

Filipina Singers and Jazz in Post-Colonial Manila (1946-1970)

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I miss my singing... I was moaning to Ariston Avelino, “why I’m just a has been, a *laós*.” But he consoled me. “Your type of singing never goes out of fashion, he said. But people forget you, you know, when you’re out of sight.” I guess I just have to resign myself.

- Priscilla “Esen” Bataclan Aristoreñas, 1966¹

Nearly thirty years before this anecdote, Priscilla Aristoreñas (1922-2018) was “the girl with the ‘it’ voice” on radio who, at the age of fourteen, drew in listeners from Manila and offshore broadcasts through “her husky, deep-throated... and dignified manner” of singing.² Priscilla was a household name. She appeared on regular radio broadcasts right before and after the Second World War (WWII), on variety shows during the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), and in the United Service Organizations (USO) circuit and night clubs after independence from the American Occupation (1902-1946).³ As she fulfilled contracts in hotels and clubs in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the 1950s, one journalist noted

¹ *Laós* means outdated or past one’s prime. Jean Pope, ‘Priscilla, the Kolynos Girl: She’s in the Mood for a Comeback,’ *Sunday Times Magazine*, November 13, 1966, 36-37.

² These quotes are sourced from articles titled “The Show Must Go On” and “Radio Personality: Priscilla” that are located in Priscilla Aristoreñas’ family archive (courtesy of Priscilla’s niece and archive holder Lulu Araullo). Like many family archives, Priscilla Aristoreñas’ archive lacks detailed information for many sources. In the case of these two articles, no date, writer, and publication information is available. “The Show Must Go On” likewise notes that Priscilla “receives hundreds of fan letters not only from people all over the country but also from radio listeners in Java, Siam, Shanghai, Singapore, Straits Settlements, etc. She personally autographed pictures weekly on the average of 200.”

³ I will use the terms “America/American” to refer to the United States and U.S. citizens/residents/cultural production throughout this article as a way to acknowledge the outsized role the U.S. and “Americanization” has played in the colonial and post-colonial history of the Philippines.

that “Priscilla is probably the best respected jazz singer in the Far East.”⁴ Returning to the epigraph above from thirty years later, Avelino was perhaps correct that, although Priscilla’s jazz-associated vocal style would always find an audience and even be built into a musical trend, Priscilla herself would not be easily remembered. Without continued radio exposure, and with no commercial recordings available until the twenty-first century, there was no way for people in the 1960s through the 1990s to hear the singing voice that Priscilla was known for during the height of her career.⁵ There is likewise very limited information about Priscilla available to the public. Priscilla does not even have a Wikipedia page.⁶ This is the case for many female singers performing jazz in the Philippines, at least until the 1970s, the result of which is a huge gap in what is already a limited understanding of jazz in the Philippines.

Throughout this piece, I use “Filipina” to describe musicians who were women. While “Filipino” is the official and gender-neutral identifier for nationals, using “Filipina” is a conscious attempt to impart how post-colonial Filipino women regulated their careers within socially constructed meanings and male-dominated spaces of jazz. The post-colonial Filipina singer navigated the sociocultural, economic, and hybrid legacies of pre-colonial traditions and colonial occupations of the Philippines by Spain (1565-1898), the United States of America (1902-1946), and Japan (1942-1945). At the same time, their careers as singers of jazz reflect Denise Cruz’s notion of the post-war modern Filipina—a woman not “bound to the land, but that of a transgressive woman who flouted the norms, spoke multiple languages, traveled, and was both the product and producer of a nation and culture in flux.”⁷ They emerged from pathways of pre-

⁴ Geoffrey A. Giras quoted in “Talking Not Her Forte” by Lina Flor. No date and publication retrieved. Courtesy of Lulu Araullo.

⁵ IndiRa Records released the compilation album *Adobo Jazz: A Portrait of the Filipino as a Jazz Artist*, and in 2002 the second volume was released which contains Priscilla singing “This is a Lovely Way to Spend an Evening” with Chris Abelardo (bass), Ric Flores (drums), and Tony Carpio (guitar) from the 1963 live broadcast recording on Radio Hongkong. CD copy courtesy of Richie Quirino. Track list available on <https://www.discogs.com/release/21963385-Variious-Adobo-Jazz-A-Portrait-of-the-Filipino-as-a-Jazz-Artist-Vol-2>.

⁶ Aside from her research including Priscilla in her book, historian of Philippine Radio Elizabeth Enriquez has released a documentary in 2022, mentioning Priscilla as the most popular jazz singer in the Philippines in the 1930s. See CHED-Salikha-EPAPC [EPAPC], “Wika, Awit, Radyo, at Pananakop,” YouTube, August 2, 2022, 7:47-8:11, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=259v_yVJVC0. See Elizabeth L. Enriquez, *Appropriation of Colonial Broadcasting: A History of Early Radio in the Philippines, 1922-1946* (University of the Philippines Press, 2008).

⁷ Denise Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities the Making of the Modern Filipina* (Duke University Press, 2012), 19.

war jazz culture in Asia and the Pacific, when Filipino musicians were frequently hired in the region's entertainment circuit, U.S. military bases, and cruise ships. These musicians' cultural presence in the Nusantara and transpacific space was very prominent, such that "jazz became strongly associated with Filipinos, rather than with (African) Americans in Southeast Asia."⁸ Thus, not only did post-colonial Filipina vocalists live through socially conditioned private and public urban music spheres of Manila from 1946-1970; their fluctuating presence in the domestic scene was predicated by their constant mobilities within and beyond the country.

