

THE PABASA OF SAN LUIS, BATANGAS

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The *pabasa* (chanting of the passion narrative in Tagalog) is an important religious, social and musical practice in the town of San Luis, Batangas. First, it is a devotional practice associated with the Lenten season. It gives this period of the Christian calendar a uniquely solemn color. Secondly, it is an event that requires the work of a complicated social machine. Each component of this machine must function smoothly in order for the *pabasa* to be carried out successfully. Many of the social relationships that exist in San Luis are, therefore, called into play when a *pabasa* occurs. Finally, the *pabasa* is also a complex form with its own logic and style. The pleasure of both the singer and the listener results from the fulfillment of the formal code of the *pabasa*. It is, therefore, an important means of artistic expression in the town of San Luis, a coastal town in the Southeast portion of Batangas province.

This paper is an attempt to describe the practice of the *pabasa* as it exists today in San Luis with the hope that it will serve as a record of a cultural form that reflect the values of a seriously threatened yet valid way of life.

In writing this paper, the writer has observed and recorded six *pabasa* over a period of five years (1979-1983). Five of the *pabasa* took place in the town proper while the sixth took place in the barrio of Bonliw. The writer has also included various details concerning the town and its people which might be helpful in understanding the setting behind the practice.

The Town

San Luis is a town two and a half hours away from Manila with a population of roughly 13,000. It is a small town, living in the shadow of two bigger neighbors. The only large public structures that exist are the church, a small municipal hall, and the two schools in the area—a public elementary school and a cooperative high school owned and run by the lower middle-class families of the town.

San Luis is closely linked to the two major towns of the area. Culturally and historically, it is a satellite of Taal, to which it once belonged.¹

¹ San Luis became a separate town only in 1918.

Although Taal is in decline today, the former capital of Batangas is still looked up to as the mother town where the great houses and families of high social standing live. It is also the center of the embroidery and garment export industry which provides the women of San Luis with their source of income.²

The town is also bound by economic ties to Lemery, the prosperous market town of the district. Lemery is the trading center for the fishing and livestock industry, again the major source of income for the town's small farmer and fisherman.³ These towns, aside from sharing the same *pabasa* style with San Luis, provide the bigness that is absent from the small, sleepy town that is San Luis today.

Aside from fishing, farming and embroidery, important sources of income from the *maglalako* (itinerant vendors) of the town who travel as far as Bohol, buying and sell mosquito nets, blankets, jewelry, etc. More recently, many *maglalako* have switched to selling sweepstakes tickets. Numerous homes have been rebuilt on commissions from winning tickets. These occupations are of major importance because fishing and farming, the traditional male occupations are unstable and the market for fish and livestock fluctuates. Thus, while the male occupations are highly seasonal and involve a great deal of risk, the traditional female occupation, fine embroidery, provides many families with a small, reliable income they can fall back on in lean periods.

Like many towns in the Philippines, San Luis is conservative and traditional in its values. Many folkways and beliefs that have disappeared from larger, more progressive and industrialized towns are not merely preserved here but are still part of a vital way of life. The *alay* (Marian

² San Luis is a traditional source of hand embroidered *barong tagalogs*, and lately, finished children's dresses, gloves and other fine sewn garments exported to Japan and the United States. Manila based local firms distribute the unfinished materials already cut and stamped, to middle women in the town. These are generally women past the childbearing age who have the time to travel into the interior barrios, further distributing the pieces to younger women who remain at home with young children. The latter, working in their free time, are paid by piece. The female children help with the simpler work—sewing sequins and buttons, growing more proficient as they grow older.

³ The fishing industry is manned by owners operating their own *bancas*. Individual families own one or two *bancas*, medium distance boats) manned by members of the family or neighbors (3-4 men to a boat). The owner provides nets, gasoline and kerosene lamps and feeds all the *mamamante* (fishermen) breakfast as fishing is done from early evening till dawn. The fish are transported to the Lemery market and sold to market vendors by women called *rigaton*. The owner of the *pante* (type of banca used) then subtracts expenses and divides the remainder among all concerned. Similarly, cattle are not raised in big ranches. A small farmer will own one or two cows which he raises and sells himself. This is the primary sources of Batangas beef. Finally, land is divided into small, owner-tilled farms and plantel to rice and lately, sugar. In the harvest season, groups of farmers band together, working each other's land and moving from one field to another until each member's land has been harvested.

mayflower rituals), *pabasa*, *babang luksa* (rituals for ending the year-long period of mourning), *pangangaluluwa* (All Souls Day carolling) and traditional Christmas carolling are part of the common yearly cycle of activities practiced by the townspeople. The older generation, those in their 40's and 50's, keep the ways strong and alive. However, most of the younger people, in their 20's and 30's, do not know how to chant the *pabasa* and are only familiar with the new religious songs written and sung the performance of which lasts at least 18 hours. It is usually performed during the mass. One can foresee a time 15 to 20 years hence when the whole *pabasa* tradition will die out, despite its frequent performance today. Thus, there is a need to document this important form.

