

A World of Asian Percussion and Dance: Immersive Workshops for Educational Institutions in Los Angeles

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In January 2023, we applied successfully for a UCLA Chancellor's Arts Initiative Grant to fund six educational workshops in percussion and dance traditions of Asia. They were to be held between June and December 2023 under the auspices of (a) a public high school within Los Angeles County, (b) the non-profit Sounds Like LA (SLLA, formerly Santa Monica Youth Orchestra), and (c) Pilipino Studies/Samahang Pilipino at UCLA, with a final Zoom feedback session with several of the participants.¹ In this report, we set out

- The background to and rationale for the project
- The choice of workshop locations, traditions, and artists
- The logistics of the project and manner of documentation
- A description of the six workshops
- An analysis of the Zoom feedback session
- Conclusions

Background to and rationale for the project

The ethnic and cultural diversity of the Los Angeles area is reflected in innumerable community activities and festivals featuring traditional and popular musics from the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific,² and both community groups and nonprofits aiming to support the performing arts of different communities across California are a very visible presence

¹ Helen Rees, a professor and director of the World Music Center in the UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology, was the PI for the grant. Learsy Martinez, a doctoral student in the Department of Ethnomusicology with over fifteen years' experience teaching high school English, art and music in local public high schools, was hired as the student project assistant. We planned the project together. We are grateful to the school district's research committee, whose members gave permission for the two workshops in the high school; the high school principal and teachers who generously and enthusiastically facilitated the workshops; Shabnam Fasa and her colleagues at Sounds Like LA (SLLA), formerly Santa Monica Youth Orchestra, who gave permission for and organized the three workshops presented to their students; the UCLA Pilipino Studies minor and UCLA Samahang Pilipino for helping recruit UCLA students for the final workshop at UCLA; Supeena Insee Adler, Instrument Curator at the World Musical Instrument Collection in the UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology, for suggesting this project in the first place and organizing the provision of *sarunay* for four of the workshops; *kathak* dancer Sufi Raina and *tabla* performer Miles Shrewsbury for presenting the *kathak* workshops; members of Ube Arte for presenting the four *kulintang* workshops; the three project participants and SLLA director who joined the final Zoom feedback session; and the UCLA IRB for approving the project (IRB #23-000656). The school district's letter of approval included a requirement to identify neither the district nor the school, hence our omitting the name of either one in this report. We would also like to thank Julius Reder Carlson, Shabnam Fasa, Miles Shrewsbury, and Mary Talusan for reading drafts of this report to ensure accuracy for their sections.

² For figures on "race and ethnicity" in Los Angeles County from the 2020 Census, see <https://www.laalmanac.com/population/po726.php#:~:text=Los%20Angeles%20County's%20population%20grew,recently%20released%20new%20Census%20numbers>. Residents identifying as Hispanic/Latino comprised 48% of the population of just over ten million; those identifying as White alone (which includes the very substantial Middle Eastern/North African communities) comprised 32.5%; those identifying as Asian alone comprised 15%; those identifying as Black/African American alone comprised 7.9%. All websites given in the footnotes were accessible as of March 2025.

in the region.³ Teaching of specific traditions is also widespread in some cases—often, but not always, mostly within the community of origin.⁴ Local K–12 music classes and teacher education, however, seldom reflect this diversity, instead mostly emphasizing genres and instruments derived from Western art music, band, and sometimes jazz; there are some welcome exceptions in the form of mariachi programs in a few local middle and high schools.⁵

In January 2022, faculty from the Department of Ethnomusicology and the Music Education program within the Department of Music began informal discussions about what could be done to offer more opportunities for music education students and local K–12 schoolteachers to learn about musics from around the world; ideas have ranged from intensive summer programs to, ideally, a master's in music education with a focus on world music, for which, at least anecdotally, there seems to be considerable demand. UCLA would be perfectly positioned to offer these options, featuring as it does one of the leading ethnomusicology programs in the Western world, along with one of the top music education programs in California.⁶ Furthermore, such a move would be responding to rising demand for culturally responsive education (CRE) in the music education sector.⁷

While these are longer-term goals, the present more modestly conceived project took inspiration from related literature on the value of seeking to engage musically with communities from which children come, and indeed with local communities more broadly. Local community engagement

³ The Filipino American arts collective Ube Arte, with whom we collaborated on this project, is an excellent example of the former (<https://ubearte.org/>), and the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (<https://actaonline.org/>) of the latter.

⁴ For example, among the Latina/o community, the School of Performing and Visual Arts at Plaza de la Raza in the Lincoln Heights area of East Los Angeles schedules "classes, art exhibits, and cultural events [that] celebrate Latinx arts and culture by and for the local community." The school offers extensive mariachi classes, from beginner through advanced, for all ages, and includes folklorico and danza Azteca in its dance program (<https://www.plazadelaraza.org/class-schedule>). Many Asian American groups also provide performing arts learning opportunities primarily for their own community, such as the Thai classical music and dance classes for children organized by many Thai temples (e.g., Wat Thai in North Hollywood, <https://www.watthailosangeles.com/weekend-services/>).

⁵ There are perhaps twenty-plus mariachi programs that reach K–12 children in Los Angeles County, a few incorporated into formal classes during the school day, but more that are community-run and meet before or after school and may include students from different local schools (information confirmed by mariachi expert Jessie Vallejo by email, 3 September 2024).

⁶ From numerous discussions, it is apparent that this is easier said than done. California's music teacher credentialing requirements and the UCLA Department of Music ensemble requirements are rather rigid, leaving music education students little room in their schedule for world music academic classes or ensemble playing. In addition, setting up an entirely new master's program will be a major bureaucratic undertaking.

⁷ For an overview of the concept of culturally responsive education as it applies to music education, see Bond 2017. She notes that "If repertoires are limited to Eurocentric traditions, students can become indifferent to school music, as it may not contain the same musical complexity or process-orientation as home music constructions. Furthermore, when one way of musical knowing is held in greater esteem than others, such as is often the case for notation literacy, the musicality of some communities is diminished. CRE calls for the public validation of culture, which should include not just heritage repertoires, but also explicit use and valuing of various music literacies" (ibid.:160). There is an increasing literature on the importance of integrating a diversity of musical traditions into K–12 music education, and on ways to do it (e.g., the Routledge World Music Pedagogy Series). For a survey of earlier discussions on related topics, see Volk 1993.

has been a longstanding strength of the Department of Ethnomusicology,⁸ and one that could usefully be leveraged for any future collaborations with the Music Education program; it also resonates with the increasing emphasis placed by UCLA on community engagement.⁹ Patricia Shehan Campbell, one of the most influential voices over the last decades in culturally diverse K–12 music education, underlines the benefits of bringing local artist-musicians into schools for short residencies, noting that they "are valued for the musical knowledge and skills they bring, and for their capacity to frame their songs, tunes, and rhythms with a cultural perspective that only they can have" (2018:143). Or, as another longtime global music education pioneer, Huib Schippers, puts it, "If you want to learn about world music, communicate with musicians and communities around you"; he also advocates for addressing the diversity of learning styles from different traditions (2010:168–169). Our long experience in the UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology of providing one-off workshops and week-long intensive immersion courses for undergraduate and high school students, mostly on our own campus, provided a further foundation for our endeavor: while we would have to adapt our techniques and cope with more complicated logistics when working with other institutions and locales, we had significant past experience of similar projects and a sense of what might and might not work.¹⁰ The research question driving the application for the Chancellor's Arts Initiative grant was the following: *How can greater diversity of hands-on musical experience, and greater awareness of the city's plethora of performing arts, be introduced to local educational institutions?*

Choice of workshop locations, traditions, and artists

With grant awards announced as ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 and most expected to be around \$10,000, we crafted the application to cover six workshops at a cost of \$10,025, and this amount was approved.¹¹ We proposed three contrasting locales:

- a high school in Los Angeles County in a historically under-resourced community that does not have formal music classes during the day¹²
- the local non-profit Sounds Like LA, which provides no-cost lessons and ensemble playing in Western classical music and a variety of world music traditions to elementary-,

⁸ For examples of such projects undertaken in collaboration with African American, Filipino American, and Thai/Thai American communities, see Johnson 2012, Lipat-Chesler and Talusan 2020, and Adler 2024.

⁹ See, for example, the website of the UCLA Center for Community Engagement for a plethora of programs, courses, and funding opportunities in this area (<https://communityengagement.ucla.edu/>). The first of the five goals of the UCLA Strategic Plan for 2023–2028, to "deepen our engagement with Los Angeles," also speaks to this commitment (<https://strategic-plan.ucla.edu/>).

