

# AURALITY AND POWER: WESTERN ART MUSIC AND THE MARCOS REGIME

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**ABSTRACT.** Western classical music flourished under the patronage of Imelda Marcos. While this legacy is often touted as a positive one, the genre of music itself and its imbrication with colonialism and racism cannot be ignored. This essay illustrates how Marcos harnessed Western classical music and conceptions of the global and universal to access ideological capital and claim a place for the Philippine nation as an equal in the international community. While the New Society also heralded nativism as nationalism, Western classical music and its trappings of Whiteness and modernity paralleled the regime's elite cosmopolitan aspirations.

**T**he *Kingmaker*, a 2019 documentary by Lauren Greenfield, made its global debut in theatres and through digital streaming services. While the film traces the biography of former First Lady Imelda Marcos, the narrative of the family's return to power in the Philippines is threaded throughout. The documentary offers a sobering counterpoint to *Here Lies Love: A Song Cycle about Imelda Marcos & Estrella Cumpas*, a staged musical of Marcos' rags to riches story.<sup>1</sup> Created by David Byrne and Norman Cook (a.k.a. Fatboy Slim), *Here Lies Love* is an aestheticization of biography and fantasy, combined to create a visceral and embodied spectacle (in which the audience dances alongside the action). Both projects reveal a persistent fascination with the former first lady—in these cases, a twist on the colonial gaze to one of spectatorship. Likewise, both make implicit commentary on the life of Imelda through their soundtracks. The original music by Jocelyn Pook for *The Kingmaker* is a dark retrospective in which the past is relived in the present—as such, it is at times foreboding and tense and at others atmospherically somber; that of *Here Lies Love* evokes 1970s and 1980s club music, calling attention to hedonism as a stand in for corruption. In the practice of listening, both soundscapes metaphorically represent aspects of Imelda Marcos.

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1. Byrne and Cook released the concept album in 2010, while the live musical debuted in 2013.

As various media show, the Marcos family—and Imelda Marcos in particular—are a persistent presence in the Philippines and in the imaginings of the Philippines. The elements of the family as a dynasty have proven irresistible to countless writers and to factions of the Philippine public whose memories of the Marcos years are surprisingly sanguine. One is forced to wonder how the romanticization of a person such as Imelda Marcos occurs, despite her role in a repressive dictatorship. Indeed, Chris Eng calls attention to “fetishizing the Imeldific”<sup>2</sup> in *Here Lies Love*, but Byrne’s musical is only one instance of a broader essentialism of Imelda—for example, to a mononym, a closet of shoes, or, as Christine Balance points out in regard to “Dahil Sa Iyo,”<sup>3</sup> the adoption of a popular song.<sup>4</sup> In retrospect, Imelda Marcos’ image rehabilitation has not occurred due to a distancing with history but rather a sanitized remembering. Figuring prominently in these favorable readings was her role in promoting and institutionalizing music and the arts during the regime.

Imelda Marcos has always been associated with music. This is partly because she performed popular songs during her husband’s political campaigns, but also because as First Lady she declared herself a patroness of the arts, with music being a particular favorite. Yet even her musical legacy is a mixed and complicated one. A wholly positive perspective is that musical life flourished during the many years of martial law and under her guiding hand. In correspondence with this view, the achievements of the time are outlined comprehensively by Antonio C. Hila in *The Musical Arts in the New Society* (2007).<sup>5</sup> Still, despite the musicians, composers, and other musical performers that benefitted from patronage during martial law, there were many shut out from this bounty. Some artists faced censorship, jail, torture, or death for overt opposition to the government.

During this significant moment in history, as we take into account the ever-growing chorus calling for decolonization of music schools and a disruption of the Western music canon, it is clear that the kind of music Imelda Marcos promoted and how she did so matters. By examining Marcos rhetoric, patronage, and regulation during the New Society (1972–1981), this essay will illustrate how Imelda Marcos’ support of Western classical was not merely a humanistic endeavor. She used music to harness conceptions of the global and universal to access ideological capital and claim a place for the Philippine nation as an equal in the international community. While in some ways the New Society heralded nativism and localism (more accurately, glocalism) in music as a form of nationalism, it was Western

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2. See Chris A. Eng, “‘Why Don’t You Love Me?’: Post/colonial Camp and the Imeldific Fetish in *Here Lies Love*,” *American Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2019): 993–1020.

3. See Christine Balance, “Dahil Sa Iyo: The Performative Power of Imelda’s Song,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20, no. 2 (2010): 119–140.

4. Extremely popular even today and also in the diaspora, “Dahil Sa Iyo” was originally a 1938 hit by Mike Velarde, Jr. and one of Imelda Marcos’ favorite songs.

