

Preservation of Philippine Culture Through Notation of Century-old Passion Tunes

Reynaldo DC. del Rosario, MA. Ed.

*DepEd, MNHS City of Meycauayan, Bulacan, Philippines

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Abstract-This study was conducted to identify, record, notate and compile the original tunes of the 'Pasyon', which was part of Philippine tradition and cultural heritage. It aimed to preserve and promote the century-old passion tunes so that the next generation will continue to treasure it. It dealt on the identification, gathering and notation of holy week passion tunes in the town of Santa Maria, Bulacan, Central Luzon, Philippines. The respondents in this study included old folks who frequently join in the *Pabasa ng Pasyon* during holy week. The population was composed of fifty (50) old folks of the town, whose ages range from 60-100 years old. The study was conducted in March of 2019. Interviewing of old folks and recording of holy week passion tunes were used as procedures in gathering data in this study. These century-old passion tunes were notated and used by local band musicians in accompanying Passion chanters.

Index Terms- *passion tunes, passion chanters, passion notation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Every nation has their own beliefs, traditions and cultural heritage, which were usually unique in their place. People who give importance to the preservation of these beliefs, traditions and culture cling to them in order to preserve and pass them on to the next generation. They will take the necessary steps and undertakings in order to continue to promote and preserve their beliefs, traditions and cultural heritage.

The singing of the 'Pasyon', known as *Pabasa*, which is practiced every holy week in the Philippines, is one example of a unique tradition in our country. At the onset of Ash Wednesday, which signals the start of holy week, the singing of the 'Pasyon' will be heard in almost every street and barangay in the Philippines. This tradition, which has been practiced for more than 200 years, started during the Spanish period when it was written by Padre Mariano Pilapil, a Bulacan Priest.

However, as years go by, there have been changes in the singing of the 'Pasyon' during holy week. The old fashioned tunes, as the younger generation described the original tunes of the 'Pasyon' have been slowly replaced with modern tunes, even with dance tunes from famous foreign artists. This practice brings the original tunes of the 'Pasyon', which is part of our cultural heritage, into the brink of disappearance and extinction. If the younger generation will continue to replace the original tunes of the 'Pasyon', these tunes will be dead and gone in the coming years. This means that our culture will not be preserved and will just be kept in treasure boxes of the old generation and will be buried with them in the graveyard of forgetfulness.

In this regard, that this study was conducted. As the original tunes of the 'Pasyon' and the singing of the 'Pasyon' or *Pabasa* itself is part of our traditions and cultural heritage, it must be preserved and promoted so that the next generation will continue to treasure it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The centuries-old singing of the 'Pasyon' or *Pabasa* plays a significant part in the Lenten rituals and traditions of the Philippines. According to the Philippine Daily Inquirer article written by Mr. Danilo G. Mendiola, published on February 26, 2015, depending on the organizer or host, a *pabasa* is done any day between the first Sunday of Lent and Good Friday. It is commonly carried out in village chapels or houses before a makeshift altar adorned with pictures and statues of saints and of the suffering Christ. The sponsor or host of a *Pabasa* is normally a family or clan whose elders have made a *panata* (vow) to hold it yearly in thanksgiving for blessings received from God. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines describes the *pabasa* as "an epic poem in stanzas of five lines of eight syllables." Apparently, it was originally intended by the Church as an instrument for evangelization. Thus, the Spanish friars used it as a means to indoctrinate the faithful in the early years of Christianity in the Philippines. The book used for the *Pabasa* is titled "Pasyong Mahal," with the cross-carrying Nazarene on its cover, implying that it is about Christ's passion. A scrutiny of its contents, however, would reveal that it is not just about the passion, that in fact the subject matter of the *Pabasa* is the whole history of salvation from the creation of the world to Christ's passion, death and resurrection from the dead.

Another article of the Philippine Daily Inquirer article written by Levine Andro Lao, published on April 14, 2014, mentioned that the chanting of the “*Pasyon*” was originally done by Filipinos when a member of the community was about to die. This is according to Regalado Trota Jose, former commissioner of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. “The belief was that when a person was dying, his soul could be stolen by the devil,” Jose said. “With the ritual of chanting *pasyon*, the dying was supported by the community in his struggle against evil.” He added that if we are to observe how the *Pabasa* is done in various regions of the country, we will see how they are distinct from each other. He explained that the manner how the different groups of Filipinos chant the *Pasyon* can be traced from how they had traditionally recited the indigenous epic in their region.