¹⁰ Recent examples of the former include the annual two-hour hands-on workshops on *sitar* and *rag*, *tabla* and *tal*, and Thai classical and folk music provided to my (Rees's) undergraduate majors in the survey of Asian musics (Ethnomusicology 20C) by my colleagues Rahul Neuman, Miles Shrewsbury, and Supeena Insee Adler. A recent example of the latter is the week-long 2022 World Music Summer Intensive for high school students organized by Supeena Insee Adler (<https://schoolofmusic.ucla.edu/app/uploads/2022/03/2022-World-Music-Sumer-Intensive-Flyer.pdf>).

¹¹ Email to Helen Rees from Kathleen Sprunger, Associate Director of Research Enhancement, 2 March 2023. The majority of the sum awarded was for honoraria to the musicians providing the workshops (\$8,000) and the student project assistant (Learsi Martinez) (\$1,040). The rest covered travel expenses (gas) and the cost of insurance for three Ube Arte representatives who presented the on-campus workshop (Budget printout, collection of Helen Rees). In the end we came in almost \$800 under budget.

¹² The school is a Title 1 school (<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=158>). Its students are mostly from Hispanic and AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) communities.

middle-, and high-school-aged children on the west side of Los Angeles, many from underserved communities¹³

- on campus at UCLA, primarily for undergraduate and graduate students engaged in Pilipino studies and/or Samahang Pilipino¹⁴

The contrasting bodies of students (different ages and stages of education) and location (a formal high school setting, a non-profit where everyone attended voluntarily, and our own campus) would allow for comparisons as to what approaches and techniques worked in different settings.

We selected two traditions with which to work: *kathak* dance accompanied by *tabla* from North India; and *kulintang* music and the associated dance from the Southern Philippines.¹⁵ We chose these traditions for the following reasons:

- Los Angeles County has the largest Asian-descended population of any U.S. county (1,488,626 in 2020), with those of South Asian and Filipino descent among the biggest communities,¹⁶ yet their performing arts are mostly absent from formal education outside their own communities
- Tradition-bearers of both traditions generally welcome the opportunity to share their art with people from all backgrounds
- The World Musical Instrument Collection of the UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology owns twenty sets of *tabla* and twenty-five sets of *sarunay* (tuned gong-sets used to teach *kulintang*), all relatively portable
- From past experience, we know that these two genres are immediately attractive to American youth
- Including both music and dance would offer the option of physical movement, and would be likely to appeal to more students than music alone
- In the case of *kulintang*, UCLA had recently (in 2020) instituted a Pilipino Studies minor and has a long-standing, very active Samahang Pilipino student group, yet does not offer performing arts classes related to the Philippines; given these circumstances, several undergraduates had expressed enthusiasm for an immersive workshop

In selecting artists to lead the workshops, we aimed to invite professional performers with deep roots in the local community and experience teaching and running workshops. For *kathak* dance, our invitees were Sufi Raina, a fine dancer from San Diego who runs her own studio and has taught at the Center for World Music in San Diego; and Miles Shrewsbury, an excellent *tabla* performer who shares *tabla* teaching in our department with his mentor Abhiman Kaushal, has

¹³ For Sounds Like LA, see <https://soundlikela.org/>. The nonprofit provides free music lessons and ensemble playing in Western art music and several world traditions to children on the west side of Los Angeles. There is a particular focus on underserved communities, such as the large Central American population in the area. The founders, organizers, teachers, and students are all from very culturally diverse backgrounds.

¹⁴ Founded in the 1970s, UCLA's Samahang Pilipino is a very active student organization that aims to serve the Pilipinx and Pilipinx American community on campus and more broadly (<https://www.pcmcatucla.org/samahangpilipino.html>). On the establishment of the Pilipino Studies minor in fall 2020, see Wolf 2021.

¹⁵ Useful introductions to these genres and instruments include Santos 1998 (on *kulintang*); Ruckert 2004, Chapter 4 (on rhythm and drumming in North Indian classical music); Walker 2014 (on *kathak* dance); and Ellorin 2020 (on *kulintang*).

¹⁶ The 2020 Census recorded 126,658 residents of South Asian descent and 339,427 of Filipino descent (<https://www.laalmanac.com/population/po16.php>).

his own studio in San Diego, and has also taught for the Center for World Music.¹⁷ Both have ample experience introducing their tradition to people of all ages. For *kulintang*, we invited the Los Angeles-based arts collective Ube Arte to run the workshops; three of the founding members, Mary Talusan, Eleanor Lipat-Chesler, and Bernard Ellorin, are graduates of our department and began working together in the late 1990s while giving lecture-demonstrations on *kulintang* for UCLA classes. By 2023 they had a quarter of a century's experience of sharing their knowledge with community members and others through performances, masterclasses, lecture-demonstrations, and workshops.¹⁸ We had seen them in action in the workshop format multiple times and knew how practiced and effective they are.

Project logistics and manner of documentation

The logistics of this project were complex. While we had discussed the idea with prospective participants ahead of time, the fact that notification of the grant came in early March 2023 with all funded activities needing to be wrapped up by 31 December 2023 led to a very tight time schedule. I (Rees) had to complete the lengthy UCLA IRB forms for us to be permitted to undertake the project, after which I had to obtain similar permission from the school district's research committee for the two high school workshops.¹⁹ We then had to juggle the schedules of the artists and locations, as well as our own schedules, since both of us had heavy teaching and other duties during fall 2023, when most of the workshops and the Zoom feedback session fell. Some sessions both of us could attend and document; others only one of us could go to (Table 1). Where we could both go, i.e., the last two *kulintang* workshops, we split our efforts, with one documenter concentrating on the learning of the music and the other on the learning of the dance.

Date	Tradition presented	Location	Institution/group for whom presented	Documenter
2023.06.11 (10:30am)	<i>kathak/tabla</i>	UCLA Fowler Museum, Outdoor Amphitheater	Sounds Like LA	Rees
2023.06.11 (12:00 noon)	<i>kathak/tabla</i>	UCLA Fowler Museum, Lenart Auditorium	Sounds Like LA	Rees
2023.10.17 (10:45am)	<i>kulintang</i>	High school No.1 classroom	High school	Martinez (Rees had to leave after 30 mins.)
2023.10.24 (10:45am)	<i>kulintang</i>	High school No.1 classroom	High school	Martinez

¹⁷ Founded in San Francisco in 1963 under the name "American Society for Eastern Arts," the Center for World Music moved to San Diego in 1979. It offers educational programming, concerts, and other opportunities for engagement with performing arts from around the world to people of all ages, including in-school courses at K–12 level (<https://centerforworldmusic.org/>). For more on Sufi Raina, see <https://centerforworldmusic.org/2018/08/sufi-raina/>; for more on Miles Shrewsbury, see <https://milesshrewsbury.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁸ On Ube Arte, see <https://ubearte.org/>.

¹⁹ Both entities were efficient and helpful, for which we were very grateful. Sounds Like LA found oversight by the UCLA IRB acceptable.

2023.11.28 (10:00am)	<i>kulintang</i>	High school No.2 auditorium	Sounds Like LA	Martinez and Rees
2023.12.02 (1:00pm)	<i>kulintang</i>	Gamelan Room, UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology	Pilipino Studies and Samahang Pilipino, UCLA	Martinez and Rees
2023.12.14 (11:00am)	N/A	Zoom	Feedback session with six participants	Zoom transcript

Table 1: Timeline of workshops and Zoom feedback session.

Logistics also directed how we were able to document the workshops. With many participants under the age of eighteen and the requirement to protect their anonymity,²⁰ we eschewed any form of video or audio recording, and any still photography (other than a few shots in some settings showing the set-up of the instruments, mikes, etc., with only the presenting artists in the frame). No interviews with students or supervising teachers/organizers were conducted. As documenters, we took handwritten notes and created hand-drawn diagrams of class set-ups, typing them up afterwards. The final Zoom feedback session consisted of six people: the two of us, plus Shabnam Fasa, director of SLA; Miles Shrewsbury, representing the *kathak/tabla* workshops; Mary Talusan, representing Ube Arte; and Mel Liu, representing the UCLA adult students who had participated in the *kulintang* session on 2 December 2023.