5. This work was published by the Marcos Presidential Center.

classical music and its trappings of Whiteness and modernity that paralleled the elite cosmopolitan aspirations of the regime itself.<sup>6</sup>

The promises of the New Society included an end to poverty, hunger, corruption, deception, and violence, and the promotion of equality, development, justice, truth, and peace. While music and the arts could not be a panacea for all of the nation's ailments, Imelda Marcos stressed their role in an almost spiritual way, referring to herself as a mother of the Filipino people and the arts as feeding the soul of the nation. Thus, despite seeming on the surface to lack utilitarian value, music had symbolic power in the New Society. Metaphorically, music could be a representation of truth in art, of development toward modernity, or of equality for the Philippine nation on the global stage. Yet, confined mostly to rhetoric and narrowly limited in execution, Imelda's wielding of music highlighted the country's inequities. This is primarily because she favored Western art music above other genres and diverted vast resources to its cultivation in her own institutions.

Western classical or Western art music is a part of global culture.<sup>7</sup> The term global culture refers to ideas, practices, values, and other resources that cross borders as a result of the processes of globalization.<sup>8</sup> For reasons of space I will not rehearse the large literature on the benefits and downsides of globalization (where, in the humanities, at least, a greater emphasis has fallen on the latter). Instead, I would like to focus on global culture as a semiotic well from which a dictatorship can obtain and deploy markers of modernity and even, paradoxically, freedom. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino notes that the discourse of globalism naturalizes the idea that globalization is "indexically equated with free-market capitalism and its technologies, ideologies, institutions, and products."<sup>9</sup> The embodiment of the transnational citizen, Turino continues, is the cosmopolitan (theorized anew)—a figure who belongs to a middle or upper-class economic demographic, whatever their place of birth, and can afford not only to travel extensively but also to readily consume the products of global culture.<sup>10</sup> Within this same

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6. Contemporary Whiteness studies look at a variety of aspects in the formation of white privilege. Here I not only invoke aspirational "Whiteness" as a lingering effect of Spanish and US colonialism in the Philippines, but also the well documented Whiteness long associated with the elitism of European art music.

7. The terms are not the same, but they are commonly used in place of one another outside of musicology. For convenience, I use them here as umbrella terms for Western European art music, mostly of the late 18th and 19th centuries, that comprise the Western art music canon. This essay does not accept the legitimacy of that canon but does take note of the implications of the canon itself.

8. See Appadurai for his oft-cited theorization of the many different scapes of globalization. Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Theory Culture Society* 7 (1990): 47-65.

9. Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 54.

10. The situation in the Philippines, I would argue, is different than Turino's conception, in that the country's GDP is dependent upon migrant workers of the lower classes. Persons within this demographic are frequently out of the country and are equally cosmopolitan in their patterns of consumption, submersion in the international

discourse, one line of thinking suggests that capitalism et al. is proven to be good by virtue of its successful globalization, linking free markets to idealizations of human freedom and free will. While often maligned for good reasons in other ways, globalization in this sense is made akin to possibility—even as it encroaches with an air of inevitability.

Likewise, examining discourse on music and globalization reveals that certain kinds of music have been linked to an ideology of universality and that these musics are valorized *because* of their widespread success. For example, longstanding discourse on Western classical music lays claim to universality based on arguments of inherent value, timelessness, and even transcendence over context. One only has to look at schools, concert halls, and other music institutions throughout the world to see that the Western classical canon remains at the top of programming hierarchies. When Western classical music appears in contexts like the Philippines, cultural brokers can harness the audible semiotic power of universality, modernity, race, and class that come with this music. Music in its many forms is a visceral way to access the cultural capital of cosmopolitanism and globality instilled after hundreds of years of Western hegemony.<sup>11</sup>

The spread of Western art music to and within the Philippines occurred over hundreds of years during both Spanish and US colonialism, and along with performance practice came discourse about product and practice. The Philippines in the first half of the 20th century had already seen the rise of several orchestras, clubs, conservatories, and publications devoted to the performance of European classical music.<sup>12</sup> Especially when one considers that bands and *rondallas* (plucked string ensembles) played classical music alongside other styles, it would be misleading to imply that participation in this culture was limited to the small upper class. However, while musicians have long belonged to the lower classes in many different societies, a general sense that the European arts represented superior culture was as pervasive in the Philippines as it was in other colonial settings, including the United States.<sup>13</sup> It is safe to say that Western art music had an elevated status during the New Society period as a result of colonial attitudes, postcolonial cultural imperialism, and a globalized discourse about European (and eventually US) arts.

