



The Layers of *Strata*, José Monserrat Maceda's Asian Musicology: A Case of Decolonization in the Filipino Musicality

Engr. Ernesto C. Zaldua, Jr., M.M.

Department of Philosophy and Humanities
Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology
Email: ernestojr.zaldua@g.msuiit.edu.ph

Oliver F. Perater, M.A.

Department of Philosophy and Humanities
Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology
Email: oliver.perater@g.msuiit.edu.ph

Menelito P. Mansueto, M.A.

Department of Philosophy and Humanities
Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology
Email: menelito.mansueto@g.msuiit.edu.ph

Abstract

This essay attempts to encapsulate the philosophical underpinnings of José Maceda's musical work and his brand of musicology. Through a critical analysis of Maceda's original musical composition, *Strata*, the authors ardently hope to extract a philosophical reflection that could re-affirm the presence of Filipino philosophy. The issue of whether there is a Filipino philosophy has been a hot topic for some time in Philippine academia and among Filipino scholars. This essay aims to contribute to the discussion and provide an artistic basis for why Filipino thought can be inscribed in some concrete cultural artifacts. José Maceda's *Strata* can be one example. Through Maceda's unique case, despite his education in Europe and America, he has successfully formulated an Oriental brand of musicology that meaningfully

embodies the Asian culture and spirit, something we can correctly label as Filipino Indigenous Philosophy. The paper also demonstrates a case of decolonization of Filipino musicality, in particular, and of Filipino artistry, in general, through the indigenization of an art piece by a Filipino musician. Maceda's musical work is thereby portrayed as a philosophical work of a Filipino which is far different from the typical and not based on the usual Western criteria and standards.

Keywords: Ethnomusicology, Asian Musicology, Drone and Melody, Filipino Thought, Decoloniality

*"...different combinations of drone and melody
represent an expression of a group of people..."*
– José Maceda, Winter 1986

Introduction

Music has long been integral to human societies and their respective cultures. This essay attempts to dissect the meanings of a musical masterpiece in conjunction with the unfolding historical event of the time. It explores the layers of cultural approaches to music as applied to the tumultuous times of the EDSA Revolution in 1986. These layers or strata are related to the movement of *musique concrète* which sought musical ideas unique from those produced by Western sounds. The well-known Greek-French avant-garde composer Iannis Xenakis actively composed based on the *musique concrète* ideology and had electronically manipulated sound to create something new and different. This popular movement of *musique concrète* also influenced José Maceda, but instead of doing the same electronic manipulation, Maceda introduced Asian instruments as his new material. Using the natural sounds from these instruments, he was able to create something that was considered new for the Western world.

As Maceda searched for ideas of Asian music and sound he found that drone and melody were the main components of the Asian sound. To understand what a drone means, one needs to use the creative imagination by listening to the sustained sound of a gong/s

over a prolonged period. According to Maceda, "Drone may be understood to be not only a sustained sound, a continuation of the long vibration of gongs but also a constantly repeating phrase of one or more pitches played by one or several instruments for the duration of the music."¹ The interlocking of these drones creates a sequence of overtones. Melody is heard as a result of this.² This essay will also portray an example of the decolonization of Western music to Eastern sounds and introduce Maceda's nationalistic brand of musicality. This will also show how the EDSA Revolution reflects in *Strata* as Maceda's main inspiration, and to show the intersections between Maceda's musical work and his political and nationalistic views. Maceda had developed a very high social consciousness of his surroundings and had incorporated them into his music. The attempt for a cultural revolution or liberation from the West was deliberate on his part.

It is widely known that Filipinos are music lovers. However, there is a predominantly significant influence of Western music on the national airwaves. The decolonization of music can be observed in many aspects. Another example wherein the emergence of decolonization can also be observed is in the rise of the popular Afro-

¹ José M. Maceda. *Strata*. Manila: Unpublished, 1988. See also, José Maceda, "A Concept of Time in a Music of Southeast Asia (A preliminary account)." *Ethnomusicology*, Winter 1986, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Winter, 1986), 11-53, published by University of Illinois Press on behalf of Society for Ethnomusicology.

² Typical of Asian cultures, when they fly a kite, they love to attach some flute or whistle, or even a string tightly attached to two opposite sticks of bamboo. When the string is tight, it creates some vibrations in the air and produce a sound wave. Up in the air, the sound waves can travel loud noisily. This is to illustrate how the drone sounds like. When more drones are positioned to create a sound, a resulting melody will be collectively produced. This is the principle behind Maceda's *Strata*. According to Santos, "The complement between drone and melody in Southeast Asian village music suggests a concept of infinity, timelessness and equilibrium whereby man and nature are hardly separated by temporal, physical and spatial boundaries. It reflects a mode of life that is anchored to a metaphysical universe, where causal logic hardly exists or matters within its sphere. In this type of music, according to Maceda, the durational values of sound emitted by the different instruments, including their decays, and the repetitive ordering of these sounds which in most cases create simple melodic configurations, play a significant role in expressing a temporal concept. The different sound qualities and their durational variants emanating from either bamboo or metal instruments, are shaped by the different techniques of muffling, stopping and allowing the sounds to resonate." See Ramon P. Santos, "From mannerism to new aesthetics: levels of adaptation in the 'classicization' of Asian music." *Canzona*. (New Zealand, 1991), 20.

