

Windows of *Harana* (Serenade): The Cultural Resonances of Filipino Popular Love Songs—*Jopay* and *Binibini* (Maiden)

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Abstract

Cultural resonance of Filipino love songs in Southeast Asia is a relevant trend in the Philippine music industry, thus, this conceptual article aims to investigate how a song can still be relevant in mainstream music despite its chronological longevity. This paper delves into the song *Jopay* by Mayonnaise, an OPM rock band, and *Binibini* (Maiden) by Zack Tabudlo who are both Filipino singer-songwriters, through semiotic analysis on the song lyrics—how Filipinos view the concept of love. The *Harana* framework adopts the three-part courtship process—*pagtawag* (call out), *pagsugid* (confession), and *pagtubag* (reply)—to analyze how the themes manifest in modern love songs, influences the emotional language, attitude, and cultural expression in Filipino love songs, and how lyrics and melodies convey deeper cultural meanings through shared emotions.

Keywords: *Harana*, *OPM*, *semiosis*, *pagtawag*, *pagsugid*, *pagtubag*

Bio-profiles

Moona Sambaoa Binalla is a licensed professional teacher, music educator, conductor, chorister, and singer-songwriter. She earned her Bachelor of Music in Music Education, major in Choral Conducting, from the Conservatory of Music, Centro Escolar University, Manila, in 2024. Currently, she serves as a music educator at Temple Hill International School, and is the founder and conductor of Alon Women's Choir. As an active choral musician, she has represented the Philippines in local and international choral competitions. She is a member of the Philippine Choral Directors Association (PCDA) and was recognized as one of the Top 5 National Finalists in the PCDA National Choral Conducting Competition in 2025. She is also a member of the Eastern Chamber Singers that won the Grand Prix at the 5th Asia Choral Grand Prix held at Incheon, South Korea in February 2026. Beyond her work as an educator and conductor, she performs and writes original music under the artist name MOONA. As an indie folk-pop singer-songwriter, she composes original Filipino songs that explore themes of love, life, and the shared human experience. Her interests include music education, choral conducting, popular music studies, and community music-making.

Dr. Crisancti L. Macazo is a licensed professional teacher, musicologist, violinist, avid photographer and filmmaker. He recently finished the requirements for the Post-Doctoral Diploma in Quality Management, Centro Escolar University, Manila. He earned his Ph.D. in Music from the University of



the Philippines in 2020; Master of Music in Music Education applied in Violin Pedagogy with *Meritissimus* (*Summa cum laude*) honors in 2012; and Bachelor of Music in Music Education applied in Violin – recipient of Rector’s Award for Academic Excellence for graduating *valedictorian* of his batch in 1999. Currently, he serves as an Associate Professor at the Conservatory of Music, Centro Escolar University, Manila; and He is a member of the Philippine Association for Teachers and Educators (PAFTE), Guild of Educators in TESOL International (GET International) – life member (since 2025), the International Musicological Society (life member since 2019), the International Association for the Study of Popular Music – Southeast Asia (IASPM-SEA), GEO Global Educators; and currently an Executive Board for the Professional and Career Development of the Southeast Asian Directors of Music (SEADOM). He is also an Adjunct Faculty member of the College of Music and the Performing Arts, St. Paul University Manila.

Original Pilipino Music: Resonance

Original Pilipino Music (OPM) is an umbrella term for a category of music created by Filipinos (Balance, 2021). As a maker of Filipino identity in popular music, the label “Pinoy Music” was coined (Prudente, 2021). Radio has become the center of entertainment of the Filipinos in the Philippines in the American Period. Ever since the existence of radio in the Philippines, it was the foreign music that dominated the country. When the Resolution No. 75–31 of Broadcast Media Council was passed under the military rule under the Marcos regime, the resolution ordered all radio stations to play one (1) OPM every hour, then in the succeeding, four (4) OPM songs every hour. The Filipino music was revived, has regained its recognition that resulted in Filipino listeners appreciating their heritage more, and has beat foreign songs for the first time. There was a relevant increase in the sales of vinyl records of Filipino music. It was the start of the OPM prevailing and “Manila Sound” (Navarro, 2014). Manila Sound has become popular especially among youths of baby boomers and therefore OPM becoming the quintessential popular music in the Philippines (Buenconsejo, 2020). The modern resurgence of New Manila Sound’s popularity has been aided by digital technology, resulting in an expansion in methods of content-creation, dissemination, and audience engagement in the country’s entertainment industry (Gabrillo, 2019). OPM holds great significance in Filipino culture and society, it significantly influences the nation by mirroring the shared experience of its people. Moreover, it reflects what resonates with the public during specific periods (Lano et al., 2024).