The Pabasa

The *pabasa* is a complex of activities centering around the chanting or singing of the text known as the *Pasyong Pilapil*, a nineteenth century Tagalog verse narrative of the life of Jesus Christ.⁴ It is sung in private homes in three different settings.

The *sukbot* is a surprise visit to a householder for the purpose of singing the *pasyon*. This is done during the lenten season and is a light, almost informal practice involving very little expense. The guests or serenaders may bring their own food, although the house-holder will often hurriedly prepare a light refreshment. Often the last 20 pages of the text will be sung.

Due to the expense involved in holding a full scale *pabasa*, many householders today will merely hold a short reading that may last 4 to 5 hours. The singers read the last 30 or 40 pages of the *pasyon* and a more elaborate *merienda* (late afternoon meal similar to brunch) than that involved in the *sukbot* is prepared for the guests.⁵ The *Pabasa* may begin at about 2:00 p.m. and end in the early evening. Thus, the meal served includes a heavy *pancit* (noodle dish), fancy bread and soft drinks.

⁴ Perhaps the most influential of the various 18th and 19th century *pasyon* texts, the *Kasaysayan ng Pasyong Mahal ni Hesukristong Panginoon Natin* (Manila: Aklatang Lunas), is also called the *Pasyong Henesis* due to the fact that it also includes episodes from the Genesis of the Old Testament. No other text is used by the readers of the *pabasa* in this area although other *pasyon* texts such as the *Candaba* and *Trunkales* *pasyons* are known to a few old *mambabasa*. See "Christ in the Tagalog *Pasyon*", unpublished thesis by Elena Rivera (U.P. 1976), for accounts of the various *pasyon* texts.

⁵ The practice of singing the last few pages of the *Henesis* is a common one. Of the five *pabasa* heard by this writer, three were short. The text is read from the top of the page desired. It is possible to begin at any point, whether it is at the beginning of an episode or not, although some prefer to begin at a specific spot, such as "*Ang Pagkabuhay ni Hesus*" (The Resurrection of Jesus). The reason, why it is the last rather than the first few pages of text that are read has been explained as "*para makatapos*" (so we can finish).

The most elaborate celebration is reserved for the full length *pabasa*, the performance of which lasts at least 18 hours. It is usually performed during the season of lent as either a special thanksgiving, or in commemoration of an important event (a graduation, wedding anniversary, a child's birth) or as part of a yearly *panata* (vow). Outside of lent, it may also be held during wakes for the dead.

All the occasions mentioned above may also be a pretext for holding a short *pabasa*. However, the more important the occasion and the more significant the event, the more elaborate the *pabasa* will be. Thus, extremely important celebrations will feature full-length *pabasa*.

The host of the *pabasa* has three main responsibilities. He must personally invite the singers from distant barrios to participate. He must also provide the transportation for these singers, sending or hiring jeeps or *bancas* (boats) to ferry them to the celebration. Finally, he must feed and house all the singers and guests for the duration of the celebration. The most elaborate and expensive preparations in the *pabasa* are those involving the entertainment and feeding of all the participants. Preparations begin on the day before the actual singing starts. The householder will usually provide a large pig plus the *recado* (garnishings) to go with the dishes served. However, many gifts of goats and chickens from the householder's relatives, godparents and godchildren are usually received. The more elaborate the feast is to be, the more numerous are the gifts.