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economy, and incorporation of certain values that may conflict with local systems.

11. Lawrence Levine's contention that symphony music became sacralized and that art music is an accessory to elite socioeconomic classes has obvious relevance here. Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

12. See Raymundo C. Bañas, *Pilipino Music and Theater* (Quezon City, Philippines: Manlapaz Publishing, 1975).

13. See Levine, 1988.

## Imelda Marcos as Patroness of the Arts

When Imelda Marcos became the most prolific musical patroness the country had yet seen, the marriage between Western art music and the aristocracy had explicit clarity. Some might disagree with this totalizing assessment. For example, under the artistic director Lucretia Kasilag, Imelda Marcos' Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) did present outreach concerts for free or very inexpensively to reach a wider share of the population. Further, in the biography she wrote about her famous pianist daughter, Cecile Licad (discussed later in this essay), Rosario Licad insisted, "To some extent, I think the former First Lady helped erase the impression that classical music is only for the elite. I think it was only during her husband's term that piano concertos were heard at the Araneta Coliseum, where a great number of the masses saw and heard Van Cliburn performing with the then CCP orchestra."<sup>14</sup> Still, most Filipino cultural critics are less charitable in their assessments of the past. Doreen Fernandez summarized this view, saying, "Imelda Marcos' patronage of art and culture emphasized the Western 'high' culture . . . and although lip service was paid to the native culture through folk art festivals and parades . . . no official government attention was paid to the national culture, its definition, preservation, or development."<sup>15</sup> The massive costs of the grand Cultural Center of the Philippines, built to be the country's premier arts venue, along with newspaper and magazine photos of the jet-set crowd attending gala events, and Imelda's association with foreign luminaries, gave truth to discourse that Western arts like the symphony, opera, and ballet were the purview of the wealthy (I will return to the case of the CCP and foreign artists below).

Establishing herself as patroness of the arts, a role ostensibly separate from her husband's, was an astute political move, giving the presidency an aura of partnership that meshed well with their rhetoric as symbolic parents of the nation. Indeed, there is much language in her speeches surrounding the idea of art as the soul of the people and the country, her obligation to nurture creativity, and the significance and power of music. For example, in a speech for the 1975 Conference of the Asian Composers League, Imelda declared, "Leaders in our country sincerely believe that in the pursuit of total national development, we must develop our culture, the arts, especially music. For sound is the first medium in reaching out to the young, or one being to the other."<sup>16</sup>

Though a review of these speeches and of her activities reveal an involvement with a wide variety of music, particular genres and artists have greater salience as markers of the New Society period. Many Filipinos of the time remember hearing New Society songs on

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14. Rosario Licad, *My Daughter Cecile* (Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, 1994), 26.

15. Doreen Fernandez, "Mass Culture and Cultural Policy: The Philippine Experience," *Philippine Studies* 37, no. 4 (1989): 501.

16. Imelda Marcos. *The Compassionate Society and Other Selected Speeches*, (N.p.: National Media Production Center, 1976), 103.

the radio and singing them in school. Newspaper stories and photos show Imelda Marcos and the Filipino elite attending concerts of Western art music at the CCP. A perhaps smaller number of people recall that Imelda Marcos promoted a Filipinization of the arts through support of certain composers and the showcasing of virtuosic groups like the Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company and the UP Madrigal Singers.<sup>17</sup> All of these examples do belong on a soundtrack of the Marcos regime. When an authoritarian regime privileges certain musical genres and artists over others, there is always a story to tell about why this occurred and what service the arts provide from a political standpoint. That said, the story may not be a simple transactional one.

Scholars have examined the role of music under dictators such as Rafael Trujillo, Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and others.<sup>18</sup> While they have been able to show how music can fulfill propagandistic needs, in many other cases, finding a one-to-one correspondence between music and political manipulation remains elusive. Particular musics, under dictatorship or not, contribute to and reflect larger, complex narratives of nation and identity, and each case must be situated in the particular circumstances of a historical moment and geographic context. Dictatorship, with all its repressive tactics, does not necessarily lead to restrictions on creativity, though censorship remains a prevalent theme in totalitarian states.<sup>19</sup> Even control over media such as radio and television stations has not ensured that music follows the ideological parameters of the ruling body.