inspired emerging new art form called 'acapella rap battle,' akin to the Filipino "*Balagtasan*," which utilizes the oral tradition, a characteristic of the African method of preserving traditions through stories, poems, or songs. But this topic can be a subject for another essay or a separate article, hence, we will immediately proceed to introduce the Filipino cultural musician –José Monserrat Maceda. What we mean here by decolonization is the effort to provide an alternative to the overarching influence of Western music that had widely served as the modern standard for music and aesthetic pleasure or expression.³

The authors argue that Maceda's *Strata* is an artistic or philosophical commentary on the identity of the Filipino as a collective society which manifested also during the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution.⁴ To prove this, Maceda uses Indigenous sounds that embody the unity and decolonial spirit of the Filipino people against any tyrannical leadership or threat to national sovereignty. The authors try to expose the musical ideas of José Maceda with the claim that his work has pertinent philosophical implications. The value and importance of Maceda's work to Philippine music is that it provides us with an example of a musical preference closer to home and is identified with the Philippine indigenous and local landscapes reconsidering his use of raw, natural, and indigenous materials and instruments.⁵ Maceda's work of art, particularly the *Strata*, attempts to illustrate a particular event in history through his music, in the Ricoeurian sense that the individual human subject through his personal experience creates a sense of meaning, memory, and narrative of human history.⁶ Indeed, many of our Filipino brethren are politically conscious and express their sentiments through music and artistry, some of these artists are even making a big name in popular

³ See Frederick B. Mills, *Enrique Dussel's Ethics of Liberation: An Introduction* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), xii–xiii.

⁴ Interestingly, Jose Maceda in 1974 performed one of his earlier masterpieces *Ugnayan* with the all-out support of then First Lady Imelda Marcos. *Ugnayan* is a multi-spatial composition for 20 radio stations.

⁵ Maceda is not just an ordinary musician, he is at best an intellectual, a philosopher, a prolific author, and an inspiring educator and academician. The Maceda Hall building at the UP College of Music was named in his honor.

⁶ See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 62–140. See also, Michal Kumorek, "The Role of Time in the Theory of Narrative Identity in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur," *RUDN Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2021, 483–494.

culture and the Filipino music industry, known as OPM.⁷ Joey Ayala and Bayang Barrios's "*makabayan*" songs could be one of these examples, among many others.⁸

The Power of Art

In Book X of his dialogue *The Republic*, Plato refers to art as a mimesis or imitation.⁹ In Plato's teaching, the world we see is but an imitation of the real world, which is not sensible but a world of thought. For him, art, such as the products of poets and painters, as it imitates the sensible world, are just mere imitations of secondary reality.¹⁰ Art is therefore an imitation of imitation. The danger of art is that it could lure away humans from seeing the real world as it imitates only a sensible world which in itself is unreal. Plato argues that any representative art is by nature at third far removed from the truth, and it is associated with the element of the human soul far from intelligence, which could lead humans therefore from the truth.¹¹ Hence, Plato asserts that to educate ourselves, imitative art like poetry is the last thing we should allow.¹² Arts like poems and paintings are secondary, unreal, and have nothing to tell us about life.¹³

On the contrary, as a realist, George Lukacs celebrates the mimetic aspect of art, it should imitate or reflect objective reality.¹⁴ Art for him, unlike science, presents universal truth, it represents universal aspects of humanity.¹⁵ He believes art makes individuals understand and transcend their oppressive and alienated condition. "A successful work of art can have the effect of catharsis; it could transform the "whole person of everyday life" into a "person as a

⁷ OPM is the shortened collective acronym for 'Original Pilipino/Pinoy Music'.

⁸ *Makabayan* means patriotic or nationalistic songs.

⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, Translated by Desmond Lee. (Penguin Classics, Penguin Group USA, Inc., 2003), 595a.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 603b.

¹² *Ibid.*, 595b.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 595a.

¹⁴ Titus Stahl. "Georg [György] Lukács," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2023 Edition).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

whole" by acquiring a sense of self-consciousness."¹⁶ Hence, art for Lukacs has a reflective and transformative capacity.

On the other hand, Friedrich Nietzsche believes life has no inherent meaning and that people should find it terrifying. He notes that the ancient Greeks knew this, they were exquisitely sensitive to the terrors and horrors of life.¹⁷ Nietzsche generated this conclusion by using the Greek myths as evidence, their myths reveal this terror of nihilism.¹⁸ The realization of the meaninglessness of life indeed is terrifying yet despite this, the Greeks still manage to strive and are still enthusiastic about life.¹⁹ This puzzle leads Nietzsche to conclude that it is because of their art that the Greeks still pursue to live a good life despite the terror of nihilism.²⁰ Nietzsche identifies two types of Greek art, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian arts are characterized by reason, harmony, order, and structure reflecting human desire to seek meaning in this chaotic world. It sought to overcome nihilism by teaching us to find joy in the phenomenal world, through the power of illusion such as that of Homer's work, it elevates our perception of the world.²¹ Dionysian art on the other hand embraces the contrary such as passion, instinct, chaos, and many other fundamental natures of life. Through Dionysian art, the Greeks overcome nihilism by finding joy behind phenomena and not in the phenomena.²² Behind the appearance of order, there is chaos that lies behind the surface of life which includes suffering and death. "Tragedy 'tames' the terrible by generating the feeling of the sublime."²³

These thinkers may hold different notions about art and their ideas fundamentally oppose each other, but they all share one thing in common, i.e., the belief that art is powerful. Art could transform, influence, deceive, or enlighten a person. Hence, it could have the power to change human consciousness and society.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Julian Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy from Plato to Žižek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 171.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Maceda's Artistic Re-awakening

