

A LECTURE

UGNAYAN – Society, Technology and Power as Music Composition¹

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For those of you who are not so familiar with the music of Maceda, let me just say that his works had been conceived as philosophical and expressive constructs of the theory and aesthetics of village musical traditions in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

My lecture today is about a musical work that stands out as the most unique, if not controversial event in contemporary Philippine musical life – Maceda’s work entitled **UGNAYAN**. It is a work of extensive, if not massive dimension that stands out among his other masterpieces which had been inspired by society and culture, specifically the role of community in Filipino life. .

What then is **Ugnayan**?

THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE FORM

Ugnayan is the title of a piece composed by the late National Artist José Montserrat Maceda. **Ugnayan** was quite extraordinary in that its creation and realization, as both composition and musical event, required a geographic space that measures hundreds of square kilometers comprising the present Metro-Manila area and the some 8 million people living in it. In principle however, the work could have been intended to be performed across the entire nation, as well as the participation possibly, by the entire national populace.

As music, **Ugnayan** may be classified as 20th century music avant-garde piece, with its structural-formal schema derived from the *musique concrète* school of composition, to which Maceda himself attributed his creative orientation in New Music. The seminal idea of **Ugnayan** is contained in Maceda’s original title of “Atmospheres” where he intended to create “atmospheres, waves, clouds, fogs...blocks, screens and windows of sound” through various densities related to the dispersion of sounds through the synchronized yet non-controlled movement of large numbers of people. Following the inherent character of *musique concrète* as an electronic medium, Maceda harnessed a popular

¹ Used with permission from Ramon P. Santos for ATMOSPHERES: UGNAYAN @ 50, Talks, 3 May 2024. Atmospheres: Ugnayan @ 50 is presented by the University of the Philippines Center for Ethnomusicology in cooperation with the Music Education Department of the UP College of Music, through the support of the the UP Diliman Office for Initiatives in Culture and the Arts as part of the UP Diliman Arts & Culture Festival 2024, “Pamamalagi at Pamamahagi.”

product of electronic technology – the electro-magnetic recorder and the transistor radio - in processing the basic materials and realizing the entire composition.

The construction of ***Ugnayan*** consists of twenty (20) 51-minute layers of recorded sounds, each layer to be broadcast by one of the 37 radio stations authorized to operate in Metro-Manila. All stations were to be synchronized to start the broadcast exactly from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on New Year's Day of 1974, during which no other sound would be heard on Philippine airwaves. A nation-wide campaign called for people to come out of their homes, bring their transistor radios, and congregate in parks, community centers (*barangay* centers), and other public places at the appointed time. Every venue was organized by designated officials or community leaders, to direct each community to optimize both the experiential and social aspects of the event. People were instructed to participate and “enjoy” the event; e.g. moving around and listening to the atmospheric changes in the entire sonic environment.

One meaning of the Tagalog word *ugnayan* is “interlinking” and it may well describe this historico-cultural-artistic phenomenon as an “interlinking” of many aspects – musical, social, and ideological – all brought into a state of re-invention and change by the unusual vision of Jose Maceda.

First, ***Ugnayan*** was the result of synthesizing two separate disciplines in music learning and music production: ethnomusicology and composition. From the ethnomusicological standpoint, Maceda was able to crystallize his social theories which provided the creative framework of his artistic expression. From his in-depth study of the systematic elements of Asian music, being a principal domain of ethnomusicology, he was able to formulate new parameters in music composition; e.g. absence of rhythmic determinism as well as the deconstruction of fixed temperament.

Second, The intent of ***Ugnayan*** to effect a totally different aesthetic atmosphere was partly premised on the linking of spatial environments by bringing ritualized performance practice from specific ethnic localities to a larger geographic cultural landscape.

Third, ***Ugnayan*** was also intended to “link the past with the present” (Maceda, 1974) in that all the recorded sounds that served as the “concretized” materials were sourced from traditional instrumental and vocal sounds that are closely identified with pre-historic, indigenous, and ethnic cultures in the Philippines and Asia. Instead of reprocessing and reshaping these sounds electronically in a studio, Maceda utilized the human machinery and the physical space of town plazas and parks to reprocess the sounds in semi-improvised dispersion schemes.