Although formal independence from the U.S. was gained on July 4, 1946, the Philippines' sovereignty was veiled by neocolonial conditions, particularly in the national capital region of Manila. The Philippine economy and nationhood ideologies were driven by the influence of the new elite, cultures of patronage, cronyism, and capitalism. These reinforced indirect control on the country's political system, including: the establishment of U.S. military bases in the country; the authorization of parity rights for Americans to Philippine natural resources; and the administration aligning with American anti-communist Cold War ideologies.⁹ One effect was the employment of Filipino musicians in military bases within and around Asia and the Pacific—although supplying the music of modernity required by the colonial state and neighboring countries was not new for Filipinos, rather it was something that they had been doing since the nineteenth century.¹⁰ In this circuit, musicians were exposed to the latest international popular music and American jazz repertoire. Meanwhile, media industries, cultural institutions, and music businesses were occupied with constructing post-colonial Filipino identities amidst the impact of Americanization. For example, while Filipino jazz musicians tailored their

⁸ Bart Barendregt, Peter Keppy, Nordholt Henk Schulte, *Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Music Histories* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 28. See also Frederick J. Schenker, "Listening for Empire in Transnational Jazz Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to Jazz Studies*, Nicholas Gebhardt, Nichole Rustin-Paschal, & Tony Whyton (Routledge, 2019), 236; Adil Johan, and Mayco A. Santaella, eds. *Made in Nusantara Studies in Popular Music* (Routledge, 2021), 1-3.

⁹ Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Ateneo de Manila University, 2017), 167-171; Kevin Sliwoski, "Sounds of Subic Bay: The U.S. Navy in the Philippines, 1950-1971," PhD Dissertation (University of California, Riverside, 2019), 26; Charlie Samuya Veric, *Children of the Postcolony: Filipino Intellectuals and Decolonization, 1946-1972* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2020), 64-67, 109, 126.

¹⁰ meLê yamomo, *Sounding Modernities: Theatre and Music in Manila and the Asia Pacific, 1869-1946* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 191-194; Bart A. Barendregt, Peter Keppy, Nordholt Henk Schulte, *Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Music Histories* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 28.

concert programming to align with the American jazz evolution narrative prevalent during the American jazz diplomacy period, they explored ways of expressing notions of Filipino-ness by arranging folk songs and performing newly composed tunes with their modern jazz interpretations.¹¹

Bringing together anecdotes from interviews I conducted, interviews between writer Richie Quirino and musicians, mainstream media coverage, and literary analyses from scholars of Philippine cultural history, I present a history of the jazz scene in Manila through the lives of female singers (and singers who played the piano) associated with the genre after the Second World War (1946 to 1970).¹² While serving as working musicians in the region's entertainment circuit, they had jazz songs in their repertoire, their few domestic mainstream press advertisements linked them to jazz, and their presence in the scene is remembered by the community, though faintly. I also highlight "associated with the genre" to emphasize how jazz was experienced and signified differently in a non-American narrative of the genre, especially in the context of a post-colonial nation. Despite this distinctiveness, there are social parallels and connected experiences between jazz in the Philippines and in the United States that reflect the translocality of jazz cultures, such as style conventions, repertoire, and the dominance of male participation. Thus, it is urgent to observe how Filipina singers navigated key encounters, as well as illuminate how they were portrayed in journalistic publications such as dailies and weeklies, particularly those based in Manila.

PIANISTS WHO SING

During the mid-twentieth century, women in Manila's scene could only occupy two types of jazz roles—as singers or as pianists who sing. Working as the latter type were Nora Linda (birth year unknown) and Thelma Quesada (b. 1936), who both made regular careers in nightclubs, military camps, and hotels as singing pianists.¹³ Linda's first recorded appearance as a solo performer was at

¹¹ Krina Cayabyab, "Becoming Jazz Friends: Translocality and Dispositions in Manila, 1946-1978," *Jazz and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2024): 13-47, 28-29.

¹² Personal interviews relevant to this article (conducted during fieldwork for my research dissertation): Megan Herrera, March 2, 2022, March 25, 2023; Thelma Quesada (through the mediation of her daughter Odette Quesada, January 2, 2023; Jun Cadiz, March 18, 2023; Rita Posadas, March 25, 2023; Ramon Guevara, April 3, 2023; Glenn Velarde, April 26, 2023; Richard Merk, son of Annie Brazil, May 6, 2023; Eddie Sangcap, May 11, 2023.

¹³ Thelma Quesada was born on August 7, 1936. Thelma Quesada, personal interview through the mediation of Odette Quesada, January 2, 2023; Luis Ma. Trinidad, "On with the Show," *Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, August 19, 1967.