The French thinker Rene Descartes was popular for his statement: "I think, therefore, I am." Descartes introduced a brand of philosophy that enables the individual to distinguish the self from the rest of his surroundings.²⁴ This "methodic doubt" approach which is the way to certainty, is crucial in his philosophy. This 'doubt-to-certainty' attitude of Descartes that became a backbone for his philosophy is also true for many people who were in dire search of themselves. This now cliché, "*I think, therefore, I am*" can also be expressed as "I doubt, therefore, I exist." Amidst all the skepticism, Descartes argues that there's just one thing that cannot be doubted – pointing back to the individual subject/self in which all the doubts exist, behind the doubt is a doubter. One cannot therefore doubt that he doubts. Such is Descartes's moment of introspection in his dream argument.²⁵ In a way, this is similar to the idea that José Maceda had based his work on.²⁶ Based on Ramon Santos's account in *Tunugan*, Maceda's colleague in France asked Maceda why he was playing a piece of music foreign to his Asian culture.²⁷ During such crucial emotional moments, this cultural dilemma had led Maceda to question his cultural origins, this led to introspection, seeking his racial identity, and asking about his native origins and cultural background. In terms of epistemic basis, there is an undeniable predominance –sort of a hegemony– of Western culture over most of modern life and human civilization. The same is true in music. Decolonization is about coming to terms with one's cultural origin or one's national and cultural identity.

Firstly, let us have a short biographical sketch of José Maceda's life in correspondence to his musical development. He was born on January 31, 1917 in Manila. His parents were Atty. Casto Maceda and

²⁴ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Jonathan Bennett Archives, 2005, 15.

²⁵ Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Michael Moriarty. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 13-17.

²⁶ Jose Monserrat Maceda was named a *National Artist of the Philippines* for Music in 1997 and signed by no other than Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos.

²⁷ Ramon Pagayon Santos, "Jose Montserrat Maceda: Rebellion, Non-Conformity, and Alternatives" in *Tunugan: Four Essays on Filipino Music*. The University of the Philippines Press, 2005, 125-178.

Concepcion “Concha” Monserrat. He was raised in a social environment filled with an interest in music especially because his grandfather, Pablo Monserrat, was a popular bandmaster. Maceda partly traces his roots to Pila, Laguna. During summer vacations, he was exposed to local traditions of ‘*Simbang gabi*’ (dawn/night novena mass, such as *misa de gallo*, aguinaldo mass), ‘*Flores de mayo*’ (flowers of May tribute vigil/ novena prayer to the Virgin Mary), and ‘*pabasa ng Pasyon*’ (Holy Week devotion).

Maceda studied piano with Victorina Lobregat, a well-known piano teacher connected with the Academy of Music in Manila. Maceda eventually entered the Academy and graduated with the highest honors. He then studied in Paris under Alfred Cortot at Ecole Normal de Musique. He earned his *Diplome de Virtuosite* with distinction after four years. Because of the outbreak of the Second World War, Maceda found a way to travel to the United States and eventually return to the Philippines.

Back in the Philippines, during the Japanese occupation period, Maceda continued to privately teach piano in Pila, Laguna, and other neighboring towns. After the Japanese war, he performed in concerts held in Luzon and the Visayas. Later, he joined the faculty of the UP Conservatory of Music in 1946. Wanting to enhance his piano skills, he went to the USA and studied at the Robert Schmitz School of Piano in San Francisco, California. Because the course he took in Paris was merely a diploma course, Maceda decided to enroll in studying Composition and Musicology at Queens College in New York for his academic degree. He continued and got his Master’s degree at the Columbia University. After that, he returned to the Philippines in 1952 and started practicing his musicology by researching the music of the pre-western Filipinos.

The *Strata*

The term “strata” refers to layers or a sequence of layers. Strata, as in stratification, is also used to identify people as in social classes, with designated social status and classification based on ethnicity, income, or education. In music, it pertains to the layers of frequencies producing unique sounds. It is a characteristic of the *musique concrète* movement which was very particular in experimenting with new and foreign sounds. In 1958, Maceda went again to France and studied the

musical phenomenon called *musique concrète* at the French National Radio under Pierre Schaeffer. He would later seek further studies and then receive his doctorate in ethnomusicology from the University of California in Los Angeles in 1963.

The movement *Musique Concrète* sought musical ideas that were different from what the Western sounds had produced. Iannis Xenakis was one of those who actively composed based on this ideology. He electronically manipulated sound to create something new and different. This movement also influenced Maceda. But, instead of doing the same manipulation, he rather introduced Asian instruments as his new material. Using the natural sounds from these instruments, Maceda amazingly produced something new for the Western world.

As Maceda searched for the sound and ideas of Asian music, he found that drone and melody were the main components of the Asian sound. According to Maceda, "Drone may be understood to be not only a sustained sound, a continuation of the long vibration of gongs but also a constantly repeating phrase of one or more pitches played by one or several instruments for the duration of the music."²⁸ The interlocking of these drones creates a sequence of overtones. Melody is heard as a result of this.²⁹

Another element of the music of the Asians is the concept of time. The Western idea of time is such that it is the product of a "linear, cause and effect entity of logic and matter."³⁰ Recordings of Western time were made through the writings of events. In Asia contrary to the Western idea, time was recorded through "recounting of oral literature and practice of old beliefs and traditions."³¹ Music in Asia then is "a product of perception more subtle than conscious thought in written documents."³²

²⁸ Maceda, Jose M. *Strata*. Musical Score. Manila: Unpublished, 1988.

