

THE EVOLUTION OF STREET DANCE IN THE ZAMBOANGA HERMOSA FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper titled, *The Evolution of Street Dance in the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival* provides the basic knowledge of the origin of the festival and the nature of the dances being performed during the street dancing event and how it evolved from its simple beginning up to the present. A qualitative method was employed through focus group discussions, interviews with key informants, actual observations, and survey with documentary analysis. The respondents were street dance organizers, dance teachers/choreographers who yearly participate in the festival, while schools were randomly selected where the proponent conducted observations. With a fact, that the city serves as the melting pot of diverse cultures, the street dance organizers are still gradually making ways in order to put up "distinct characteristics" and calling the performances Zamboanga's own. One thing is clear to everyone that the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival is celebrated in honor of Zamboanga City's patroness, the Nuestra Señora La Virgen del Pilar. The concept of theme for costume and performance is left to the discretion of the participants as long as it depicts the Hispanic influence, culture and tradition of the Zamboangueños. The dance should also portray homage to the Lady of Pilar. It is recommended that the Video-CD produced in this study on the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival should be utilized to provide concrete documentation of preserving the rich heritage of the Zamboangueño culture, in observance of the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival particularly in the street dancing event.

Keywords: culture, festival, evolution, street dance

INTRODUCTION

The Street Dance in the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival

To date, there is no known literature on the Zamboanga Hermosa Street Dance Festival except for the unpublished thesis of the main proponent of this study, which she wrote 11 years back. Building on this previous study, the researcher would like to know how this particular street dance has evolved since then, in terms of the dance steps, the music used, the costumes worn, the instruments as well as the props.

The Zamboanga Hermosa Street Dance Festival started in the 1980s when the Department of Tourism (DOT) encouraged major cities nationwide to hold their own festival just like the Sinulog Festival in Cebu City, which as we all know, has proven to be a huge tourist attraction, bringing in to the Queen City of the South both local and international visitors.

In the earlier times, the Zamboanga Hermosa

Festival borrowed the dance steps of the Sinulog but used Chabacano music as accompaniment which was recorded by a local group of singers called the Stages. The use of the canned accompaniment was the desire of the then city mayor the late, Maria Clara Lorenzo Lobregat, who wanted to give the festival a touch of Zamboangueno color. Very recently, the city government under city mayor Hon. María Isabelle Climaco, has established new guidelines for the festival. One important requirement is not to dance with the image of the Blessed Nuestra Senora La Virgen del Pilar. The image can be used as a prop but the same shall stay put in one place. Another innovation for the dance presentation was to depict the Subanen, Tausug and Hispanic cultural influences.

It would be interesting to delve deeper into the background of these changes and their trajectory. Could this be a move towards truly defining the Zamboangueno identity, considering that the city is a melting pot of people from various tribes making the city immensely multi-cultural?

Culture and Dance

Culture is the fountain of progress and creativity and must be carefully nurtured to grow and develop. This is how the World Commission on Culture and Development had described what culture is. While the Philippine Agenda 21 had explained that, a central goal of development is the improvement of human well-being... the development of people and their culture has been the guiding principle for development policies and strategies. And this is supported by the National Commission for the Culture and the Arts stating in an article that the important role of culture is the foundation for national development and unity.

The National Commission for the Culture and the Arts (NCCA) had defined culture as dynamic – which continuously restructured as the younger generations innovate, create and change certain phases of cultural practices to make these relevant and consistent to the needs and demands of times. As this commission was created, it emphasizes on the need of every citizen to preserve and conserve the Filipino historical and cultural heritage and resources. It also stresses on the grassroots of its mandates: It serves as an enabling body for various activities that lead to the preservation of our national identity and the enrichment of the total development of our nationhood. Together with various agencies like the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), Philippine Folk Dance Society (PFDS), National Historical Institute (NHI) and the Department of Tourism (DOT) promote the preservation of culture and coordinating with these agencies to establish well-defined programs that focus on the unique history and rich culture of the country. As Senator Loren Legarda has said that the Philippines is a nation full of talent, creativity and ingenuity. Art and Culture should be a priority because it shapes our identity which is the facet of nation building (Ang, 2015).

