Giving Back in the Philippines

My Fulbright Scholar story begins in Barrio Malued, Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines, amidst throngs of openhearted school children and my volunteer work at the city's downtown Pangasinan Provincial Hospital during my U.S. Peace Corps service.

Royal Hartigan visited the Barangay Malued Elementary School in Dagupan City during his U.S. Peace Corps service.

Photo by Juanito Saplan

I began my Fulbright lecture/research grant four decades later at the University of the Philippines (UP) in world music. I spent the next two months primarily in the Musicology Department teaching world music, including African drumming, song and dance, and African American jazz; giving workshops; performing in the Manila area; and conducting research on the indigenous kulintang ensemble music of the Maguindanao people of the south and the gong ensemble music of the Kalinga people of the north.

My main teaching responsibility was to teach in my areas of focus, African music, with the possible addition of jazz. With the assistance and support of Professor Verne dela Pena, we developed a class that met three times a week with extra rehearsals for drummers. Dean Raymon Acoymo helped with logistics and visibility in the campus and regional communities. Dance Professor Basilio Esteban Villaruz and percussion Professor Leo Roque also supported the class with their advocacy of student enrollment.

The class members, most with no previous African music or dance experience, worked hard, and we were able to present four dances and three drumming pieces in our concert in the music department's Abelardo concert hall. We also performed at the Penguin space in Malate, Manila, outdoors at UP near the music department, and at the University of Santo Tomas.

I met the current Afro-Latin professor, Bo Razon, who assisted me with the class. My goal was to equip Professor Razon with the abilities to continue African music and dance after my departure. His networking with the local music and arts community, in which he is a professional percussion and strings performer, was invaluable to my mission of reaching as many people as possible during my Fulbright Scholar grant in the Philippines.

The African music and dance class was so popular that students remained and worked long after the scheduled class time. Their intense commitment was inspiring, and their interest grew to the extent that we added an informal drumming class to prepare for our concerts prior to the scheduled class times.

The Philippine-American Educational Foundation (PAEF) staff directed by Esmeralda Cunanan and Professors Verne dela Pena (the UP Fulbright faculty liaison) and Bo Razon were invaluable to my residency, arranging connections and logistics for my teaching, research, community outreach and performances. Their assistance allowed us to accomplish a year's worth of teaching and performances in three months through intensive daily work, including many weekends. The Fulbright Scholar experience has already enhanced my University of Massachusetts Dartmouth community. I have expanded our world music curriculum to include Philippine culture, history and music in our semester offerings of world music classes for music majors and non-majors. I am also including Philippine indigenous music in my workshops and lecture demonstrations here in the United States and am working on a book with DVD on traditional musical styles for educational and professional use in performance.

Royal Hartigan conducts research on the music of the Kalinga people of northern Luzon with Antonella Bernardo and master artists Alex Tumapang and Oliver Gumawang.

Photo by Maria Regina Tuazon

In the contemporary era of rapid change and uncertainty, the best antidotes to violent upheaval are the human community, interdependence, and caring fostered by global programs such as the Fulbright Program. My path is clear, to contribute positive connections among the world's peoples through the power of music and dance, activities that express the deepest levels of culture.