²⁹ A beautiful example of drone and melody is the *tongatong*, which is the bamboo instrument typically used in the Kalinga province. The *tongatong* is traditionally used to communicate with spirits or ancestors in healing rituals. As an indigenous musical instrument, the cylinder form in bamboo is potential to produce a unique rhythm as the sound vibrations passes through the hollow chamber.

³⁰ Jose M. Maceda. "A Concept of Time in a Music of Southeast Asia (A preliminary account)." *Ethnomusicology* vol. 30, issue 1 (Winter, 1986): 11 – 53.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Jose M. Maceda. "A Concept of Time in a Music of Southeast Asia (A preliminary account)." *Ibid.*

A simple example would be the concept of time during sunset. The Western idea is that six o'clock in the evening would be an approximate time for the sun to set. Whether it be summer solstice or daylight saving time, still bright and warm or chilly and dark, 6 PM is a time set for cooking or dinner. However, in the Asian concept, the exact or specific "number" of the clock does not matter. When the sun is at a certain angle in the sky, that is the time to cook or to have dinner.

Producing the Sounds

Western composers of the *musique concrète* style strove to find new sounds. The Western view is that they looked for the degree of different elements in instrument sounds through isolation³³ and manipulation. Hence, they took the individual sound whether a trombone, flute, or radio frequency, and manipulated it electronically, especially during the performance. They then combined all these manipulations to create something collectively new from the individually existing sounds. The musical sounds are said to be differentiated and integrated – unity in diversity.

Maceda, on the other hand, did not manipulate the resultant sounds of the instruments but integrated indigenous instruments and natural sounds. Through this, he created sounds with timbres and colors in his compositions that were essential within the *musique concrète* principle.

Drone and Melody as Archetypal Portrayal of EDSA People Power

By combining the concept of drone and melody and plotting them against a backdrop of the notion of time influenced by Asia, Maceda composed music that was representative of the Asian soundscape. But this kind of representation was not enough for Maceda. According to one of his students, Dr. Jonas Baes, Maceda's compositions were more of a social commentary than a representation of society.³⁴ With this approach, the events during the bloodless

³³ Isolation is used within the Engineering terms 'differential'.

³⁴ See Jonas Baes, *Maceda, Spahlinger and the Dialectics of a "New Music" Praxis in Southeast Asian Modernity*. The University of the Philippines Press, 2023. See also

Philippine revolution of 1986 became fertile ground for Maceda's composition, *Strata*.

The dramatic occurrence of the EDSA Revolution became a pictographic social portrayal or exhibit of Maceda's work –*Strata*. Like *Strata*, the EDSA is the culmination of all protests of the Marcos regime or the tyrannical government since Martial Law of 1972. The bloodless revolution was a byproduct of the collective participation of the different sectors of the Philippine society from within and from abroad, the synchrony and symphony of sounds, so to speak, towards a common goal – e.g., to remove the seating tyrant in the Malacañang. In essence, the *Strata* embraces the Filipino spirit of unity and difference as the divergent Filipino communities were involved in that crusade against corruption in the administration of President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos. The various protests and varied groups were represented by the synchrony of sounds in drones. The fusion and combination of the distinct sounds and vibrations represent the mobilization of the different sectors of Filipino society from all walks of life, now in unison, and the chorus of protests mobilized in the streets of EDSA and Mendiola, as well as, all over the country.

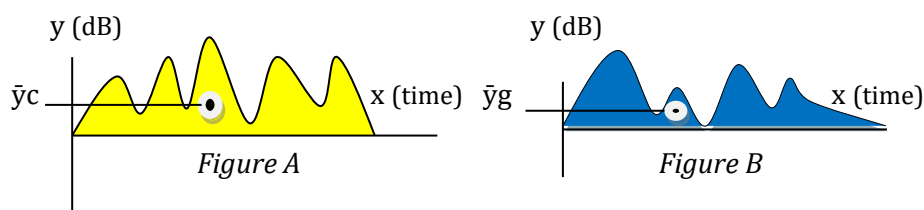
Understanding *Strata's* Musical Score

The written score of *Strata* is an oversized score of forty-three (43) pages. The Title Page contains a 'General Explanation' of the whole piece with an example plan for a stage performance. Brief instructions like tunings of the flutes, celli, and guitars are also written. The grouping of the instruments is made of focused and unfocused pitches. The focused pitches are the flutes, celli, and guitars. The unfocused ones are buzzers, sticks, and gongs. It was handwritten on large pages of graphing paper. According to Santos in *Tunugan*:

...Maceda intended to deconstruct the pitch functions of Western instruments by intentionally blurring their natural acoustical frequencies. While other composers would normally change the tuning of these instruments to dislocate their sounds from the standard temperament, their use would still be necessary in a "normal" melodic configuration to perceive their pitch

dislocation. Maceda, however, creates a totally "illogical" process by keeping their tunings in place but making them perform highly "non-western" musical structures, such as crisscrossing layers of scales or "unmelodic" sequence of pitches by the flutes, guitars, and cellos grouped in fives. It is through this highly unconventional technique that Maceda used these instruments to "cancel" out each other's tempered frequencies and make their sonorities approach "the opaque colors" of bamboo and wood, with the extended resonance and harmonic partials of the tam-tams as the interfacing agent between the pitched and non-pitched sounds.³⁵

Another thing that can be observed is that temperament is not the main issue in *Strata* but the centroidal mass frequency or overtone. Each instrument has a corresponding frequency. Each frequency has an independent overtone and mass frequency. The mass frequency is the density of sound. So, for example, when the sounds of the cello *ostinati* are combined with the decaying sound of the gongs, it creates a new density. The combination of these densities creates a new overtone. This new overtone is precisely what Maceda wishes to convey. The following illustration below demonstrates the calculated frequencies of sounds: Let us suppose that the frequency graph of a cello (Figure A) and gong (Figure B) is represented as:³⁶