The tangled systems of meaning in the intersection of sound and subjectivity make a narrowly restricted, monovocal reading virtually impossible—even when political intervention is overt. Music produces multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings, which explains why there are so many songs labeled as political but with texts that are vague and multivalent. While sonic aesthetics are enculturated, even convention is not dictatorial enough to restrict meaning in music. At the same time, we can discern the politicization or depoliticization of certain musics and how these processes connect to extramusical factors. For example, the conception of absolute music that music critic Eduard Hanslick and others championed in the 19th century insisted on German symphony music's ability to transcend all extramusical associations. Clearly, transcendence must also include depoliticization, or at least the illusion of such. This is a dubious proposition. Yet, even if one were to accept that absolute music was possi-

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17. See Christi-Anne Castro, *Musical Renderings of the Philippine Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

18. See Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Solomon Volkov, *Shostakovich and Stalin: The Extraordinary Relationship between the Composer and the Brutal Dictator* (London: Little, Brown, 2004); and Roberto Illiano and Massimiliano Sala, eds, *Music and Dictatorship in Europe and Latin America* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009).

19. See Pamela Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the end of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

ble for the sake of debate, the very process of promoting absolute music as superior to others is inherently political; it is the exercise of power, one that is pervasive today in Western-style music conservatories and is the focus of decolonizing efforts. Further, I argue that the institutionalization and elevation of this music is multisensory and experiential, thus maintaining power instead of only reflecting it.

Western art music is something that is seen and felt as much as heard. One of its distinguishing features is the sacralization of the written score. Through this, the work remains intact, even without performance, and experienced musicians can “hear” the music by reading the score. Other important sensory and affective aspects come into play when attending a live concert. As an example, attending a gala musical event at the Cultural Center of the Philippines by invitation from Imelda Marcos would have necessitated formal dress. Attendees knew they would be seen, not only by their peer group, but also by the press, who then published photographs in the major newspapers. Metaphorically, the event gave attendees a context through which to see themselves in association with the music as elite, aristocratic, and cultured. Concertgoers would have been guided to experience the event in particular ways as well, because Western art music concerts are highly structured affairs. The loose noise and sociality of the lobby would be normatively hushed when the audience settled in their cushioned seats, as extraneous noise during the performance is taboo. Bodies are thus disciplined into stillness; yet, conforming to these structures is a willful act of compliance that reveals insider knowledge and belonging.

Within this setting, then, even apolitical music can serve a propagandistic purpose, because it evokes colonial discourse about the superiority of the West and the alignment of the state with prior generations of power. On a more micro level, the orchestra is itself a model that supports centralized power. While the hierarchy of Western classical music of the common era places the genius composer at the top, in practice it is the conductor that literally stands above the musicians and leads them. The implicit message is that working together under the baton of a central, powerful leader can produce something beautiful, valuable, modern, and Western.

All this said, of course Western art music has not been the only nor even primary vehicle for supporting particular regimes. Folk song collecting and the incorporation of melodies, rhythmic patterns, and other elements into different musical forms for nationalistic aims has been a common endeavor, as has the co-optation of popular music by politicians and parties. In the consideration of any dictatorship, many musical forms are in circulation at the same time, and only a few of these are under centralized control. In the case of the Philippines and other places, patronage as a form of control reveals the multileveled nature of power beyond overt censorship of songs or performance of propaganda ones. Indeed, under the Marcoses, there are relatively few examples of propagandistic music in comparison with other genres, but overtly political songs are not the only musical vehicles for ideolo-

gy.<sup>20</sup> The hidden messages of seemingly apolitical music make for more interesting discussion, because they can still be deeply effective without the weakness of having an obvious and possibly coercive agenda. By signaling the symbolic content of different music types, we can alter perceptions about assumed neutrality and, as mentioned above, tap into what is now a global discourse on the universality of Western music. That the ability to perform Western art music—through education and training of musicians, the obtaining and maintenance of instruments, and all the other resource-consuming acts necessary to do so—is viewed as an admirable measure of success apparent in numerous narratives (see, for instance, Venezuela’s El Sistema as a prime example). Because it takes so much in the way of resources to do well, Western art music has developed as a marker of national cosmopolitanism and class elevation.

Is it contradictory, then, that Filipino nationalist discourse has also highlighted “Filipino arts” before, during, and after martial law? The rhetorical question is misleading. As a postcolonial (and it would be easy to apply postmodern here) nation, Filipino arts, taken as a whole, cannot be limited to pre-colonial expressions. Western tonality is almost ubiquitous—even co-existing alongside non-tonal music in some places—and popular music is more a part of daily life throughout much of the Philippines than traditional folk songs. To the point, while variegated, all elements of the musical soundscape remain essentially Filipino precisely because Filipinos think this is the case. Western art music might then be considered glocal, because there are numerous local orchestras and other evidence of institutionalization throughout the Philippines. But, to the degree that our perceptions of Western classical music elevate the composer and the score, delegating musicians to mediators, it becomes clear why a Beethoven symphony played in the Philippines is not an adaptation in the same way a McDonald’s franchise in Makati is. Both carry hallmarks of Westernization and modernity, but the symphony need not undergo transformations to appeal to the local context. The affordance of transcendence gives Western art masterpieces a kind of universality immune from change.

