

**Introduction to Philippine Folk Dance**  
 Classroom Online Resource Document (CORD)

Filipino folk dance history is not the history of a single national dance of one or two regions. Dances evolved from different regions which are distinct from one another as they are affected by the religion and culture.

In the Philippines, dance is as diverse as the culture intermingling in the archipelago. It encompasses all the dance forms that have been used by the Filipinos through the centuries to express themselves. This dazzling diversity of dances in different forms and dynamics grew out of the times, situations, and experiences of the people and the exposure to the varied cultures and traditions introduced by the waves of colonial rule that have reached the Philippine shores.

*Brief Development of Philippine Folk Dance*

1. Pre-Colonial Period- Dances during this period were considered by some historians, anthropologists, and researchers as dance in its purest form because this particular dance form has not been refined, developed, trained, or guided by an artist. To the early Filipinos, dance was an expression of community life that animates the various rituals and ceremonies.

*Classification*

Ethnic dance (or Indigenous dance)- found among the ethnolinguistic groups scattered all over the Philippine islands who have not been substantially Westernized. The mountain regions of Northern Luzon house dances that continues to be an expression of community life that animates the various rituals and ceremonies. Sometimes, these dances are called Cordillera dances. Cordillera is a name given by the Spanish Conquistadors when they first saw the mountain ranges. Meaning "knotted rope", the Spanish term refers to the jumbled rolls and dips of this long-range traversing the northern part of Luzon Island. One dance coming from this area is called Banga.



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"Banga" literally mean pots. The Banga or pot dance is a performance of Kalinga of the Mountain Province in the Philippines. This dance illustrates the languid grace of a tribe otherwise known as fierce warriors. Heavy earthen pots, as many as seven or eight at a time, are balanced on the heads of maidens as they trudge to the beat of the "gangsá" or wind chimes displaying their stamina and strength as they go about their daily task of fetching water and

balancing the banga. For a video of this dance, check the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08eXrO9s4Nk>.

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Another ethnic dance found in southern Philippines (also known as Muslim dance) is called *Singkil*. Like their brothers from central and northern Philippines, Filipinos in the South are avid lovers of dance. The dances, particularly of the Maguindanao, the Maranao, and the Tausug, are largely ceremonial and are often accompanied by percussion instruments such as gongs and drums.

Singkil is usually in the repertory of most Filipino dance troupes. There are many interpretations of this dance. In 1958 the Bayanihan Dance troupe started with a simple version and has since developed it into a theatrical and stylized spectacle to the point of its becoming the troupe's signature piece. According to Maranao legend, the *Singkil* derives its name from the feat of a certain Princess Gandingan. While she was walking in the forest, *diwatas* (fairies) caused the earth to quake and shake the trees and rocks; Princess Gandingan, however, skipped nimbly from one place to another so that her feet did not touch the fallen trees and rocks. Originally, in *Singkil* (Maranao word for "getting a leg or foot entangled in an object") a solo female performer danced in and out of crisscrossed bamboo poles, keeping time to the syncopation of the poles, at the same time manipulating two fans (*apir*). The dance had no music other than the beating of the poles and had a moderate and static rhythm. Here is a sample of the dance *Singkil*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXbbfv8Wq9o>



2. Spanish Colonial Period- Exposed for almost four centuries to the influence of European dances, the Filipinos gradually assimilated the dances of the Spaniards, evolving their own simplified versions and derivations of the different forms with each region adding its own touches. The elegance of the body and arm movements of foreign dances fascinated the Filipinos, so they adopted these. However, the sharp and fast movements of most European dances were tempered and softened by the languid grace that is characteristic of many Filipino dances.

*Classification*

Maria Clara dance (or Western Influenced dance)- These dances reached their zenith in popularity around the turn of the century, particularly among urban Filipinos. They are so named in honor of the legendary Maria Clara, who remains a symbol of the virtues and nobility of the Filipina woman. Maria Clara was the chief female character of Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*. Displaying a very strong Spanish influence, these dances were, nonetheless, "Filipinized" as evidence of the use of bamboo castanets and the abanico, or Asian fan. Typical attire for these dances is the formal Maria Clara dress and barong tagalog, an embroidered long-sleeve shirt made of pineapple fiber.

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An example of a Maria Clara dance is Cariñosa. The dance originated in Panay Island in the Visayan Islands and was introduced by the Spaniards during their colonization of the Philippines. It is related to some of the Spanish dances like the bolero and the Mexican dance Jarabe Tapatio or the Mexican Hat Dance. According to the book of Francisca Reyes-Aquino, Philippine Folk Dances, Volume 2, there is a different version of the dance in the region of Bicol. In the Bicol Region Carinosa, hide and seek movement is different ways. In the original version, the dancers used the Fan and handkerchief as the way to do the hide and seek movement, in Bicol they used two handkerchiefs holding the two corners of the handkerchief and doing the hide and seek movement as they point their foot forward and their hands go upward together with their handkerchiefs following the movement. Here's a link for the said dance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sy18EXrueu0>

3. American Colonial Period- In dance, America made its presence felt in the Philippines through “bodabil” dancing, a term which comes from the French “voix de ville”--- street songs, which was dancing in the variety show which consisted mainly of popular and theatrical dances from the U.S.A. but later included Philippine folk dances and choreographies among its production number.

*Classification*

Rural dance (or Countryside dance)- Perhaps the best known and closest to the Filipino heart are the dances from the rural Christian lowlands: a country blessed with so much beauty. To the Filipinos, these dances illustrate the fiesta spirit and demonstrate a love of life. They express a joy in work, a love for music, and pleasure in the simplicities of life. Typical attire in the Rural Suite include the colorful balintawak and patadyong skirts for the women, and camisa de chino and colored trousers for the men.

One example of a rural dance is Binasuan. This is a popular folk dance that originated in Bayambang, Pangasinan. The word “binasuan” means “with the use of drinking glasses.” The dancers balance glasses on their heads and in their hands as they move. The glasses are filled with rice wine, which makes any misstep a messy mistake. People dance binasuan at weddings and festivals. Here's an example of Binasuan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJHJSuWy8ZE>



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