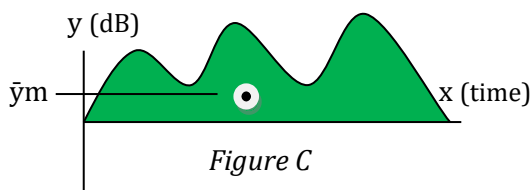


The y-axis represents the decibel count. The x-axis is the time element. The black dot in the middle is the overtone represented by the $\bar{y}$ -bar concerning time (x). The shaded area is the mass frequency. When the

³⁵ Ramon P. Santos, "Jose Montserrat Maceda: Rebellion, Non-Conformity, and Alternatives" in *Tunugan*, 2005, 125-178.

³⁶ For purposes of illustration: the green color (Figure C) is the resulting color combination of yellow (Figure A) and blue (Figure B). Kindly refer to the graphic illustrations in Figures A, B, and C.

frequencies from Figures A and B are combined, they produce a new density (See Figure C). This density will sound new to the listener.



Every mass frequency is a function of *time*. A new set of combined mass frequencies comes up with a single overtone. In *Strata*, the layering of instruments in every measure and time creates a mass sound with a single resultant overtone melody. The summation of all measures will produce a phrase of drone, and that of melody.³⁷

West Meets East

Western instruments that were combined with Eastern instruments were used by Maceda in *Strata*. The natural sound from the instruments is automatically combined with and homogenized. It created a new sound with the drone effect. Three layers of timbre are produced in *Strata*: steel, wood, and a combination of both. The timbre of steel is heard in the cello, flutes, and gongs. The timbre of the wood comes from the bamboo buzzers, sticks, and guitars. The combination of steel and wood sounds creates a set of drones and melodies.

The notation of *Strata* contains probabilities and permutations of the three timbre layers that were mentioned. Each layer contains the probabilities of the sound frequency. The combination of layers can be folded through permutation, with each layer producing more probabilities for the possible sounds produced. The final choice of notes for the piece depends on the composer and is nearly impossible to predict.

³⁷ The beauty in the concept of drone and melody is that it should be done synchronously and collectively as the resultant overtone melody effects cannot be achieved solitarily. The overall rhythm and synchrony are necessary to achieve drone and melody. Drone and melody can be understood as a transcendental concept of harmony and unity. The individuation must jibe to the collective spirit or the entire goal of the overall totality. Unity and diversity in its whole essence.

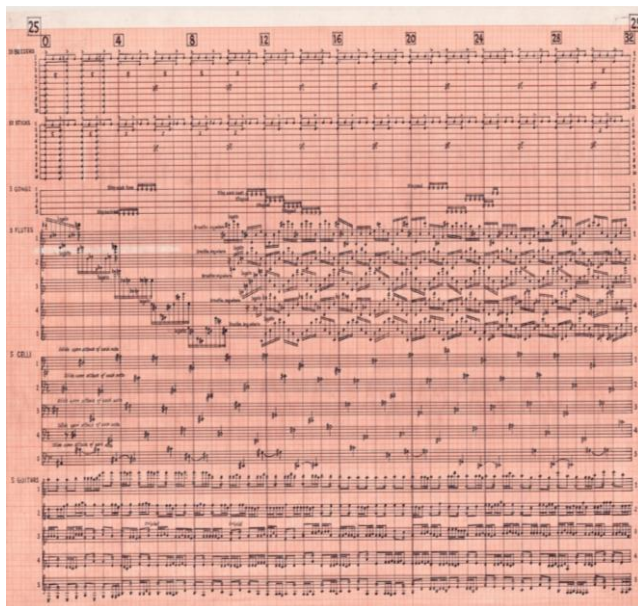


Illustration. Page 25 of Maceda's *Strata*. 1988, unpublished.³⁸

Concerning Maceda's Page 25 above, the unfocused-pitched instruments are the first three layers: buzzers, sticks, and gongs.³⁹ The focused-pitched instruments are the bottom three layers: flutes, cello, and guitars. On that same page in *Strata*, the buzzers, sticks, cello, and guitars provide the drone through the ostinati patterns. The flutes in the first few bars provide a certain disruption of this ostinati. The gongs also do the same thing producing sounds and vibrations in three different areas. These combinations result in an overtone melody.

Musique concrète influenced Maceda to search for "nothing."⁴⁰ In our analysis of the philosophy behind *Strata*, Maceda wanted to create

³⁸ A physical copy of the musical score of *Strata* is stored at the UP Center for Ethnomusicology in Maceda Hall, UP College of Music, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

³⁹ Jose Maceda, *Strata*. Manila: Unpublished, 1988.

⁴⁰ 'Nothing' is the sound concept of *Musique Concrète*, a movement that creates sound structures out of manipulated raw sounds. The sound concept of "nothing" as discussed in this paper is not anyhow related to the notion of "nothingness" as introduced in *Metaphysics*. In music, however, "nothing" is achieved when the musicians will not play the instrument for that certain duration, but the sustained

an integral use of frequency. It did not matter whether the materials used were Western or Asian. He wanted to create a "nothing" that could not destroy nature. He wanted to produce a sound of "nothing" from natural materials. Maceda intends not to alter or manipulate the unique frequencies of the given instruments being used.