There is also a large number of people involved in the preparations. One group of men, for instance, is involved in building a temporary bamboo structure outside the house which will serve as the eating area. Another group of men traditionally work butchering the animals, preparing them for cooking. Cooking goes on throughout the day, until the dawn of the *pabasa* itself. Simultaneously, the women concern themselves with preparing the table appointments. The householder often does not own enough of these to go around, so much of the silverware, holloware, etc., are loaned by relatives and close neighbors. On the day of the *pabasa*, these women divide themselves into two groups, one to serve at the table and one to wash the dishes. Eating is done in numerous shifts as not all the guests arrive at the same time. Thus, there is a ceaseless setting of the table, clearing away the dishes and washing them in preparation for the next round of diners. There will be guests fed at four formal meals and one *merienda* during the celebration proper but the householder must also be ready with supper the night before the actual *pabasa* to feed all those involved in the preparations.

Thus, we must take note of the special nature of the celebration. Many of the feasts involving this kind of preparation are celebrations of

a personal nature—weddings, birthdays, etc., but while the host is responsible for calling together all the elements of the feast—food, entertainment, etc., many of the components are provided by people who are also “guests” and who have contributed a goat, eggs or labor in one form or another. Thus, there is a real communal aspect involved, even in what appears to be a purely personal celebration.

The singing of the *pabasa* begins after lunch and usually lasts until the dawn of the next day. It takes place in the *sala* (sitting room) of the home. A table is set up in the middle of the room. Around this table, the singers will seat themselves. *Pasyon* books are laid out on the table as well as native cigarettes and soft drinks for the singers' consumption. A religious image either belonging to the host or borrowed/rented for the occasion may also be found in the room. The singers need not face the image. In the more formal, elaborate *pabasa*, males may be segregated from the female singers, sitting on opposite sides of the table.

Eating does not take place in this singing area. The guests may eat at an adjoining room or, more likely, they may do so at the specially built eating area outdoors. Thus, the singing itself takes place in a quieter atmosphere than is possible near the crowded, busy, eating space.

There are not too many people inside the *sala* besides the singers. Usually, these consist of women and children. The men generally sit outside or in the veranda of the house, talking, eating or drinking. Many other guests, both invited and uninvited, all of whom take part in the eating, usually peep into the house from the windows (if the *pabasa* takes place on the ground floor) or listen from afar. The host will sometimes provide a loudspeaker for the benefit of those who cannot enter the house. Thus, the audience for the *pabasa* may be described as a constantly shifting mass of people, seated or standing inside or outside the house. People move about freely, eating, drinking, conversing and, at times, listening. It is rare for a guest to stay for the whole reading unless he has come from very far. Otherwise, he stays long enough to eat one meal, socialize a bit and listen to the singers.

In recent times, the *pabasa* has been aired on radio the whole of Holy Week. For five days, groups of *mambabasa* (*pabasa* singers) take turns singing the *pabasa* non-stop. Avid listeners sometimes leave their transistors on the whole day, listening to the broadcast.

The Music

The singing of the *pabasa* is a collective effort of from as few as six to as many as 24 individuals at a time. The whole group expends its energy with the aim of completing the chanting or singing of the whole

213-page text. Thus, after the final “*siya nawa*” (amen) has been said, such comments as, “ay salamat, nakaraos din.” (Thank goodness, it’s done at last) may often be heard. The idea of finishing a task may also be perceived in the explanation of why in the short form of the *pabasa*, the last few rather than the first pages of the form of the text must be read — “*di hindi natapos*” (then it wouldn’t be finished). The effort, however, does not take the form of choral singing in which all the *mambabasa* (*pabasa* performers) sing simultaneously. The work is divided among all the singers evenly, in the following manner:

The *pasyon* consists of octosyllabic quintillas called *pie* (foot or stanza). Each *mambabasa* sings a single *pie*, men (*bajo*) and women (*tiple*)⁶ alternating until all of the singers have sung once. The singing then goes around again and again until the whole *pasyon* has been read. If there are six singers, each *mambabasa* will sing only one in six *pie*; if there are eight, one in eight, etc. The following example shows a round with six singers.