In a 1975 speech at the Asian Composers League Conference, Imelda Marcos confirmed this point of view, intoning, “At its best, music is universal. There are no ideologies, no nationalities, no prejudices that differentiate between the music of one country or another.”<sup>21</sup> Since the constitution of 1935, Filipino arts have been under the patronage of the state. This obligation was reaffirmed under Ferdinand Marcos in the 1973 Constitution where it states, “Filipino culture shall be preserved and developed for national identity. Arts and letters shall be under the patronage of the State” (Article 15, Section 9.2). What constitutes Filipino arts and the degree to which one may or may not

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20. For examples of New Society compositions, see Christi-Anne Castro, “Music, Politics, and the Nation at the Cultural Center of the Philippines,” (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 2001).

21. Marcos, 103.

practice patronage is really what is in question; and it is clear that Imelda Marcos took this particular duty quite seriously. Indeed, the arts were her platform and patroness her most public role. It is fair to ask, then, how much control did Imelda Marcos exert as patroness of music?

In her autobiography Lucrecia Kasilag, the former artistic director and then president of the CCP, observed that the former First Lady's role was primarily as patroness and supporter and not as programmer. "Though Mrs. Marcos was herself of an artistic bent, she was a good boss and hardly interfered with the programming of events, giving me a free hand deciding on the direction the performing arts should take. Every so often, she would work on inviting a top *artiste*, but most times, she left us to our own devices.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, during my various research trips, artists and cultural workers affirmed many times over that Lucrecia Kasilag (known tellingly as "Tita King") provided most of the direction for the CCP during her almost two-decade term of leadership. Yet, despite not controlling the day-to-day operations of the CCP, Imelda Marcos' interest in the rarefied Western art forms was clear from her speeches, her promotion of artists and events, and her attendance at symphony concerts and ballets.

Leaders and patrons take on the cultural capital of the art forms they support even as much as they provide the actual capital. In uneven power relations, the appropriation of minority culture allows entities like the state to co-opt aspects of tradition that may be crucial for performances of national identity, connecting the present with the past or with practices viewed to be of the masses. For example, in writing about the role Ladysmith Black Mambazo of South Africa played in the creation of tracks for Paul Simon's album *Graceland* (1986), the ethnomusicologist Louise Meintjes tellingly observed:

In sum, the state and other *Graceland* supporters construct a national heritage for themselves by combining these interpretive moves: they fabricate an iconic relationship with the musicians then assume ties to the land for themselves through the musicians' traditions and history . . . Their evaluation in turn legitimates their identity and, from their point of view, endorses their vision of social cooperation without having to question their privileged access to capital or their sociopolitical control. Culture is shared; history is shared; land is shared; rights are shared.<sup>23</sup>

While this type of appropriation from the top is commonplace worldwide, the same kind of identity association can occur when borrowing traditions from outside the nation that could confer privilege. Imelda's ability to support Western art music

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22. Lucrecia Kasilag, *Lucrecia Roces Kasilag: My Story* (Manila: Philippine Women's University, 2000), 75.

23. Louise Meintjes, "Paul Simon's *Graceland*, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning," *Ethnomusicology* 34, no.1 (1990): 54-55.

marked her as a cosmopolitan partaking in a shared value system. That the Philippines could also produce composers and performers capable of maintaining the European tradition and expanding upon it with original works and virtuosic performances was proof of a modern nation deserving recognition from the West.

While wealthy Filipinos were long adjusted to the patronage system from Spanish colonial days, twentieth-century artists recognized how important a role the state could and should play in the arts. Just two years prior to martial law, the composer and president of the National Federation of Music, Rodolfo Cornejo, urged for more government civic involvement in music. In a somewhat humorous vein, he talked about government in everyday Filipino terms.

As for our government . . . I suggest that each and every executive of a province or a city be invited to rally behind this laudable project. For is it not the pride of any particular province or city to see a native son wield a baton or compose a symphony with the approval of the musical world? After all, the budget, if any, will come in from donations or appropriations such as their so-called “discretionary fund.”<sup>24</sup>

Of course, politicians obtaining funds one way or another is common practice in the Philippines and does have some bearing on the very word “patroness.” After all, Imelda Marcos’ role was often more similar to a middleman, routing money from a separate source to achieve her arts-related goals. In an anecdote about a performance by visiting opera singer Placido Domingo, Kasilag mentions in passing that “Placido’s fee and the entire group’s were picked up by Mrs. Marcos’s close circle of friends, the Blue Ladies, as well as whoever her ‘flavor of the month’ was, the entrepreneur chosen to fund each of her endeavors.”<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Imelda Marcos was able to take on the roles of both the aristocratic patroness as well as the responsible representative of the state playing guardian to the nation’s arts.

