

Keynote Speech

TOWARD REVITALIZATION OF OUR INDIGENOUS CULTURES

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I take great pride and honor in being with you today at the kind invitation of the Dansalan Research Center and its 15th Annual Seminar Committee. This occasion is another rare privilege for me to participate in an enriching interaction and dialogue with you. For I am identified with you by sanguine affinity as Filipino. Coming to your beautiful city makes me feel like having taken on a nostalgic pilgrimage to a Mecca of Philippine culture. For here, many a Filipino can trace a good part of his identity.

Today highlights the start of the three-day Festival of Mindanao/Sulu Folk Arts, a special event seeking to bring together the music, dance, visual arts and folk literature traditions in this part of the archipelago. This is an annual encounter of discovery and delight, making all of us appreciate the differences and uniqueness of age-old customs and mores. This is a celebration of the contribution of this part of our country to the richness of our people's colorful heritage.

In the process, not only do all of us become inseparable partners in nation-building but more importantly, together we forge an enduring bond of mutual respect and love for each other as brothers and fellow citizens of a great nation. We also take this opportunity to look at ourselves and reaffirm our identity --- who we are and what we are --- making common denominators in our existence and relationship our strength as we unite together in spirit.

How I wish I could at least express myself in some of the beautiful dialects in which our brothers in Mindanao and Sulu areas have been reared and have grown roots. There are times when one feels the need to have meaningful nearness to his fellowmen through the medium of the spoken language. They say that one must be able to argue in a particular language to show mastery of it. I dare say that a brief word for "hello" should be enough. Besides, it would take a lifetime to be sufficiently able to master the various dialects in use in our archipelago and still miss the whole point, having as we do more than 100 linguistic groups to reckon with in our 7,109 island archipelago, each group with its distinct cultural practices.

I have, in my own little ways, nevertheless, always felt very close to the people of Mindanao and Sulu. At one time in his colorful career, my late father, Marcial Kasilag, who was Commissioner for Mindanao and Sulu before the last war, resided here in Dansalan City. His long service to the people of this area has always made me feel a certain degree of closeness to the traditional culture of Mindanao and Sulu. Later visits with friends on official missions here, as well as my association with contemporary colleagues from Lanao while I was serving as Dean of the College of Music and Fine Arts at the Philippine Women's University in Manila, my contact with the Maranaos for my research in music and arts and my official duties at PWU's Bayanihan Folk Arts Center, have enabled me to make periodic research excursions to Bukidnon, Davao, Lanao, Zamboanga and Sulu. All these have provided important vicissitudes in my life. Indeed, my association with the people of Mindanao and Sulu has earned for me the love and affection of the many who address me and consider me as their sister.

As a composer, I have become deeply interested in Maranao culture as a result of extensive researches. My music somehow reflects traits of this particular culture and I hope that I am able to contribute to an awareness of this culture among many of our countrymen and friends overseas. The themes of several of my compositions are mainly an integration of Muslim folk tunes and Western idioms, like in *Toccata for Percussion and Winds* which won for me the Republic Cultural Heritage Award in 1960, and *Divertissement for Piano and Orchestra*, and *Improvisations on Maranaw Themes*.

Still, one realizes that there is much more to learn, greater tasks before us, as we create and begin to understand things.

It is not only through music that our people can understand and appreciate each other. The totality of our cultural traditions --- in the visual arts, architecture, dances, rites and rituals, which are very much admired in the West --- can bring us all together in one heart and one thought. All we need is to look back at ourselves and with resolute will power, allow ourselves to be bound by traditions and heritage and the desire to improve on them.

I am deeply touched by the concerted efforts of various learning institutions in pursuing the revitalization of Maranaw culture. Schools like the University of the Philippines, Philippine Women's University and Silliman University and research centers like those of Xavier University and the Dansalan Foundation, Inc. have a vital role in the development of a nation. And it is just fitting that major influence must be exerted by the educators in the moulding of young minds, with emphatic objective on the discovery and revitalization

of folk culture and art which form the foundations of our basic strength as a people. It is truly necessary for our young ones to know their cultural roots and rich heritage, for them to preserve the best of their cultural past as they strive to live through the present and to know their directions to the future.

As I have said, I am not here to impose on you what you must do and how you must do the thing you already know. I am here to interact and in the process learn from you --- for much we can learn of and with one another.

When the First Lady, Imelda Romualdez Marcos, built the Cultural Center of the Philippines as a sanctuary of the Filipino soul in 1969, she opened wide our doors and windows to the cultures of the world while discovering and enhancing our very own, starting an unprecedented and unparalleled cultural renaissance all over the Philippines. In the same spirit, we at the Cultural Center of the Philippines are committed to a two-pronged program of cultural development --- the fuller blossoming of local talent and the sharing of the best of Western art with our people. We seek to provide wider avenues of expression for our various cultures and traditions. We catalyze and hope to be able to continue doing so by show-casing what is truly our own. We help undertake researches in upland, lowland and indigenous traditions of our cultural minorities but we do not profess to introduce any new thinking in our culture, because we can only add a few frills to it here and there, but cannot change it drastically, because culture is self-evolving and self-generating according to the environmental processes of time. And if, indeed, we do feature Western cultures, it is merely to show to our people and our artists how things are across the seas that we may compare and appreciate our own better and more fully .

As part of the CCP overall program, the Folk Arts Theater holds an annual Festival of Folk Arts and Dance which invites the participation of the whole country. As many as thirty to forty provinces take part in these folk festivals usually held in July every year. An important feature in this festival is the holding of folk music and dance competitions, folk arts and crafts exhibits, culinary arts demonstrations, and lecture forums on the varied folk dances of the different provinces. The whole exercise is taped and recorded for posterity and book publication of Philippine folk music and dances becomes an ongoing project of the Folk Arts Theater for the sharing. The support and cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Local Governments lend value to this important national project toward unity.

We also believe that with advanced technology in this century, we can perpetuate our own culture and traditions more effectively by the use of modern facilities this generation can offer. Surely, an interchange of cultural ideas in art, dance and literature can result in better understanding, not only among the various ethnic groups in this region but throughout the entire country.

As I inferred earlier, it is unfortunate that our archipelago is divided by several islands making it almost inaccessible for everybody to be easily in touch with one another. But it can surely be done if our hearts and our minds are willing to undertake the process of establishing valid cultural linkages.

Publications, recordings, film and other forms of media can be tapped to achieve our goals. Actual exhibitions, performances, and demonstrations of each other's cultures can be both profitable and enjoyable. Seminars and forums like this can do a lot to relate each participant to the other through an exchange of knowledge, of one another's views and experiences.

At this point, let us suggest the full implementation of a four-fold program of *preservation* through documentation and research, *dissemination* through performance, *appreciation* through education and *promotion and development* through creation. Educators and administrators, scholars and writers, ethnomusicologists, composers, choreographers and painters could work hand in hand to carry out the enormous task of discovering, translating and revitalizing the researchers on our cultural heritage into living functional arts, be they in music, dance, drama, visual arts and literature.

Through seminars, lecture-demonstrations, guided listening, viewing and training programs, our rich traditions on a nationwide scale can become more fully integrated with contemporary life and need not be lost in the woods for lack of communication and dissemination. It is essential that indigenous arts should be introduced and incorporated early enough in the grade schools through high school and college onto professional life later. Thus, the variegated aspects reflected in our indigenous cultures can find their way into the mainstreams of national unity, with mutual understanding and respect for the multi-colored traditions of our diverse communities. Such an understanding can only become a unifying force toward national development and integration.