human voice – the very instrument that carried the songs and stories of our forefathers, always with us and within us. However, the inevitability of human movement had an impact on the songs that were conceived by our ancestors. As music has become domesticated in sedentary societies, songs that used to serve as memory banks of our tradition and our lineage get lost in the transition to the standardization of human life. This standardization meant that music can no longer be transmitted through oral tradition alone, as writing systems have developed all over the world and helped preserve histories and cultural knowledge, thereby making the creation and propagation of culture easier to realize.

In music culture, the structuring of sound through writing provided ways for humans to venture into creating music that surpass monody. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, simultaneous musical lines are now laid into sheets of music in Europe (Spitzer, 2021). In the East, few music cultures have written accounts on music notation. The oldest Chinese musical notation can be traced from pre-Confucian times (Kuttner, 1964), Korea's earliest pieces of music were found in the *Koryo-sa*, a history book from the Goryeo period (Provine, 1985), whilst Japan derived their notation from both nations and developed various regional styles. As music notation made it possible for all kinds of music to thrive - culminating in the permanence of ink on paper or etched in stone tablatures; the survival and preservation of music in print and in other material culture was more than enough to immortalize a musical idea.

Musical thought in various localities is very much determined by their own cultural histories. Conceptions of sound and its relation to belief systems and values as a society help forge the distinct musical flavor of each culture. However, the inevitability of change and adaptation to new styles came about as humans regularly generate an appeal for novelty. With the certainty of exploration in the ancient and modern world, the incessant exchange of ideas and objects resulted in the melding and merging of musical cultures. Henceforth, innovation through our own cultural memories, and that of others whom we encounter in our lives, predictably influence our creation of musical styles, thereby generating an emergence of new genres of music all over the world (Spitzer, 2021).

### **Tradition and Innovation in Filipino Vocal Music**

For the past 400 years, music acculturation was constant in Filipino society. The music that was brought by the sailors of the Manila-Acapulco Galleon trade introduced string

instruments such as the guitar and the violin (instruments that also developed through the Silk Road) to the natives of *Las Islas Filipinas*. Along with the arrival of the instruments are the melodies that revolve only around the diatonic scale. Far from the microtonal chants of indigenous people from the South and the pentatonic songs of indigenous people from the North, the new musical flavor that the Spanish and Mexican sailors brought incessantly altered the soundscape of the archipelago. Standard musical forms such as the *valse*, *jota*, *habanera*, and many other Western forms were introduced and were revolutionized into Filipino versions such as the *kumintang*, *kundiman*, and *balitaw*. Two-part harmony was introduced in Spanish Catholic churches which eventually expanded into four-part harmony upon the arrival of the US Thomasites and protestant missionaries in 1901. Hymnal singing was presented, and Filipinos adapted polyphonic music into their own secular and communal gatherings. Harmonizing with others brought about other vocal forms such as the *pabasa*, a two-part counterpoint that is delivered in a chant-like manner; however, devoid of the roundness of tone in vocal production that the missionaries performed. Singing the *pabasa* required a raw voice that is reminiscent of the bygone chants of our forefathers. The *pabasa* is one example of a vocal form that represents a compromise among Filipinos and other colonized peoples all over the world to honor their traditions yet show their malleability to adapt to new styles without losing their identities. By honoring and adapting, Filipinos have learned to combine the past and the present by making it into their own brand of “Filipino music” while generating new styles and genres of music. This phenomenon of innovating upon tradition continues up to this day as a result of a constant search for a postcolonial Filipino identity.

## **Filipinicity**

Filipino identity has long been contentious not just among scholars in academia, but among Filipinos themselves. The 7,600 islands that isolate communities from different ethnolinguistic groups, and the politico-regional boundaries that distinguish people's individuality from others all play a role in the great divide among Filipinos. Having more than 100 languages and a mass of cultural differences make it difficult to be united in a singular identity and designation such as "Filipino." However, despite these differences, shared experiences and commonalities have established what qualifies as Filipino culture.

Having been colonized for more than 400 years, the inevitability of appropriating Western culture has produced a homogeneous societal culture; a culture that has a dominant set of values and beliefs dictated by a dominant ruling elite (Enz, 1986). The power of the colonizers in wielding their own ways of being towards the inhabitants of the archipelago has strongly influenced all aspects of the natives' lives, resulting in a hybridity of cultural expression. Regrettably, long after the colonial powers have left the country, the national government's standardization of education which in turn included an embedding of a uniform cultural mores throughout the whole archipelago has slowly (and unintentionally) eradicated indigenous cultures – all geared towards the country's pursuit of a national identity.

While some ethnolinguistic groups have preserved their own cultures and heritage, the idea of a Filipino nation prevailed in the archipelago through the educational system and the schools which has "become the most important agency which 'objectively' certifies the dominant cultural code of society" (Nash, 1990, as cited in Tan, 2014, p.118). The idea of "Filipinoness" eventually became an imprint in the whole country, 'uniting' the archipelago into a singular identity, thereby strengthening nationalistic values. As the people of a collectivist society such as

the Philippines has embodied unified cultural mores, a bolstering pride in being Filipino has developed and has empowered the Filipino national identity.

Filipinicity, according to nationalist scholar Antonio Molina, is the “quality of being Filipino regardless of location or surroundings” (Trimillos, 1998, p.53). In other words, whether Filipinos are uprooted from their native land, Filipinos insist to uphold their culture and traditions in their new domiciles. This strong sense of nationalism in the consciousness of Filipinos manifests in all forms of Filipino art and music.

Filipino composers and artists who migrated and now live in various parts of the world seek to embody Filipinicity in their works to establish and assert their identities. Growing up in school environs that practice a hybrid form of musical expression that which combines Western and local modes of music, Filipino composers still predictably tap into their respective ideas of what comprises Filipino music. Therefore, it is important to note the differences and distinctions between indigenous, folk, and traditional music to further understand the qualities of Filipinicity that abound in the compositions that will be tackled below.

- Indigenous vocal music is unadulterated and not influenced by the music of the colonizers. These are the chants and epics that withstood time despite not having a system of writing and was only passed on from one generation to another through oral transmission. Most indigenous vocal music has survived in far-flung areas with difficult terrain and are still practiced by indigenous people who were spared from the ills of modernity and have preserved their own culture.
- Folk music is any music that is common or popular amongst a group of people and are mostly taught in school to enrich national consciousness as standardized by those who control the educational system of the nation. Folk music’s flavor,

however, is mainly a concoction of indigenous music combined with various musical influences from colonial powers whose authorship is (mostly) unknown and is transmitted orally.

- Traditional music is any kind/genre/style of music that is passed on from one generation to another and has become part of the listening customs of a family or a community. Hence, both indigenous and folk music are considered traditional; therefore, making all music traditional. This unavoidable transfer of musical knowledge and sharing of musical tastes from one household member to another, or those within communities, ascertain music's traditionality. Henceforth, all new music come from a long tradition of innovation.

### **Filipino Vocal Music in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Vocal music in 21<sup>st</sup> century Philippines mainly revolves around popular music (jazz, mainstream pop, rock, rap, etc.). Indigenous and folk vocal music are left to be heard in government-sponsored cultural events, while other forms of vocal music are only heard in the academe. The *kundiman*, a century-old art song form that is based on themes of unrequited love, is mainly heard in the walls of conservatories as requirement for music degree completions. Many new compositions for voice only get to have one performance in its existence – the “world-premiere.” Unlike popular songs that are heard regularly in radio stations and social media, new forms of vocal music are left unheard.

Everywhere in the world, the “new music” scene revolves around academia, and barely a few sprout outside the halls of conservatories and music institutions. In the Philippines, long-standing music institutions such as the University of the Philippines College of Music,

University of Santo Tomas, and St. Scholastica's College Manila have bred composers who embarked on careers that cater to mainstream popular music, and only a few have established themselves as composers of "new music." For pragmatic and economic reasons, most composers take on jobs that would generate a regular income, and most of them discontinue their artistic pursuit of creating music, consequently losing their own voice in the process. It is for this reason that I embarked on a project that seeks to create new compositions for voice and expand the repertoire of Filipino contemporary vocal music.

### **WÍKÁWIT: A Commissioning Project**

New Filipino compositions for contemporary classical voice are scarce. Most compositions are written as school requirements in conservatories and are rarely performed. There is no demand for new compositions even in established art institutions such as the Cultural Center of the Philippines, and the new music community in the Philippines is close to nil. It is not surprising that a lot of Filipino creatives seek jobs elsewhere where their talents can be valued. As a consequence, most Filipino composers study and make a living abroad in order to keep their music playing. Furthermore, the added challenge of asserting themselves in a foreign country further implicates a need to project their unique voices and identity. It is this struggle of keeping their identities intact and adjusting to the social climate of their new domiciles that make their music distinctively Filipino.