As we documented the workshops, we bore the following guiding questions in mind:

- What techniques are the artists leading the workshop using to teach students the basic principles of the percussion instruments and music? (Demonstration, imitation, playing the instruments simultaneously with students, verbal explanation, gestures, answering queries, etc.?)
- What techniques are the artists leading the workshop using to teach students the dance movements and aesthetic? What technique seem to work best to convey the footwork, arm postures, and rhythmic framework? (Demonstration, imitation, dancing simultaneously with students, verbal explanation, gestures, answering queries, etc.?)
- Are there differences in the efficacy of different teaching techniques with groups of students who have more or less experience with music and/or dance in general?
- How are the artists leading the workshop using PowerPoint, audio recordings, videos, storytelling, etc., to convey the cultural context of the music and dance, and what seems most effective at generating interest and discussion with different age groups and in different settings? What kinds of questions do students come up with about the music and dance, and how effectively are the artists able to answer, and to put across an insider's sense of what the music and dance mean to the originating community?

²⁰ As per the requirements of the UCLA IRB and the school district's research committee, high school students wishing to participate in the workshops signed an assent form and had a parent or guardian sign a consent form; Sounds Like LA students had a parent or guardian sign a consent form; UCLA students were provided with a research information sheet.

After each workshop, we wrote down more subjective thoughts as to our overall impression of the session—what was successful, what could be done better next time? And where unexpected circumstances arose, how were they navigated?²¹

The two Sounds Like LA *kathak*/*tabla* workshops, 11 June 2023

Both workshops took place on the same day, Sunday 11 June 2023, as part of the annual spring concert of Sounds Like LA, titled "Creativity in the Courtyard: Music and Art with the Santa Monica Youth Orchestra."²² This was held at the Fowler Museum at UCLA, partially indoors (Lenart Auditorium) and partially outdoors (Amphitheater). About five hundred people (children and parents) attended the event. The centerpieces of the day were the concert by the "orchestral groups" (Western orchestral instruments, 1:30–2:30pm, indoors) and the concert by the "world groups" ('ukulele, Balkan ensemble, mariachi, and tutti piece, 3–4:30pm, outdoors). The morning was devoted to rehearsals, and the two hour-long workshops were slotted in as follows:

- 10:30am (for the world music students, in the Amphitheater, as the orchestral rehearsal was underway in the Auditorium)
- 11:30am (for the orchestral students, in the Auditorium, as the world music rehearsal was underway in the Amphitheater)

In addition, the two workshop artists, Sufi Raina and Miles Shrewsbury, graciously agreed to perform for fifteen minutes at 3pm, when the world music concert started.

In discussion ahead of time with the Sounds Like LA (SLLA) administrators, I (Rees) learned that the non-profit had not yet included Indian music of any genre in their programming for students, so they were happy to have the opportunity to present a "taster" for the children, and to engage them with something new and interesting during the morning downtime when they were not rehearsing for their performances. I had obtained permission from UCLA's senior *tabla* instructor, Professor Abhiman Kaushal, and the Instrument Curator, Professor Supeena Insee Adler, for us to bring several sets of *tabla* across campus for the children to try, but the space constraints were such that this was not possible, either indoors or outdoors. The same space constraints made it impossible for us to have the children try out the footwork of the *kathak* dance.

As noted above, the 10:30am workshop was for the world music group students and was held in the Amphitheater. Sufi and Miles, wearing traditional Indian attire, were stationed on the flat concrete surface at the bottom of the bowl-shaped space, while about forty-five people—children and parents—spread out on the concrete steps and grassy slopes of the space, which can comfortably hold two hundred. By the end of the workshop, sixty people had gathered. Most children appeared to be around middle-school age, with a few younger and a few older.

Miles and Sufi began by introducing themselves, explaining what *tabla* and *kathak* are, and providing a well-received 4-minute performance to begin the workshop (Figures 1a and 1b).

²¹ Below we present summaries of our notes for the first four workshops, while for the last two, we present lightly edited versions of our complete hand-written notes, to give a sense of the details we noted down for all six. We chose the last two to present in their entirety because they were covering similar material, but for different age groups and settings, and because both of us were able to be present to take notes.

²² Publicity for the day may be found at <https://fowler.ucla.edu/events/creativity-in-the-courtyard-a-day-of-art-and-music-with-santa-monica-youth-orchestra/>. All notes for these two workshops were taken by Helen Rees.

Tabla can be very virtuosic, and *kathak* features dramatic still poses between movements, so this vibrant short performance immediately engaged audience attention.



Figures 1a and 1b: Sufi and Miles provide a short performance at the start of the outdoor workshop, 11 June 2023. Photos by Helen Rees.

Miles continued by explaining the basics of *tabla*, getting the audience to repeat the right- and left-hand *bol* (finger stroke) sounds back to him;²³ they started laughing as the *bol* patterns got faster and faster. Miles changed topics about every three to four minutes, including anecdotes of his own learning of *tabla*, the concept of the *tal* time-cycle, and how to clap out the 16-beat cycle *tintal*.²⁴ At one point, three children were moving bodily to the rhythms. Miles finished by playing a virtuosic composition in *tintal* with the audience keeping the *tal* for him; there was spontaneous applause at the end.

Half an hour in, Sufi took over, explaining *kathak* as the classical dance of North India, and that it has two sections, "technical" and "storytelling." She showed the different hand gestures that represent different deities and demonstrated the complex dance steps, with Miles accompanying on *tabla*. Speaking the *bol* patterns, she showed how they are expressed in dance steps. The workshop concluded with *gat nikas*²⁵ and applause.

Most members of the audience were engaged most of the time, and several people were taking photos and videos. When Miles invited questions, two adults spoke up, asking more about the drums' names and how long it took for Miles to become a professional-level *tabla* player. No children asked questions. The SLLA administrator present was extremely pleased with the workshop.

²³ *Bols* are syllables spoken to represent different strokes on the *tabla* (Wade 1987:150–151).

²⁴ The commonest *tal*, or rhythmic cycle, in North India classical music; it is easy for people who grew up with Western music to grasp quickly, as it contains sixteen beats divided into four groups of four. When counting it, the first, fifth, and thirteenth beats are marked by a clap, the ninth by a silent wave (Ruckert 2004:42).

²⁵ Graceful form of dance within *kathak* whereby dancer imitates the movements of particular characters as they walk.

For the noon workshop, we moved into the indoor Lenart Auditorium, just behind the amphitheater. This seats about 325 people. For this workshop, about sixty people were present, mostly children under the age of twelve, with fewer parents than at the previous workshop. Miles and Sufi set up the same equipment as before, but this time on a very narrow stage. The SLLA administrator encouraged everyone to come to the front, so that there was a very concentrated audience, and most of them were also closer to Sufi and Miles. This had the advantage of everyone being able to see hand movements clearly on *tabla* and in the dance (Figure 2). The content was similar to the first workshop, with the closer proximity allowing for more back and forth between presenters (for example, chanting *bols*, and imitating *mudra* hand gestures). Two children and one adult at the end asked questions, about how long Sufi had been learning *kathak*, whether the *tabla* has sheet music, and how many sounds the *tabla* has.



Figure 2: Sufi demonstrates a hand gesture in the indoor workshop, 11 June 2023. Photo by Helen Rees.

This workshop setting had advantages over the first one. The children were mostly very engaged, and more continuously so than at the first one. Reasons for this could include the much tighter space and the lack of distractions from nature. Two children asked questions, while it was only adults doing so at the first one. And this was despite the fact that there were fewer adults present at the second one, and the children were much younger. As with the first workshop, there was unfortunately not enough space for the children to try out the dance movements, which would have been ideal.

Sufi and Miles's final contribution to the day was a short *kathak* performance in the Fowler Amphitheatre, just after 3pm. This opened the official world music concert. As my notes taken at the time document, the Amphitheater was packed, and extra audience members were standing above the Amphitheater to watch. There were 250–300 people, including children, parents, grandparents, and siblings. It was a very ethnically and culturally diverse group. Sufi and Miles

performed for about fifteen minutes, to great applause at the end (Figure 3). All the SLLA representatives present said they were very happy with how the insertion of the *kathak/tabla* workshops and performance segment had gone. As noted above, it was the first time SLLA had had any Indian music content.



Figure 3: Sufi and Miles perform at the beginning of the world music concert, to a packed Amphitheater, 11 June 2023. Photo by Helen Rees.