Here's Howe at the Shellborne Hotel along Dewey Boulevard, a waterfront landmark for Manila's trade, tourism, and naval forces.¹⁴ Between 1961 and 1967, she was heard at the Metro Garden and Grill, Le Parisienne Grill, and The Office where she was advertised as "Nora Linda and her Combo."¹⁵ She was also remembered for singing "East of the Sun (and West of the Moon)" and other Japanese songs, as well as risqué Tagalog ditties at the Tropicana Bar at Bay View.¹⁶ Entertainment publications in Manila described her as "tall, charming," "whose style could pass for jazz," as she played "extremely different tunes, from the serio-comic and jazz to the sound of pop and long-hair."¹⁷

Born in San Juan, Manila in 1936, Thelma Quesada grew up in her family compound until the family fled to Bunis, Quezon when WWII began.¹⁸ Her father, Dominador Quesada, was a composer, a bandleader, and was her first piano teacher—a standard carrier of the stern, wrist-slapping tradition. Thelma Quesada recalled him telling her mother, a coloratura singer, before he passed away in 1945, "Don't forget to have Thelma study piano because I think she has a talent for that."¹⁹ For as long as her mother could afford, Quesada was able to take private lessons, eventually entering St. Scholastica's College for women. She enjoyed listening to the records of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, June Christy,

¹⁴ According to a later article by Luis M. Trinidad, "On with the Show," *Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, August 19, 1967. Here's Howe at the Majestic Arms Hotel was one of the earliest venues where jazz habitues went to in the 1950s. Earliest newspaper account was 1952, with former American GI playing Larry Allen as its pianist entertainer. See "Piano Artists: Their Kind of Music Ranges from Bach to Be-bop," *Saturday Mirror Magazine*, November 8, 1952. There was also a newspaper column entitled "Here's Howe" with writer Pete Howe on the Evening News in 1946.

¹⁵ *The Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, "Dinin' and Dancin'," September 24, 1961; *The Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, "After Sundown," October 1, 1961; *Philippines Free Press*, "Nightlife," October 21, 1961; Luis M. Trinidad, "On With The Show," *The Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, August 19, 1967.

¹⁶ Eric S. Giron, "The Jazzy Days of Philippine Music: Before Bacharach and the Beatles, the boogie and Brubeck," *Sunburst*, Vol. II No. 5, 1974; Eric S. Giron, "Jazz and Friends Die Hard," *Philippine Panorama*, December 16, 1979.

¹⁷ "Tall, charming" from *The Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, "After Sundown," October 1, 1961; "whose style could pass for jazz," from Eric S. Giron, "No Jazz," *Mirror Magazine*, August 29, 1964; "...with extremely different tunes..." from Luis M. Trinidad, "On With The Show," *The Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, August 19, 1967;

¹⁸ She was described as "willowy" by Eric S. Giron in "Jazz and Friends Die Hard," *Philippine Panorama*, December 16, 1979 and in "No Jazz," *Mirror Magazine*, August 29, 1964. Family background information from personal interview.

¹⁹ Dominador was beaten up by Japanese soldiers and retained injuries that became connected to his death. Thelma Quesada, personal interview through the mediation of Odette Quesada, January 2, 2023.

the Stan Kenton and Count Basie Orchestras, and Dave Brubeck.²⁰ She eventually began playing at Here's Howe, where Linda also started, which was at the time described as a cozy hub for young local listeners of jazz.²¹ Because she was still underage in the early 1950s, Quesada could only take daytime gigs; she performed four sets of forty-five minutes until seven in the evening. She would later play or hang out at the Manhattan Club, and at the Del Rosario Brothers Building—places where staunch advocates of jazz got together.²²

One memory that lingered for Quesada was a remark from a male jazz pianist: "I think you should just better sing... Don't play the piano, Thelma!" she recalled.²³ It might seem that playing jazz and popular music on the piano was an unlikely or a new skill for Filipina musicians to perform after WWII, however even during the Spanish (1565-1898) and into the American (1902-1946) occupations, Filipinas were already shaping music scenes (i.e. as performers, consumers, promoters, etc.) as part of Manila's thriving cosmopolitan modernity. By the time Quesada and Linda were beginning their rounds in the circuit, female orchestral players, opera and stage performers, radio and stage vocal personalities, music educators, and journalists had become ubiquitous in the various music cultures in Manila. For example, when the rock 'n roll and combo fever flooded local media between the mid 1950s to the 1960s, Manila's middle-class communities, all-girl exclusive schools, and mainstream entertainment media displayed the existence of female guitarists, bass players, and drummers in the youth culture.²⁴ Although women were collectively playing

²⁰ Thelma Quesada, personal interview through the mediation of Odette Quesada, January 2, 2023.

²¹ Thelma mentions Here's Howe to be in Sheraton Hotel. In 1952, Here's Howe was at Majestic Arms Hotel according to *Saturday Mirror Magazine* in November 8, 1952. In August 1967, the bar was associated with the Shellborne Hotel (Eric S. Giron, "No Jazz," in *Mirror*, August 29, 1964; "Entertainment: Nightclubs," *This Week Magazine*, September 5, 1954, October 17, 1954; "Piano Artists: Their Kind of Music Ranges from Bach to Be-bop," *Saturday Mirror Magazine*, November 8, 1952.

²² *The Manila Chronicle*, "Ad," 1957, from Odette Quesada; Giron, "Jazz Friends Die Hard." Other places she regularly played in were Club Celebrity, the American bases in Clark, Pampanga and Sangley Point, Cavite.

²³ Thelma Quesada, personal interview through the mediation of Odette Quesada (daughter), January 2, 2023. During the interview she repeated this quote thrice. Her first paycheck was PHP10.00 a night when the minimum wage was at PHP6.00. Thelma was never part of a jazz band at the beginning, so she was just on her own playing and singing a variety of popular and jazz tunes.