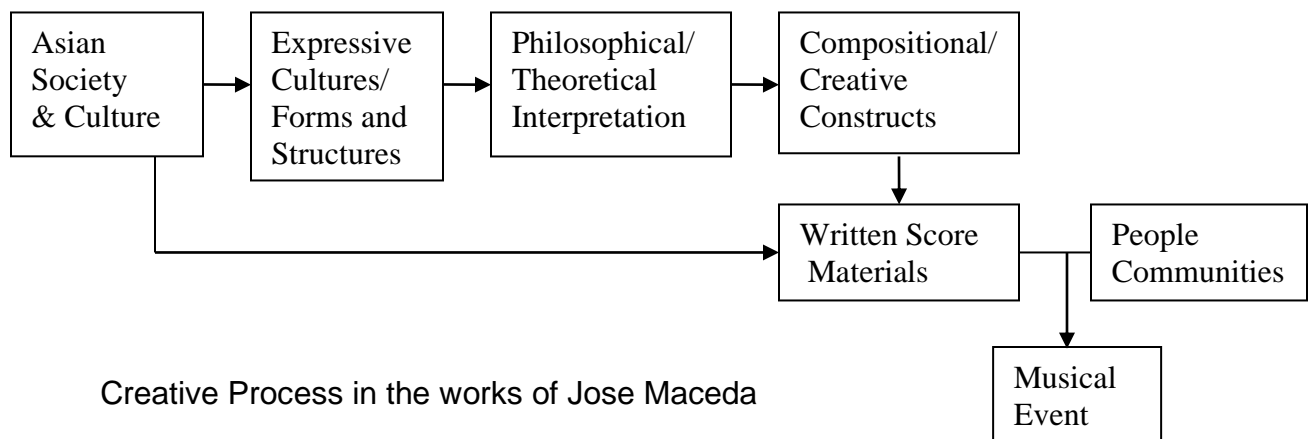
The fourth ideological dimension that surrounded *Ugnayan* was the socio-political agenda of the martial law regime of Ferdinand Marcos, which gave all-out support to the “performance” of the work.

Viewing the above as primary motivations in the creation of an unprecedented piece of art work, this brief presentation intends to re-visit and examine the phenomenon of *Ugnayan*, a unique musical creation in twentieth century avant-garde repertoire, in terms of its culturally and socially-determined aesthetic constructs as well as the politically-motivated ideological objectives that engendered its realization.

MUSIC COMPOSITION AS RECONSTRUCTED CONCEPT

From the musical perspective, *Ugnayan* displaced the orthodox notion of western music composition as an exclusive domain in music production by integrating the creative process, with performance and the entire experiential environment. In *Ugnayan* Maceda assigned the primary catalytic role to the people as partly sharing in the creative process, as performers, and as the audience themselves, the entire creative schema including the written score and its ultimate realization as one musical event of unprecedented proportion.

The event marked a dramatic introduction for Maceda’s future creative ventures wherein theory and practice acquired greater latitude in terms of philosophy and concept, as well as cultural and behavioral signification and experientiality. Maceda sought to redefine music composition as an expression of philosophical thought directly or indirectly derived and suggested by village musical practices in Southeast Asia or the classical court traditions in East Asia.



UGNAYAN AS SYMBOLIC MATERIALIZATION OF ASIAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Maceda’s inherent musical instincts was struck by the underlying social paradigms and cultural significance of Asian expressive traditions vis-a-vis the

uniqueness of their structural elements and distinctive sonic manifestations. Maceda formulated his now classic theories in musical production as emanating from such social phenomena as concepts of non-linear time, shared labor and human technology, and the unorthodox classification of things.

From a socio-cultural standpoint, Maceda considered the volume of raw human energies as a form of technology itself when linked together in meaningful synergy as opposed to machines that generate artificial energy and reduce the human capacities in the productive process.²

When and how did *Ugnayan* begin?

The over-all concept of *Ugnayan* was long in the making. In 1968, six years previous to its realization in 1974, Maceda had already conceived of an environmental sound event that required thousands of cars with loudspeakers that would create different soundscapes while cruising in freeways in large cities like Los Angeles. His blueprint was submitted to international funding agencies, but did not gain much headway in terms of funding commitment.

In the meantime, in the same year, Maceda was able to premiere his monumental ritual music entitled *Pagsamba* (Worshiping) for 240 performers that also utilized the environmental space of a circular structure, which perfectly fitted the architecture of the Catholic chapel of the University of the Philippines.