Countries have dances that identify the region and its culture. Cultures are made more colorful and vibrant because of folk dances that reflect the people. The National Artist in Dance, Leonor Orosa Goquingco had defined dances as a veritable mirror reflective of the deepest sensitivities of the human spirit and she even added that dance is an integral part of the most meaningful events in the life of an individual and of the community (Goquingco, 1980).

Philippine Festivals

In the Philippines today, dance occurs in an amazing diversity. It is not only found among the Christians but also among people of other religions in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao (Dacanay, 1973) Culture changes and develops. Just like how Dr. Jesus Peralta

in his article mentioned that, persons on the edge of society are individual agents of change who create, invent, and innovate because they are not restricted to normative acts. And because unrestrained, they can break free. This is where the development of culture starts (Peralta, 2015). With this statement, new festivals in the country had emerged following the footpath of the famous Sinulog festival in Cebu, Dinagyang in Iloilo and Ati-Atihan in Aklan among others. These festivals have been planned, organized, conducted and developed in order to preserve their customs and traditions. But what are festivals and why are they important to Filipinos? Festivals or Fiestas are parts of Filipino culture. Each city or municipality or even a barrio has at least one local festival of its own, usually on the feast of its patron saint or maybe based on the origins of their place and each have various reasons for the celebrations (www.philippineinsider.com).

Vispera, Bando Real, Velada and Diana

Just like any other city in the country, Zamboanga City has its fiestas. Fiestas are celebrations with parades and dances in honor of a saint that our forefathers had handed from one generation to the next. Enriquez (1984) described it as a pietistic revelry in supplication for favors, expression of gratitude of assistance granted, or simply in evidence of faith and devotion to the deity. In a study conducted by Sacares about the Dance Ethnography of the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival, she made mentioned on how Zamboanga fiestas were celebrated in the old days. There were colorful flower, torch, and other entertainment (Sacares, 2006). These were clearly written in a book by Orendain as he said that, the festivities begin on the vispera, the eve of the fiesta. A bando real paraded the main streets spreading the spirit of jubilation. Singing and dancing dressed in a fanciful costumes depicting legendary, fictitious or historical characters. A velada or literary musical program featured declamations, skits and folk dances from the different representatives of the old town. On the dawn of the fiesta, a diana is held. It is a daybreak arousal of the town by a band playing lively tunes, marching along the streets (Enriquez, 1984). Notice that these celebrations dated back as early as the Spanish period, where Zamboanga is known to be one of the seats of Spanish government.

Zamboanga Hermosa Festival

Just when the Department of Tourism ordered each key city to have its own festival, Zamboanga City did not hesitate to start on its own (Quiling, 2017). In the mid-80s during the time of the then city administrator Rustico Varela, with the help of the Department of Education, Zamboanga City Division Office, MAPE Head Mr. Theodore Quiling, a street dance was started. It had simple beginnings. There were no prizes at stake, just pure participation from the different schools in the

city. They agreed on concepts that were too broad yet undemanding.

Does the fiesta have a future?

This query was made in a postlude of Alejandro Roces's book. The article cites that; the fiesta is a vital element in our culture. The author even suggested that we should make an equal effort to study, evaluate and conserve our ritual traditions. The unique features of certain fiestas should be studied. Old records should reveal how certain unusual practices began (Roces, 1980). The main reason why this study was conducted.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive qualitative research method.

Research Respondents

Key informants of the study were the street dance organizers and choreographers of the different schools in the city that have participated in the Street Dance competitions or continue to get involved in the festival. Likewise, official and judges were also interviewed as sources of significant information.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the various schools and relevant offices in Zamboanga City.

Research Instrument

The dummy table (Table 1) served as a guide for the researchers in further analyzing the data gathered to trace the changes in the evolution of Street Dance in the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival through a three-period timeline.

Features	1980s		1990s		2000s	
	Description	What/Who influenced the adaption of these features	Changes	What/Who influenced the adaption of these features	Changes	What/Who influenced the adaption of these features
Dance Steps						
Music/Instrument						
Costumes/Props						
Concept						
Composition of Participants						

Table 1 Dummy Table

Data Gathering Procedure

Letters of Interview and Observation were signed and noted by our College President and were sent to the different respondents of the study.

Document analysis of primary data such as press

releases, reports, issuances by the city government of Zamboanga and other official documents from related agencies were conducted. Key informants were interviewed. Data gathered were triangulated through focus group discussions among key informants – dance choreographers involved in the said festival.