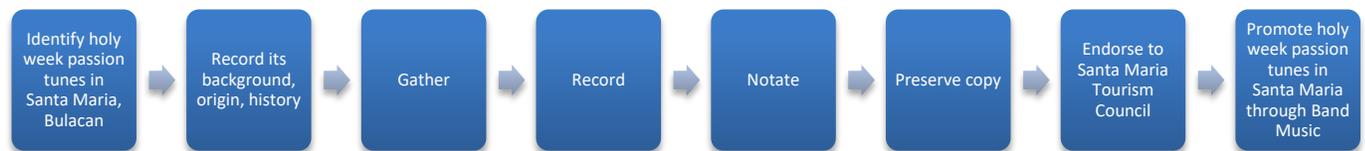
‘*Pasyon*’ was written 205 years ago by a Bulacan priest, another article published by Philippine Daily Inquirer article written by Carmela Reyes-Estrope, published on March 24, 2016, described how it begun. “*Pasyong Mahal ng Panginoong Hesukristo*,” was written by Fr. Mariano Pilapil of Barangay San Jose, Bulacan, Bulacan in 1814. He is a doctor of theology and a representative to the law-making body, the Spanish Cortes, who also wrote the book, “*Gramatica Hispano-Latina*,” which drew attention to his linguistic prowess before he gained popularity for writing the “*Pasyon*”. It was also known as “*Pasyong Pilapil*.” It was described as an epic narrative of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, often set to dolorous music by the faithful and chanted during the Lenten season. The singing of the *Pasyon*, indeed, is a unique tradition that should be preserved. Emeritus Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales said the *pasyon* appears to be dying in some parts of the country because the parents and the elders in the community, failed to pass on the tradition to the younger generation. This statement was published in The Philippine Star on April 1, 2015 by Evelyn Macairan, with the title, “*Traditional pabasa, a dying passion?*”

A similar view on the survival of this Lenten tradition is also expressed by those who loved the tradition and are doing the chanting of the *Pasyon* by heart. In an article published by The Philippine Star on April 15, 2014 entitled “*Will the Pasyon survive?*” by Iral, Mendoza and Lopez, it mentioned that some experts believed that the tradition will survive but will evolve into something that can be grasped by young people and the masses. However, views are divided on whether devotees are ready to hear the fusion of the life of Christ and the songs of contemporary performers like Miley Cyrus and Lady Gaga. This would be a clash between the traditional and modern views and beliefs.

As a musician, who loves to promote the original tunes of the *Pasyon* and this Lenten tradition, conducted this study to help in its preservation and promotion.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The figure showed the conceptual framework of this qualitative study.



According to the narration of the old folks of the town of Santa Maria, whose ages range from 60-100 years old, the reading and singing of passion tunes during Lenten season started from the Spanish Era and handed down orally from generation to generation until the present time, from the hearts of the town people who were so devoted to the Virgin Mary, the very reason that the name of the town was taken after her. They sung the *Pasyon* under the tune of *Tagulaylay* (Sorrowful motif), *Treskieda* (Waltz music style) and the *Pasodoble* (March music style).

26 out of 50 respondents or 52% told the researcher that *Pasodoble* (March Tempo) was the most common passion tune that they used in singing during *Pabasa* (Passion Chanting during Holy Week), 30% said it was *Treskieda* and 18% said it was *Tagulaylay*. Below was the musical score of one of the century-old passion tune that they used under a March Tempo or Pasodoble.

SCORE

PASODOBLE
(MARCH TEMPO)

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$\text{♩} = 110$

10

21

32

The next musical score under *Treskieda* (Waltz music style) is also one of the century-old passion tune that they used.

SCORE

TRESKIEDA
(WALTZ TEMPO)

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WALTZ TEMPO $\text{♩} = 100$

The musical score below, *Tagulaylay* (Sorrowful motif) is also one of the century-old passion tune that they used.

SCORE

TAGULAYLAY
(SORROWFUL MOTIF)

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$\text{♩} = 70$

IV. CONCLUSION

The researcher compiled the notated century-old passion tunes, endorsed them to Santa Maria Tourism Council and promoted them in Santa Maria, Bulacan through band music in order to preserve the notated century-old passion tunes. At present, Passion chanting in Santa Maria are accompanied by Brass Band Musicians composed of seven to ten members. The usual instruments that they play are tuba, baritone, trombone, French horn, trumpets, clarinets, saxophone and snare drum. Before bands in Santa Maria are playing through what they call in Filipino term “*uwido*” or an ear for music, this means they are playing without musical notation. This holy week of 2019, our band are accompanying passion chanters using the notated century-old passion tunes.

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AUTHOR

Reynaldo DC. del Rosario, MA. Ed., Secondary Music Teacher, DepEd-MNHS, sir_aldo@yahoo.com.ph