The Artists

Mayonnaise is a Filipino alternative rock band that was formed in 2002 from Manila, Philippines and launched in 2004 after winning the grand prize of the *Red Horse Muziklaban 2004*. Their band name was from the American alternative rock band *The Smashing Pumpkins*’ song *Mayonnaise* (1993). The group then released their debut self-titled album with their first single *Jopay*.



(Chua, 2019) The group consists of five (5) members: Monty Macalino, their vocalist and guitarist, Carlo Servano and Keano Swing on guitars, Nikki Tirona as their bassist, and Shan Regelado as their drummer. They have been active in the music industry for more than 19 years with their hit songs such as *Jopay*, *Bakit Part 2* (Why Part 2),¹ and *Tayo Na Lang Dalawa* (Just the two of us). (Rappler, 2019) The band has released fifteen (15) albums and eight (8) EPs (Extended Play) wherein based on the song titles and context of lyrics, most of their concepts talk about love. (Wikipedia, 2026)

Zack Tabudlo, a Filipino singer, songwriter, and producer, commenced his solo career in 2018. He rose to prominence in 2021 with the release of his single *Binibini* (Maiden), which achieved significant commercial success by topping the Spotify Philippines charts for six consecutive weeks and ranking first on the Global Viral chart for four weeks. This breakthrough not only solidified his status in the local music industry but also garnered international recognition, including a feature on a Times Square billboard and the distinction of having the most streamed song in the Philippines on Spotify for the year 2021. The song garnered significant recognition throughout Southeast Asia, opening opportunities for Tabudlo to perform in countries such as Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. This regional success also led to collaborations with prominent Southeast Asian artists, including Violette Wautier (Thailand), Tiara Andini (Indonesia), Billkin (Thailand), and Yonnyboii (Malaysia).

Zack wrote *Binibini* about a deep mutual relationship between lovers who are willing to do everything for each other but are “waiting for the right moment to say what they feel” relating it to his own experience where he would dance with his partner under the rain despite the chaos around them (Chong, 2021).

The song illustrates the lens of cultural resonance wherein a cultural product aligns with the emotions, sensibilities, identities, and lived experiences (McDonnell et. al, 2017) *Binibini* resonated deeply with Filipino listeners due to its emotional vulnerability and romantic lyricism—love and longing. It became relevant as it was released during the 2021 pandemic where romantic relationships are challenged (Bondoc et. al, 2021) thus, Southeast Asian audiences share the same cultural narratives and emotional registers. This illustrates the auditory resonance where the audience instantly connected emotionally with the Filipino song despite the cultural differences (Geobel, 2022).

The Hit Song: *Jopay*

With its emerging popularity, classic OPM love songs created by Pinoy Rock bands in the late

¹ *Bakit Part 2* (Why Part 2) and *Jopay* are both included in the OST (Original Soundtrack) of the movie *Ngayon Kaya* (Maybe Today).



'90s and early 2000s still remain to be relevant and part of the mainstream music such as *Ang Huling El Bimbo* (The Last El Bimbo) (1995) by Eraserheads, 214 (1995) by Rivermaya, *Your Song* (2004) Parokya ni Edgar, *Beer* (2006) by Itchyworms, and the latest viral hit song, *Jopay* by Mayonnaise. The song was included in the band's debut album in 2004 titled "Mayonnaise," and since then, the song has gained popularity as it is one of their hit songs and became significant in the OPM rock scene. (Cruz, 2023) *Jopay* was named after a popular dancer-actress in the 2000s.

The inspiration for this song stemmed from a poignant scene in a drama special, capturing the moment when *Jopay* was overcome with tears. (Chua, 2019) As of June 2023, *Jopay* obtained 71 million streams on Spotify and over 507.2 million content views on Tiktok with the hashtag #*Jopay*. The song was released in 2004 and it became popular and emerged in 2022. The song can be heard in various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, and Twitter, mostly used as a background music to video content; it started with the "What if" trend that talks about the "what ifs" in a situation wherein someone from your past resurfaced and crossed paths with you, how will you react from that situation; the context was inspired from the movie *Ngayon Kaya* (Maybe Today) directed by Prime Cruz.² From that, the song has reached millions of listeners and consumers; it has been used in different contexts as well in memes, but despite its utilization in various contexts, the idea of "what if" has been now the trademark of the song *Jopay*.