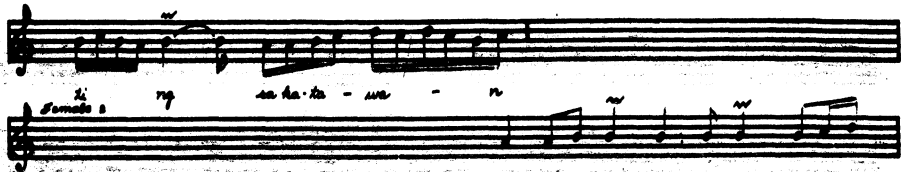
Example 1

Semala 1

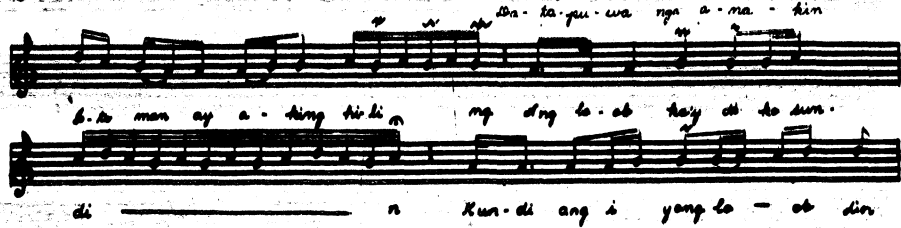
A - ni - ya ay pa - ter me - yi ————— A - ma tang ma - ka - la - wi -
 ngi ————— (Bajo) pa - ter - te - est ang ni -
 Na tung ka - ga mang - ya - ya - ni

Semala 2

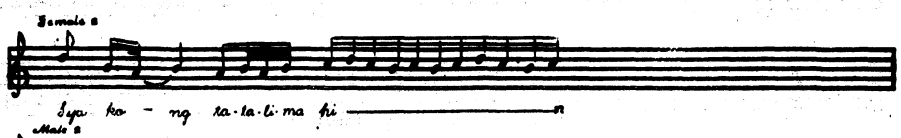
Tran - se al mi - ca - liz - is - ta
 A - ma ka - tung ka - lo - ob - a - n mang - ya - ring i -
 yo - ng i - li - ba ————— n at tu - wag kang
 ma - is pa ang ka - li ng ka - pa - i tan ma - da - ro -



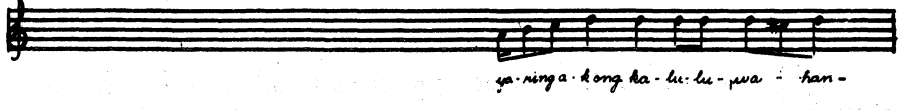
di ng sa ha-ta - wa - n



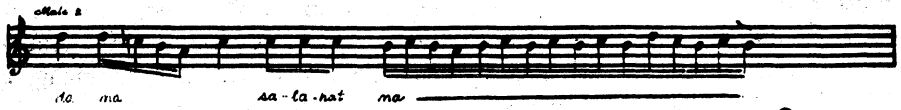
Ba-ta-yu-wa nga a-ma-tin
Sa to man ay a-hing hi-li ng dng lo-ob kay di to sum.
di n Kun-di ang i yang lo-ob din



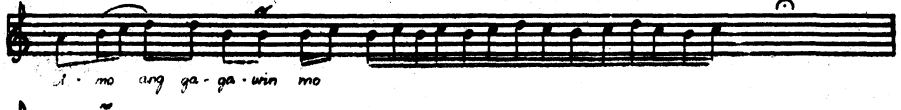
Sya ka - ng ta-la-li-ma fi n



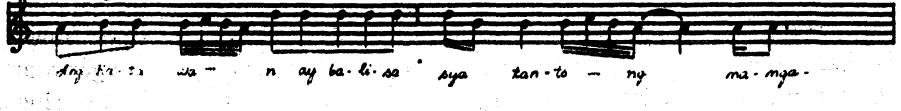
ya-ning a-kong ka-lu-lu-wa-han



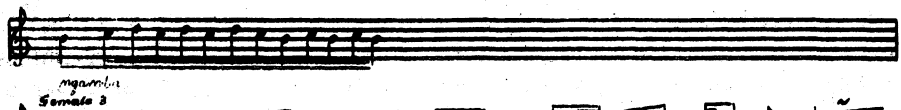
do ma sa-la-hat ma



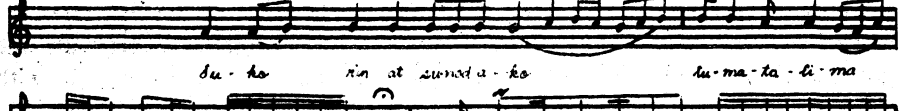
I - mo ang ga-ga-win mo



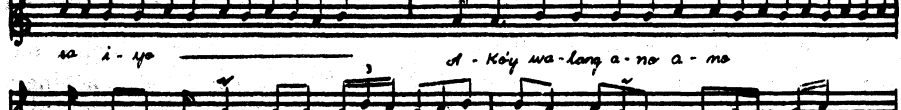
Ang hi-sa wa - n ay ba-li sa sya kan-to - ny ma-mya