In 1971, Maceda composed and premiered *Cassettes 100*, which as its title describes, is a piece for 100 cassette tape recorders. The piece was staged at the spacious lobby of the Cultural Center of the Philippines

Labeled as the “Study in Sound: Sound in Various Densities, Dispersions and Concentrations” (Goquingco, 1971), *Cassettes 100*, was Maceda’s first attempt in using an electronic device in his compositions. Although the general public reaction was highly mixed, Maceda was greatly encouraged by the result of his experiment, which, in contrast to the sedentary location of the sound sources in *Pagsamba*, was able to create unpredictable dispersions of sounds through the planned and unplanned movements of the participants. It was immediately after this work that Maceda broached to Lucrecia Kasilag, then President of Cultural Center and the chief cultural *majordomo* of Imelda Marcos, the fundamental idea of a sonic event of unusual dimension.

In a nutshell, *Ugnayan* was the composite musical mural that fused together various musical and extra-musical concepts from *Pagsamba* (large number of performers in a prescribed spatial configuration), *Cassettes 100* (the use of the cassette and taped natural sounds, as musical instruments, as well as

² It was during this period that Maceda’s works, inspired by his findings in ethnomusicological research, emphasized the participation of many people in the process of realizing compositional ideas (*Pagsamba* (1968) for 140 performers, *Cassettes 100* (1968) and *Udlot-Udlot* (1975) for 800 players and singers)

the dynamic configuring of sonic clouds as part of the musical realization), and the original blueprint of

Atmospheres which involved the participation of communities of people creating a musical environment through semi-controlled interactive performance.

The expressive construct of the piece has been defined by Maceda as something that is both collective and individual in terms of its intended philosophical and psychological response from its participants:

The totality of music in a sound atmosphere can characterize whole cities, villages, parks, centers and airports. In Ugnayan, quiet portions invite contemplation... the bamboo zithers...when treated in a certain manner...cannot but attract a listener to be led to personal thoughts, feelings and abstractions. In the same composition, loud tones from hundreds of sonorous sticks with programmed beats make up altogether a very dense sound atmosphere.

Naturally, a musical experience of this sort is a departure from the usual way of listening to music as emanating from one source – the concert stage or a loudspeaker. But this departure opens to new paths of thought.

UGNAYAN AS SOCIAL POWER

The involvement of peoples and communities in both concept and actual realization of **Ugnayan** transcends the boundaries of music and music composition as process of communicating individual emotion or aesthetic condition. Rather, it harnessed the collective participation and energy of many individuals in the process of creating and producing a unique environment of both sound and human volition. It is for this reason **Ugnayan** was seen and adopted as a potentially effective instrument in the exercise of collective power in the context of political governance.

What superseded the musical and easthetic ideologies surrounding **Ugnayan** was the socio-political agenda of the newly-installed martial rule of the regime of Ferdinand Marcos, which gave its all-out support through the immediate patronage of then First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos. **Ugnayan** became a flagship project in her thrust to cultivate culture and the arts as part of the campaign to mitigate the impact of the authoritarian rule over an otherwise gregariously licentious Filipino society.

The very title **Ugnayan** was in fact not Maceda's idea but was rather suggested by Imelda Romualdez Marcos who commissioned and directly supervised the implementation of the work. In the involvement of people and community, the totally opposing ideological intents of Maceda the composer and

Marcos the dictator led to a point of intersection by which each one could achieve their separate ends. Quoting from one propaganda material,

*“The project **Ugnayan**, as initiated by the First Lady, Mrs. Imelda R. Marcos, in [her] capacity as founder of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, aims to focus public awareness on indigenous musical instruments while seeking music as a ‘medium for organized meaningful social action in the New Society’. **Ugnayan** also hopes to illustrate how art and industry can work together and how persons and communities or tradition and technology can be interlinked creatively”.*

In this [directive], it is quite apparent that the artistic aim is subordinated to the politicization of the musical act. In the editorial of the same propaganda material, the government agenda is revealed in more explicit terms, contextualizing the improvisational aspect of Maceda’s compositional idea as a manifestation of collective will in line with its own design for absolute governance:

*“As a creative ideology for unity and community,... **Ugnayan** can operate in large or small groups...brought together or linked together for positive ends. It would be difficult for this nation to develop its full potentials, to experience its longed-for democratic revolution...in the generation of a new reform-oriented and a compassionate development-oriented society, unless its people are one in body and in spirit.*

THE SOCIO-AESTHETIC IMPACT

In the context of the totality of Maceda’s creative vision, the success or failure of **Ugnayan** as a musico-cultural-historical phenomenon could pose a challenge to both aesthetic judgment and socio-political evaluation.