As a Filipino artist who seeks to expand the contemporary music scene in the Philippines, one of my aims is to give opportunities to my composer colleagues to explore their unique voices. In the process of collaborating with the composers, the only requirement was for them to choose indigenous languages and texts that are familiar to them which they can set their music

to. Composers were free to come up with a subject or theme for their compositions, yet the compositions all showed qualities of Filipinicity and were evidently honoring their roots and traditions through their innovative works.

### **Featured Compositions in *TAN-ÁW***

#### 1) PINTIG by Chaitanya Tamayo

Chaitanya Tamayo's *Pintig* started out as a conversation about the idea of "looking back yet looking forward." Inspired by the famous quote of the Philippine National Hero Dr. Jose Rizal:

*"Con el recuerdo del pasado, entro en el porvenir."*  
"I enter the future with a memory of the past"

Tamayo deems it impossible to approach the future and be in the present without reconciliation of the past. Seeing the past as a persistent character in our present lives that somehow reveals itself as a throbbing headache, Tamayo was inspired by Biofeedback Training Techniques that help control the functions of the nervous system. In order to control brainwave activity, heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension, the German psychiatrist and psychotherapist Dr. Johannes Schultz formulated a technique using autogenic phrases that would help control the autonomic body functions:

I feel quiet ... I am beginning to feel quite relaxed ... my feet feel heavy and relaxed ... my ankles, my knees, and my hips feel heavy, relaxed, and comfortable ... my solar plexus and the whole central portion of my body feel relaxed and quiet ... my hands, my arms, and my shoulders feel heavy, relaxed, and comfortable ... my neck, my jaw, and my forehead feel relaxed ... my whole body feels quiet, heavy, comfortable, and relaxed ("Biofeedback Training Techniques," n.d.).

In lieu of Schultz' phrases, Tamayo suggested a translation of these phrases into a mix of Filipino languages such as Tagalog and Ilocano (languages that reminded both of us of the soundscape of our hometown – Baguio City), including English. Like chants in a ritual, these

words are to be repeated over and over to provide a sense of calm, clearing the mind to serve as a *tabula rasa* for the events that have yet to unfold.

One benefit of the COVID-19 pandemic is the expansion of the capabilities of transnational music collaborations through music processing softwares such as Pd and Sonobus. Communicating through Facetime or Zoom, Tamayo and I worked through the latency of Sonobus using our respective audio processors. Connecting from Brooklyn, New York to La Jolla, California; our collaboration culminated in a 12-minute performance in May 2022.

*Pintig* (pulse) is a quasi-improvisatory piece for solo voice and remote audio processing. The piece includes pre-recorded audio of the singer's voice. Spoken texts about random thoughts in random settings were recorded; and will be processed alongside the actual vocal sounds that will be performed in real-time.

The piece is divided into five sections. The first section seeks to imitate droplets of rain, cumulative sound of cicadas, and fluttering of wings; a sonation that originates from a single sound and accumulates and multiplies into a natural sonic reverberation of a singular material. Aspirated Ts, and other clicking sounds such as "Tsk" and "Tok" were used to capture the idea of sonation.

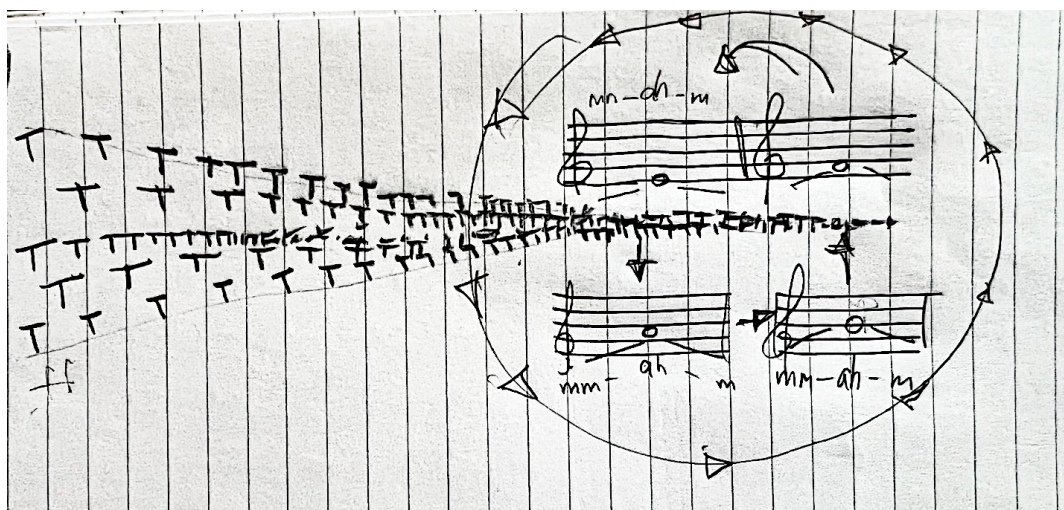


Figure 1. Tamayo's sketch of Section 1, parts A and B

Along with the natural decay of the “T” sound comes the birth of a new cyclical repetition of the vowel [a] in fluctuating pitches which serves as an impression of the coming and going of thoughts in varying degrees or levels. The nodes in the illustration below represent the approximate pitches to be sung. The suggested pitches are indicated on the staff.

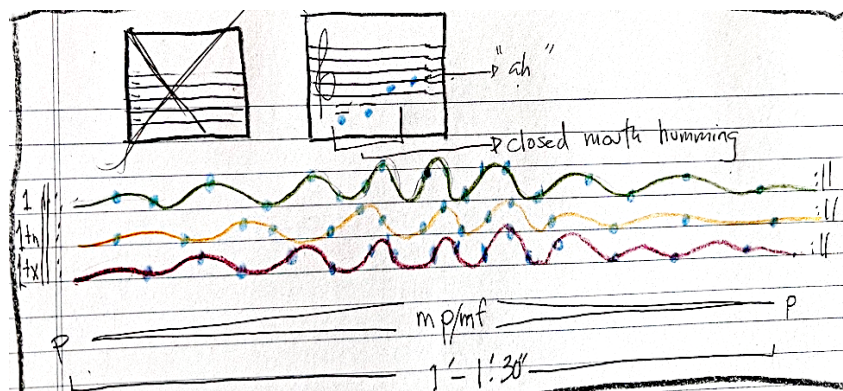


Figure 2. Tamayo's sketch of Section 1, part B

With the help of visuals in implicating recurring headaches (past), gradients of colors are to be flashed onstage for the second section of the piece. The interval between flashes starts off slow, and gradually increase in speed to further imitate the persistent throbbing of headaches. The section is supplemented by vocal units that replicate the soundworld of our hometown. Schwa vowels and dark vowels that are prominent in our hometown's lingua franca are used: [ʃəng], [muwen], [duj].



Figure 3. Tamayo's sketch of Section 2

The third section relies heavily on remote audio processing. The singer is required to sing on a singular vowel [u] in a slow descending scale, favorably passing through quarter tones. The descending pitches will then be replicated and patched above the actual descent of pitch in order to create an overlapping of dissonant pitches. This dissonance recreates the painful effects of tinnitus that happens alongside migraines or headaches.

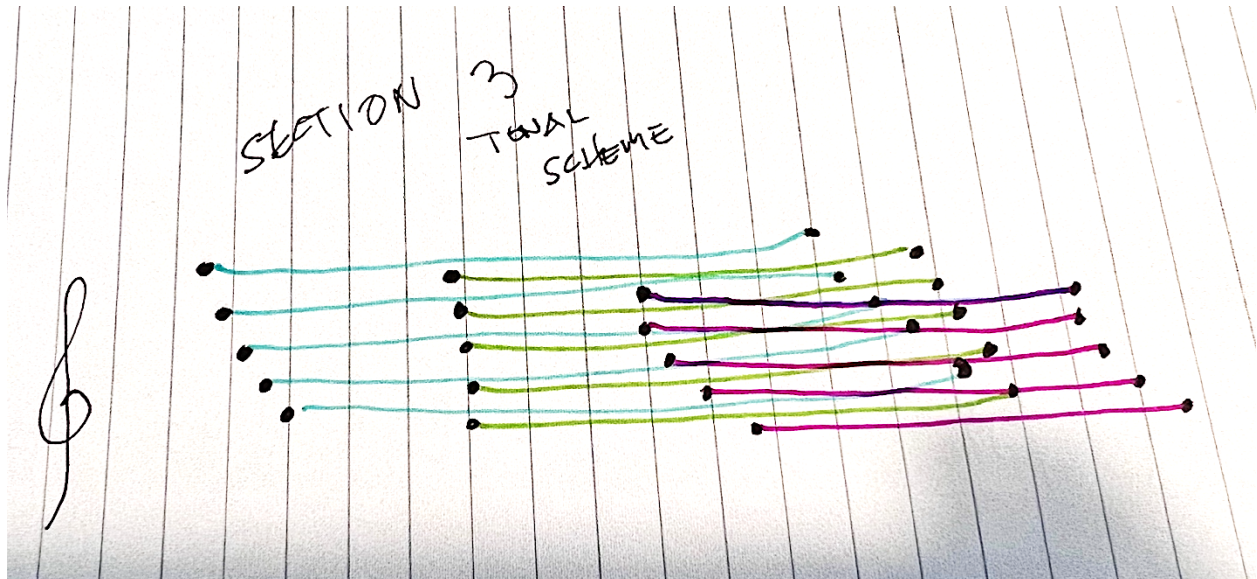


Figure 4. Tamayo's sketch of Section 3

The fourth section requires the singer to stutter using Ilocano words: *agtalna* (keep quiet), *nadagsen* (heavy), *agulimec* (hush), *nabara* (to block); and Tagalog words: *palubayan* (relax), *mabigat* (heavy), *tahimik* (quiet), *mainit* (hot). Stuttering using these words reflect the challenge that are experienced by Filipinos who uprooted themselves from their homeland. The struggle of finding their words in their own native language is a sign of assimilation to the dominant culture of their new domiciles.