Along with the other rising pinoy rock bands, *Mayonnaise* is one of the most popular rock bands in the Philippines, many have acknowledged their significance and huge influence on shaping modern Pinoy rock music. During the early 2000s, Mayonnaise experienced a significant surge in popularity when their song *Jopay* became a crowd favorite. Now, nearly two decades later, history is repeating itself as they once again capture the attention and admiration of the listeners. (Basbas, 2022) The composition achieved remarkable success on two separate occasions, each time for distinct reasons. Initially, it garnered popularity upon its release during the period of OPM's prominence. Subsequently, its resurgence came when it was selected as the official soundtrack for the film *Ngayon Kaya* (Maybe Today) and later utilized as background music for the "What if trend" which was inspired by the movie. This phenomenon has caught my interest as it was astonishing to encounter this kind of phenomena in the Philippine music industry.

² The movie *Ngayon Kaya* (Maybe Today) released in 2022 about a chance meeting at a friend's wedding rekindles old feelings between two college friends as they wonder whether it's too late for their love. It is starring Paulo Avelino, Janine Gutierrez, and directed by Prime Cruz. Netflix, <https://rebrand.ly/uejvltm>



Theoretical Framework

The framework developed for this article is based on theories pertaining to colonialism and Barthes' *connotative theory*. (Barus, et al., 2025) The colonization in the Philippines has resulted in a notable and ongoing pursuit of a distinct Filipino identity, leading to extensive deliberations among nationalists, intellectuals, and artists. The label "Pinoy Music" was coined in the early 1970s as a symbol of Filipino identity in popular music, thus the origin of the genre "Pinoy rock" in which the band—*Mayonnaise* belongs to. (Prudente, 2021) Roland Barthes employs the term "connotation" to depict the interplay that unfolds when a sign intersects with the emotions and values of individuals, influenced by their cultural background. (Barus, et al., 2025) Since *Jopay* is a love song written by the band's frontman dedicated to a specific person whose name is *Jopay*, (GMA Integrated News, 2023) this will be correlated to a similar tradition in Philippine history which is *harana* (serenade), wherein it is one of the methods through which a man could capture the attention of the woman he admires. (Yu, 2021) Hence, Barthes' *connotation theory* was utilized to examine the lyrics of *Jopay*, as well as Zack Tabudlo's *Binibini* to discern their respective connotative meanings and correlati~~on~~s to Filipino culture of serenade. (Ramadhani, 2019)

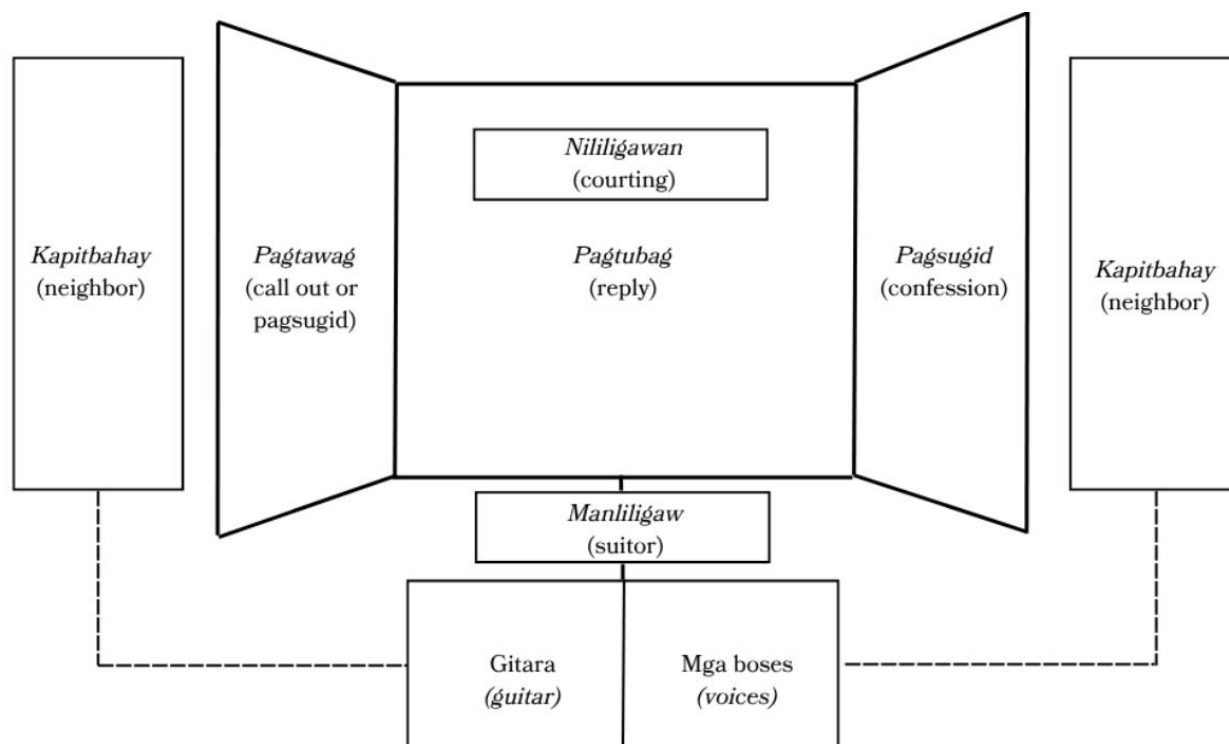
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this paper draws on the traditional process of *harana*, highlighting how it reflects the artist's journey in gaining audiences. It explores the parallelism between the traditional *harana* and the modern artist's experience of building recognition and resonance with listeners. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.