Aside from the sheer magnitude of the endeavor, **Ugnayan** could have scored unquestionable success in advancing a concept of music making and musical experience in which audience, performers, participants, space, and sounds play equal roles in both the compositional, experiential and re-creative processes.

In the context of the worldwide revolution in modern musical literature, **Ugnayan** may have also contributed significantly to the undermining of western musical aesthetic parameters, from which even the so-called avant-garde composers from Europe and North America, could have only partly succeeded. (I remember presenting introducing Ugnayan and Udlot-Udlot to the composers from Illinois in 1988 and they thought the work was impractical because it is difficult to perform in the west.) In this regard, **Ugnayan** may be viewed as a cultural critique of the New Music movement in western art music which, in its concentrated effort to liberate music from the harmonic theory and old structural constructs, has failed to address the role of humans as agencies in the

experiential dimension of a musical act. The very fact that this highly experimental and extremely intrepid musical venture materialized at all, considering the tremendous and varied resources that it required, could serve as sufficient indicator of its being an extraordinary creative achievement. Furthermore, Maceda was able to “dramatize” in **Ugnayan** his advocacy for change in the language of music:

A spiritual consciousness for change can be aroused by a new rather than by a worn-out musical language.

It is in this regard, however, that **Ugnayan** may have had its shortcomings, if not failure. As an instrument of communication in which its main componential mediums – people and sounds, **Ugnayan** did not factor in the proper aesthetic synchronization of the two. The almost messianic vision of **Ugnayan**, from both musical and political perspectives, obfuscated the fact that no common ground existed between the musical culture of the communities of people mostly coming from the cosmopolitan Manila Area, the sounds extracted from village musical practices and the linguistic and compositional concept of the European avant-garde music. The lack of any schematic design on the entire organizational machinery, including the composer himself, to reconcile these elements, resulted in disorientation, if not alienation, as well as in further delineating the aesthetic difference between these elements. (See reviews by Goqingco and Molina) As one writer put it,

“Philippine response to the Ugnayan experience was almost apathetic – or pathetic – that New Year’s night. Precisely because Ugnayan is visionary and ultra-sophisticated in concept, it proved to be the ken of the masses. To begin with, they cannot even claim a nodding acquaintance with Ugnayan’s indigenous instruments which are strange to them.”

The only common property that may have successfully bound these disparate elements was the radio technology that both offered a familiar experiential medium or was able to transcend cultural, temporal, or spatial objects.

UGNAYAN AND THE POWER DISCOURSE

At the same time, questions on the extra-musical merits of **Ugnayan** as well as the social and political issues that surrounded its [realization], still linger to this day. If indeed **Ugnayan’s** most shining moment is its very realization, would it have been possible to happen without the mechanism of the martial law regime? Would hundreds of thousands of individuals have congregated and followed promotional directives under a different political climate? The “people power” events succeeding and actually ending the martial law regime can provide the basis for arguing for such a possibility, considering the Filipinos’ proven capacity for collective action and creative maneuvering. On the other hand, one can still doubt that without a power-laden leadership and what

Foucault calls a “polymorphous disciplinary mechanism”, such an endeavor could be accomplished with all its complex technical and logistic demands.

The entire phenomenon of ***Ugnayan*** could spawn protracted, if not endless, discourse on power, both as a symbolic and a pragmatic mechanism. One is the bi-polar view of its conception and its utilization. From Maceda’s compositional perspective, ***Ugnayan*** was conceived as a symbolic affirmation of the concept of juridical power, operating in the context of individual rights by the different sectors of society to change and ramify the structures of a collective musical production. On the other hand, the Marcos regime mobilized its entire communications apparatus and invested substantial resources in the view of utilizing ***Ugnayan***, as an instrument of consolidating and dominating a people, inured to a sense of community action.