Recordings of the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival Street Dance Festival were gathered and analyzed in terms of the distinct features and the innovations made. The researchers immersed themselves and observed the Street Dance last October 2015 and 2016 during which they also interviewed random spectators and record the dances in still photos and videos. Data were also gathered through face-to-face interview with the Executive Director of the Sinulog Foundation, Inc. in the person of Mr. Ric Ballesteros, the data may shed more of the beginning of the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival.

Delimitation

This study commenced in the year 2015 and was completed in the year 2017.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the consolidated result in a tabular manner showing different timelines.

Table 2. Street Dance in the 80s

Features	Description					
Dance Steps	Basic Folk Dance Steps					
Music/Instrument	Canned music using cassette tapes. Each contingent provided own sound system					
Costume/Props	Rural costumes, ethnic, occupational					
Concept	Participants were asked to perform rural, highlands or occupational dances					
Composition of Participants	Elementary students in the public school					

Table 3. Street Dance in the 90s

Features	Description
Dance Steps	Basic Dance Steps in 2/4 and ¾ time signature
Music/Instrument	Canned music using compact disks. Live drum beats and drum and bugle were introduced incorporated with Chabacano Song
Costume/Props	Spanish-inspired Maria Clara , Ethnic Attire
Concept	Free Interpretation
Composition of Participants	College and High School students in the public and private schools

Table 4. Street Dance in the 2000s

Features	Description
Dance Steps	Latin, Ethnic or Samba Steps
Music/Instrument	Mixed music – Live Latin Beats with canned music
Costume/Props	Mixed. Maria Clara Inspired, Curacha inspired etc
Concept	Depicting the 3 cultural influences – Subanen, Muslim, Spanish
Composition of Participants	2 Categories: 1. Elementary 2. Open Category – HS, Colleges, Universities, Barangays

The Evolution of Street Dance in the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival

In a study made by the same author, it was noted that the first street dance (See Table 2) in Zamboanga City had simple beginnings (Sacares, 2006). There were no strict rules on the number of participants, no prizes at stake, no specific dance steps, the accompaniment, costume and props were all left to the discretion of the teachers assigned. Folk dances in rural and occupational settings were performed. And presentations were open to Elementary students in the public school (Quiling, 2017).

In the 1990s the street dancing gradually became more organized following the call of the Department of Tourism to provide a total package to the city's festival. Guidelines of the street dance became more specific and organizers changed the composition of the participants, among others (See Table 3). This particular decade marked the beginning of a free interpretation category. Thus, giving the choreographers freedom to decide what to perform in the festivities.

Street dancing had a new face in the following

decade (refer to Table 4). This could be the result of the whirlwind success and influences of some other major festivals in the country – Sinulog, Dinagyang, Ati-Atihan among others. Each city took extra effort to pioneer a festival which is uniquely theirs with the aim of promoting the tourism industry. The concept of Latin music and performances were the upshot of the city's new tag name as Asia's Latin City from being known as The City of Flowers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

It is concluded that after almost 30 years, the street dance organizers of the Zamboanga Hermosa Festival are gradually making ways to incorporate features that are distinct Zamboangueno. It is noted that the features of the dance steps and concepts have changed from simple to highly-choreographed presentations. Likewise, the music and accompaniment have changed from canned folk music to well-arranged Chabacano compositions. The costumes evolved from plain colored pongee to adorably embellished get-ups. The props from bare to strikingly brilliant huge flowers, candles, vinta sails and the like. The continuous revisions of the street dance's concepts / guidelines are encouraged until organizers could put up distinct features of the competition. One thing did not change since the inception of street dance and is main the reason of the celebration – that is in honor of the Blessed Nuestra Senora La Virgen del Pilar.

Recommendations

Based from the results, the following recommendations are hereby proposed:

1. Search continuously for distinct features that could be incorporated in the street dance and make it truly Zamboangueno.
2. Establish more stable and consistent guidelines in consultation with the city's choreographers as well as in coordination with the DOT and other agencies on Culture and Arts.
3. Increase the amount of prizes in order to help cover expenses of the participants.
4. Establish an independent foundation that would plan and organize the street dance festival.
5. Conduct more research-based studies on street dance and other aspects of Zamboangueno culture and arts.

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