Not all were impressed with her methods or her choices. Some of her wealthy compatriots resented being intimidated into giving. Intellectuals and other critics noted the diversion and misuse of funds. At the performance level, many musicians and composers felt shut out—because of their political views, the kind of work they did, or simply because they could not break into the circle, an unfortunate truism in the business aspect of the arts everywhere. Still, amidst criticism, Imelda was able to influence the arts in the Philippines during the New Society with lasting effects. A favorable summation of Imelda Marcos’ impact on the arts appears in Isabelo

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24. Rodolfo Cornejo, “For More Government Civic Involvement in Music Creation” in *The Role of Music in a Changing Society* (Manila: National Music Council of the Philippines, 1970), 64.

25. Kasilag, 78.

Crisostomo's laudatory biography. He wrote, "Even the most uncompromising weekly magazine of pre-martial law days, the Free Press, recognized her contributions and called her, in a Page One editorial, 'the greatest patroness of art the country has ever known'" (1980, 169).

### **Funding an Arts Infrastructure**

Local mastery of Western art music to the level of global standards requires the creation of certain spaces, extensive training of performers, and audience cultivation. In the case of the Marcos dictatorship, audience cultivation took on a different flavor. As shown in the quote above about the Blue Ladies, the existing aristocracy already recognized Western art music and its patronage as a clear marker of class. So, in practice, Imelda Marcos had a ready-made audience for Western art music. One obvious aspect missing was a space commensurate with her cosmopolitan visions. Much has been made of the Marcos penchant for monumentalism in the form of buildings, including hospitals, museums, and centers for the arts. It is worth revisiting very briefly, however, because there is a very close relationship between the form and purpose of structures and the ideologies behind their building. One need only consider the differences between the formal auditorium spaces of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (mentioned several times in passing above) and the nearby Folk Arts Theatre. Part of the cultural capital of European art music is the concert hall. The opulence of a space reflects the audience with access, and though the CCP from early on initiated programs to bring in the economically disadvantaged, audience cultivation found an easier road with the small upper class who were already aligned with the values of highbrow symphony, ballet, and opera. As Imelda herself observed, "Beginning with a physical space, starting from the corporeal, we beat a path for the mind, the spirit, and the imagination."<sup>26</sup>

As the CCP has been written about extensively in various sources, I will provide just the necessary background here.<sup>27</sup> The CCP, first conceived of in 1965 just prior to Ferdinand Marcos assuming the presidency, was inaugurated on September 10, 1969. The building's cost, its design and construction, and even its very purpose were controversial from the outset. In response to the outcry, former short-term executive director of the CCP, Jaime Zobel de Ayala, outlined different parameters to the debate when he stated,

This time, however, the Center becomes incidental; it is art itself which is the subject of controversy . . . [This] new crop of critics advance the argument that for art to be "relevant," it must stir up responsible social action. It must do this in a particular way, by inducing people to actively support the powers of

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26. Marcos, 17.

27. For example, see Castro 2001.

social liberation and oppose the powers of social oppression . . . The critics go on to say that the artist, to produce art that is relevant, must have ideological training, must allow technique to give way to the need for more direct popular expression, must subordinate the meaning of individual experience to the need for broad political truths in the social struggle.<sup>28</sup>

In the end, Zobel disagrees with this criticism, calling for a recognition of art for its own sake. To conclude that art is a transcendent expression aligns with Western arguments about the nature of much of classical music. The native as intellectual and nationalist, in this case, is the native as a citizen of the world.

Aspirations to join the global community as members of a refined and cosmopolitan class are evident in newspaper and magazine articles of the time that frame the Philippines as a bastion of the West in the East. For example, in 1980, Isabelo Crisostomo declared, "The Center has become what she had envisioned it to be: a national center of art, music and theater, a Philippine Parthenon. It has become the home of Filipino performing artists and host to world talents in music, dance, and theater. World-famous artists like Van Cliburn, Margot Fonteyn and Rudolph Nureyev are not infrequent guests. The First Lady, through the Cultural Center and other cultural projects initiated by her and supported by her husband, has made Manila a center of the performing arts in Southeast Asia" (1980, 181). Indeed, Imelda Marcos herself initiated the comparison between the CCP and the Greek Parthenon, a not-so-subtle reference connecting her work in the East to the foundations of civilization in the West.