At the end of the day, I noted down my overall impressions. Miles and Sufi's long experience of teaching children, as well as their impressive music/dance skills, was crucial to the success of these one-off workshops. They were able to adapt quickly to challenges—such as Miles's lifting the mike that had been placed too low in the first workshop so that he could make eye contact with the audience, which visibly improved audience engagement immediately. They broke the time up into small, digestible chunks, alternating performance and well-pitched explanations/stories, and despite not having the space to have the children actually try the drums or dance steps, found other ways to get the children to participate—imitating Sufi's hand gestures, for example, or counting out *tintal*. Their sheer virtuosity also caught everyone's attention, for instance with people laughing in amazement as *bols* and *tabla* hand movements sped up. The somewhat different reactions of the audiences in the outdoor Amphitheater (spread out, physically distanced from the workshop leaders, and with many distractions of birds, people walking past, airplane and helicopter noise, etc.) and the indoor Lenart Auditorium highlighted the significance of location, space, and distraction.

The four *kulintang* workshops

These were all run by members of Ube Arte. For the major instruments used, see Figure 4, from a prior public performance.



Figure 4: Members of Ube Arte performing in the Gamelan Room at UCLA for the annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai'i Chapter, 5 March 2016. From left: Marlo Campos, dabakan; Mary Talusan, gandingan; Bernard Ellorin, kulintang; Eleanor Lipat, agong. Photo by Helen Rees.

The two high school *kulintang* workshops, 17 and 24 October 2023

Both workshops were 90 minutes long. The first workshop began at 10:45am, with the principal welcoming everyone.²⁶ Twelve students had signed up to participate. Ahead of time, we had set up twelve *sarunay*,²⁷ mallets, and seat cushions in the small room so that participants could face the workshop leaders. The three workshop leaders from Ube Arte, Mary Talusan, Marlo Campos, and Jasmine Orpilla, set up their *kulintang*, two large *agong* gongs, and *dabakan* drum at the front of the room.²⁸

The workshop leaders introduced themselves and then played a short piece, switching off among the different instruments. This was a striking way to begin the workshop, and students were immediately interested and attentive. Mary then led a brief history of the Philippines using PowerPoint, engaging with the students in a dialogue that covered the country's location; history of colonization; the history of the bronze instruments that dominate much music in the southern region; and the failure of the Spanish colonizers to conquer the southern region, leading to the retention to this day of the non-Europeanized *kulintang* traditions.

After about fifteen minutes, Jasmine, the dance specialist, took the floor, playing a recording of the ocean and talking with the students about how many of the dance movements are based on the movement of the waves and the ocean. She then put the decorative finger extensions (*pangalay*) on her fingers and demonstrated the hyperextended hand gestures while moving gracefully across the floor, accompanied by *kulintang*. In response to lively student questions, Jasmine explained how the center of gravity is in the waist and centered on the ground, with music and dance working together.

²⁶ The notes for these workshops were taken by Learsy Martinez.

²⁷ *Sarunay* are metallophones from the southern Philippines. Eight tuned knobbed metal plates are strung atop a wooden frame and played with mallets. They are often used as a cheaper, more portable alternative to the *kulintang*. For a photograph of *sarunay*, see Figure 6.

²⁸ For photos and explanations of the instruments of the Maguindanao *kulintang* ensemble, see <https://centerforworldmusic.org/2021/09/instrument-kulintang/>.

About half an hour in, the workshop leaders had the students sit in front of their *sarunay*, with Marlo demonstrating the *kulintang* and noting that "the faster I play, the slower the dancer goes." He explained the sticking technique, and for about twenty-five minutes everyone worked on this, with the workshop leaders moving among the students to give individual assistance. After everyone had grasped the basic principles, Marlo invited the students up one by one to play the big *kulintang* at the front of the room, with Mary teaching students the rhythm of the *agong* gongs.

A little over an hour into the workshop, Jasmine took over again to teach basic dance and hand movements, using vivid instructions such as "Imagine you're picking up a bunch of marbles and scoop up, curl and then drop, making your hands have dexterity." She encouraged the students to try the wave-like squatting motion, which everyone enjoyed as Marlo and Mary played *kulintang* and *dabakan* to accompany them. Jasmine reminded everyone that "the faster he plays, the slower we go."

The last ten minutes or so were allotted for questions and discussion. Students were thoroughly engaged throughout the workshop, and several now came up with thoughtful questions, including how long it took the Ube Arte artists to learn the music and dance, and what the meaning of the painted patterns on the wooden *kulintang* stand was. With some students in the class stating that they were themselves of Filipino descent, there was also discussion of the different parts of the Philippines. At the end, students helped put everything away.

As the Ube Arte artists and I (Martinez) left the school, the artists said how happy they were at how interested and willing the students were to learn the music and dance. It was also clear that the students found the history/culture part of the presentation extremely interesting, as some of them enthusiastically engaged the presenters with questions on everything, even dialects.

The second workshop, a week later, also started at 10:45am. Eleven of the previous week's students, plus two more, joined the workshop. The workshop reviewed the previous week's work, then built on it to explain more about the different ethnic groups in the southern Philippines; the way that the traditional *malong* (woven cotton tubular cloths worn by both sexes, brought by Ube Arte) differ in design among the different groups; and the history of Filipinos in North America.

More advanced music and dance were then taught, based on the principles learned the previous week. At one point, Marlo played a rhythm on wall so that students could see him from behind, making it easier to follow his arm movements. When the students grasped a more complex piece, I (Martinez) noted that "You can see the concentration, exhilaration & accomplishment in the students' faces."

The workshop ended with a mini-performance in the room combining the dance and music. I noted that "The students are focused and giving it 100%. The musicians are working hard to keep the tempo; Jasmine shows them how to acknowledge a thank you with their hands." Again, students were engaged and asking questions throughout, interested in both the music/dance and the cultural background information conveyed.

Ube Arte's years of experience leading workshops for different age groups, their ability to switch activities and to gauge students' level of interest in different facets of the workshop content were central to the enthusiasm with which the students learned the material and wanted to know more about the music, dance, and culture.

The Sounds Like LA *kulintang* workshop, 28 November 2023

This workshop was held in a Santa Monica private school where SLLA runs a program.²⁹ Because of the need to fit into the school day, the presentation was limited to 50 minutes. We (Martinez and Rees) arrived 45 minutes ahead of time, and with the help of Jasmine Orpilla, today's dance specialist from Ube Arte, who had also arrived very early, and the SLLA assistant, set up 23 *sarunay* ready for the workshop to start at 10am in a concert hall with a stage and amphitheater-style seating. The other two Ube Arte artists for this day were Mary Talusan and Marlo Campos. About 45 students participated; when they split half-way through to learn the music and dance, 23 learned the former, 22 the latter. The students appeared to be between 14 and 17 years old. The student body was quite diverse, with perhaps a quarter to a third of African American, Asian, or Hispanic backgrounds. They already had substantial musical performance experience. In addition to the Ube Arte artists and SLLA assistant, SLLA director Shabnam Fasa was present, along with two or three teachers from the school.

Mary Talusan began the workshop with an introduction to the Philippines; when it was discovered that no projector and screen were available for a PowerPoint presentation, she pivoted quickly to an entirely spoken introduction. The workshop began as follows (notes from Rees and Martinez, merged and lightly edited):

10:02am: Mary starts with spoken introduction to the Philippines. She asks them to pronounce *kulintang*. Points out that *gong* is one of the few Southeast Asian words to make it into English; *ketchup* is another. She asks them what they may have noticed about many Filipino last names—what are they similar to? One student pretty quickly says Hispanic last names. That leads into a very brief outline of the colonial era, and how *kulintang* is a survivor of indigenous musical traditions from pre-colonial times. Mary asks the students, "What is indigenous?" One student replies, "Of the land." Mary explains that indigenous Philippines culture, such as *kulintang*, was not wiped out by colonization. Mary says they will learn a Tongkil piece and the Pangalay dance ("fingernail dance").³⁰ Both are from the Sulu Archipelago. She mentions briefly the fact that the Southern Philippines cultures from which *kulintang* music and the related dance come are Muslim, although the music and dance predate the arrival of Islam. Mary introduces Jasmine as the dancer and Marlo as the instrumental specialist. She continues, showing the students the new brass instruments (*sarunay*) and the older bronze instruments (*kulintang* gongs on a wooden frame and *agong* large hanging gongs).

10:11am: One-minute demonstration of the piece (with *kulintang*, *agong* gongs, and *dabakan* drum) and the dance. Mary is on the gong *agong*, Marlo on the

²⁹ Notes on this workshop were taken by both of us. For this workshop and the final one, we reproduce our handwritten notes in their entirety, with only light editing for comprehensibility.