This is different from the use of electronic devices or machines. Machines create a new sound by destroying the individual nature of the instrument. These are then used as materials and techniques for the music composition of *musique concrète*. This is something like what Iannis Xenakis did.⁴¹ He used an electronic machine to create a new sound. He looked for the differential elements of the frequency. These elements are the "nothing" that comes from the wholeness of the natural sound. By manipulating it, the elements of natural sound are destroyed or altered. Only a machine can do that. Being dependent on the creation of the machine for the production of something new can be dangerous to our society or the natural world. These little things that occurred in music can be reflected in future inventions of human societies, including musical and electronic instruments.

There is a saying that all things happening in nature will return to their natural state. If one destroys the path or norms of nature, it will eventually return to its natural path. In Maceda's philosophy, he creates "nothing" without destruction or manipulation. He creates "nothing" out of the natural reaction of nature. This results naturally because of the balance of nature. That is the explanation of the illustrations above, to present this scientific representation of the centroidal equilibrium of frequency. Nature always looks for equilibrium and balance. Even in statics and dynamics to become stable, it must be in equilibrium.

In *musique concrète*, they manipulated the sound by getting the differential elements from it and using it as material. In the principle of efficiency, the elements of sounds that they can get are at the maximum of only 75% of the expected sound, there is a loss of mass frequency. If it is returned to the original frequency, it will add another loss. In relating the above discussion to human society, this concept of the differential will create destruction. In a similar vein,

sounds go on. The music goes on without electronic disruption of the prolonged sounds.

⁴¹ Iannis Xenakis is one of the world's most revolutionary musical composers who helped change the landscape of modern musicology.

once the ideas of a mass of people can be manipulated, it will create chaos in our society. There will be no more common goal. Like the EDSA Revolution of 1986, the vested interests of some movers and actors in that bloodless revolution sabotaged the whole liberation process. The whole triumphant moment loses its meaning in the long run. It is the same in music, losing sight of the united goal or that common harmony will result in dissonance.

In Maceda's concept of drone and melody, he uses natural sound and integrates it to create a mass sound or mass frequency. The resulting efficiency is 100% natural mass frequency from 100% natural sound of instruments. Again in society, the concept will create integrity and result in a common idea with a pure un-manipulated sound. This was his philosophy with his work, *Strata*. This piece *Strata* was conceptualized right after the EDSA Revolution of 1986 with the revolutionary spirit and the new atmosphere at work serving as Maceda's inspiration.

Philosophical Insights Through Decoloniality

Decoloniality is a conscious politico-philosophical movement that aims to decentralize the dominating and imposing Western perspectives, standards, and worldviews of human culture.⁴² In music, the electronic frequencies and sound waves that are produced in sound engineering or the electric guitar for example would have serious and negative consequences to the environment implying that the use of modernized technologies is known to be destructive to the human planet. In contrast, the indigenous type of musicality uses only indigenous materials, such as bamboo, and wood, human sounds, and sounds produced by nature, such as dripping water and the chirping of birds, all these imply an environmentally friendly musicality.

Decolonial philosophy was introduced by Latin American thinkers, including, Enrique Dussel, Walter Dignolo, Maria Lugones, and Anibal Quijano. American sociologists, like Immanuel Wallerstein, also share some decolonial insights. Other postcolonial thinkers, like

⁴² See Walter D. Dignolo, "DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality, and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3 (March 2007), 449-514. See also, Menelito Mansueto, "Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation: Philosophical Reflections at the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Special Issue 2020, 173-208.

Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, had served as significant influences. Similar themes, however, can also be observed among the pioneering works of some Filipino thinkers, for example, in the works of Virgilio Enriquez, Renato Constantino, Zeus A. Salazar, Prospero Covar, and other similar scholars.⁴³ The inspiration of the EDSA People's Power also invigorates a sense of nationalism and national pride among the local artists that represent the country in the exchange of ideas in artistic musicality on the global stage, introducing a Filipino brand of musicality that we can be truly proud to call as our own.

Music and the Notion of Time

One way to understand the Filipino mind is through understanding how the Filipino regards the notion of time. Basically, for the Western understanding, time is linear, such as, for example, time often implies a beginning and a definite end. In contrast, Filipinos would regard time as something very abstract, and never specific. Unlike the Western clock that has a very specific minute hand, Indigenous Filipinos often relate to time with specific reference to nature and daily routine or activities. For instance, when the sun sets to disappear at dusk, it always means it is time to go home and then go to bed to wake up early the next day, especially in mountainous places where there is less activity to do during the darkness. Another instance is when asked about distance with unique reference to time, instead of saying 'It's a 5-minute walk', the Filipino might refer to one stick of tobacco to be consumed before one arrives at the place. In short, the Filipino understanding of time is indefinite. This is akin to what Leonardo Mercado had referred to as the non-dualistic (or non-linear concept of time, space, and causality, which is a Filipino harmony-with-nature orientation).⁴⁴

Since time is a very essential element in music, how time is understood can also be reflected in the way music is conceived. The Filipino understanding of time and music is rarely an expression of

⁴³ See Menelito Mansueto, *Decolonial Turn in the Philippine South* (USA: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2024), 60. See also, Menelito Mansueto, "Dance Music and Creative Resilience Within Prison Walls: Revisiting Cebu's Dancing Prisoners." *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 2, October 2019, 133-161.