Following this bi-polar dimensionality of ***Ugnayan***, another question that can be asked is “how much did Maceda sacrifice on his original idea of creating a music of ‘atmospheres’ in accommodating and actually remolding the compositional concept into a socio-political experience?” Would his communities of people have been more sensitized and focused on the sonic dimension of the work if they were oriented from the very start that the element of social interlinking – or *ugnayan* – is merely secondary to the musical, aesthetic, and environmental goals of this unique creative venture?

Instead of venturing an answer to this question which will need another long analytical discourse, one can follow up with the question of how much did the Marcos regime sacrifice or may have lost in giving all-out support to ***Ugnayan***? Looking from both sides of the issue, one must realize that ***Ugnayan*** was as much a musical experiment as it was a political one on the part of the Marcoses, albeit an experiment of *avant-garde* character and proportion. One reason that the regime may have adopted this artistic venture was the very philosophy of the work contained in Maceda’s social thesis: the concept of collectivity and cooperation, that could have inspired the entire regime and given it a symbolic action to capitalize on for its agenda of governance:

The idea that only large groups of people can put together sounds spread out over a big area is paralleled by the cooperation necessary for large numbers of people to achieve a certain purpose. (Maceda, 1974)

One may even surmise that the regime found credence in Maceda’s determinism and sense of purpose in undertaking such an (unprecedented/suicidal) experiment, in the same manner that it placed much premium on the country’s intellectual and artistic resources in building a “New Society”. On the other hand, the Marcos regime might have also taken a big risk in mobilizing people to congregate as one mass of humanity to perform a concerted action, the very same popular mass that constituted people power that toppled the same regime 12 years later. It is told that Imelda Marcos who, with all her imperial boldness

and savvy in undertaking projects of Victorian magnitude, invested and gambled her own patroness-of-the-arts persona and bore the responsibility of committing the entire Philippine government to an unknown musical enterprise, entertained doubts on the final outcome of **Ugnayan**, especially in involving large numbers of people in what everyone knows as an unpredictable Filipino society. According to Orosa,

“This [the involvement of the masses] filled Mrs. Marcos, Ugnayan’s principal patron, with apprehension. She was launching, full scale, a project that was too eclectic, too esoteric in approach and, therefore, not likely to capture the common tao’s imagination. But without taking the risk, she would have allowed Ugnayan to remain nothing more than 20 sheets of paper stashed away in a drawer, doubtless to mold in obscurity.” (Orosa, 1974)

From the socio-political perspective, **Ugnayan** may have achieved more of its political agenda during the course of its preparation, of galvanizing the various sectors of the national polity – government, civil society, the educated, ordinary man on the street, the barrio folks, etc., in working towards a common end, rather than on the actual “performance” of the piece, where the principal players themselves and its main consumers – the people, failed to gain any form of social and aesthetic fulfillment.

There are indeed many more questions that remain unexplored in **Ugnayan** of 1974, not only from an artistic and political perspectives, but also on its place in the cultural history of the Filipino as an imaginative, creative, visionary and pragmatic people. For its historicity, these questions on **Ugnayan** may even be considered today as moot and academic. Thirty years after its happening, today’s world is perhaps more willing to accept such artistic experimentation based on its own musical and artistic terms, without its extra-musical rationale or socio-political agenda.

From a wider perspective, the concept of **Ugnayan**, artistically and politically, could suggest other forms of social action, designed under aesthetic concepts that are derived from the cultural and social environment of its framers. This possibility was actually entertained by Jose Maceda himself while working on the project.

In this regard, **Ugnayan** also demonstrate the use of musical composition as a form of critical commentary of social realities and issues, in the same breadth as literary essays or audio-visual documentaries could function.

Under these considerations, **Ugnayan** of 1974 should therefore be viewed as a phenomenon of daunting vision, with its own futuristic significance, in spite of and because of, its use of old and ancient elements as well as its focus on the

life of ordinary people, including its use of unsophisticated technology, and culturally ingrained sense of collectivity.

What is important is that the inner vision of *Ugnayan*, as music and social action, has not been disproven by succeeding events in the Filipinos' cultural or political history. Just like any seed that takes a while to blossom, all it needs is to be continuously re-visited and refertilized whether in its original or ramified form to really discover its true essence and potential, which time and circumstance in 1974 may not have completely allowed.

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