

ABOUT KUNDIMAN AND ITS TRADITIONS

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Kundiman is a genre of Filipino music that is primarily in the style of 19th century Western art song. Though not originally in this style, the kundiman we will work on emerged around the time of Filipino Independence from the Spanish in 1898.

The kundiman's origin traces back to the *kumintang*, a pre-colonial dance song that was sung by warriors to ignite feelings before going to war. The text is generally written in four stanzas, with 12 syllables, and in a triple meter. The kundiman does the same, while also using the harmonic minor melodic formula with more Western-influenced tonal harmonies by way of Spanish colonization. During this time, at the end of the 19th century, was when the kundiman took on more nationalistic feelings. Most of the songs are love songs dedicated to a woman – this woman became a symbol for the Philippines – while the unreciprocated love is that of unattainable freedom.

Kundiman is written in the Tagalog language. The term itself “kundiman” comes from the Tagalog phrase “kung hindi man” meaning “if it were not so,” hence the theme of unrequited love songs. These love songs hid the patriotic feelings beneath the music that would later unite Filipino revolutionaries to revolt against the Spanish. Writers like Dr. Jose Rizal, who was executed by the Spanish for his published criticism of the oppressive rule of Spaniards, wrote song texts of Kundiman. Subsequently, composers would incorporate Spanish elements, along with their formal Western classical training, to write these songs that would also serve to preserve Filipino culture while assimilation was happening.

Two composers, Francisco Santiago (known as the father of Kundiman art song), and Nicanor Abelardo, both established the form and style of the kundiman. Generally, it is found in triple meter with a minor-parallel major tonality. Additionally, it is often described as a combination of *lieder* and opera accompanying. Interpretation of the style differs amongst groups. Some believe kundiman should be sung in the most natural voice and with traditional, speech like practices. Others believe kundiman should be interpreted with more Western practices, using techniques that would be applied to German *lieder* or *bel canto* style singing. I believe the most important aspect of this music is to understand fully what the inspiration behind the text is. Though kundiman is a love song, it is an expression of nationalism from an oppressed people through folk song. Philippine identity is rich in the music, as is the longing for freedom. This artform is shared across cultures (which is in large part the connection I am making between Finnish song and Philippine Kundiman for the recital), but each culture has very specific characteristics that make it unique to that country, its people, and their culture.

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