The last section of the piece relies solely on the translated autogenic phrases, processed in real-time through Sonobus. The singer is required to deliver the following phrases to generate a sense of calm after a tumultuous cacophony of sounds in the previous sections:

*Kaway ng madalas na bisita* (Waves of a frequent visitor)  
*Pintig na nagsisimula sa puso* (Pulse that starts from the heart)  
*Unti-unting dumadaloy sa ulo, sa utak* (Slowly flowing through the head, and the brain)  
*Tanda ng nangangalawang na utak* (Signs of a rusty brain)  
*Bulaklak na pinabayaan nalang sa agos ng dagat*  
(A flower that was left to be carried away by the waves of the sea)

This piece is a culmination of the experiences of Tamayo and I in navigating our lives in the United States of America, whilst acknowledging the strong pull of our past lives in our native land and reconciling it with our current circumstances to hopefully face the future with fervor.

## 2) d:ua:ta by Feliz Anne Reyes Macahis

Premiered in 2019 at the Neue Galerie in Graz by the Latvian mezzo-soprano Helēna Sorokina, *d:ua:ta* was written for solo voice (specifically for Sorokina) as part of Feliz Anne Reyes Macahis' Ph.D. Research Project at the Kunst Universität in Graz, Austria. The piece was a culmination of their close collaboration as composer and performer, with the composer intensely and intently knowing the voice of the singer, resulting in an intricately detailed score for solo voice.

Macahis' research undertakings revolve around the idea of redefining the notion of narratives in contemporary music. By choosing a Filipino oral epic called the *Tudbulul* of the T'boli ethnolinguistic group, Macahis aims to tell the story albeit in a deconstructed version of her transcription of the text and the music based on a recorded performance of a native T'boli performing the *Tudbulul*.

With regards to the *Tudbulul's* performance practice, the ethnomusicologist Manolete

Mora mentions the following in his article on the *Tudbulul*:

The *Tudbulul* epic is sung unaccompanied, a feature that gives much freedom to the performer. This freedom is exhibited in a highly ornate, melismatic style of singing that characterizes much of the performance, especially the introductions to each episode, though there are also sections of syllabic singing. The verse melodies are mostly stichic, that is, the same melody (or nearly the same melody) is used for every line of verse, though sometimes it is strophic wherein the melodies consist of phrases that extend over more than one verse line. The stichic melodies are narrow in pitch range, spanning an interval of a fifth or so, while the strophic melodies exhibit a greater pitch range. Variety is achieved through the contrasts between non-metrical and metrical sections as well as between narratives and dialogues (2007, p.34)

In Macahis' composition, it was evident that she honored these performance practices, somehow replicating performance elements of the oral epic into the musical score. Her in-depth study of the T'boli culture and integrating it into her musical and artistic practice resulted in a musical output that pays homage and respect to the T'boli people, devoid of the intent of appropriation and exploitation of their culture. By using T'boli phonemes and morphemes, without using actual T'boli words, Macahis recreated the soundscape of the T'boli's of Mindanao. Toying around modifications in the vocal tract and vocal formants, Macahis requires the singer to produce overtones in various parts of the piece, also necessitating specific overtones to be produced by the singer as seen in figure 5.

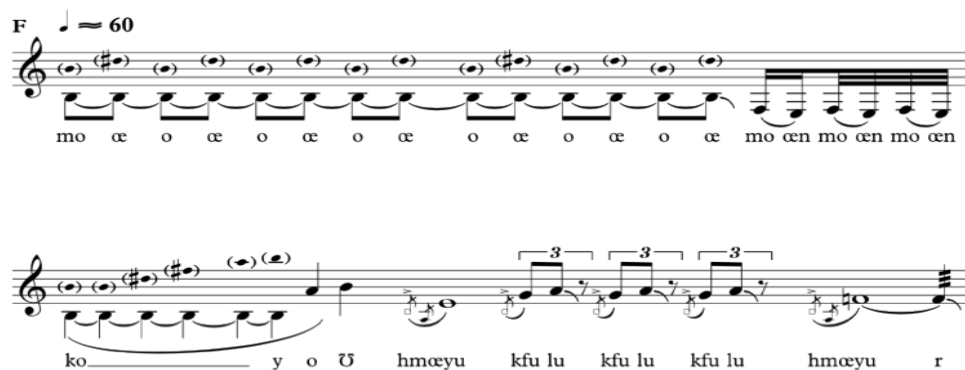


Figure 5. Pg. 3 from *Feliz Macahis' d:ua:ta*

In Macahis' collaboration with Sorokina, Macahis endeavored to "blur the space between sung and spoken parts" (2019) by keenly observing Sorokina's speaking voice and tone color. As an experienced chorister and singer, herself, Macahis relied on her instinct and her own experiences in writing for solo voice; then after, she consulted with Sorokina for a more detailed and nuanced vocal line that would fit Sorokina's instrument.

When I approached Macahis for the WIKÁWIT commissioning project in 2021, I was surprised to know that she was currently working on the oral traditions of the T'boli people in Mindanao. As she showed me the score of *d:ua:ta*, I was captivated by the ideas that were incorporated in the composition. Hence, I chose to include the piece in my recital program instead of asking for a new composition because I believe that Macahis' piece deserves to be performed more than once and more often by Filipino singers.

*D:ua:ta* is not as easy as it looks. The score looks simple at first glance, but with all the nuances along with the necessary changes in tone color, the piece proves to be stimulating for singers. Perhaps the most challenging part of the piece is the production of overtones. It is a rarity for female singers to produce overtones deliberately and easily. Since every instrument is different and my vocal fach is soprano (which is not the intended vocal classification for the piece), Macahis gave me the option to change some fundamental tones in the piece that would make it easier for me to generate overtones. But with grit and perseverance, I decided to stick to the score and was able to create the overtones that were written on the score.

In terms of interpretation, Macahis gives the singer of this piece the freedom to create their own narrative based on the vocal line and vocables that are made available in the score. Like a real presentation of the *Tudbulul*, singers are given the autonomy to have their own understanding of the material and perform it as if they are telling a story of their own.

### 3) kaLIKHAsan by Jonathan Domingo

A play on three Tagalog words: *Ikaw* (You), *Likha* (Create), *Saan* (Where), kaLIKHAsan is a piece written by Jonathan Domingo in collaboration with the young poet Ralph Lorenz Fonte. Their collaboration on the theme of environmental degradation plays around the idea of life and death as a continuous cycle; that as a consequence of living, one must eventually die.

According to Domingo:

“I creatively played around the word *death* and used it as the main rhetorical and structural anchor of the cycle. The recurring quintuplets throughout the entire cycle remind us that death is inevitable, something that cannot be severed from us” (2020).

The piece is written for coloratura soprano with piano, cello, and flute instrumentation. However, all movements vary in instrumentation, with different combinations per movement. The piece is composed of 7 movements, of which six of them are sung and one is entirely spoken, as per the poet’s request. Written in a conventional manner of writing music, the composer included some extended techniques for each instrument with some imitating the sounds of Philippine fauna. Domingo also used church modes to create certain ‘affects’ that he deems suitable for the theme of each movement, “ending with a spelled out D (re) E (mi) A (la) T (ti flat) and H (ti natural), with the exception of those labeled as dialogues” (2020). The composer’s way to innovate still reflected his Filipinicity within the context of an homage to his homeland.

My close friendship with the composer reflected on the musical decisions in the vocal writing of the piece. Carefully tailored for the capabilities of my instrument, Domingo’s choice of tessitura and melodic phrasing gave my instrument the freedom to express without incurring unnecessary muscle tension in my vocal tract. Ease of vocal production was given a priority in the creation of the piece.