⁴⁴ See Leornado N. Mercado, "Notes on the Filipino Philosophy of Work and Leisure," *Philippine Studies* 22 (1974), 71.

individuality, but often of collectivity –the individual participates in the collective goal. Through *Strata*, Maceda was able to express the Filipino character using his musical artistry. Time is portrayed in *Strata* as cyclical, instead of linear. The beginning is similar to the end, as the sound progresses in a recurring manner. There is no clear distinction between the beginning and the end, and the process is cyclical and repetitive. The unity in diversity of Filipinos is artistically demonstrated in EDSA, like in Maceda's *Strata* which consists of various layers producing a unity of diverse sounds.

Jose Maceda and Filipino Philosophy

Some Filipino philosophers and scholars preoccupy themselves with the question: "Is there a Filipino Philosophy?" The term Filipino itself is problematic since its current concept did not exist before the propaganda movement in the 1890s.⁴⁵ The word also meant differently during the Spanish colonial regime in the Philippines since it referred to the Spanish by blood but were born in the 'Philippines.' According to Anton Heinrich Rennesland, the people labeled as Filipino have diverse traditions, cultures, and even languages, hence the group of people called Filipino is hard to represent.⁴⁶ This concept of diversified Filipino is also emphasized by Christopher Ryan Maboloc. In his application of Chantal Mouffe's Radical Democracy, he also rejects a homogeneous Filipino society.⁴⁷ In his interpretation of phenomenal mass support of Rodrigo Duterte's presidency using the Radical Democracy concept as his lens, Maboloc viewed this mass support as rooted in the fact that Duterte represents the *Bisaya*, a particular group of people in Southern Philippines emphasizing its

⁴⁵ The archipelago was referred to as *Las Islas Filipinas* (The Philippine Islands) without necessarily referring to its people as Filipinos, instead the inhabitants are referred to as Indios. The Indios were the lowest-ranked group in the Spanish racial hierarchy. Nick Joaquin has an interesting argument against this point, to cite Joaquin: "The person may change from baby to child, and from boy to man, but through all these changes he will remain his person and cannot be another." See Nick Joaquin, "Culture as History," in *Culture and History*. (Mandaluyong City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2004), 19-21.

⁴⁶ Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, "Five Assumptions on the Illusion 'Filipino Philosophy' (A Prelude to a Cultural Critique)," *SURI*, 9:1, 2021, 76-89.

⁴⁷ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte," *Philippine Daily Inquirer (Inquirer.net)*, December 16, 2016.

difference from the people of Luzon dominated by the elites.⁴⁸ In Maboloc's interpretation, the sentiment of the Bisaya as understood by Duterte showcases that there is an ideological divide among the people that has been called Filipinos.⁴⁹

Jeremiah Joven Joaquin also notes that the concept of 'Filipino Philosophy' has different connotations among different scholars.⁵⁰ The Works of Gripaldo and Mabaquiao are good examples since the two took different paths as the former seeks to define what qualifies as a Filipino Philosopher, while the latter seeks to describe what qualifies as a work in Filipino Philosophy.⁵¹ In his 2014 paper, Feorillo Demeterio identifies at least twenty-six (26) Filipino scholars and philosophers assuming that indeed there are Filipino Philosophers.⁵² Demeterio supports Gripaldo's assumption then that there are Filipino Philosophers. However, according to Joaquin, the project that Mabaquiao lays down is a more interesting and relevant path to take than that of Gripaldo.⁵³ It reinstates once again the fundamental problem raised long before, i.e., whether there is a Filipino Philosophy or not at all. The truth of this question has become an important discourse among scholars in Filipino Philosophy. On the one hand, Emerita Quito denies the Filipino Philosophy's existence. With the elite philosophical orientation of Quito, nothing can qualify as Filipino Philosophy due to the harsh realities of life living in a third-world locality.⁵⁴ Leonardo Mercado, on the other hand, believes otherwise

⁴⁸ Christopher Ryan B. Maboloc, "Chantal Mouffe's Radical Democracy and Rodrigo Duterte's Radical Politics: A Second Reply to Critics," *Aradman: Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, Volume 3:1, 2024, 4.

⁴⁹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "President Duterte's Grammar of Dissent," *Philippine Daily Inquirer (Inquirer.net)*, August 9, 2018.

⁵⁰ Jeremiah Joven B. Joaquin, "Gripaldo and Mabaquiao on Filipino Philosophy: A Critical Assessment of Two Attempts to Establish a Filipino Philosophy," *Dalumat E-Journal*, 2010, Volume 1:1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Feorillo P. A. Demeterio, "Assessing the developmental potentials of some twelve discourses of Filipino philosophy," *Philippiniana Sacra* Vol. 69 (147), 2014, 189-230, 193.

⁵³ Joaquin, "Gripaldo and Mabaquiao on Filipino Philosophy: A Critical Assessment of Two Attempts to Establish a Filipino Philosophy," *Dalumat E-Journal*, 2010, Volume 1:1, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ This is to quote Quito's disapproval of something we can call Filipino Philosophy: "... There are no real philosophers in the strict sense. On the popular or grassroots level, the term "philosophy" is virtually unknown, but the term "pilosopo" (Pilipino word for "philosopher") is a pejorative name for anyone who argues

with some scholars behind him such as Rolando Gripaldo, and Florentino Timbreza, Mercado believes in the existence of Filipino philosophy.⁵⁵ Rolando Gripaldo, supporting Mercado, suggests that there is a Filipino Philosophy in the cultural sense.⁵⁶ The cultural sense or what Mercado calls an anthropological sense is a worldview of a certain group of people that is reflected in their way of thinking and behaving.⁵⁷ Therefore, this implies that Filipino philosophy, even though none of which is written, can still be observed in Filipino traditions. To support Mercado's claim, Timbreza agrees that there is Filipino Philosophy, and this philosophy is expressed by Filipinos through Indigenous dances, sayings, mythology, poems, epic, songs, chants, and riddles among others.⁵⁸ Similarly, Gripaldo also claims that Filipino Philosophy can be discovered from languages, folk tales, riddles, folk sayings, and many other Filipino traditions.⁵⁹