²⁴ Part of this promotion was the genre's cultural impact and connotation of being "rather harmless, causing more good than bad: Countless charities have been benefitted by rock 'n roll shows; competition has spurred much improvement in the quality of the music produced by these young talents; many parents are relieved to have their sons work diligently at rehearsals

instruments in western classical, brass band, and rock music before the 1970s in the Philippines, they were not a similar presence in jazz.²⁵ Perhaps due to sexist connotations that grew from American jazz histories, class aspirations, and gendered expectations and symbolisms that especially came out of colonial intricacies, there was and is a lack of women jazz instrumentalists in Manila's public.²⁶

SINGERS

Access to performance spaces and the development of new vocal practices led to the proliferation of Filipina singers in the scene. Singer Katy de la Cruz (1907-2004) was a significant *bodabil* (vaudeville) star before WWII who was popular for swing tunes like "*Balut*" ("Fertilized Duck's Egg") and ditties that often depicted sexual double-entendre, transgressing expectations for Filipina female behaviors that were typically coded as modest, demure, and virtuous.²⁷ These songs include "*Saging ni Pacing*" ("Pacing's Banana") to the tune of "I Don't Know Why (I Just Do)" by Fred Ahlert and Roy Turk and "A Tear Fell" (Dorian Burton and Eugene Randolph), which had the following lyrical hook on the last

rather than have them out doing the town" in Jean Pope, "Combo Explosion," *Mirror*, May 12, 1962. Current research on rock 'n roll shows an initial mention of the genre in "He Sings A Song: Local Favorite Rocks and Rolls with the Rhythm of His Songs," *Saturday Mirror Magazine*, May 14, 1955. Images of girls playing guitar, bass, and drums are found in issues from 1961 onwards of *Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide* and *Mirror*.

²⁵ In nineteenth century Manila, the Orquestang Babae (Orchestra for Women, "Babae" translating to "woman" or "female") was founded, an ensemble of three instrumentalists and three singers in 1890 (Tan, *Music, Labor and Capitalism*, 202-205). As consumers in the early twentieth century, women made up a significant portion of those purchasing local popular song music sheets circulated in Manila (Frederick J. Schenker, "Empire of Syncopation: Music, Race, and Labor in Colonial Asia's Jazz Age," PhD Dissertation (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2016), 209). Symphonic bands, though male-dominated, increasingly became an avenue for female musicians in the 1930s as displayed by the Banda Ligaya from Malabon that received the top award for the Manila Carnival Grand Band Competition (Raul Navarro, "The Soundscape of the Manila Carnival," *Saysay Himig, A Sourcebook on Philippine Music History*, ed. Arwitin Q. Tan (University of the Philippines Press, 2018), 325).

²⁶ For a thorough discussion of the makings of the "modern Filipina" through the various colonial regimes especially dealing with "the developing definitions of what it meant to be Filipina and Filipino during three imbricated regimes; to the emergence of middle-class, heterosexual identities and the elite's attempt to control these definitions; and to the marginalization of indigenous peoples and rural or working-class Filipinas and Filipinos," see Denise Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities the Making of the Modern Filipina* (Duke University Press, 2012), 7.

²⁷ Maria Rhodora G. Ancheta, "The Rise of the Naughties: Humor in Katy de la Cruz's Bodabil Songs," In *Philippine Modernities: Music, Performing Arts, and Language, 1880 to 1941*, ed. José S. Buenconsejo (University of the Philippines Press, 2017), 334-345.

line, “A fool am I, *kung ‘di ko naman matikman*” [if I would never even be able to taste it]. This was, as Ancheta writes, the “most direct statement about women’s sexuality and the implied advocacy for change in sexual conduct among Filipinos.”²⁸ de la Cruz’s relatable personality, artistic choices, regular and well-acclaimed performances, and recurring presence in various popular media since the inception of jazz as an American commercial culture in the 1920s have contributed to her Filipino cultural memory of being the Philippines’s “Queen of Bodabil and Jazz.”²⁹

Besides Priscilla Bataclan-Aristoreñas (discussed in the introduction to this essay), many Filipina singers’ performance trajectories were similar to that of de la Cruz. Singers like Dulce Din (1930-1975), Josie Quizon Andico (b. 1930), Annie Brazil (1933-2019), Megan Herrera (b. 1941), Rita Posadas (b. 1941), and Nelda Navarro (1935-2023) occupied gendered roles as singers in Manila and around Asia’s jazz circuit. Although they had varied social backgrounds and familial influences, they all had an early start in show business. They pursued early singing opportunities, finding their stride as jazz performers on stage shows, nightclubs, radio, concert halls, and later television.

Born in what was then Jakarta to an Indian father and a Filipina mother, Dulce Din was often referenced by postwar jazz musicians. She was even recognized as “Asia’s Queen of Jazz” in event and nightclub advertisements in the 1960s and by Lito Molina, a jazz musician, journalist and advocate of the scene.³⁰ She was remembered in interviews as having lived a life tainted by poverty, illiteracy, and tragedy.³¹ An anecdote from pre-WWII bandleader and arranger Eddie San Jose remembered her as a “seven year old mendicant.... She begged for me to listen to her song.... I was impressed by the kid... her diction was flawless.... I asked if she had any parents. She pointed at her mother who was selling flowers on the sidewalks nearby.”³² She premiered as a child singer at

²⁸ Ancheta, “The Rise of the Naughties,” 350.

