

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING LOCAL AS AN ARTIST / LUMPIA LOVE SONG / ARE YOU FILIPINO?

Sean-Joseph Takeo Kahāokalani Choo

I was raised by storytellers. I was raised by family members who first and foremost identify as “local” and who passed down local values through Pidgin asides and jokes. My Filipino identity is inherently tied to this local identity since all of my relatives that I grew up with on my Filipino side were raised here— the motherland of Siquijor living in the memory of my ancestors further up the family tree. For better and for worse, my identity is tied to colonization. It is expressed in the stamp of Catholicism and the loss of language—English becoming my primary language. In my work, I piece together culture through learning stories of my family, like my Uncle David Maligro’s interview with my great-grandfather Paulino Alayaay for his Ethnic Studies 202 class in the 1970s. I piece together my culture through looking up words I don’t know, or, as an actor, imagining what it would be like to be in my ancestor’s shoes, as I write, or perform stories like R. Zamora Linmark’s Rolling the R’s, or learn Filipino dance from Uncle Wayne Mendoza, like my Nana did, and my mom did, and my cousins did.

Being Filipino has always been associated with positivity in my mind: gathering with my family on the weekends, with second and third cousins, eating food, learning to talk story and tease each other, Nana picking tanglad in her garden. I recognize not everyone’s experience growing up Filipino was similar to mine. I was confused when I heard about other folks’ experiences with growing up being teased for speaking Pidgin (my first language) or having a Filipino accent. Pidgin and Filipino-tinged English are love languages to me as they sound like my grandparents. It reminds me of my great-grandmother Maria Alayaay, the rising, falling, and melody of her “broken” English mirroring the Visayan she grew up with.

Both of my songs featured here came out of a brief time when I was trying to start a band, named TANGUAY, with my other Fil-Am friends. I came to the name TANGUAY by way of rum. Tanduay Rum is delicious. I discovered that the related Cebuano word “tanguay” can mean a place where palm wine is sold. I liked this word’s association with drinking and with the exchange of money and ideas. “Tangwai” was also the name given to a political movement of people outside the main political party in Taiwan who called for reform. I was thinking of singing and writing songs that had humorous as well as political messages.

Are You Filipino? was completely improvised. It was a culmination of the collective joy from jamming with my talented

musician friends Jaslyn Loftin, Aaron Garcia, and Ernie Ecraela. While it sounds silly and sophomoric, the question, “Are you Filipino?” can also have darker implications: “Are you Filipino enough?” “How do you prove how Filipino you are?” etc.

Lumpia Love Song had its beginnings in one of our TANGUAY jam sessions. I was thinking about tensions between different groups in the Philippines (and in Hawai‘i) when writing it. Humor has a wonderful way of confronting, confounding, and connecting, and I think that’s apparent in these absurd songs I’ve created.

I always aspire to good mischief in my art. Because of my mixed background, a lot of my work explores the complication of an increasingly global society: how do we connect or fail to connect across cultures, languages, belief systems, etc.? My curiosities are expansive because I am a proud descendant of Japanese, Uchinanchu, Korean, Portuguese, English, Irish, Visayan, and Kānaka Maoli ancestors. I hope my comedy and my art invites people into a space of reflection, surprise, and joy. I hope it offers a space that reflects the beauty of the place where I was raised. I hope it allows us to not take for granted the wonderful multiplicity of perspectives that can be found here in Hawai‘i.



Video (Local Artist): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TRp0MLRy9hX-f1xfNtXP4Wz7o2QrdsaTW/view?usp=share_link

Lumpia Love Song Audio: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TRp0MLRy9hXf1xfNtXP4Wz7o2QrdsaTW/view?usp=share_link

Are You Filipino Audio: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TRp0MLRy9hXf1xfNtXP4Wz7o2QrdsaTW/view?usp=share_link

Lumpia Love Song

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you are shang hai
i am turon
you like goodbyes
i love meeting new people saying hello
you like to cry
i like to talk
i like fried food
and you hate oil woks
do you not like yourself, shang hai lumpia girlfriend?
maybe we should find you a therapist?

we are lumpia
two different lumpia
literally lumpia
but we can't be together, no
because society says so
wasak ang puso

i'm full of sugar
you are not
i am dessert
and you are spicy szchezuan hot
our parents disapprove
of our love and union
but each time push comes to shove
i'll always choose you
there's no substitution
for us

us lumpia
two types of lumpia
rich and poor lumpia
my family's poor lumpia
your family's rich lumpia
my dad's cebuano lumpia
your family's ilocanos lumpia
two different lumpias!
so we can't be together, no
wasak ang puso

a lumpia
by any
other name would taste as sweet
unless
you're eating a savory one

filled with meat
two methods
both alike
in their dignity
in fair kalihi valley
where we lay our scene

oh, oh, oh
wasak ang puso

we are lumpia
two different lumpia
it's not working lumpia
it's you, not me lumpia
oh wait it's not you it's me lumpia
i messed that phrase up lumpia
you are angry lumpia
do you want a beer or something lumpia

do opposites really attract?
or is it trying to fit a square peg into a round hole?

think about our lumpia babies?
what's best for them?
have you considered that maybe
all the dreams we dreamt
were just that
and we aren't meant to be

oh shit we going to get eaten now goodbye
crunch

Are You Filipino?

Sean-Joseph Takeo Kahāokalani Choo

are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino
yes you are
you are and i are and we all roll r's

we're filipino yes this is true
repping the gold star, red and blue
we like to eat all kinds of food
that's filled with vinegar this is true
we all live in waipahu
or wahiawa yes that's cool

im done with rapping

are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino
yes you are
you are and i are and we all roll r's

i'm filipino from the Bisayas
i don't know what can rhyme with Bisayas
it would be great if you could sing beside us
did you see what i did there what i did decide-us

are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino
yes you are
you are and i are and we all roll r's

filipinos have a distinctive nose
did that sentence have racist overtones?
i hope you noticed that it was because if you did not
i'd have to have a word with you and that would go hot

that rhymes!

are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino
yes you are
you are and i are and we all roll r's

my friends come from the Ilocos
they small kine little bit loco
if you know what i mean (hint hint marcos!)
he's coming for you with a gun you better run
and hide ohhhhh

are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino
yes you are
you are and i are and we all roll r's

(rolling r sounds)

bahay kubo
kahit munti
ang halaman doon
ay sari sari
i don't remember the words about this house
but if you come to manila i can show you around

are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino?
yes you are
are you filipino
yes you are
you are and i are and we all roll r's