It shall be our Parthenon built in a time of hardship, a spring-source of a people's living conviction of the oneness of our heritage. For history teaches this lesson well: that the monuments of man's hands which have remained alive and endure are those which were built as sanctuaries of the soul, which despite all the winds of change and adversity, keep eternal vigil in the halls of Time.<sup>29</sup>

Just a year after the declaration of martial law, in 1973 Imelda Marcos set to work on another center located in Laguna Province to support a new generation of musicians proficient in Western art music. Completed in three years, the National Arts Center opened as a school of the arts for gifted students and became part of an international network of conservatory-style schools. The inauguration served simultaneously as the occasion for conferring an International Artist Award on ballerina Dame Margot Fonteyn, and it was attended by the first

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28. Jaime Zobel de Ayala, "The Cultural Center of the Philippines" in *The Role of Music in a Changing Society* (Manila: National Music Council of the Philippines, 1970), 37-38.

29. Marcos, 19.

recipient of the award, pianist Van Cliburn. One of the initial programs of the center was a three-week-long International Young Artists Chamber Music Festival to be followed by a Music Camp for Asia.<sup>30</sup>

Ferdinand Marcos gave the principal address at the NAC's groundbreaking. When her turn came, Imelda remarked, "The National Arts Center is more than a school: it is a community of creative men and women, a living testament of our society's regard for the spark of divinity in man."<sup>31</sup> In keeping with the rhetoric of the New Society, she continued, "Mt. Makiling, land of fable and legend, shall be home of this creative community that shall symbolize our resolution to rediscover and redefine ourselves and our determination to preserve and enhance our common cultural heritage. But we shall not stop at a national culture. For art, in its real sense, recognizes no national boundaries; it is universal."<sup>32</sup> This rhetoric offers yet another vantage point from which to judge Imelda Marcos' negotiation of the universal nature of the global and the need to strategically present elements of the local within an international context. By harkening to the legend of Mt. Makiling, Imelda takes on the persona of the *diwata* Maria Makiling, the protector and benefactress of the local poor who is eternally beautiful and young. So widespread is this legend that it belongs to the national collective and it is one from which the arts can mine music, dance, and literature. It is, in other words, a wellspring of locality from which universal arts may draw. The universal arts are themselves localized rather than imposed; they may carry local/national values and still be relevant on the global stage, as long as they have achieved the appropriate level of excellence.

Apropos to this, in his lecture entitled "The Filipino Composer and His Role in the New Society," the scholar and composer Eliseo Pajaro made clear that Western art music did not represent the dangers of foreign influence, saying, "I want, however, to make it clear that I am not entirely against the teaching of foreign music, since a lot of the serious music that have come to us belongs to the whole world, hence, is universal" (1976, 3). He continued, however, by directing Filipinos toward making their own music. "The Filipino composer should take upon himself the challenge to contribute to the reshaping of our present music education system in order that it may conform with one of the goals of the New Society, which is to Filipinize curricular offerings and teaching materials" (Ibid., 4). This tension between participating in valorized global culture while still maintaining a distinctive individuality with ties to the past is typical in exhortations of postcolonial identity.

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30. George C. Wilson, "Return to Mt. Makiling," *Music Educators Journal* 63, no. 5 (1977): 57.

31. Marcos, 16.

32. Marcos, 16.

## Global Ambassadors

The final aspect of Western art music during the New Society that I will consider is Imelda Marcos' patronage and association with music ambassadors, focusing on the US American pianist, Van Cliburn, and the Filipino prodigy, Cecile Licad. While the National Arts Center was but one training ground of several for music in the Philippines, it serves as a good example of how a global expressive form can be adopted locally to serve a larger political platform, all the while teaching young people that so-called universal culture appertains as much to them as domestic arts. Likewise, the ability to raise a local talent to global ambassadorship in music served as a necessary transition from admiration to adaptation and belonging.