²⁹ This label is based on various mass media including Wikipedia.

³⁰ Lucy P. Imatani, “Dulce Din, the Asian Queen of Jazz,” *Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, August 5, 1967; Victor Gamboa, “That Sound Called Jazz,” *Philippines Caltex Circle*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1963. Lito writes of her when she passed away in 1975. Exequiel S. Molina, “Dulce Din, 45,” *Business Day*, July 4, 1975; “Final Rehearsal,” July 11, 1975. Advertisements for The Shadows club, news clip from Tony Velarde’s family archive c/o Glenn Velarde.

³¹ Although she learned to speak English through an expatriate community in Indonesia before moving to the Philippines at an early age, fellow musicians observed that she could not read. Personal interviews with: Glenn Velarde, April 26, 2023; Megan Herrera, March 25, 2023; Rita Posadas, March 25, 2023; Ramon Guevara, April 3, 2023. See Lucy P. Imatani, “Dulce Din, the Asian Queen of Jazz,” *Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, August 5, 1967.

³² Luis Ma. Trinidad, “On with the Show,” *Manila Chronicle Entertainment Guide*, December 18, 1965.

the Avenue Theater and emulated her idol Ella Fitzgerald's vocal quality, singing tunes such as "A Tisket, A Tasket" during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945).³³ Apart from stage shows still in full swing in Manila's theaters (a result of American films generally being banned in cinema), the United Service Organization (USO) shows also became an outlet for Filipino and Filipina musicians during Japan's authority, during Liberation time (1944-1945), and immediately after the war. Din performed alongside Priscilla, Katy de la Cruz, and Rosita dela Vega in bandleader Pete Aristoreñas's big band, which played the "well-loved harmony and rhythm, chord for chord, of the famous Glenn Miller Band."³⁴ From the 1950s to the 1960s, Din sang in Manila's jazz venues like Café Indonesia, the Manhattan Club, The Shadows, Ulog, and the Manila Hotel. My interview participants described her as "no read, no write"; indicated that, due to rumors that she fell into drugs, was taken advantage of by men, or "fell in love too easily"; and some of the participants muttered or implied the phrase "*Sayang siya*" ("What a waste").³⁵ She passed away at the age of 45 in 1975. Reflecting on her career, Lito Molina wrote:

Dulce set a style of singing that up to now has not been matched by any of our singers. At the height of her career, she was the darling of musicians, jazz fans and the many opportunists who took advantage of her open generosity.... She stuck to her repertoire and style even when people said jazz was a thing of the past and at the height of the rock and pop craze. In

³³ Eric S. Giron, "Jazz and Friends Die Hard," *Philippine Panorama*, December 16, 1979; Exequiel S. Molina, "Dulce Din," *Business Day*, July 4, 1975.

³⁴ This was in 1945. The musicians included: Pete Aristorenas (leader), Pacifico Yumsuan (1st alto sax), Bernardo Aristorenas (2nd tenor sax), Pastor Villapando (3rd alto sax), Manuel Umali (4th tenor sax), Pacifico Villapando (5th Bari sax), Hermogenes Ponce (1st trumpet), Carlos Reyes (2nd trumpet), Pedro Molina (3rd trumpet) Vicente Gonzales (4th trumpet), Julio Carasco (1st trombone), Juan Valero (2nd trombone), Tomas de los Reyes (3rd Trombone), Nestor Robles (piano), Manolo Velasquez (bass), Ramon Fortunato (drums), Severino Bato (guitar) (Harold Anthony Gregory, "Music From Home," *Philippines Free Press*, December 10, 1955).

³⁵ Interview participants who particularly described her: Megan Herrera, Ramon Guevarra, Rita Posadas, Glenn Velarde, Jun Regalado, Pilita Corrales, Winston Raval. Pianist and arranger Nick Demuth anecdote: "Singing in [the Oasis Club in Bangkok] was a brilliant girl named Dulce Din. In the words of Cole Porter's classic, "She Fell in Love too Easily." Dulce kept on taking vacation leaves to get married. She asked Billy Banks to come to Vietnam for her wedding, but Billy had no choice but to try and reason with her. "But Dulce," he said, "I've already been to three of your weddings!" in Quirino, *Mabuhay Jazz: Jazz in Postwar Philippines* (Anvil Publishing, 2008), 74.

the process she had to give up many opportunities to make good money but Dulce's commitment to jazz was that encompassing.³⁶

Molina added, "I found it even more painful that on the day of her funeral, there was only a small crowd of mourners, most of whom never ever heard her sing."³⁷ This sentiment harkens back to Priscilla Aristoreñas' anxiety of not being remembered or relevant as a singer as time went by. In this case, a critical participant of the jazz community laments on the wider muteness that has and will become of Dulce Din's highly admired but faintly witnessed voice. These concerns imply their understanding of the ephemerality of these women's performances, especially because of the lack of record companies during the 1950s to the 1960s intending to domestically produce jazz repertoire or to package and market records as jazz. This "lack," however, can be thought of as a causal link to one of the sociocultural orientations of many Filipino jazz players, which was to work outside the country, prioritizing prolonged and better contracts especially in the live entertainment circuit. Additionally, major record companies were engaged in producing more Filipino-signifying tracks as well as widely marketable music such as rock 'n' roll that could overall achieve their artistic and business objectives. With the immediate post-colonial Manila attitudes of "nationhood," and during the increasing thrust of constructing jazz as art in America—translocally endorsed by the jazz elite—the idealized local jazz music barely had space in the mainstream record industry.