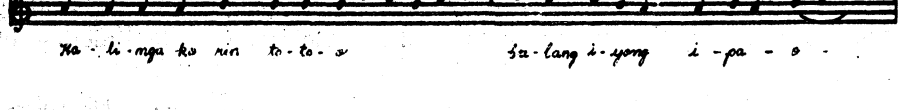
ngamali



Sa - ko rin at sumata - ko lu-ma-ta-li-ma



sa i - yo I - Koy wa-lang a-no a - mo



Ka - li-mga ko rin to-to - a sa-lang i - yong i - pa - o

The musical score consists of a piano introduction followed by five vocal staves. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines. The first staff is marked 'Male 3'. The lyrics are: a - no - ay ng ma - ga - map na - ng pa - ma - ma - la - ngin mi -
ya ma - tin - di - g ka - pag ka - na - ka
hi - ma - rap rap si hi - ma - ta ng ta - la - rap - ng
ka - ka ma

Thus, the individual does not tire himself out immediately, for he must conserve his strength for the next few days. The singer is usually called upon every day of the holy week to read in various *pabasa* around the area. He or she is also able to show off his or her skill at singing in the *punto* (translation to be discussed later), because he or she can sing alone and not in chorus. The contrast between male and female voices and different female voices is considered the source of much of the beauty of the *pabasa* by its enthusiasts.

Another point worth mentioning about the mechanics of the singing is that there are no gaps between one *pie* and another. As a singer starts to sing the long melisma that marks the last syllable of his *pie*, the singer who succeeds him will enter. Thus, there is an overlapping of male and female voices at the beginning and end of each *pie*. The singing resembles a relay. The singing line is like a baton, held and passed from singer to singer with a point of junction held by two singers at the beginning and end of each *pie*. Second, although the *pabasa* is a collective effort with one group end in view, the individual has a chance to shine through with short burst of artistry, never getting completely lost in the collective act.

We can see that this particular way of ordering *pabasa* singing partakes of an approach very characteristic of the town's social machinery. Like the systems for division of labor found in rice harvesting, embroidery and especially in the mechanism for large celebrations, the ordering of

⁶ The terms *bajo* and *tiple* are Spanish for the adult male and treble voices, respectively.

the *pabasa* is essentially that of a collective enterprise which does not suppress the individual's effort or personality but, on the contrary, encourages it to grow and develop within the bounds of the social enterprise.

The Singer

The singer's demeanor during performance is calm, dispassionate and relaxed. There are no contortions or unnecessary motions of the face. The body, similarly, remains relaxed and still. A common gesture of the female singer is to cover the mouth with her hand or kerchief while singing. This may take the form of propping up the head with a closed fist and forearm. Other singers turn away from the audience, making it difficult to pinpoint who is doing the singing.

The audience inside the singing area, similarly, does not exhibit any outward signs of approval or disapproval. Their faces and bodies maintain the relaxed, calm stance and there is no direct applause or any other form of audience response. Quiet whispers are the only form of sound in this area aside from the singing. The *pabasa* however, can be very moving to the audience. This can only be gleaned from comments made by the listeners in casual conversations that take place outside the listening area or long after the actual event. Such comments as, "napapaiyak ako sa ganda ng *lamentacion* noon" (the beauty of the *lamentacion* or closing section of the *pabasa* made me weep) or "sabik na sabik kaming marinig ang boses noong isang taga-Bauan at napakaganda" (we were very eager to hear the voice of one of the singers from Bauan because it was very beautiful), reveal the ability of the singing to deeply touch the listeners.

Indeed, beautiful voices are very much admired and appreciated by aficionados of the *pabasa*. They can have a profound effect on the listener. Such comments as, "napaibig ako sa boses niya" (I fell in love with his/her voice) or "pinaglihian ko ang boses niya noong buntis ako" (When I was conceiving, I developed an unusual craving to hear his voice) or even, "napapaihi ako sa ganda ng boses niya" (I even lose control of my bladder when I hear his/her beautiful voice) reveal the extent of the enchantment.

When asked about the ideal voice, qualities that are often mentioned are wholeness and clarity. The terms used to refer to the first quality are *buo* (whole) and *hindi paos* (not hoarse). An unattractive voice, on the other hand, is referred to as *basag* (broken) or *paos* (hoarse). *Buo* and *basag* refer to innate qualities of the voice while *paos* may be the result of fatigue after many days of continuous singing.