Young scholars like Menelito Mansueto also believe that Lumads or Indigenous people have their unique way of doing philosophy.⁶⁰ However, whether this infant involvement in the discourse supports Mercado's quest for a homogenous Filipino identity or supports Rennesland and Maboloc's emphasis on diversity is yet to be anticipated. However, although Rennesland emphasizes diversity in Philippine society, and even believes further that Filipino Philosophy is an illusion, he asserts that it is a necessary illusion.⁶¹ Napoleon Mabaquiao Jr. describes "Filipino philosophy as referring to any kind

lengthily, whether rightly or wrongly.... This is one reason that philosophy has not enjoyed the same prestige in the Philippines that it has in most European countries." Emerita S. Quito, *The State of Philosophy in the Philippines*. (Manila: De La Salle University Research Center, 1983) 9-10.

⁵⁵ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, (Tacloban City, Philippines: Divine Word University Publications, 1974), 3.

⁵⁶ Rolando M Gripaldo, "Filipino Philosophy: Past and Present," (*Kaisipan*, 1:1, 2013).

⁵⁷ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 4.

⁵⁸ Feorillo P.A. Demeterio III, "Status and Directions of Filipino Philosophy in Zalcita, Timbreza, Quito, Abulad, Mabaquiao, Gripaldo, and Co," (*φιλοσοφία*, Volume 14:2, 2013).

⁵⁹ Rolando M Gripaldo, "Filipino Philosophy: Past and Present," (*Kaisipan*, 1:1, 2013).

⁶⁰ Menelito Mansueto, *Decolonial Turn in the Philippine South* (USA: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2024), 65.

⁶¹ Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, "Five Assumptions on the Illusion 'Filipino Philosophy' (A Prelude to a Cultural Critique)," *SURI*, 9:1, 2021, 76-89.

of Philosophy that results from the activity of philosophizing by someone whose consciousness has the identity of being Filipino.”⁶²

Ballads, narratives, and music are some of the various indigenous Filipino traditions. José Maceda’s *Strata* could be interpreted either as a representation of Filipino culture, a social commentary, or an attempt to create a Filipino brand of music if it were to be called music at all based on Western standards. Unlike modern Western music, the *Strata* takes about twenty minutes long. If Maceda’s *Strata* is to be interpreted as an attempt to interpret a Filipino sort of tradition, it is not without reference. The *Komedya (Moro-Moro)*, *Pamuyong*, and the grander epics like *Hudhud* of Ifugao and *Darangen* of the Maranao people are chants or narrations that last for days or even weeks. Maceda may not have been the first person to contextualize this type of tradition.⁶³ Some traditions of this sort have also been attempted during the Spanish colonial period such as the *Pabasa ng Pasyon*. That we lost a certain part of our history and traditions, due to colonial interruption, does not mean at all that we cannot consider something to refer to as a Filipino Philosophy.

Conclusion

For Maceda’s ideas, culture has a different view of invention. The West and East have different concepts of creation. We in the East are based on the communal, the community. We do something for the better of our society. We do not paralyze the ideas of the community for the ideas of a certain person. In general, we are not individualistic in character. José Maceda was a concert pianist, composer, ethnomusicologist, and philosopher with high social consciousness. He grew up in an atmosphere that is highly cultural and musical situated in a very challenging political time. Spanish and American-influenced music surrounded him. But because of his philosophical and nationalistic mindset, he started looking for music that he could say was Filipino. Instead of rejecting Western influences, he used them in his compositions and added Philippine indigenous music. Maceda took

⁶² Napoleon M. Mabaquio, Jr. “Pilosophiyang Pilipino: Isang Pagsusuri,” *Philippine Social Sciences Review*, vol. 55, issue 1-4, 1998, 203-215.

⁶³ See Francisco Feliciano. *Four Asian Contemporary Composers: The Influence of Tradition in their Works*. (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983), 31-109.

it a step further by researching Asian sounds. He theorized the difference between the context of time in music between the West and the East. He also theorized that the music in Asia is primarily drone and melody. He further stated that a combination of drones brings about a resultant melody. In his compositions, the drone and melody figure strongly especially in his 1988 work, *Strata*.

Taking sides was not a habit of Maceda but in his musical works, the social commentaries on the political situation in the country were observed. *Strata* was finished in 1988 merely two years after the first EDSA Revolution in 1986. Maceda saw that the various sectors of Filipino society were acting individually, but working toward a common goal of ending a dictatorship. This was his inspiration in *Strata*. The mass of people is represented in the massive sound of the drones. The resultant melody is the clamor of the people for democracy. A subtle form of protest through authentic music that cannot be easily, or readily known by the political agents. More than his many-faceted musical life, Dr. José Monserrat Maceda was a philosopher who embedded his wisdom into his life, writings and works. The layers of such an awesome life of a musical and political figure are found in the layering of *Strata*.⁶⁴ Filipino thinkers Leonardo Mercado, Rolando Gripaldo, and Florentino Timbreza have similarly argued in the assertion that there is what we can refer to as Filipino philosophy, which is not written, but we can excavate from Filipino traditions, such as in music, cultural practices, or literature (poetry, riddles, among many others).

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