The "Harana" (Serenade) Framework





Origin: Harana and OPM Pinoy Rock

According to Hope Sabanpan-Yu's paper, "Women and the Harana," *harana* is described as a blended art form that emerged through the amalgamation of pre-existing Cebuano and Hispanic elements. (Yu, 2021) This cultural expression embodies intangible heritage, featuring the enduring oral traditions of indigenous poetry alongside the influence of colonial sensibilities. The paper also stated that according to Resil Mojares, the Spanish colonization deeply impacted native poetic traditions, introducing new themes and sentiments. Harana reflects the prevailing customs of its time, showcasing the composers' perspectives on how men and women should interact. These ideas were disseminated among members of the community. The serenade, as a form of courtship, elevated its performers by imitating the chivalrous approach to wooing a woman. It employed the formula of alluding to words from earlier traditions, adding depth and significance to the act of courtship.

From city to province, radio has become the center of entertainment of the Filipinos in the Philippines in the American period. Ever since the existence of radio in the Philippines, it was the foreign music that dominated the country. Resolution No. 75–31 of Broadcast Media Council was passed under military rule under the Marcos regime, the resolution orders all radio stations to play one (1) OPM song every hour, in the succeeding years, it progressed to four (4) OPM songs every hour



thereafter. The Filipino music was revived, has regained its recognition that resulted in Filipino listeners appreciating their heritage more, and has beat foreign songs for the first time. It also resulted in a relevant increase in the sales of vinyl records of Filipino music. It was the start of the OPM prevailing and “Manila Sound.” (Navarro, 2014)

Pinoy rock encompasses a wide range of styles and sub-genres, including pop rock, folk rock, punk rock, hardcore punk, heavy metal, and alternative rock. It drew inspiration from American and British bands, which served as influential models and catalysts for the emergence of local rock music. Radio stations, particularly Boss Radio DZRJ 100.3, founded in 1963 by entrepreneur and musician Ramon “RJ” Jacinto, played a pivotal role in the development and promotion of Pinoy rock. (Prudente, 2021)

Analysis: Traditional and Modern

Harana is one of the ways a man could attract the attention of the woman aside from reciting love verses of the former to the latter. The man woos a woman beneath her window at night by singing and playing his guitar. The *harana* has a formula that includes three (3) parts: “*pagtawag*” (call out), “*pagsugid*” (confession), and “*pagtubag*” (reply) (Yu, 2021). In present time, the song *Jopay* is the medium in serenading a person, in Mayonnaise’s case, the song expressed consolation and admiration for *Jopay*. It can be seen in the first line of the first verse: “*Jopay, kumusta ka na?*” which translates to “*Jopay, how are you now?*” and it signifies that interest in her well-being which is also similar to *harana*. The act of singing, in this context, signifies a man’s interest in a woman and serves as a polite way of imploring her to open the window and listen to the song being performed. The band used the song as a medium to entice listeners by using it as a track song in their debut album.