Terms used to refer to the second quality are, "kailangang malinaw mga salitang binabasa." (The words that are read must be clearly understood).

Thus, what is referred to is the clarity of diction and the ability to make the words of the *pasyon* text understood.

The strength or loudness of the voice is not really an important quality to the *mambabasa*. In fact, a female voice that is much admired, the type called *matinis*, is a high pitched, thin and finely, soft voice.

Lung power is only important because it can support or sustain the singer through long passages without breathing. Thus, singers have mentioned that children do not have the capacity ("hindi nila kaya") to sing because their breath cannot sustain them. Despite this, two fine young singers may be found, aged 7 and 8, in the barrio of Bonliw. These young girls are considered strange phenomena, however, and are admired for their rather unusual talent.

The singing style

A term often used in connection with the *pabasa* is the word *punto*. Exactly what this means is rather ambiguous as it can be used in many ways. In common parlance, it usually refers to regional speech accents (e.g., *puntong Batangas*, *puntong Bulacan*). In the *pabasa* context, however, it has several different connotations. For example, it is used to distinguish the different melodies found in other parts of Batangas—e.g., "Ang mga punto sa Balayan, iba-iba, parang mga kanta." (There are various *punto* in Balayan which are like songs). Balayan, a town roughly 30 kms. north of San Luis has a *pabasa* practice which involves fitting the *pasyon* text to all kinds of tunes, both traditional and contemporary. Thus, the *pasyon* repertoire here includes "puntong Farewell" sung to "Aloha Oe" and "puntong Ramona" sung to *Ramona*, a popular song of the 1950s, as well as what might be older *punto-puntong kinalamyas* and *biyolin*, the tunes of which cannot be ascribed to any popular song of recent vintage.

The comment has also been heard, "Ang mga punto ng mga lalaki sa San Luis, nagkakaiba, pero ang sa babae, halos pareho." (The men of San Luis have a variety of *punto* but the women's are all alike.) Perhaps this is a reference to the fact that the women hew very closely to a single melodic pattern when singing their *pie* while the men are freer in putting together the melodic components of each *pie*. The examples below compare three female *pie* with three male *pie*. Notice the single gasic melody that is apparent in the women's *pie* as opposed to the greater latitudes of the male solos:

Example 2:

a. Males

ang ma - ng - a - nal ma - ya - ng ma - sa - ma - it wa - lang ta - la - ga

ti - ma - bang aw ang la - hat na

at ma-pag-su-way tu-wi-na sa-ha-ri na-ming ma-gan-da

b. Maats 2

at i-to ring pa-kang-ma-hal ang sa da-gat bi-mi-ti-wa

Ang ma sa Pa-riis na ka-ya n sa kom-plong lub-hangma-i

nam ni San Dio-mis-yong ma-ta

c. Maats 3

Si na-man lub-hang na-ba lan nya-ang pa-ang

na-lu-lumb-a Ang tat-lay a-gad

i-mi-wa at mag-ba-lik ka-pag-ku-

wa-n sa pi-ma-na-na-la ngi-ma

d. Semala 1

a-ni-ya ay pa-ter me-yi A-ma kang ma-ka-la-wi-

ng (im) pas-ist-le-cal ang si-bi

Na-kung ba-ga mang ya-ya-ri Tran-se-at mi-ca-lis-i-a-te

e. *Fornate 2*

Sa-ta-pu-wa (nga) e-na-kin I-to man ay a-king hi-li-mg

Ang lo-ob ko di ko sun-di n Kun-di ang i-

sung lo-ob din dya ko-ng ta-tali-ma hi n

f. *Fornate 3*

Su-ko nin at su-noda-ko tu ma-ta li-ma

na i-yo 3 at-Koy wa-lang a-no a-no

Ka-li-nga ko nin to-to-o ba-lang i-yong i-pa.

On the other hand, *punto* is more often used to describe the style of the singing (the vocal technique, the range of characteristic melodies, the common ornaments, etc.) peculiar to San Luis and its bordering towns.⁷ Thus, more often than not, the contention is made, “iisa lang ang punto namin dito” (we have only one *punto* here), despite the many male melodic variations that exist. In this paper, therefore, the latter definition will be adopted.

The following is a general discussion of the *punto* based on all the *pabasas* heard and recorded by the researcher. In many features such as range, progression and phrasing, male and female execution and style vary somewhat and these differences have been noted.