With regards to the text, Fonte's poetry is mainly a retaliation of nature to its stewards, citing the failure of human beings to recognize their responsibilities as custodians of the Earth. Many references in the text pertain to actual events that transpired in the Philippines such as mass flooding, earthquakes, and typhoons. The piece is a humble plea to its listeners to reflect on the past and learn from it in order to have a better future. (See appendix)

#### 4) AMAHAN NAMO by Dave Dagta

Written for voice, Pierrot ensemble, and percussion, Dave Dagta's *Amahan Namô* (Our Father) is a setting of the Lord's Prayer in Cebuano and other Filipino languages such as Ilocano, Ibaloi, and Kalanguya. Both the composer and I have decided to include languages of our ancestors and from our own regions that we do not necessarily speak. As part of the WIKÁWIT project, it has also been my aim to utilize different Filipino languages that are in danger of extinction, hence the decision to utilize four Filipino languages.

Hailing from Davao City, Dagta's fluency in speaking the Bisaya/Cebuano language was advantageous as he provided audio recordings of the pronunciation of the text, to which I provided the IPA transcription which can be used by other Filipino singers. It is our collective dream to come up with a website that features Filipino compositions and materials for singers all over the world and share awareness on the diversity of languages in the Philippines.

As a response to the current political climate and poor societal conditions in the Philippines, Dagta made reference to the *pasyon*, a Filipino Catholic re-telling of Christ's passion and death through a musical reading of the biblical text that is performed with a raw vocal production, often sung by two individuals or two groups; mostly in unison, and sometimes harmonizing in dissonant intervals or in an antiphonal manner. This musical reference strongly

reflects the hardship that Filipinos face amidst the political turmoil in the country, yet its juxtaposition with The Lord's Prayer (a prayer that is known by the majority of Filipinos) implies that there is hope for the nation. All parts in unison set-up the *pasyon* as a unified plea for redemption.

**AMAHAN NAMO**

The musical score for 'AMAHAN NAMO' consists of four staves. The first staff begins with a boxed 'J' and a piano (*p*) dynamic. It features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes and a 'Sing and play' instruction. The second staff continues the melody with another triplet and piano (*p*) dynamic. The third staff includes the lyrics 'Ug pa-say' and a 'Sing and play' instruction. The fourth staff repeats the lyrics 'Ug pa-say' and includes a 'Sing and play' instruction. The score uses various musical notations including slurs, triplets, and dynamic markings.

Figure 6. Pg.26 from Dave Dagta's *Amahan Namo*

## Conclusion

The history of Filipino music over the last 400 years has been a story of acculturation and a continuing regard for tradition through innovation. All four pieces in *TAN-ÁW* manifest how Filipino composers opt not to distance themselves from their culture, but further showcase their cultural mores and Filipino identity through their music. A constant acknowledgment of the past deems necessary for Filipino composers in order to move forward and break new grounds. For without this humble acknowledgment, their Filipinicity is lost and so is their identity.

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## Appendix

ECOPOETRY  
by Ralph Fonte

I. Larawan ng mag-inang osong puti sa Laot ng Artiko  
*Photo of polar bear mother and cub in the Arctic Sea*

Ipinapanganak tayong  
mga alipato na nagsakatawan:  
usok ang hininga, paso ang haplos.  
Likas sa apoy ang mang-ubos,  
agad lumalaganap ng alab,  
ang ngumangatang latang,  
ngiping muli't muling naghahanap ng mangangasab.

Walang-hanggan ang gutom:  
kinainging gubat,  
pinakulong putik,  
gintong tinunaw,  
bulubunduking sumisiklab.

Ang mga katawan natin ang bagang  
sumasaid sa lahat ng nasa paligid:  
tubig, lupa, kahit hangin.

*We were borne of embers:  
with smoldering breath  
and scalding touch.  
Fire consumes and permeates  
with its crackling and gnashing sound  
constantly searching for something to devour.*

*Hunger never ends:  
gnawed forests,  
boiled mud,  
molten gold,  
burning mountains.*

*Our bodies are flames  
exhausting everything that surrounds us:  
water, earth, air.*

II. Glasyar  
*Glacier*

Ikaw na nagbinyag sa akin,  
maaalaala mo pa ba kung sino ako  
ngayong ako'y naglaho na  
sa landas ng niyebe, at ng selyiska,  
ng mga glasyar at ng puso ng gubat?

Naglaho na tayo sa isa't isa.

Ang pangalan ko:  
alingawngaw na hindi ko na mabigkas.

Ito ang panganib ng mga pangalan  
— ako ay nagiging ako  
ayon sa pagbihag mo.

Niyebe, glasyar, yelong itim  
ang bawat isa'y bagay na kasing tiyak ng buto.  
At ikaw, nasa layong halos isang mundo.  
Naglaho na rin ako maging sa sarili.  
Iusal mo ang aking pag-iral.

Ako ay glasyar sa bingit ng paglipad.

*You who baptized me,  
will you remember me  
now that I have vanished in the snow,  
the chaff,  
glaciers, and in the heart of the forest?*

*We have ceased to exist from each other.*

*My name:  
echoes that are bereft of sound.*

*It is the danger of names  
— I have become who I am  
as you have desired me to be.*

*Snow, glacier, black ice  
to each certain as a bone.  
And you, are at a world's distance.*

*I have disappeared within myself.*

*Tell of my existence.  
I am a glacier  
on the brink of flight.*

III.

Sinabi sa akin ng hanging habagat:  
“Putangina mo ka! H'wag ka nang magsulat tungkol sa kalikasan.”  
Hindi marunong magpigil ang hangin  
kaya narinig ko ang bawat pantig ng mura  
na parang pag-ingit ng preno ng tren  
na dumarausdos sa paling na daangbakal.

Bakit ko nga ba aagawin ang boses  
ng mga bagay na kayang magsalita para sa kanilang mga sarili?  
‘Hayaan mong ipakita ko sa iyo kung paano tumula,’  
sabi sa akin ng lunop  
na biglang iniunat ang kamay ng dagat sa lungsod.

*The southwest wind tells me:  
“Fuck you, stop writing  
about nature!”*

*The wind knew nothing of restraint  
I heard each and every syllable  
of its swearing  
like the snivel of a train’s halting  
slipping from the sides of the tracks.*

*How dare I steal the voices  
of things able to speak  
for themselves?*

*Allow me to show you  
how to write a poem,  
says the surging flood  
suddenly stretching the hand of the sea  
to the city.*

IV.

Sa bawat taong isisilang,  
may kawan ng paruparong napupunitan ng mga pakpak.

Sa bawat sanggol na iiyak,  
may angkan nalampaso't  
lulunurin ng multong lambat.

Sa bawat paslit  
na matututong magsalita,  
may isang buong kalawakang nababasag:

isang bayan ng walrus  
na lulundag sa bangin.  
isang batis  
ng mga itlog ng palakang maluluto sa araw.

*For each person born,  
multitudes of butterflies are torn*

*For each crying infant,  
a generation drowns*

*For each child learning to speak,  
a galaxy shatters*

*A horde of walruses  
plunge into a deep ravine*

*A spring of frogspawn  
cooking under the sun*

V.

Pagagalitan ako ng lindol:  
“Sino bang gago ang hindi nakauunawa sa aking talinghaga?”

At noon ko nalaman  
na hindi nga kailangan ng lupa ng tagasalin  
ng mga tulang nasusulat sa wika ng sakuna.

Itinanong ng sinag ng araw sa balat ko,  
‘paano ba nakikipagbalagtasang ang tao

sa mga supling ng tábano na umuuka sa balat,  
sa mga uod na nanginginain sa bukas na sugat,  
at sa matalim na halik ng lintá?’

*The quake scolds me,  
what asshole fails to understand my metaphor?*

*It was then I realized there was no need  
of the earth  
for any translator of poems  
written in the language of calamity.*

*And sunlight asked my skin,  
how can people joust in verse  
with the offspring of ox-flies  
carving their bodies in hide, with worms  
feasting on open wounds,  
with the sharp kisses of leeches?*

## VI.

Ang bawat batang iluluwal,  
ay isang kalawakan ng pinsala:  
guwantes sa paanakan, heringga,  
dayaper at tsupon, bote ng gatas,  
ang araw-araw na paglamon sa mundo,  
at ang malaong pag-angkin sa luwad.

Magtitindig ng bahay, bibili ng kotse,  
magtatapon ng basura  
mulí’t mulí hanggang maging bundok ng sakuna.

Ang bawat tao ay malalim na galos sa balat ng lupa.

Nanganganak.

*Every child born  
is a galaxy of harm:  
gloves at the midwifery, syringe,  
diaper and pacifier, a bottle of milk,  
devouring the world every day,  
claiming the land.*

*Builds a house, buys a car,  
throws the trash over and over  
until it becomes a mountain of disaster.*

*Every man is a deep scar on the surface of the earth.*

*Spawning.*

VII.

Kahapon, may dumaang bagong bagyo.  
Tinulaan ng mga makata  
ang mga nabuwal na bahay,  
ang mga pamilyang nabaon sa putik,  
ang gobyernong taksil,  
ang nalulunod na sanggol.