Like Din, Josie Quizon Andico and Annie Brazil appeared in the USO circuit, although at different times during the early post-colonial period. They were born and raised in Manila, from large families (Josie was the third of twelve children, and Annie had five sisters), and with fathers who worked as mechanics.³⁸ Like the rest of the singers, they did not acquire institutional training, but instead entered shows and contests at a very young age. Brazil first sang with three of her sisters at the age of six before doing stage shows as a duo with her sister Julie in San Miguel by 1939.³⁹ Her solo career began in 1945 when she sang with big bands that performed at the American air force base in Clark Field. She was the vocalist for various groups, like those of Iggy de

³⁶ Exequiel S. Molina, "Dulce Din, 45," *Business Day*, July 4, 1975.

³⁷ Molina, "Dulce Din, 45.

³⁸ Annie Brazil's legal family name is Bulawin. She chose to use Brazil, her mother's maiden name as her stage name. Quirino, *Pinoy Jazz Traditions*, 184-185, 191.

³⁹ Quirino, *Pinoy Jazz Traditions*, 184-185. Her sister Julie was also playing with Lito Molina's band immediately after the war. She and her sister performed later in stage shows with the popular singing comedy acts such as the Reycard Duet.

Guzman and Cesar Velasco, by 1948.⁴⁰ Brazil's repertoire included "Better Luck Next Time," "Embraceable You," "Hot Toddy," and "Stardust." Also performing with Velasco's band was Quizon Andico, during her first overseas stint in Hong Kong's Luna Park Skyroom in 1950.⁴¹ Surrounded by siblings who performed in stage shows, including, in the decades to come, the very prolific comedian Dolphy Quizon, Josie was about six years of age when her mother began to sign her up for singing contests. After a contract in Hong Kong, she acquired a regular stint at the same Air Force base as Brazil (Clark, Pampanga) in the mid-1950s, with a five-piece band playing repertoire sung by Fitzgerald, Vaughan, and Christy, often requested by the Americans, especially "Moonlight in Vermont."⁴² It was also at this base where pianist-singers Thelma Quesada and Nora Linda played in the 1950s.⁴³

The singers took every employment offering, especially those outside the Philippines. It was in these overseas performances that Filipina singers fondly remembered playing jazz. Quizon Andico shared that in 1955, "The best jazz gig I had was when I was in Japan.... Our crowd was Japanese and American. They didn't dance, they came to listen to our music and really appreciated jazz.... I was so proud to be part of our band at the Golden Gate Club... with the best musicians of the Philippines."⁴⁴ Similarly Brazil recalled that when she was in Okinawa in 1951, "This is where I developed my jazz voice."⁴⁵ She continued doing the rounds, fulfilling contracts in Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and for a longer time, in Thailand.⁴⁶

"Annie took me under her wing," Megan Tippet Herrera (b. 1941) recalls when she entered the entertainment circuit in Hong Kong in 1960. Herrera

⁴⁰ Quirino, *Pinoy Jazz Traditions*, 191.

⁴¹ Quirino, *Mabuhay Jazz*, 147.

⁴² Quirino, *Mabuhay Jazz*, 147. A very similar line-up, even the succession of names mentioned, to those shared by Thelma. When Josie Quizon Andico was at the Officers Club in Clark Field, the band's musicians include Bading Tuason, Tinoy Umali and Vestre Roxas (Quirino, *Mabuhay Jazz*, 15).

⁴³ Giron, "Jazz and Friends Die Hard," 1979; Thelma Quesada, personal interview, January 2, 2023.

⁴⁴ The musicians in this band were Angel Peña, Vestre Roxas, Bading Tuason, Piding Alava, Tony Velarde, Ading Dila, Roger Herrera, and Al Abido (Quirino, *Mabuhay Jazz*, 147).

⁴⁵ Quirino, *Pinoy Jazz Traditions*, 186.

⁴⁶ Annie Brazil was married to David Wolff, a big promoter in Bangkok who was part of productions bringing American jazz artists in Bangkok such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Woody Herman, Anita O'Day and Sarah Vaughan (Richard Merk, personal interview, May 6, 2023). Brazil recalled in her interview with Richie Quirino that she sang with Duke Ellington during his visit to Thailand, singing "It Had to Be You," "My Funny Valentine," and "East of the Sun," in Quirino, *Mabuhay Jazz*, 66.

continued her career in Bangkok in 1962, singing at the Siam International until 1971.⁴⁷ Born in Australia, Herrera was already singing on the radio at age five, and garnered performing experience with the Tivoli theater group. At nineteen she joined an orchestra in Hong Kong led by Filipino Celso Carillo, and afterwards performed in Kuala Lumpur at the Federal Hotel with a Chinese Orchestra.⁴⁸ Reflecting on this period in her life, Herrera noted that

All of this time I was singing the standards.... Of course if you're singing in a hotel, you have to sing the popular songs also. So I was doing a combination of pop, but my love was always jazz... just the rhythms, and I love playing with time, but I didn't scat.... It's exciting, it really is.⁴⁹