Imelda's friendship with Van Cliburn is well documented, and it is not their personal relationship that is of interest here but rather what he represented as an international cultural ambassador of Western art music. Cliburn came to fame internationally in 1958 by winning the first-ever International Tchaikovsky Competition at just 23 years old.<sup>33</sup> His achievement inspired awe worldwide, not least back in the US. "Cliburn's victory dwarfed all other news on the nation's presses. To most readers, it was the world's greatest story. Every bus driver and his passengers, every doorman and all his tenants . . . in fact, the world and his neighbor were buzzing with nothing else."<sup>34</sup> As this occurred during the Cold War period, his victory and the positive regard with which Russians held him transformed the shy young man into a celebrity transcending the politics of the day. As one Russian opined to him during the celebration of his win, "You've been a very good politician for your country. You've done better than all the politicians."<sup>35</sup>

Imelda Marcos and Van Cliburn met during one of her trips to the US, and they quickly warmed to one another. When she returned, she suggested to the Philippine Society for Music Education and the League of Filipino Composers that he be invited to the Philippines to perform.<sup>36</sup> Shortly thereafter, the First Lady bestowed upon Cliburn the first International Artist Award. Upon its conferral in 1973, she attested, "A great artist is God's way of showing that he believes in man. This is Van Cliburn. He has charmed the savage beast of discord with the unifying power of his universal art."<sup>37</sup> The salient point here is not that Cliburn was chosen over any other artist, but rather that the very establishment of a state-funded International Artist Award in the Philippines, and its acceptance by a world-renowned pianist from

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33. While the competition itself was a way to promote Russian music and performers, some critics feel that the judges were actually in favor of Cliburn winning for the positive press and recognition that it would bring to the Soviet Union internationally.

34. Abram Chasins and Villa Stiles, *The Van Cliburn Legend* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1959), 113.

35. Chasins, 117.

36. Kasilag, 75.

37. Marcos, 34.

the US, served a political purpose. Imelda Marcos could claim a place for the Philippines in the international arts arena due to her ability to attract international musicians and through the prestige of adjudicating and bestowing an arts award to a Western classical music performer.

Cliburn was also a mentor and supporter of young talent, and Imelda Marcos invited him to listen to some of the promising pianists of the Philippines. The most notable at the time was Cecile Licad. Lucrecia Kasilag relates Licad's emergence in the following way:

A child prodigy brought to our attention at the Music Promotion Foundation of the Philippines was chubby eight-year-old, Cecile Licad . . . Mrs. Marcos happily assumed the role of grand patroness and sponsor of the Philippines' shining star in the world's musical firmament, bringing her prevailing dream of discovering at last a Filipino performing artist of international caliber in the young person of Cecile B. Licad, God's great musical gift to the Philippines.<sup>38</sup>

Licad first played for Van Cliburn over the telephone at the urging of Imelda, and he also heard her in person when he came to accept his International Artist Award. According to Licad's mother, "Of much help to Cecile's career was that almost all of the articles written on Van in the Manila dailies mentioned Cecile alongside the American pianist" (1994, 25). Imelda Marcos subsequently awarded Cecile Licad the First Piano Scholar of the Philippines Young Artists Foundation. This was soon followed by Imelda's offer to pay for her education at the renowned Curtis Institute of Music in the US.<sup>39</sup> In 1981, Licad won the highly coveted Gold Medal Award from the Leventritt Foundation, opening the way for concert appearances throughout the world and a recording contract from CBS Masterworks. She debuted with the Boston Symphony under the baton of conductor Seiji Ozawa at the Tanglewood Festival.

Licad became nothing less than a musical ambassador for the Philippines, continuing to have obligations to Imelda Marcos in return for her initial patronage.<sup>40</sup> Licad also managed to avoid appearing political for the most part. "Whenever foreign or local newspaper people try to coax her to comment on the political situation, she would dodge the question by answering, 'No comment. I believe art and artists should be beyond politics.'<sup>41</sup> Despite many outstanding classical music artists who have emerged from the Philippines, Licad has her place in history as one of the most internationally celebrated, and her ties to Van Cliburn and Imelda Marcos remain salient for the story that they tell.

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38. Kasilag, 76.

39. Patricia Morrisroe, "Thriller from Manila: Filipino Piano Prodigy Cecile Licad," *New York Magazine*, August 12, 1985, 48.

40. Morrisroe comments that she saw Licad in NYC after she had to play for a luncheon given by Imelda Marcos in Rome and that "as one of the Philippines' brightest stars, [she] has certain 'obligations'" (1984, 50).

41. Licad, 28.

## **Conclusion**

While any examination of music during the New Society would turn up a multitude of genres, this essay has focused on the multivalent manner in which Imelda Marcos used Western classical music to promote and maintain political symbolism for the regime. Widespread and longstanding discourse that Western art music is universal but also elite confers upon participants cultural capital and therefore a form of power. While they were not the first or last to influence the development of Western art music in their nation, the Marcoses were instrumental in promoting the development of these musics, even during the darkest days of dictatorship. The association of the Marcoses with art music was so strong that it was unsurprising the subsequent Aquino government turned away from arts patronage as part of a larger strategy to distance themselves from the regime.