At saka muling nanaghoy sa taludtod.  
Hindi nila nakita na kinaumagahan  
nakangiti ang abot-tanaw,  
isinusulat ang mga susunod na sакnong  
ng epikong aanod sa pugad ng langgam

ngunit muli't muli pa ring pamumutiktikan.

*Yesterday, a new storm passed.  
The poets wrote poems  
about houses fallen and upturned,  
about families buried in mud,  
about the traitorous government,  
about drowned infants.*

*To help relieve  
the lives of those crippled by the catastrophe  
in their poems  
no one saw the next morning  
how the horizon was smiling, writing  
the next stanza  
meant for the applause of ants.*

English translations by Alyza Taguilaso and Jonathan Domingo

## PART TWO

### Creative Project 1

#### ***TAO PO: Opera Aria from the opera *Estadong Mapagkitil* (State of Carnage)***

This essay details the events and processes that led to the creation of an opera aria that is based on the theme of Social Justice, a requirement for an Opera Workshop class offered by the UCSD Music Department.

In Winter Quarter of 2021, all courses at UCSD were still held online due to COVID-19. Despite this, the UCSD Music Faculty remained steadfast in offering interesting and well-crafted courses for the graduate students. One of the courses that was offered during that quarter was the Opera Workshop, supervised by Prof. Anthony Davis and Prof. Susan Narucki. The purpose of the class was to help the students develop their creativity and learn to revolutionize the operatic genre in ways that are more impactful to society. As a voice graduate student, I was very much interested in the course, and I willingly took it to enrich my knowledge in the creative process of making an opera.

The main requirement of the class is to come up with an opera aria that is based on a complete and cohesive story. The original idea was to create a short opera, but due to time constraints, our class decided to submit an opera aria instead. The class also held extensive workshops together with some faculty of the American Lyric Theater (ALT), an opera company that aims to create new operas for new audiences that which aspires to train and guide up and coming composers and librettists. The ALT faculty members who were present during the workshops were composer and librettist Mark Adamo, together with ALT's artistic director Lawrence Edelson. In addition, a webinar about Opera and Social Justice was organized by Prof.

Narucki, seeking to answer how opera as an art form can give voice to a new historical narrative. Enriched and inspired by the stream of ideas that emanated from the esteemed panelists such as John Adams, Thulani Davis, Anthony Davis, and Daniel Roumain, I was then inspired to focus my creative project on the current political turmoil in my home country – the Philippine War on Drugs.

### **Deciding on a Theme**

The theme and political issue that I thought of is the Philippine War on Drugs. In 2016, the newly elected President of our country, Pres. Rodrigo Duterte, declared a war on drugs and gave a “shoot-to-kill” order towards those who are in possession of drugs, selling drugs, manufacturing drugs, and drug users. Given an enormous political power from the highest authority of the land, the police force whose mission was to serve and protect civilians went on a rampant killing of “alleged” drug users and suspects. Some of them were killed in broad daylight, some even in front of their families. According to the Philippine government, there were only 5,600 casualties, but “according to human rights organizations and International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan, there is a higher estimate of between 12,000 to 30,000 deaths” (Simons, 2023). With the President giving orders to kill suspects even in broad daylight, the number of vigilante killers inevitably grew. However, the changing societal mores and values were more shocking and disturbing as the number of people who supported these killings and supported the Drug War Movement grew exponentially.

To provide more context on the political situation, the 2019 statistical data released by the Dangerous Drugs Board shows that the profile of drug users are as follows: 1) majority of the drug users are unemployed; 2) with a high school educational attainment of only 28% (yet most

jobs in the Philippines require college level education, and the job offerings in the Philippines are far less than the number of people who need jobs); 3) majority of the drug users come from low-income families with an income of more or less 6 USD per day (2019).

The most common denominator among the drug users was poverty. Job insecurity, financial incapacity, and the lack of money to provide for their own families have led to a destructive ecosystem. Some are forced to enter the drug business in hopes of earning more, while others are enticed to use drugs to appease themselves of their anxieties. Despite a myriad of reasons and justifications of these people for using drugs, the drug users are merely victims of a society that has failed to uphold its values, morals, and responsibilities.

Biases towards the poor were evident. One problem that ensued in the Philippine Drug War was the rampant police anti-drug raids that were held in slums or poor communities. Since it was easier for the police force to catch alleged drug users in the slums, a killing spree ensued for the duration of Pres. Duterte's term. The big drug lords, however, are at large up to now and have not been caught.

According to a report filed by an anonymous commander of the police force, the police were given monetary incentives for executing and catching drug suspects, thereby fulfilling their quotas. "Police officers kill for money, but also out of fear" (Reuters, 2017). The police fear that they will be added to a watch list of people defying their superiors' orders. Unfortunately, only a few of the alleged drug suspects were tried in court. There were a lot of cases when the police planted evidence in the alleged suspects' home, causing them to be brought to prison without a warrant of arrest. Due to lack of education, the alleged suspects who did not know about the Miranda rights ended up in prison. The others who were not lucky got killed because they "resisted arrest," or perhaps, were just an additional number to the police forces' quota.

Upon reading various news articles and reports on the drug war, I could not help but wonder about the impact of these killings on the families of the victims. As I was browsing online, I stumbled upon a video and was emotionally struck by the documentary created by Human Rights Watch entitled “Our Happy Family is Gone”: Impact of the “War on Drugs” on Children in the Philippines (2020). The documentary follows the story of a child named Jennifer whose father was killed in front of her. This compelling documentary became the basis of my “hypothetical” opera.

### ***Estadong Mapagkitil / State of Carnage***

With a harrowing political situation in mind, I came up with a title for my opera: *Estadong Mapagkitil / State of Carnage*. It infuses two meanings: first, as a noun that pertains to the Philippines as a nation or state that enacts the killing of individuals in the whole country; and second, as a noun that pertains to the condition or state of mind of some Filipino people who find no remorse or guilt in having their countrymen killed whilst viewing it as an act of nationalism - by saving the country from people who are deemed useless and considered ills of society.

### **Outlining the Scene**

As a singer-performer, it has always been imperative for me to think of my character’s back story. Whether I’m performing a staged theatrical number or a concert aria, I always make sure to have a back story in mind to keep me focused on the intention of the song and the character that I am portraying. Hence, it was important for me to clearly set the background of the characters: their past, their fears, and their aspirations.

Since the class requirement was only to make an aria, I decided that the scene should be short but powerful enough to set up the mood of the aria. Traditionally in operatic history, the function of an aria is to reflect on a previous action within a scene, that which is preceded by a recitative where the action of the story takes place. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to create a recitative for the scene that I had in mind. Hence, I focused on building the drama and the emotions of the characters in preparation for the aria.

The scene that I thought of was the usual coverage of news agencies in the Philippines during the bloody regime of President Duterte. The *Oplan Tokhang*, “taken from the Cebuano phrase ‘*Toktok-Hangyo*’ meaning ‘knock and plead’ or a polite request to surrender and stop using drugs” (“Tokhang,” n.d.) is a nationwide anti-drug operation administered by the Philippine National Police which claimed the lives of thousands of Filipino people. As it is a very familiar scene in the news, it is unfortunate to note that a minute number of documentaries and coverage are made about the impacts of the anti-drug operation towards the families of the victims. Thus, for the aria, I thought of focusing on the psychological effects and trauma caused by the *Oplan Tokhang* on the remaining families of the victims. However, this does not mean that the *Oplan Tokhang* scene is no longer necessary in the creation of the aria, but rather, I deem that it is the most important aspect in the aria-creation-process as it lays out the context or background of the characters, their intentions, goals, and frustrations.

Below is a detailed description of each character, including the background and the scene:

Characters:

1) Caloocan Police Force (Three Policemen)

- Middle-aged men who are fearful of their superiors.
- Notorious police unit who had more than a hundred casualties in their anti-drug operations.
- They have a strong desire to live long to provide for their families.

2) Jose

- 30 y/o, construction worker
- He used drugs 10 years prior to the day he was killed.

- Jose stopped using drugs after the birth of his daughter.
- He dreams of giving his daughter a bright future.

### 3) Jocelyn

- 10 y/o, Jose's daughter.
- Abandoned by her mother after her birth.
- Her father is her one and only family.
- She loves her father so much; she vows to take care of her father until he grows old.

#### BACKGROUND:

In 2016, Pres. Rodrigo Duterte declared his war on drugs and gave a "shoot-to-kill" order. Alleged drug suspects were killed in broad daylight, some in front of their families. According to human rights organizations, over 12,000 people have been killed.

#### SCENE: *Oplan Tokhang*

Despite being tired after a long day's work as a construction worker, Jose prepared dinner for his daughter Jocelyn's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, as promised. But before going home, he made sure that he was able to buy a delicious cake for his only daughter using his 2-day salary.

Jose knocked on their shanty door, and to his surprise, Jocelyn opened it immediately without asking who knocked. Jose handed the cake box to Jocelyn and said, "Happy Birthday, *Anak!*" (Happy Birthday, My child!). Jocelyn's eyes were then full of tears and thanked her father with a hug.