It was in Bangkok, her “heaven on earth,” where she met and got married to Filipino bass player and bandleader Roger Herrera.⁵⁰ Megan Herrera recalled that, “King Bhumibol Alduyadej played saxophone, he loved Benny Goodman... he brought them all to Bangkok... Buddy Rich, Tony Scott... and Roger played with them.”⁵¹ The couple fulfilled Intercontinental Hotel contracts in Afghanistan, Beirut, and Tehran before settling in Manila in 1974.⁵² Megan was sentimental in remembering her eleven years with a Filipino community of musicians in Bangkok, and how “musicians had the respect of the people, unlike

⁴⁷ Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022. Megan Tippett Herrera was born in Sydney on September 12, 1941. She participated in Sydney's scene before travelling as a musician. In the early 1970s, she and her husband Roger, continued fulfilling contracts for Intercontinental Hotels in Afghanistan, Beirut, Lebanon, Tehran, and Iran before returning to Manila and staying there from 1974 onwards. Megan and Roger were also close to the Pete Aristoreñas and his band as they were also in the Bangkok circuit.

⁴⁸ Megan Tippett Herrera worked in Hong Kong for two years, managed by Benny Tung who handled all artists coming from Australia and from other places (Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022).

⁴⁹ Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022

⁵⁰ Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022.

⁵¹ Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022.

⁵² Megan recalls the Intercontinental Hotel's manager as Mr. Martinet, and when he was transferred to Manila, he brought Megan and Roger's band with him in 1974. Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022.

in Manila it's very difficult."⁵³ This was not an unusual feeling for many Filipino musicians who worked abroad.⁵⁴

Herrera's "*kumare*" (close female friend and co-godmother to a child), Rita Posadas (b. 1941) was also making the rounds in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Thailand with her husband, pianist and bandleader Romy Posadas.⁵⁵ A few years after she was born in Cotabato City, Mindanao, her family moved to Manila; and just like Quizon Andico and Brazil, she entered radio singing contests like *Tawag ng Tanghalan* (Call of the Stage) and performing on daily noontime music and entertainment shows like *Student Canteen*.⁵⁶ She met Romy during her gig at the Soda Fountain restaurant in the late 1950s, and after a courtship they became a "package" for shows, just like Megan and Roger Herrera. She said, "*Kay Romy ako natutong mag jazz,*" (I learned to jazz from Romy).⁵⁷ The couple was in Bangkok for seven years at the Rama Hilton Hotel.

While these Filipino bands, such as Herrera's and Posadas', often performed for audiences packed with American GIs and international expats, the cohort would get together every Sunday for jazz jam sessions at the Bangkok Dixieland Jazz Club, Aladdin Jazz Club, or at the Cat Eye's Bar at the President's Hotel, with fellow Filipino working musicians of Bangkok's entertainment circuit and with American and Australian players who were working at the American base in Thailand.⁵⁸ The sessions became a space for unwinding with compatriots, where Filipinas and Filipinos found a liminal musical base that fostered a communal spirit through their joint pleasures of playing jazz. Some moved on to work in other countries or on cruise ships, while some returned to Manila and elsewhere, carrying out short gigs. These musicians' experiences with diasporic communities, local jazz scenes, and overseas work expectations culturally shaped Manila's jazz scene.

⁵³ Although she was Australian, she expressed how she felt she had become more of a Filipina since being together with Roger and living in the Philippines since the 1970s. "I've assimilated the Filipino lifestyle, everything. In Australia, I'm a tourist." Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022.

⁵⁴ Based on personal interviews, newspaper articles especially those written by Exequiel S. Molina and one by Angel Peña, and interviews in Richie C. Quirino's *Pinoy Jazz Traditions* and *Mabuhay Jazz*.

⁵⁵ Rita Posadas was born on September 20, 1941 in Cotabato City, Mindanao (Rita Posadas, personal interview, March 25, 2023).

⁵⁶ Rita Posadas, personal interview, March 25, 2023.

⁵⁷ Rita Posadas, personal interview, March 25, 2023.

⁵⁸ Megan Herrera, personal interview, March 2, 2022; Jun Cadiz, personal interview, March 18, 2023; Rita Posadas, personal interview, March 25, 2023; Eddie Sangcap, personal interview, May 11, 2023; Richard Merk, personal interview, May 6, 2023.

In 1960s Manila, critics and musicians both worked to uphold an ideal cultural perception of jazz-reinforced genre distinctions in concert productions. This ideal entangles the American practice of jazz as an elite art form and the nationalist imagination of expressing a Filipino identity. For example, media tension between rock and jazz increased as some concerts were being billed as jazz, even though rock bands were on the line up.⁵⁹ Most of these were fundraising concerts, and it was perhaps the mainstream association of jazz with the moneyed elite that encouraged promoters to market the concerts to patrons of jazz. Nelda Lopez Navarro was the radio host, singer, and producer of the radio show “Jam Session,” which launched the career of jazz pianist Emil Mijares in 1957 and many other musicians of jazz in the Philippines (it is important to indicate here that women newspaper journalists, radio DJs, and TV personalities at this time, though few, contributed to the cultural memory of jazz in Manila).⁶⁰ She also hosted and sang at the *New Directions in Jazz* (1961) concert at the University of the Philippines. Introducing the concert, she distinguished between those “illegitimate” jazz concerts and this “legitimate” jazz concert:

And we must say, that this is a real, legitimate jazz concert.... I suppose, they call it jazz concerts, but then uh, we found out that it isn't really legitimate jazz. They feature rock and roll most of them, and to the dismay of the jazz musicians who are performing in the shows, and also for the jazz aficionados who want to listen to real good jazz. Well ladies and gentlemen, tonight is the night.⁶¹

A lot can be said about this quote in regard to ideas surrounding legitimization, U.S. jazz diplomacy ideologies, media studies, and popular music histories,

⁵⁹ Such rock bands include Electromaniacs, Ramon Jacinto and the Riots, The Ramrods, the Cyclones, The Hellcats, The Hotshots. *The Manila Times*, “Proceeds from jazz concert for needy Catholic missions,” January 24, 1962; *Daily Mirror*, “Jazz concert set at Pines City,” April 6, 1962; *The Manila Times*, “Dagupan jazz show slated,” April 9, 1962. The jazz advocates responded with the article, “Chiaroscuro: Progressive jazz given proper dignity on Aug. 3” from *The Manila Times*, July 31, 1962.

⁶⁰ Some music and entertainment journalists writing about jazz include Lina Flor, Erlinda Villamor for the *Manila Times*; Leni Limjuco and Amelita Reysio-Cruz for the *Manila Bulletin*; and Eugenia D. Apostol for *Sunday Times Magazine* (Richie C. Quirino, *Pinoy Jazz Traditions*, (Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, 2004), 159).

⁶¹ From Lito Molina’s live recording of the concert in 1961, digitized by the University of the Philippines Center for Ethnomusicology, 2023. The concert was sponsored by the sorority Sigma Delta Phi and Upsilon Sigma Phi, the fraternity that began a continuously running series of jazz concerts at the University of the Philippines in 1955. This concert also featured vocalist Nelly Martin, of whom little is known. See *The Manila Times*, “Jazz professionals at sorority concert,” October 16, 1961; Ric Diño and Efren Yambot, “New Directions: Upsilon presents jazz concert at UP Oct. 23,” *The Manila Times*, October 21, 1961.

among others. For the purposes of this article, I highlight Navarro's unique platform to demonstrate how she asserted the beliefs of an inner influential circle of the jazz community—that is, the visibly productive and determined “committed activists” of jazz raising its ideals.⁶² Like Navarro, other Filipinas like journalists Lina Flor, Leni Limjuco, and Eugenia D. Apostol took part in promoting the music by upholding a cultural stance, and engaging a sense of belonging in the local jazz scene.⁶³

CONCLUSION

If women had a strong place in the public spheres of literature, media, and other music cultures in the Philippines, why weren't there as many Filipina jazz instrumentalists as there were singers? This question is relevant across jazz histories and demands more detailed discussion, but the answer involves at least three cultural layers unique to the Philippines. First, male dominance and patriarchal codes in jazz culture were manifest in Manila's scene. Jazz defenders, both male and female (though women were fewer and less visible), performed across a socially constructed range of characteristics in playing, making choices, and promoting jazz ideals primarily aligned with the dominant American advocacy. Second, the colonial sociocultural histories that shaped class structures and gender constructs in the Philippines forced Filipinas—especially those of disadvantaged social, cultural, and economic states—to navigate the intersections of race, class, colonialism, and gender. Filipina singers had to be in line with the gendered notions surrounding the public and private spheres, and the colonial legacies of moralizing values that ultimately conditioned their positionality as women in jazz.⁶⁴ And third, as Filipinas negotiated these systemic structures, they followed aspirations shaped by the neocolonial, migratory, and translocal circumstances of being singers of jazz in Manila and Asia's entertainment circuit. Their agency as Filipina jazz singers can therefore be defined by their resistance to “discrete and containable identities.”⁶⁵ As they

⁶² See J. C. Lena, *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 34.

⁶³ Some of their articles in the 1960s include, Lina Flor, "Sparklers by Lina Flor: A shot in the arm for local jazz lovers," *The Manila Times*, November 19, 1966; Leni Limjuco, "Music and the men behind bands," *The Weekly Nation*, October 31, 1966. Manila Bulletin, December 12, 1962; Eugenia D. Apostol, "He's not much for talking... but give him a drum... boy! can that guy converse," *Sunday Times Magazine*, June 9, 1963.

⁶⁴ See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006).

⁶⁵ Denise Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities the Making of the Modern Filipina*, 34.

navigated their gendered pathways, their jazz identities became radiant. The choices that they made, the determination they had of performing regularly and exceptionally, and their visible love for jazz were undeniable.

This case study has illustrated how a mid-twentieth century jazz scene in Manila was shaped by the social negotiations of Filipina singers of jazz. The ways Priscilla, Thelma, Nora, Dulce, Katy, Josie, Annie, Megan, Rita, and Nelda lived as performers of jazz is critical in understanding the history of jazz from the post Second World War Philippines onwards. Unmuting their experiences emphasizes the multidirectionality of jazz histories, diverse yet linked, that further reveals alternative jazz pathways. Doing so allows for the examination of myriad cultural situations, such as the peripheral presence of domestic jazz record productions in narrating a history of jazz in the Philippines, and the gendered reasons behind the decisions of Filipina jazz musicians to either be a singer or a pianist who sings. Overall, examining the encounters of jazz singers from Manila brings to light how jazz was dynamically transmitted through diverse spaces, shaping a cultural space of empowerment, in this case, for women and for Filipino advocates of jazz.

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