³⁰ On this dance, see de Guzman 2020.

kulintang, and Jasmine is dancing, a very slow, elegant dance with hands stretched backwards. The students look interested. Some students are nodding their heads, smiling at each other as the music is played; one student tries to mimic the drumming.

After this, the students were split into two groups. Martinez remained in the theater to document the music workshop. Rees joined the group Jasmine took out into the hallway to learn the dance.

The music instruction proceeded in the theater as follows (notes from Martinez, lightly edited):

- 10:14am: Marlo sits facing the students; he is sitting on a chair playing the *kulintang*, while the students sit on the floor, facing the seats of the theater, playing the *sarunay*. Marlo explains the "left to right" tones of the *kulintang*, 123456, and explains that different instruments have different tunings.
- 10:16am: Rhythm is started on gong #6; students mimic Marlo, now adding #3 and #6; Marlo turns to face the theater seats so that his back is to the students and they can see the sticking pattern: together, left, right, right, left, right, together. The students concentrate on following the pattern and the changing speeds. Mary states, "Start on both hands and end on both hands—TLRRLRT."
- 10:19am: Marlo gets the *tambul* drum, Mary reminds students to put their thumbs on top so the drumming is easier. Marlo starts again on *kulintang*, then stands to remind students of the sticking pattern; adds the left hand moving up and down on gongs 3, 4, 5, 4, while the right hand continues the original pattern. He notes, "It is a pick-up note to start the pattern," and "the left is just repeating." He models the sticking pattern facing away from the students so they can follow the pattern: "3, 4, 5, 4, back to 3"—he calls out the pattern's gong numbers to make sure students are following. Mary has been walking around helping students; Marlo now gives students time for independent practice while he squats in front of different students' *sarunay* to help them find and follow the correct pattern; he also squats on the side to see and guide students practicing independently.
- 10:29: Mary says, "You guys are doing well." The dance students return and join the instrumentalists on the stage, laughing, smiling, and moving their bodies to the beat Marlo has started to lead the instrumentalists. Mary asks the dance students to find a spot on stage.

Meanwhile, the dance instruction proceeded in the hallway. I (Rees) was able to stand on a staircase above the action and have a good view. The available space was oddly shaped, but Jasmine had the students spread out as effectively as possible (Figure 5).

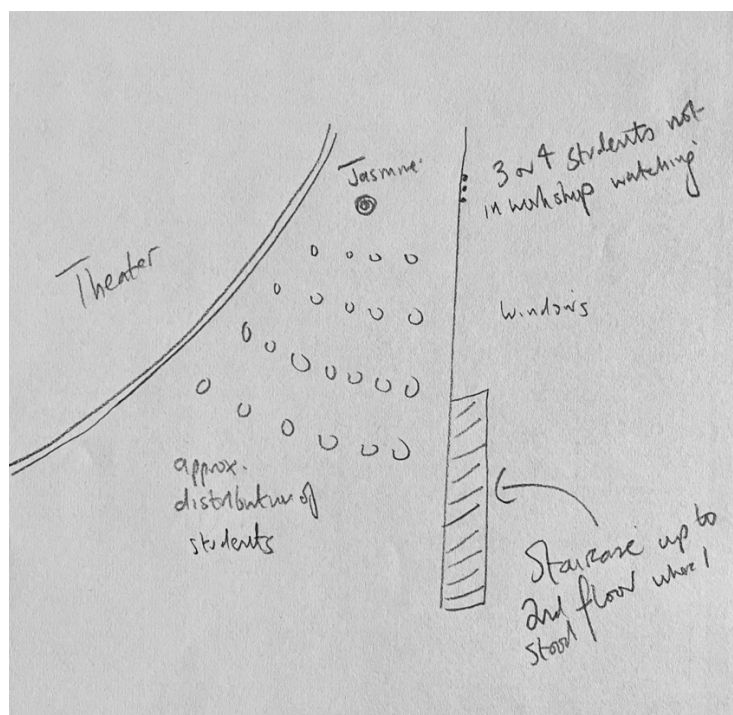


Figure 5: diagram of dance instruction space (hand drawn by Helen Rees, 28 November 2023).

Following are Rees's notes (lightly edited):

- 10:14am: Jasmine explains that this dance was inspired by the ocean. "How do waves move?" Students respond, "Up and down." First she has them warm up: "Work on your quads." She has them bend their knees and keep their feet flat on the floor; she has them keep their knees bent for a minute or so, then gradually come up. She tells them to find the middle ground—move as if going into the water and then out of the water. One student says, "My knees are getting a workout!" Jasmine responds that they need to work on their quads.
- 10:19am: Jasmine has them move as if into the water, bobbing in the ocean. Step forward, back, micro movements. Slow movements.
- 10:20am: Steps: lead with toe, plant heel. She now turns her back to them so that they can imitate her more easily. About 20 of the 22 are doing as asked. Three or four other students are watching from the sidelines.
- 10:22am: Moves on to arms: "We stretch our arms a lot." Talks about fingers: "Curl, curl, curl, pinch, pinch, pinch, let go . . . you should feel the tops of your hands, the muscles, working. Ball up your hands, then stretch—you should feel a little more flexible now."
- 10:22am: She checks the time.
- 10:23am: Jasmine shows the greeting movement, with palms together, rotating inward; she works individually with a couple of students at the front, then moves to the back to help students. She comments, "We have five more minutes." Now she

puts the feet and hands together. She explains that "The faster the musicians play, the slower you dance—that's the tradition." She shows how to walk with one hand up, and the other behind one—"out of the water, into the water." "Those are just three movements, we're going to show them what we've got."

10:29am: The dancers come back into the theater.

After the music and dance students were back together in the theater, the combined group worked together. Following are our notes (Rees and Martinez, merged and lightly edited):

10:30am: Dancers are on stage. Different students take turns at soloing on the *kulintang*, some doing it very well indeed. Marlo is on drum, Mary on gongs, the other students on *sarunay*, and the dancers start to move—standing up, squatting, moving their arms. Eventually Marlo hands the drum to a student. He says that he can show the student (male) a special more difficult pattern if the student is up for a challenge. Then students swap, with a new boy on the *kulintang* and a girl on drum.

10:34: Jasmine says, "Let's get some solos or trios," and "Dancers, you are dancing for the whole audience—you can turn around" [and face the seats in the theater]. The drummers begin, and three students begin to dance with the music in the background—they walk and squat across the stage, moving and twisting their arms. The students started together by looking and smiling at each other.

10:37am: Students are concentrating hard on their instruments. Another student takes over playing *kulintang* and the drum, and there are four new students who get up to dance. The student playing *kulintang* moves her body to the motion of the rhythm she is playing; Marlo keeps a beat on the lower going to keep the group together; the group dance ends, and the students cheer. Mary says, "We have ten more minutes."

10:40am: One dancer moves over to try *sarunay*. Mary teaches a student the rhythm on the two *agong* gongs; there is a student now on the drum. Jasmine explains to the dancers what different hands are doing on the *kulintang*. Then some dancers try starting a dance by kneeling on one knee, just using hand movements, then standing up and starting the wave movements. All the students seem engaged except for one on his cell phone. Three teachers are watching, as well as the SLLA assistant. Now Mary offers the chance to students to play the *agong*. Mary says this is going to be the "last one." Jasmine says, "One more chance to try the *kulintang*," and "All dancers get ready," and they do the basic movements again.

10:43am: One student on *sarunay* leans over to help another student out—he models it to his neighbor, she tries to follow, he models again and she repeats, he reaches over to her instrument to guide her, and eventually Marlo helps her out. *My (Rees's) comments: The dance is a little messy around the edges. It's easy for the musicians to play the solos because they are all short repetitive patterns.* Mary asks if they have any questions. Marlo explains that this type of music can be used

for trance music, and that's why it can be repetitive. He explains that they'll play for hours, sometimes days. Jasmine adds, "Dancers also dance all night." It's ritualistic but also celebratory.

10:45am: Mary offers opportunity for students to share their thoughts.