The two went on to celebrate Jocelyn's birthday, with Jose bugging his daughter if she can find him a wife. Jocelyn insisted that she will protect her father's heart from women, even from her own mother. The two laughed contagiously, until someone knocked on the door.

Jose was baffled as he was not expecting anyone to arrive. The knocking continued rapidly (as if there was an emergency). Jose eagerly opened the door and was greeted by a gun pointing at his head. Three men in police uniform entered the shanty – one of them holding the gun, and the other two toppled the table and chairs, boxes and clothes. The police kept asking Jose regarding the whereabouts of the drugs, while Jose denied having drugs with him and stating that he stopped using drugs 10 years ago. The police started beating him with a wooden baton, in the hopes of getting an answer to their questions.

Jocelyn's voice filled the air as she was crying at the sight of her father being beaten. One of the officers pointed his gun at Jocelyn, and Jose panicked. He asked them to take him to jail instead, fearing for his daughter's life. He pleaded to spare the child. The agitated police officer who was pointing his gun at the girl shot Jose in the chest instead.

With the following scenario, I chose to focus on the emotional and mental state of Jocelyn as she grieves the death of her father. According to psychiatrist Dr. Erich Lindemann, grief is "a syndrome with a predictable course and distinctive symptoms, including (1) somatic distress, (2) preoccupation with the image of the deceased, (3) guilt, (4) hostility, and (5) loss of usual patterns of conduct" (Lindemann, 1944). It is my goal to bring all of these emotions into the aria and show the frailty of the soul and mind.

## Constructing the Aria

Since the creation of the aria is a collaborative work with one of my colleagues and classmates - Iranian composer Vahid Jahandari, we both decided that he will provide the accompaniment to whichever melody that I will be conjuring up for the piece, including the editing of the sound file and the video file; whilst I will provide the story, text, melody, and video recordings, too.

As a starting point, I began to write the text of the aria. In constructing the text, I thought of Lindemann's symptoms of grief and integrate it with Jocelyn's reflection on her father's death, the events that led to it, and how she opts to move forward in life. I made sure to write the text in Filipino/Tagalog to further emphasize the grief of the character as there are some words that lose their meaning when translated to English.

I originally framed the aria like the *kundiman*. *Kundiman* is a Filipino musical form with a theme on unrequited love that begins in a minor key for the A section (which signifies the despair of a lover), then shifts to a major key for the B section (signifying the lover's unending hope to be loved by the other). However, in this aria, I wish to alternate those sections, but still playing on the theme of unrequited love (not about lovers, but about a person who can't love you back because they're physically gone).

For the A section, its content reflects on the last moments between Jose and Jocelyn, including Jocelyn's last words to her father, stating that she'll protect his heart. I sought to establish in this section that the emotions that we have at a certain moment in our lives could vary quickly through time. A sentence or phrase that we said to another person today might mean differently tomorrow, signifying that a happy memory from our past might just become a sad memory when we grow older.

*Yakap na singhigpit ng kadenang iyong pinihit*

Hugs that are tight, like the chain you've bound

*Sa katawang malamig, dumampi*

Felt by this bitterly cold body

*'Di makalilimot sa sinapit mong lagim*

and shall never forget your fate

*Pinangako kong ika'y kakalingain, ngunit*

I promised that I'll take care of you

*Tadhana.. ang iyong ipinamana*

Instead, you bestowed your fate to me

For the B section, I needed a change in affect, transforming from a contemplative one to anger and frustration. To feel the change and the weight of the moment, I highlighted the text through repetition of the word “*nasaan*” or “where” in English. It is my belief that the repetition of text is a powerful tool especially if each word will be interpreted by the performer in different ways. It is my intention that the first *nasaan* should signify a feeling of longing or pining for eternal happiness; the second *nasaan* would be about experiencing despair in the loss of a loved one; the third *nasaan* would be directed anger towards the unjust government; and the last *nasaan* would be reflective and contemplative, turning inward and musing about one's own purpose in life. These repeated questions would not have answers. Therefore, I ended the text with a request for an answer to these questions but at the same time emphasizing that we cannot control our destiny.

*Ang katok na umaatikabo*

The rapid knock

*Sabay ang pagtibok ng pusong dumadagundong*

In sync with my heart's thumping beat

*"Nasaan? Nasaan?"*

Where? Where?

*Ang hustisya sa tinubuang lupa*

Where is justice in this beloved land?

*"Sabing nasaan?"*

"I said, where?"

*Ang amang kumalinga sa kanyang anak*

Where is the father who took care of this child?

*"Ayaw mong sumagot? Nasaan?"*

"You won't respond? (threatening) Where?"

*Ang panghabambuhay na kasiyahang aking hinihiling*

Where is the eternal happiness that I am looking for?

*Sana'y sumagot ka, tadhanang mapanlinlang.*

"I hope you'll give an answer, treacherous fate."

For the accompaniment of the aria, I originally thought of using the guitar - an instrument that has been ingrained in Filipino music culture since the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in 1521 in the country. In addition, most of Filipino music today (folk and popular) use the guitar either as a solo accompaniment or an ensemble instrument. In terms of timbre, I thought of a cheap guitar with steel strings which would be a great addition to the overall sound of the aria due to its rough timbral quality that somehow reminds me of Filipino men who sing with their

guitars and drink outside their shanties, laughing loudly, and sometimes quarrel on the street.

This image is reminiscent of scenes in slums and poor communities that are cramped. Hence, the proximity of one family to another was so close, a minuscule sound can be heard from one household to another; thereby defining the community as a tightly knit one which rarely experiences a moment of silence and peace in their community.

To counter the calamitous scenario provided above, Vahid and I turned to a contemplative mode for the creation of the music. Our collaborative process comprised of numerous Zoom meetings involving various improvisations on the Turkish Oud played by Vahid. The harmonic minor tuning of the Oud got stuck in my inner ear, thereby causing my initial melody to be in the same scale: G-A-Bb-C-D-Eb-F#-G. I came up with different iterations of the melody, recording up to 50 voice memos that we can choose from, sending them to one another for feedback and approval. In the end, I recorded and freely improvised on my previous recordings, inventing harmonies that would slowly build up to a climactic section in the piece. I sent all the recorded materials to Vahid for his perusal and gave him the freedom to put the piece together, mix and match the melodies, and provide a favourable accompaniment.

Vahid's initial drafts consisted of atmospheric layers of low drones with chimes which provided an eerie yet meditative texture that is apt for the first paragraph of the piece. Not wanting to overshadow the voice, Vahid honored the voice recordings by keeping the voice at the fore, thereby supporting the idea of an innocent grieving child wanting for her voice to be heard.

Lastly, as I pondered upon the title of the aria, I believed that the Filipino formal expression "*TAO PO*" would make a compelling title. "*Tao po*" is a phrase used by Filipinos to ask permission to enter a person's home, showing utmost respect to the physical boundaries and

privacy of the homeowner. At the height of the Philippine "War on Drugs," the police force was tasked to look for the homes of drug users, pushers and syndicates, and ask the alleged suspects to change their ways. The "Operation *Tokhang*" (tokhang = "knock" and "convince") was intended to make drug suspects to rehabilitate. However, as the operations were implemented, some suspects were taken out of their homes by force, and some "alleged" suspects resisted and fought for their rights. Some were lucky, while the others perished in the hands of those who swore an oath to protect people. "*Tao po*" is a plea from the children of those who were slain, gently knocking on heaven's doors to bring justice on earth.

### **Integrating Video with the Music**

In addition to the creation of the aria, we made a music video that consisted of images of myself singing and embodying the character of the child, alone in a room full of clutter, trying to replicate the scene after Jose's death. The decision to focus on the child for the music video came after numerous arguments with Vahid on how to present the scene. The process that it took for us to come up with the decision was quite long and arduous. I had to travel to Tondo, Manila, a place that is known to be the largest slum of the country's capital, to capture images of the vicinity and the community in order to give my classmates and colleagues who have never been to the Philippines an idea of the communities that have suffered from the Drug War. The images that I took made some of my colleagues uncomfortable as the issue of poverty porn was raised. To me, as a citizen of a "third world" or "developing" country such as the Philippines, I thought it best to present the reality of my world to others. In my perspective, I'd rather show the actuality of the situation on the ground than to present the aria in a way that would not make the audience uncomfortable. In my opinion, presenting the piece in a toned-down manner loses the

power of the piece to make an impact on the lives of the audience. Coating the piece with images that subdue the realities of a situation and an issue that is strongly controversial in a crumbling society was disparaging for me. However, Vahid and my other colleagues' perspectives were different from mine. The emphasis on considering the audience's reaction was highlighted and was their main concern. There was an assumption that a higher percentage of the viewers of the music video might be discouraged to continue watching the video for the reason being that it might make them uncomfortable. To me, that was the whole point of the piece. Regardless, conversations on presenting the piece continued to revolve around issues on aesthetics, art appreciation and evaluation, critical analyses of art, and art's functionality were all considered carefully. In the end, a judiciously crafted music video was produced by Vahid after finalizing the audio mixing and sound editing.