In *pagtawag*, this stage involves men positioning themselves outside the woman's window to announce their presence, often accompanied by a repertoire of specific songs and a guitar. In the song, he started with the word “*binibini*” which directly translates to “young lady or maiden” to call the attention of the woman he admires, and in the song’s context, it is used as an endearment to show respect and affection. To the artist, in the perspective of “*manliligaw*,” he released his song as a medium to introduce himself to the music industry to call the attention of his target audience and woo them to be his listeners.



In the practice of *pagsugid*, the man effectively captures the woman's interest and curiosity. Typically, the woman opens the window and welcomes the man into the house. In the living room, another round of singing takes place. The man then expresses his admiration for the woman's virtue and beauty. In Zack Tabudlo's *Binibini*, the lyrics of the chorus say:

Figure 2.

Chorus of Zack Tabudlo's "Binibini" (2021)

<i>Isayaw mo ako sa gitna ng ulan, mahal ko</i> <i>Kapalit man nito'y buhay ko</i> <i>Gagawin ang lahat para sayo</i> <i>Alam kong mahal mo na rin ako</i>	Dance with me in the rain my beloved Even if it costs my life I will do everything for you I am certain that you love me now too. (English translation by the authors)
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This part of the song is the man's confession of his love to the extent saying that he is willing to do everything for her even if it costs his life. In the artist's perspective, the song can be said to have been acknowledged by the listeners through the number of views, streams, and likes of the song on the internet, the number of times it has been added to a playlist, the number of comments it has received; the higher number of engagement with the song, the more it signifies interest and curiosity from the listeners.

In *pagtubag*, the third part of the traditional *harana*, the woman also replies in the form of a song. The second verse of the song says:

Figure 3.

Verse 2 of Zack Tabudlo's "Binibini" (2021)

<i>Binibini</i> <i>Sabi mo noon sa akin ayaw mo pa</i> <i>Pero ang yakap mo ngayo'y kakaiba</i> <i>Hindi ka ba nalilito?</i> <i>Totoo na bang gusto ako?</i> <i>Wag nang labanan ang puso</i> <i>Alam kong mahal mo na ako</i> <i>Kung gano'n halika na't wag lumayo</i>	My beloved You told me before that you were not ready yet But your embrace this time tells me otherwise Are you not confused? Do you now like me? Do not resist what your heart desires I am certain that you love me now too Therefore, come here and don't let go (English translation by the authors)
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This suggests that the woman already has a response in mind, though she does not mean to express it directly. Her actions, however, reveal her interest, giving the man even more reason to persist in encouraging her to be honest about her feelings. From the artist's perspective, acceptance by



the audience becomes evident when they gain loyal fans and consistent followers, their songs are covered and widely used, their live performances attract audiences, and their names become subjects of public conversation. Thus, when the woman being serenaded responds, it is done in the form of a song, which is known as “*pagtubag*” or response. In the present times, the song can be determined that it has been successfully accepted by the listeners if it is being utilized by the listeners and content creators as such as a background music to media content, an official soundtrack (OST) to a film, or part of the (pop) culture.

During the *harana* performance, family and neighbors are alerted that there is a *harana* in their neighborhood once they hear the guitar play and the voices sing. Then the next day, the woman becomes the object of teasing among her family members and even relatives. With Zack Tabudlo gaining his audiences in the Philippines, the “*gitara*” in this situation is the digital platform used as medium for his song to be known in the neighboring countries and gaining his audience from there. Moreover, the “*mga boses*” (voices) in this situation are the collaboration Zack Tabudlo had with the Southeast Asian artists which helped him to gain an audience from his neighboring countries. This also also true with the case of Mayonnaise's *Jopay*.

Conclusion

Traditions can still be utilized in modern times. Similar to *harana*, wherein the process of acceptance of the person being serenaded engages in a series of stages, the acceptance process of the listeners to a certain song or musician in the present time also undergoes the same approach wherein an artist has to entice and convince their target audience to listen to their discography through their music. The *harana* framework was conceptualized to determine the levels on how the audience responds to a specific song. Correlating tradition to a modern situation shows that both can have various approaches but have the same goal and diverse reactions. It is evident how the song *Jopay* and *Binibini* were accepted in the society thus embodies the phenomenon. With this framework, one may gauge how Filipino love songs gain popularity in the current times, ergo, the use of existing cultural trait, i.e., *harana* by our folks to understand OPM love songs in the present.

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