- "I had a good time."
- Mary: "On a scale of 1–10, what is the difficulty level?" Answer: "8."
- Mary: "Could you sustain this for hours? The dancers don't break a sweat. At a wedding, if people like the dancers, they insert bills between their fingers."
- Mary: "What is special about this?" "I thought it is cool how there isn't one single tuning, but you can distinguish the same notes." "What was the scale?" "It's not exactly a pentatonic scale." Mary: "Instruments are all slightly different, they're all hand-made."
- Student question: "This is from where in the Philippines?" Mary: "Tausug, really close to Malaysia—it's a 30-minute boat ride away; you can see it."
- Jasmine asks, "How does this dance relate to the music?" Student response: "The music is going fast, the dance is going slow."

10:50: Shabnam calls out, "It's time." One student continues to ask questions:

- Student: "What does *Tongkil* mean?" Mary: "It's named after a place in the Philippines. The piece is often used for celebrations."

10:52: Shabnam says, "Thank you so very much, Ube Arte." Students leave the stage.

Comment (Martinez): When all students were playing and dancing on stage together, with instrumentalists at the back of the stage and dancers up front towards the audience, the dancers were very expressive and enthusiastic. It was obvious they were having fun and enjoying themselves.

Observations (Rees): Most of the students seemed to catch on very quickly to the music and dance. Mary also had this impression. Confirmed with Shabnam that they have had a lot of opportunities to learn music. We had to do a very quick tear-down afterward to leave the theater free. Learsy pointed out we should have asked each student to unscrew the legs on their own sarunay!

UCLA kulintang workshop, 2 December 2023

We arrived about two hours ahead of time to remove extraneous instruments and whiteboards from the Gamelan Room and set up the *sarunay* (Figure 6). It took about 30 minutes to return the room to good order with some extra help at the end. Publicity about the workshop had gone out via the student group Samahang Pilipino and the office managing the Pilipino Studies minor. Nine students participated, though two arrived late, and two had to leave half-way through. About half identified themselves as being of Filipino heritage, three of whom had participated in Pilipino cultural nights; the other participants said they were of other Asian or Hispanic heritage. Three of the other participants were graduate students. The undergraduates had heard of the workshops via Samahang Pilipino. Two of the graduate students happened to be in the building and voluntarily came and asked if they could join in when they heard the workshop setting up. Two of the participants were ethnomusicology majors, one a jazz major, and one a skilled performer of Javanese gamelan. The workshop today was led by Mary Talusan, Bernard Ellorin,

and Eleanor Lipat-Chesler. Mary and Bernard concentrated on instrumental instruction, Eleanor on dance instruction.



Figure 6: Several of the nine sarunay set up for the final workshop, 2 December 2023.
Photo by Helen Rees.

Rees's notes on the workshop (lightly edited) are as follows:

1:05pm: Mary, Bernard, Eleanor, and the one experienced student present start by playing, swapping round on instruments. At this point we have six students present.

1:10pm: Mary introduces the three presenters, noting that they are all UCLA graduates. She asks "How many of you have heard of *kulintang*?" Three people say they have. She makes the following points:

- *Kulintang* is part of our heritage not erased by colonization
- 20 years after meeting in Ethnomusicology 20C (Music Cultures of the World: Asia), we're still playing around Los Angeles

Bernard continues: We'll be covering two areas today, Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. The Samal people for Sulu, and the Maranao for Mindanao. *Kulintang* is related to other gong-chime traditions of maritime Southeast Asia—you can see their relatives here [pointing to the Javanese and Balinese gamelans in the Gamelan Room]. In the Philippines, gong-chime traditions are found among the Muslims. We have here a *kulintang*, *agong* gongs, and two different drums, the *dabakan* from Maranao and the *tambul*, the round drum, from the Samal people. The *kulintang* is used on special occasions, such as weddings, and for healing rituals, NOT for Islamic festivals. It's not an Islamic tradition, despite this being an Islamic area.

Eleanor continues: "We're Filipino Americans, students of each other and of native practitioners from the Philippines."

Mary: You can take audio or video as you wish. How many people have been to a PCN?³¹ [Three hands go up.] To know that we have a legitimate classical music that is hard to learn is important. We all learned in the Philippines.

Rees's comment: By this point there are seven students. See diagram in Figure 7. Five women, two men.

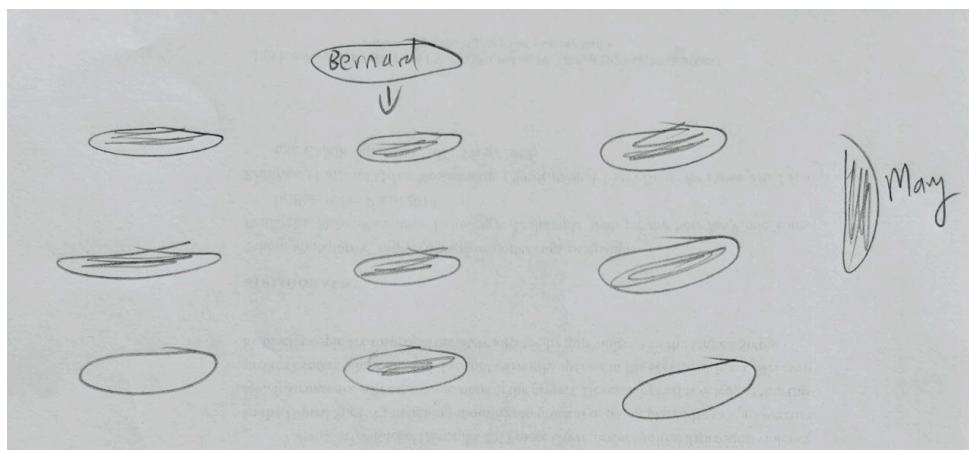


Figure 7: Position of the sarunay and students in relation to instructors, 2 December 2023. Bernard sat at the kulintang teaching the stick patterns, while Mary often circulated to help individual participants. Diagram by Helen Rees.

1:19pm: Bernard explains the piece "Tongkil," accompanied by *tambul* drum. The highest pitch gong plays the same rhythm as the drum. "We'll go through phrase by phrase, and you repeat it back to me." He says the LH should be on gong 3, the RH on gong 6. He teaches them the Introduction and Phrase 1, repeating them many times [Figure 8]. Most students pick it up fast; Eleanor helps one student.

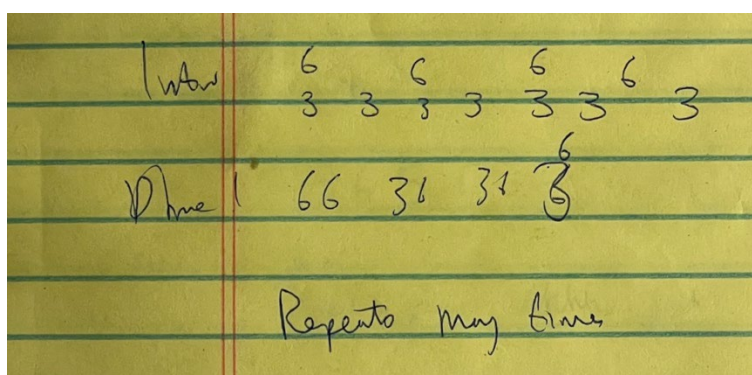


Figure 8: Introduction and Phrase 1 for "Tongkil" jotted down in descriptive notes, 2 December 2023. By Helen Rees.

³¹ UCLA's student group Samahang Pilipino is renowned for its annual PCN (Pilipino Culture Night). On these Filipino American student-run shows at American universities, see Matherne 2020.