## **Conclusion**

In the future, I hope to complete this opera; if not, I envision this theme and topic to be a full-blown opera in Filipino. There are only a few operas that are written in Filipino; and creating more operas in the vernacular language would be a great contribution to Filipino vocal literature. Furthermore, the story of the drug war victims should never be forgotten. Their stories should live on as a reminder of the atrocities that were committed by the Duterte regime.

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## PART THREE

### Creative Project 2

#### Reimagining Identities and Narratives in Georges Aperghis' *Recitation 1*

This essay delves into my performance and interpretation of Georges Aperghis' *Recitation 1*, thereby presenting my process of interpreting the piece and showing my perspective as a performer.

#### Background

Aperghis' *Recitations* was composed in 1978 with a total of 14 movements that span around 40 minutes for the performance of the whole work. Specifically written for one of the closest singer-actor collaborators of Aperghis in France, the chanteuse Martine Viard has premiered a lot of Aperghis' vocal works. The piece was premiered at the Festival d'Avignon, an annual festival of contemporary performing arts.

#### Process of Learning Aperghis' Score

##### 1) Assess the level of difficulty

As an interpreter of music, my first step is to scan the score and assess its level of difficulty. Knowing how much time and effort will be allotted in learning the piece will certainly give me enough headspace to prepare for its execution.

##### 2) Troubleshoot

I troubleshoot which parts might be extra hard to execute vocally, because it takes quite some time for a piece of music to "sit well" in the voice. In any vocal piece, there needs to be a

calibration in the vocal muscles for it to produce a healthy sound for each note and the vocal muscles need time to adapt and memorize levels of muscle engagement that are necessary for the piece.

### 3) Decipher the text: diction, semantics

In deciphering the text, I usually put International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions to assure the phonetic sounds that the composer is asking for. To me, it is essential to put IPA transcriptions because each word has its own special color. If the word is pronounced or produced in a different way than what the composer had in mind, then the overall sound of the piece changes drastically. If it was written in a language that the composer speaks very well, I typically do a background check and know which region the composer lives in, and I try to know the specific accent in that region because I believe that every composer is greatly influenced by the soundscape of their surroundings in their daily lives. In this case, Aperghis was living in Paris at the time of his composition of *Recitations*. Therefore, the pronunciation of the text that I have decided to do for my interpretation is Parisian French.

As I decipher the text, I investigate if the words have semantic meaning or if they are non-semantic vocal utterances that only serve as a timbral effect in the piece.

### 4) Study patterns

Thereafter, I study the rhythmic and melodic patterns, and sequences that I could easily identify. Looking for sequences is a crucial step for memorizing the patterns which pave the way for an easier execution of the piece.

### 5) Creating a narrative and a subtext

I combine all the aspects together and create a narrative in my head. Making a narrative is

very helpful even if the material is devoid of semantic context because it assists me in thinking of a clear direction and flow within the piece.

#### 6) Adding extra-musical elements

Lastly, I think of extra-musical elements that can add vitality to my performance. In my performances of new music, I usually ask permission from the composers that I work with if they are amenable to my proposals of adding lights, images, etc. In this case, since I have no way of being in contact with a famous composer such as Aperghis, I opted to add images in my performance that complement the narrative that I have created from the text.

### **Aperghis' Compositional Style and Practice**

Aperghis was evidently influenced by the music of Schoenberg. As we can see in Recitation I, a set of 12 pitches are laid out to be performed in succession. Each system starts with or picks up from the last pitch from the tone series.

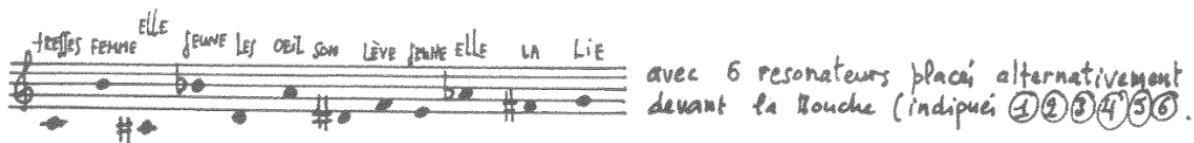


Figure 7. *Aperghis' Recitation I*

### **RECITATION 1: Structure**

*Recitation 1* is the most straightforward movement in the whole cycle. It is also the movement that has very minimal instructions.

#### 1) Pitch set

In the score, at the top left corner of the piece, there is a set of 12 pitches (as seen in Figure 7) — which are the only pitches to be sung and this provides the frame or structure of the

whole movement. Clearly, Aperghis was very much influenced by serialism and that was apparent in this piece.

The intervals of pitches somehow move inward, from a major seventh interval moving chromatically to a minor second at the end.

At the beginning of the piece, the pitches are laid out in the score in a way that the pitches will not be repeated within a unit until the whole series has been sung.

Figure 8. *Recitation 1 - Full Score*

However, Aperghis also varied the order of presentation of the pitches - sometimes taking a fragment of the last set of pitches as the beginning of a unit (as seen in Figure 8, in the second unit which began with Ab instead of C) which continues throughout the first system, varying the order of presentation, yet building up in density for each unit.

But it is seen in the second system up to the end, that Aperghis distracts the flow of the series by repeating some notes, which to an effect causes an interjection within a line.

## 2) Text

As seen in Figure 7, each pitch corresponds to a French word. It is important to note that the French language is a language that is delivered in a very smooth and connected manner, yet by setting the text in leaping intervals, Aperghis' decision to set the text in a disjunctive manner automatically loses the fluidity in the delivery of the text. Note that Aperghis also decided not to include an IPA transcription which significantly influences the number and variety of interpretations that are possible. It is also likely that this can be considered a *klangfarbenmelodie* in which the melody is made of colours, that is not just from the timbre of the voice itself but also from the text's sound with its syllables and phonemes.

The following are the French words with corresponding English translation:

- Tresses - braids
- Femme - women
- Elle - she
- Jeune - young
- Les - the
- Oeils - eyes
- Son - his
- Léve - survey
- Jeune - young
- Elle - she
- La - the
- Lie - v. to tie / adj. worthless/ n. remnants

It is quite difficult to make sense of the text if read from top to bottom. The text does not form a complete sentence. But knowing that the words were carefully picked out by Aperghis,

somehow gives the interpreter a gist on the narrative. With Aperghis' emphasis and repetition of the words *jeune/young* and *elle/she*, we get the sense that the piece might be about young women. However, Aperghis also included the word *son/his* which we can interpret as a hint about men's involvement in the lives of young women.

Perhaps the most intriguing word in the list (and may be considered as the word that defines the whole text) is the word *lie* which means to tie / worthless / remnants. Almost all phrases end with this word.

Upon translating these texts to the English language and seeing how they were carefully laid out in the score, I immediately thought of child prostitution as the narrative for the whole piece. Before I finalized the topic for my narrative, I researched the social conditions of women during the time that Aperghis wrote this piece. I then learned that there was a movement in Paris that proposes to decriminalize prostitution, because at that time, brothels were closed and were not legal to operate. However, the prostitutes at that time who had no pimps and were working at their own accord were complaining that they could not exercise their profession. The issue has become very controversial in Paris for decades, tempting feminists to argue with one another, with one side seeing prostitution as commodifying women's bodies, while the other group argues that their body is their own responsibility and that they have all the right to do whatever they want with it. As a result, France legalized prostitution but criminalized the clients who are caught paying for sex.

Another factor that might have influenced Aperghis is his place of abode. At the time, he lived in Bagnole, a suburb in Paris that is known to be full of disturbances especially at night. I speculate that Aperghis' work on the *Recitations* is a social commentary on the issue of prostitution. If my speculation is correct, Aperghis' emphasis on the word *jeune/young*, stresses

the most vulnerable victims of prostitution - the young women who become slaves of the trade. To further complement the narrative that I have created in my mind, I scrutinized the only instruction stated by Aperghis.

### ***RECITATION 1: Instructions***

#### Resonators

At the top left corner of the piece (as seen in figures 7 and 8) there is an instruction which states “avec 6 resonateurs placés alternativement devant la bouche (indiqués 1,2,3,4,5,6)” / “with 6 resonators placed alternately in front of the mouth (as indicated in the encircled numbers: 1,2,3,4,5,6).”

Placement of Resonators - The encircled numbers are plotted in the score in different ways:

#### 1) In the middle of a unit / group

First, some of the resonators are placed in the middle of a unit/group - which indicates that the resonators must be switched in the middle of a unit.