For example, female range is more limited than that of the males. The *pie* sung by the women have a range that spans four notes. In the examples notated, this range is:

The male melodies may have a wider range, although the range of a fourth is also common. The widest range spans the interval of a sixth and may be seen in examples 1b and 2a.

The melodic progression is mainly conjunct although singers sometimes will use the major or minor third and male singers may occasionally attempt a rare fourth.

Each verse line is generally sung to a complete musical phrase. Between the fourth and fifth line of each *pie*, however, the pause is very brief, sometimes practically indistinct. Among females, a verse line is always completed in a single musical phrase. Some male singers, however, occasionally extend the musical phrase well into the next verse line. (Ex. 2a by a four-syllable-long phrase. No matter how short or long the verse. For example, the first musical phrase may be twelve syllables long, followed by a four syllable-long phrase. No matter how short or long the verse line are, however, five musical phrases are always sung per *pie*.)

The end of a phrase may be marked with the singer merely taking a breath or he may end with a long melisma like ornament. Usually this consists of a series of upper or lower neighbor tones or both, ending on a slow glide from the lower to the upper neighbor tone.

Finally, certain special sections of the singing must be mentioned. These are performed only by the male singers. The first of these are called *latin*. These Latin phrases inserted into the verses by the author of the *pasyon*. The singers orate or speak these phrases out loudly rather than sing them.

A second special type of section is called *aral* (lesson). This is a reference to the sermonettes in verse found at the end of each narrative vised on the letters "A-r-a-l" by the male singers at the start of the *aral* connection with optional verses not found in the *pasyon* text and improvised on the letters "A-r-a-l" by the male singers at the start of the aral sections. An example of these verses is:

Ang unang "ay" Amang Mahal
 at ang "ere", reynang hirang
 ikatlong "ay" anak naman
 at ang "ele" ay larawan
 Aral ito ng Maykapal.

It is also the male singers who do the work of "tinataas ang tono" (raising the pitch) of the singing. This is done for two reasons. First, there is a tendency for the pitch to go down after long, monotonous stretches of singing. Then too, there is the need to revive the flagging interests of the

singers who have been singing for eighteen hours at a stretch. Thus, raising the pitch contributes to the excitement of the reading. Put to the test, the singers following the one who has raised the pitch must match the latter's prowess.

Thus, while the female singers constantly return the listener as much as possible to the single and, to the writer's mind, basic melodic pattern the *punto*, the male singers who, as a rule are considered "maarte" (showy), add to the color of the reading by varying the melodic patterns to which the *pie* are sung, inserting orated sections that stand out from the *punto* sections, improvise *aral* that show off their skill as versifiers and pull the pitch up to heighten interest at points where it lags.

The Lamentacion

The *pabasa* may be ended in several ways. In the simplest kind of ending, the whole group may sing the last *pie* in the *punto*. Twelve or more variously sung *pie* are performed simultaneously.

A more complete ending, however, involves the performance of the *lamentacion* which is also called *sabalan* (exchange or answering back and forth). Unlike the body of the *pabasa*, which is performed by solo singing, this brief 10 to 15 minutes section is sung chorally. The characteristic melody used in this section is noted as follows:

Grp. 1 ma nga Kris-tia-nang ta-naw ma-pa-ban-to
 Grp. 2 ng a-a nal
 Grp. 1 Mag-i-hip ka nat mag-ni-la y lo-ob na-ting sa-la-wa-han
 sa ga-a
 Grp. 2 Di-Ka-zu-wi nan

During the holy week of 1983, a group of *mambabasa* from the barrio

of Bonliw were heard by this writer incorporated a new melody into the *lamentacion*:

MEN: ♀ ta - ong na - Ka - li - li - mol sa sa la - y Na - ka - ka - tu - lo ♀

WOMEN: ♀ Pu - ka - win ang ni - yang lo - ob at i - si - pin mang ti to bos ang sang mundong pag - ka - ta - pas.

When asked where the new tune came from, they replied that they had heard it from another group of *mambabasa* from a far off town and had seen fit to incorporate it into their rendition. They did not find it proper to use the new tune in the body of the *pabasa* but its use in the optional *lamentacion* was permissible. It seems that the singing of this additional ending allows the singers to experiment and add new melodies to the otherwise very conservative *punto*.