- 1:25pm: Bernard teaches Phrase 2, which involves gongs 3, 4, 5, and 6.
- 1:31pm: Bernard asks for questions, reactions . . . one student responds that it's fun.
- 1:32pm: Bernard says "We'll go faster. And the faster the music, the slower the dance." They practice again; mostly students are getting the hang of it, though a few strokes are sometimes off.
- 1:35pm: Bernard teaches Phrase 3. The self-identified gamelan player catches on very fast.
- 1:37pm: Two more students arrive, one female, one male. *My (Rees's) observation: the young woman helped specially by Eleanor is now doing fine.*
- 1:40pm: The 7 students have learned well by this point. Bernard invites questions. One student says, "It's making my head spin." Mary suggests that one should "zone out" and use muscle memory.
- 1:40pm: Eleanor introduces dance. She says that the Sulu Archipelago is built on water, with lots of boats, and house on stilts. Dance is about wind, waves, birds, and flowers. Often they dance on boats. She continues: In much Southeast Asian dance, they use a deep squat, with pronounced angles. This is good for keeping one's balance on a moving boat. Language is conveyed with the hands. You can hear the rhythm of the music through the hands and arms. It's a very individualistic dance form, usually not choreographed.
- Mary adds: This would be a new thing to do in PCN—a fun thing to try.
- 1:43pm: Eleanor starts dancing; it includes much wrist-twisting. Three students are videoing. Shortly after, she takes several students out to the corridor to learn dancing. I (Rees) stay to document the music learning. [Martinez joins the dance students.]
- 1:47pm: Bernard teaches the dance accompaniment. He reminds everyone that the *solembat* (top gong on the *kulintang*) and the *tambul* provide the same rhythm, with the accent on the downbeat. He teaches one student how to do it, and says it's "teamwork"—lots of laughter. Then he has one student play the *solembat* and incorporates the two newcomers by having them learn the two accompanying instruments.
- 1:53pm: All four students on the instruments are doing well. Mary says, "It clicks when you are doing well."
- 1:54pm: They switch instruments, and there's lots of laughter.
- 1:56pm: They switch again.
- 1:57pm: Bernard asks if there are any questions so far. One student says they saw a performance where the dancer was holding the *agong* and playing it at the same time. Bernard says that with full group, there should be three people on gongs. He demonstrates and says there's also a *pangalay agong* dance. Mary says, "What keeps the music alive is competition—look on YouTube; you'll see younger people play it too." She says it's a form of social interaction.
- 2:02pm: Eleanor says the dancers are ready. Two students have to leave for a rehearsal. The *kulintang* is turned round. The dance and music work surprisingly well together. Bernard is helping the *agong* player. The experienced student is playing *dabakan* drum too.
- 2:07pm: Mary says "Awesome," and there is lots of laughter. Eleanor says, "Can you believe what they learned in 15 minutes?"

2:10pm: Break for cookies and water. Mary tells a story about a ritual to heal a grandmother who was sick for days, and at the end of it got up and started dancing.

2:22pm: Eleanor says, "Travel with us to meet the Maranao—people of the lake." She says it's also very tied to water, but a completely different ethnic group. She shows the *malong* tubular cloth, used in everyday life by everyone. She says that a choreographed version of the dance became popular in universities, and made its way back into the originating communities, where it is now taught. Eleanor demonstrates the dance with Bernard on *kulintang*, Mary on *dabakan*, and the experienced student on *agong*.

2:27pm: Eleanor asks, "What did you see?"

- "Picking up a basket, carrying a baby"
- "What is meant by putting it on yourself?"
- "Protection from rain"

Eleanor: It's also a sleeping bag. Masculine vocabulary: can be carrying water, or harvest.

Mary: "We buy straight from Mindanao. It's how we give back. We don't fake it. We have a supplier."

The dancers leave again.

2:30pm: Bernard teaches the melody for this by rote—simply moving the pattern up the gongs, then back down [Figure 9].

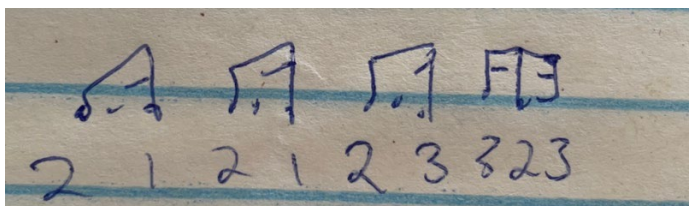


Figure 9: basic pattern jotted down in descriptive notes, 2 December 2023. By Helen Rees.

Mary asks: "Is it up to you when you want to move up to the next gong?"

Bernard: "Yes."

Bernard: Among the Maranao, this is part of a holistic performance by professional female dancers—dance, singing, *kulintang*. In the 1960s/1970s they started creating choreography. Kaganat sa Darangen—origin story of the Maranao people.

Mary: Can you talk about why Maranao women are "cool"?

Bernard: "It's always about 'smize,' keeping a cool demeanor."

Mary: "They don't move the face."

Bernard: "Hold the sticks between the thumb and forefinger. Make it look effortless. Angle in the direction you're going."

Question: When you're going up to the next gong, you end on the higher gong and come back down?

2:45pm: Bernard: I had a teacher who spent 30 minutes improving my sticking technique.

Bernard: *Dabakan* is much more complicated. RRLR. (Shows standing position with sticks angled.) Same technique: wrists and shoulders loose, and hold sticks like *kulintang* sticks. *Agong penanggisa* (one); the other *agong* responds.

2:50pm: Puts ensemble together. One student volunteers for *dabakan*, and Mary coaches them. Lots of merriment. Eventually the two *agong* manage to interlock.

2:57pm: The dancers come back.

3:00pm: Music and dance together. Bernard oversees *agong*. Mary oversees *dabakan*, with help of the experienced student. The student on *kulintang* does well. The dancers do a good job imitating Eleanor.

Bernard: "Don't stop learning! Don't stop at PCN."

As students leave, Bernard gives them Kalanduyan CDs.³²

Themes emerging from the Zoom feedback session

This took place on 14 December 2023 and lasted about ninety minutes, and with the permission of the participants was recorded, with an AI transcript generated for later reference. Participants were Miles Shrewsbury, representing himself and Sufi Raina (*tabla* and *kathak* dance); Mary Talusan, representing Ube Arte (*kulintang*); Mel Liu, a UCLA graduate student who took part in the UCLA *kulintang* session; Shabnam Fasa, founder and executive director of Sounds Like LA; and Helen Rees and Learsy Martinez.³³ All participants have been invited to review and edit the following summary of the discussion.

Discussion of the *kulintang* workshops

After general introductions, the Zoom feedback session began with me (Rees) asking Mary, as the mastermind and main leader of all four *kulintang* workshops, to speak to the three different groups of students, the different techniques used, and impressions of what worked well and what might be done differently next time.

Mary noted that Ube Arte had three main objectives with the workshops:

- To give participants a sense of what music from the Philippines is like, and to emphasize that despite the well-known stereotype that Filipino culture is highly Westernized and colonized, there are rich traditional musical cultures that existed prior to colonization and are still living today
- To emphasize *kulintang* as a Philippine indigenous musical tradition that has also spread to the diaspora and in which Filipino Americans find meaning by discovering and engaging in a music that they themselves are not familiar with
- To engage students in participation in cultural diversity—not just to learn about it, but to participate and experience it through their hands and their bodies with the dance

She commented that for the high school workshops, she chose two colleagues from Ube Arte to work with her who have worked with that age group in the past, and that they had two parts to the workshops: the history and culture of the Philippines and Filipino/a Americans, and the

³² On Danongan Kalanduyan, a *kulintang* master who was a major force in bringing the genre to the United States and teaching it here since the 1970s, see Russell 2023. The CD is *Kulintang Kultura: Danongan Kalanduyan and Gong Music of the Philippine Diaspora* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, 2021).

³³ While it would have been ideal to obtain feedback from some of the workshop participants under the age of 18, it was not practical to do so. The notes below were written up by Rees.

music and dance. She felt the format worked well, as the students were really engaged and achieved a good level in the time available, and a couple asked some excellent questions, but she hopes to find ways next time to encourage more participants to raise questions.

With regard to the SLLA workshop, Mary described how she had adapted the format to a much shorter period (50 minutes rather than 90) and to the lack of PowerPoint facilities. She still aimed to get in important basic contextual information, but then the students had to choose between music and dance rather than being able to try both. The students' considerable background in music and dance made it relatively easy for them to pick up the new sounds, rhythms, and movements quickly. Here too there seemed to be real enthusiasm on the part of the students; several were eager to speak up during the question time, and one was eager to find out more about *kulintang* and Ube Arte after the workshop.

For the UCLA workshop, Mary asked Bernard Ellorin and Eleanor Lipat-Chesler, both UCLA graduates, to work with her, since they had first met at UCLA and were particularly comfortable working together there. She noted that because most of the participants were of Filipino heritage or otherwise familiar with the cultures of Asia, it wasn't necessary to cover the real basics of the historical and cultural background. It was also especially meaningful to the three presenters to be interacting with students of Filipino heritage, including those engaged in PCNs, who often wish to incorporate *kulintang* in their performances and benefit from understanding the sophistication of this complex style that is unfamiliar to most Filipino Americans. Giving students from Samahang Pilipino greater insight into *kulintang* music was especially rewarding.