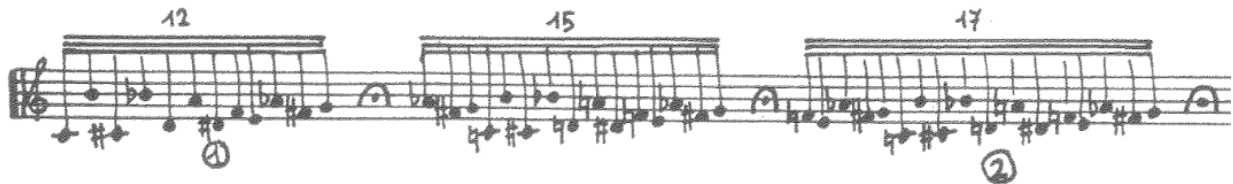


Figure 9. Resonators indicated as encircled numbers placed in the middle of a unit/group.

2) At the beginning/end of each unit

Resonators may be found at the beginning/end of each unit which demands for a consistent colour/timbre throughout one unit until a switch has been indicated.



Figure 10. Resonators indicated as encircled numbers found at the beginning/end of a unit.

## Interpretation

I have first encountered Georges Aperghis' Recitations I in 2020 and from then on, I have been fascinated with the intricacy of his vocal writing. Since all vocal works demand theatricality in performance from a singer, it is easy to be theatrical in the performance of *Recitation I*. However, Aperghis himself noted in his interviews that the worst thing that could happen to the pieces is if his music will be acted out by the performer. He insists that the theatricality will come from the music itself.

At an early age, Aperghis found theatrical arguments in classical music such as those of Beethoven's and Mozart's. His imagination took him to different times and places with different characters and storylines. It is in these early realizations of Aperghis that he wanted to achieve theatricality in music without being physically theatrical. This idea, however, poses a challenge to performers as it has become second nature for singers to act out in a performance. So instead of showing facial expressions and using movement and gestures, I opted to utilize images that can help me present the narrative that I had in mind.

In Aperghis' *Recitation I*, the performer has the freedom to create their own narratives out of the "mental miniatures" that Aperghis has laid out. The fragmented melodic and rhythmic materials when combined into a greater whole gives the performer a direction as to how it can be interpreted. Aperghis himself noted that he does not want to add theatrical instructions to the piece, as for him: the music can narrate a story for itself. True enough, Aperghis' music challenges our ears and psyche to follow a particular train of thought that is dependent on the choices of the performer.

From a performer's perspective, being handed a score with very limited instructions either gives the performer enough freedom to interpret the piece and have the liberty to expand and diminish dimensions of time or perform the piece from the beginning to the end without adding inflections, dynamics, and character. But in this day and age, engaging the audience has been a top priority in keeping shows and theaters afloat – making performers torn in their artistic choices; whether to give in to the demands of the audience and compromise their ideas or stick to their own notions of commendable art.

In my performance of Aperghis' *Recitations I*, I took the liberty of interpreting the piece by assigning characters to each resonator, as specified below:

Resonators functioning as characters' voices:

For the resonators, I assigned a character for each number that can fit the narrative that I had in mind:

- 1 - Narrator / Spectator
- 2 - Madame
- 3 - Young Girl
- 4 - Prostitutes
- 5 - Courtesans
- 6 - Pain

No.1 is the narrator of the story and the spectator in the whole scene.

No. 2 is the madame who arranges clients for the prostitutes and earns a percentage from their payment.

No.3 is the young girl who does not have a choice about her circumstances.

No. 4 are the adult prostitutes who chastise the young girl for being given to the high-profile clients.

No. 5 are the courtesans who are considered high-class and cater only to fewer men who can offer them “security.”

No. 6 is a colour / timbre that I designated to characterize pain and make it an entity.

#### Resonators / characters and their corresponding timbres:

For each character, I have assigned a specific timbre.

1 - Narrator / Spectator	- Normal voice
2 - Madame	- Dark and deep tones
3 - Young Girl	- Breathy voice
4 - Prostitutes	- Nasal and shrill voice
5 - Courtesans	- Wine glass
6 - Pain	- Paper towel roll

I decided to just use two external resonators for numbers 5 and 6. I used a wine glass for number 5 and a paper towel roll for number 6. I decided to use these resonators because I wanted something that was fragile and can be easily torn apart - symbolizing the vulnerability of the characters. For nos. 1-4, I made use of my own instrument to create different voices and timbres: such as creating darker tones for Madame, using a breathy voice for the young girl, and making nasal and strident sounds. To me, this progression of colours give emotional depth to the piece.

## Narrative

The piece begins with an introduction of the material, laying out the pitch set in unit 1 (See Figure 8, all units in this section refer to the same figure). This introduction gives the narrator a chance to state the images in the scene - perhaps Madame braiding the hair of a young girl.

In unit 2, it started with the fragment *elle la lie* / she the tie - to which I interpret as the Madame maintaining and keeping the brothel together.

Then in unit 3, it starts with *leve jeune* / survey young - I interpret this as the spectator/narrator seeing Madame looking at young women on the streets and asking them aloud to join her brothel, hence the shift of vocal timbre in unit 3.

Then in unit 4, it starts with *les oeils son leve jeune* / the eyes his surveys young - if we reconstruct it, it means: his eyes surveys the young woman or a man looking at the young woman/girl.

In units 5 & 6, the narrative of the combined text results to the imagery in which the Madame (or resonator 2) talks to the man and convinces him to take the young woman.

For the next system, Aperghis repeated the word *jeune* / young. Since it is still at resonator 2, I interpret this repetition as the Madame trying to convince her client to take the young girl.

As the piece transitions to resonator 3, I tried to create a timbre that sounds pure and innocent and a little bit breathy. Therefore, in this unit, the young girl now understands the predicament that she is in. She is scared and hesitant to join the client, but in the middle of the next unit, there is another transition to resonator 2 in which Madame insists and persists to give the young girl to the client.

The following unit in the system goes back to the narrator/spectator who emphasizes the word *lie / tie*, as the narrator sees that the girl has no choice and is bound to the situation.

In the third system, I relate the grace notes to a state of panic in the voice of the girl, with madame's insistence at the end as it shifts to resonator 2.

For the first time, within the same system, resonator 4 is utilized - which I interpreted as the prostitutes chatting about the madame choosing the young girl for the big shot client. The bigger notes in that unit serve as the pauses in between conversations, and those are the pauses that are necessary for suspense in rumors.

But in the next unit, we see a quintuplet sung by the girl. This somehow suspends time, and I interpret this as the girl getting disoriented with the situation - followed immediately by madame - asking herself about what she has done to the girl.

In the following system, we see an interchange of resonators/characters all ending on the word *jeune/young*. To me, it speaks of guilt on madame's part, hopelessness for the girl, envy from the prostitutes, and despair from the spectator.

With the introduction of resonator 5 - the courtesan, I interpret the courtesan's prolonged notes on the word *jeune* as a reflection of their journey within the realm of prostitution. Since almost all courtesans started from the same stature as the young girl, probably coming from all walks of life, most of them poor, they slowly rose up the ladder until they reached the highest status in the world of prostitution. In this line, there is a constant interchange between Madame (no.2) and the courtesan (no.5). To me, this shows a juxtaposition of their lives - with Madame's lines in constant flux through the leaping intervals —showing Madame's fluctuating conscience, while the courtesan's line has a prolongation of the pitch — which to me shows stability in their

stature. It can be interpreted as being in a state of acceptance that it is the life that they have chosen to live, and they are at peace with that choice.

The succeeding line (still resonator 5) shows the courtesans' recollection of her own memories, slowly coming back as the notes add up and disturb her peace.

With the shift to resonator 6 at the end of the system, we acknowledge the recurring pain that the experience has caused in many lives of women and girls involved in prostitution.

Up until the end, resonator 6 - which I attributed to pain, continues to be present in the lives of the other characters. By repeating the texts and pitches it signifies that pain is a perpetual entity in their lives. With the fermatas, I see the recurring pauses in between units as attempts to stop the system of prostitution, but the immediate reinstatement of the pitch set right after the fermata then makes the pauses as breath marks that only serve as a reset for the continuation of the system. In the score, those that continue within the system are nos. 4 & 5, those are the prostitutes and the courtesans, who, in my perspective are already trapped in the system, unknowingly masking their pain to live.

At the last part of the piece, we see a huge chunk of notes with a repeat sign, which I interpret as a cycle of pain in the lives of the characters.

## **Conclusion**

It is my belief that Aperghis blurs the boundaries of language, and by doing so, the performer has the freedom to add multiple subtexts to the melodic line and it also gives the performer the liberty to create different identities and characters in the music. I made a performance video of the piece to try to integrate Aperghis music into the social situation in my country. According to UNICEF, the Philippines has the highest rate of child prostitution in the world. In 2020 alone, we have had 60,000 child prostitutes, with their own parents serving as pimps. Therefore, I incorporated images in the video that I made: pictures that are from news articles about child prostitution and human rights websites in the Philippines, pictures of children who became victims of prostitution, teenagers who became accustomed to the trade, young women who became pregnant due to prostitution, who in turn became pimps of their future children. My aim for this project is to bring light to the issue of prostitution that has become a cycle of pain in Filipino children's lives.

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