To effect the movement from the *punto* to the *lamentacion* the singers may, after completing the last *pie* in the *punto*, return to the last *aral*, singing it a second time, this time to the *lamentacion* melody. Or, the singers may switch to the *lamentacion* towards the last 2 or 3 pages of the text. Finally, if the singers are very tired, they may even omit a few pages and jump immediately to the end, singing the last few pages in the *lamentacion* manner.

The longest and most elaborate ending, however, would feature both the simultaneous singing of the last *pie* in the *punto* and the *lamentacion* section.

The *lamentacion* section is sung chorally, either in unison or in thirds, with the upper voice carrying the melody. At the end of phrases below is sometimes added. The melody is divided antiphonally or responsorially. The voicing may be done with a solo singer answered by the whole group, two or three singers answered by two or three others, a small group answered by a large one, men answered by women or vice versa.

There are two ways of ordering the singing of the *lamentacion*. The first involves singing the text straight through with the *lamentacion* melody. The second involves the singing of the *lamentacion* melody alternately with

the *pie* in the *punto*. The latter *pie* are sung only by the women. For example:

menis chorus (unison)

Ma - ya na at in - yong kam - tan a - poj sa im - pier - nong

ka - yan women's chorus

sa in - yet sa diat - long ta - nan

menis chorus

i - ni - han dat i - ni - la - an namag - pa - ra - ting

women's chorus

man sa - an

female solo

sa la - ki ng da lang po - ot

ng pa - ngu - ngu kap ni He - sus (Ang) ma da - gun

long na tu - nog tan - long ka - ki - la - ki - la - bot

ya - ong to - see ma ma - la - as

Ma - tu - tu ka a - ki - pa - la

(Ang) ki - nu - tun tun tun gang lu - pa

women's chorus

la - la - mu - nin ya - ong mad la

menis chorus

ta - ot diat - long ma - sa - sa - ma ma - nga ma - lu - pit



The *lamentacion* melodies

The *pasyon pie* consists of five lines of verse. Each line is 8 syllables long. In the *punto*, one verse line is generally sung to one musical phrase. In the *lamentacion*, this is not the case.

With the first melody (ex. 3), there are 5 musical phrases set to 5 verse line. However, verse lines 1 and 4 run on into lines 2 and 5, respectively when they are sung. The text:

Oh manga Kristianong tanan
mapabantog ng aral
Mag-isip ka na't magnilay
Loob nating salawahan
Sa gawang di katuwiran

is restructured thusly:

Oh manga Kristianong tanan mapabantog
ng aral
mag-isip ka na't magnilay
Loob nating salawahan sa gawang
di katuwiran.

The singers break off the second and fifth lines leaving one or two of the last words of these lines for the melody. Thus, the text sung to phrase 2 is only 3 syllables long while phrase 5 is only 5 syllables long. The result is that phrases 1, 3 and 4, with more syllables, are sung in a syllabic manner while phrases 2 and 5 are more melismatic in character. Usually, a small group will answer singing phrases 2 and 5. The contrast created in the answering back and forth by the 2 different groups of singers is heightened by the 2 different chanting textures.

With the second melody (ex. 4), the text of the *pie*:

O taong nakalilimot
sa sala'y nakakatulog
pukawin ang inyong loob
at isipin mong tibobos
ang sang mundong pagkatapos.

is divided into 2 distinct sections of 2 phrases each. The first section, sung by the men, is done to the first two lines of verse. The first phrase (A), sung to the 1st and part of the second line of verse is rendered in a clipped,

even, syllabic manner. The second phrase (B), sung to the last word of the second verse line, is done in long held notes.

The second half of the *pie* is sung by the women. The first musical phrase of this section (A1), sung to the third, fourth and part of the fifth line of verse, is similar to the first male phrase while the second musical phrase (B1), sung to the last word of the *pie*, parallels and B phrase. Again, in this melody, differences in vocal color and melodic textures create a contrast between the sections and phrases.

Thus, while there is an ordered structure for *pasyon* singing, there is also considerable leeway given to the possible combinations and recombinations of its components. That much satisfaction is gained by both the singers and the listeners when these components are put together in an acceptable manner can be seen in the ability of the successful carrying off of the *lamentacion* to bring tears to the eyes of both listeners and singers in the early hours of the morning as the *pabasa* comes to a close.

⁷ The *punto* found in San Luis is shared by the towns of Taal, Alitagtag, Lemery and Bauan, all in Southwest Batangas.