Mel, a graduate student who participated in the final workshop, commented on their familiarity with gamelan music, so that they were approaching the workshop with experience in a related genre. They found the "scaffolding" approach and the presenters' circulating to help individual students effective, and appreciated the presenters' openness about their own experiences and motivations for facilitating the workshop. They suggested that perhaps a handout with pictures of the instruments and their names could be helpful in a future workshop of this nature.³⁴

Learsi, who was present for both the high school workshops, felt there was great enthusiasm for them on the part of students and teachers, and that perhaps it was unfamiliarity with learning music together, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, that caused some students to be less confident at first about asking questions, especially compared with the SLLA students, who do have weekly music lessons in different world traditions. As a former high school teacher herself in Southern California, she also sensed strongly the value in introducing the history and culture of a country from which the ancestors of so many residents of Los Angeles came, and felt it was a bonus that some of the workshop participants in the high school did have personal connections to Filipino culture and could find out more about it. She commented that the modeling technique used by Marlo to teach stick technique was extremely effective. The SLLA students had experience of a variety of world music traditions through their weekly music lessons, so seemed more immediately comfortable asking questions about this unfamiliar tradition.

³⁴ Mary made note of this suggestion, and commented that she had provided the PowerPoint slides to the high school principal so that they could keep them for future use as needed.

Discussion of the *kathak/tabla* workshops

Miles noted the flexibility he and Sufi had to apply, when initially the sound system was not working well, and when Sufi had to dance barefoot on a stone floor part of which was rough cobblestones; she managed to work round these patches. In addition, normally there would be other musicians to provide the cyclical melody (*lehra*, or *nagma*) to show where the rhythm is falling within that cyclical form, so Miles had to provide this from his laptop, which added to the initial difficulties with the sound system. He noted that it was easier to do a dialogue-style workshop in the indoor setting, and that while initially the students seemed a bit reserved, once he had them going back and forth with him creating "musical sentences," they started to have fun. He added that in the 3pm mini-performance, he noticed a lot of the children who had been in the auditorium workshop among the audience, and could see they were very engaged in what he and Sufi were doing. He would have liked to have had more questions from the workshop participants, but felt that perhaps the timing was so tight that day, with so much going on, that it didn't allow for a more relaxed Q&A.

I (Rees) was the only other team member present at the *kathak/tabla* workshops, and, as noted above, I definitely noticed that the children in the indoor workshop seemed much more consistently attentive, in part because people were sitting closer together and there were no outdoor distractions. The SLLA administrator's push to get everyone sitting close to one another in the front of the indoor auditorium was a really good decision. I could see the children eagerly participating in counting the claps and waves of the *tal*, and trying out the *mudras* (hand gestures) that Sufi demonstrated.

Miles added that as a performer in general, the smaller and more crowded the space, the better the reception; a large space needs to be packed to get that same type of engagement. He would also have liked us to be able to let the children try the *tabla* hands-on, if we'd had a suitable setting. Sufi had hoped to get the children up to try the footwork, but the space was not suitable for that (we contrasted the space situation with that for the *kulintang* workshops, where we were able to organize that, and it was very well received).

One person asked how many people of South Asian descent were at the workshops, and what type of sense of diversity Miles and Sufi were aiming to convey. Miles noted that there were very few people of South Asian descent at the workshops, and only a few more at the 3pm concert, and with the workshop participants being so young, he wasn't explicitly addressing issues of diversity with the music—instead, he wanted them to experience how this form of music differs from others they hear. Miles and I (Rees) noted that historical and cultural background is emphasized more explicitly in the workshops Miles provides each year for the Asian music survey taken by the undergraduate ethnomusicology majors at UCLA.

Comments from the SLLA director

Shabnam reported that the children had told her how much they enjoyed the *kathak/tabla* workshops, and that they'd never previously had workshops on the day of their big performance. She explained that the core mission of SLLA is to teach children about these world music ensembles that are in their back yard. SLLA works with about 650+ children at any given time, some in Title 1 schools with no music program other than what SLLA provides, others from private schools where there isn't any world music, but there is exposure to music. At the high

school where the *kulintang* workshop ran, the students can all play in a jazz band, a salsa band, and some others, but they don't have Western classical music. But they do become really confident in themselves and in asking questions and engaging in music and dance workshops. They need world music exposure. Shabnam concluded that the workshops were a learning process for SLLA in logistical terms, and that she looked forward to future partnerships of this nature, and wanted to hear about the presenters' experience.

Further discussion

Especially with regard to the SLLA *kulintang* workshop, Shabnam stressed the importance of the students physically getting to grips with the instruments and dance and creating a muscle memory of the experience; it was a rare experience to learn from and dance with master artists, and the students will remember it forever. In future, for any more *kathak/tabla* workshops, they will plan to include more of that opportunity. Both Shabnam and Miles commented on the stress the students had recently gone through in the pandemic, making the hands-on physical engagement all the more important.

With regard to future projects of this nature, we noted that this was a pilot project that can function as a proof of concept of partnering with community artists to bring global musics into local educational institutions, ideally for longer than just one or two classes. It showed an overall successful model that may interest other funders potentially willing to support a larger-scale initiative of this nature. Miles commented on a similar project, rather further along, by the Center for World Music in San Diego, which brings artist-teachers into local elementary schools for ten weeks at a time and is now expanding the program to provide the teachers with materials before and after the ten weeks, so that it is not just a one-off endeavor. He observed that it's important for community artists to know how to come up with a rubric that aligns with conventional music curricula and to communicate effectively with other education professionals.

Mary stated that as the president of the Filipino Cultural School [until 2024], she sees that the school is doing what everyone was discussing in a more targeted way—using music and language not just to teach children about diversity, but also to teach them about themselves by exposing them to different elements of the Philippine traditions.³⁵

Conclusions

We ran these six workshops at a time when the young people attending were just emerging from the disruptions to their schooling caused by the pandemic. Some workshop participants had had little opportunity for music and dance learning over the previous few years, while others, especially those already enrolled in SLLA activities, were quite well versed in a variety of genres. The ability of the presenting artists to pivot and adjust to the age groups of the participants and their prior exposure to music and dance was crucial, as well as to deal on the fly with unexpected challenges such as constricted space, sound system problems, lack of PowerPoint facilities, etc. The fact that all the presenting artists had two or more decades' experience presenting workshops in all kinds of settings and had devised ways of explaining technical musical features, dance movements, and cultural contexts suitable to different age groups was central to the project. Equally crucial was the generosity of the hosting institutions, whose leaders saw the potential value of the pilot project and provided the best possible

³⁵ On this school, which was established in 1965, see <https://www.filipinoculturalschool.org/>.

facilities. All the workshops were well received, and the enthusiasm of most participants was obvious. The high school students and UCLA students, many of whom had less experience than the SLLA students with different types of music, had all self-selected, so clearly made the effort to be there. This was most likely another reason for the overall success of those three workshops.

There were a number of other take-aways from the project:

- The marrying of music and dance to cultural context worked extremely well for the students of high school age and above, leading to thoughtful questions and a better understanding of the history, geography, and culture of the performing arts learned
- For college-age students, handouts may be an effective way to satisfy their desire for more academic information about the genres and instruments
- If multi-week residencies can be organized, liaising with education professionals in situ to provide materials before and after the residency can help a relatively short-term project have greater long-term impact; after this short-term pilot project, we compiled a short list of open-access online materials that we provided to our workshop partners at the high school and Sounds Like LA (see Appendix); they were glad to have this material for future reference
- The inclusion of dance adds a truly valuable dimension to the workshops, especially for younger participants, for whom physical movement involving the whole body is especially enjoyable and a way to "feel" the culture through muscle memory
- Learning from projects such as those at the Center for World Music in San Diego and Sounds Like LA will be essential for any future plans

Finally, the experiences from 2023 will help undergird desired future projects that seek to link ethnomusicology/world music at UCLA with formal K–12 music education and to offer a performing arts dimension to the academic study of different cultures.

Appendix: open-access online materials on *kathak/tabla* and *kulintang*

All these were accessible as of March 2025.

Kathak/tabla

Ali Akbar Khan Library. Website. <https://aliakbarlibrary.com/>

Chandrakanta.com. Website. <https://chandrakanta.com/>

Kathak.org. Website. <https://kathak.org/>

Tabla Legacy. Website. <https://www.tablalegacy.com/>

Kulintang (and other Philippines performing arts)

Kapangagi: Learn Kulintang Music for Southern Philippine Music and Dance. Website. <https://www.learnkulintang.com/>

Our Culture Resounds, Our Future Reveals: A Legacy of Filipino American Performing Arts in California. Interactive e-book. <https://ubearte.org/our-culture-resounds/>

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