

**ASIAN AMATEUR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS (JAO, PASAKNUNGAN PHILS.,
and U.P. ARCO) - MODELS OF ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL SOILS FOR
SIGNIFICANT INTERACTION, CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND THE CULTIVATION OF
COMMUNITY AMATEUR ORCHESTRAS.**

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Parts of this paper are from the author's dissertation; **The Symphony Orchestra in the Philippines: A Cultural Outline (1896-1986) for her PhD in Philippines Studies, excerpts of which were delivered at the 52nd JAO FESTIVAL and NPO-World Federation of Amateur Orchestras (NPO-WFAO) forum in Toshima City, Tokyo, Japan on August 4, 2024.*

I was seven when I first joined the Pasaknungan Philippines Youth Talent Development Center - a children's string orchestra. The group was founded by violinist-pedagogue Prof. Vicente Sales, an accomplished violinist, conductor, music educator, composer and an advocate of Philippine music and culture. He was then employed by the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) for the noble objective of introducing violin music and giving free lessons to children of GSIS employees, Prof. Sales was assisted by his musician-friend and colleague Primitivo Marcelo.



Figure 1-1. Vicente M. Sales. Profile Photos from July 1977 Pasaknungan Philippines Concert Playbill. From the Martinez Family Collection.

Pasaknungan Philippines was an offshoot of the good Maestro's pioneering efforts in promoting string instrument playing among Filipino children. The name Pasaknungan was coined by Sales himself, a native of the Tagalog region of Batangas; from the root

word Pasak which means "to plug in" and the suffix -nungan (from the words: *tulungan* that is, "to help" and *karunungan*, "wisdom"). Thus, Pasaknungan, to connote collaborative efforts for a common and noble pursuit. When Pasaknungan was later opened to children of non-GSIS employees, my parents took my two brothers and I to the auditorium of the old GSIS building on Arroceros street Manila to audition. This was Pasaknungan Philippines' first home.

On Saturdays, around 50 children who were clustered into groups of ten took violin lessons simultaneously. Group lessons taught us the value of teamwork and discipline at a young age. Soon the number grew to a hundred. Most of us came from lower-middle and middle-class families. As our numbers increased, Prof. Sales invited other musician colleagues to join him in teaching us. Then, Pasaknungan was offered a bigger venue at the *Nayong Pilipino (Philippine Village)* park in Pasay City for the weekly classes. Sales took the offer and made the transfer with his team and us children to our new home. The move provided more space for the group classes and opportunities for more children to join.

It also birthed the Pasaknungan Children's Orchestra, a major innovation by Prof. Sales and his

team. Pasaknungan, as envisioned by Vicente Sales, was to be the nursery of young Filipino musicians, from which future Filipino instrumentalists and music teachers would stream from, with the hope that most will primarily fill up the country's orchestras. To the pioneering mind of Sales, his pitch for the future of the country's orchestras would be in the form of training young Filipino string players. A big nursery of string players where he would propagate string ensemble performance, would be his contribution. Sales was motivated knowing that he could influence and train a large pool of musicians in his lifetime. He anchored his ideals on the well-rounded development of a person from within, through meaningful life experiences, with emphasis on music and related art forms. (Martinez,140)

For us children, the word "orchestra" had a certain ring to it. It gave the impression of being a cut far above the others. In fact most of us already

felt we were different from our peers in how we spent weekends honing our skills in playing the violin instead of enjoying toys and games as most children did. So the possibility of being "promoted" to the orchestra from the violin ensemble classes was everybody's aspiration.

To be chosen for the string orchestra was a status symbol. It was an affirmation of one's level of proficiency, musicality and maturity. It meant upward mobility, hence the prestige that it brought us. Training was meticulous and refinement in instrumental ensemble playing was one of its focal points. We were made to follow every gesture and nuance of the conductor while paying close attention to the details in our individual musical parts. We were taught to build rapport with our seatmate and were constantly reminded to make every effort to play in synchrony with the entire group. Hence, **the value of teamwork was reinforced.**



Figure 1-2. Early 1970s File Photo. From 50 to 450 children. VM Sales with the Pasaknungan String Ensemble Group at the Grounds of the Vigan House, Nayong Pilipino, Paranaque Metro Manila.



Figure 1-3. Prof. Vicente M. Sales Conducting the PASAKNUNGAN CHILDREN'S ORCHESTRA. Extreme Left (seated as Concertmaster) Violin teacher Mr. Primitivo Marcelo. Photo from the Martinez Family Collection.

Somehow the orchestra opened up a new world to us young musicians. I was one of those who were chosen to move up to the string orchestra after five years of training in the violin ensemble group. It was in the string orchestra too where I was introduced to the viola. Eventually, I shifted from the violin to the viola and decided that it was my final instrument of choice. I grew to love the viola and decided to make music my profession. After Pasaknungan, I became part of the Philippine Youth Orchestra, then eventually of two other professional orchestras in Manila. I also had a few opportunities to join international festival orchestras over the years. (Ibid, 2)

In 1998, barely three years into my teaching at the University of the Philippines College of Music (UPCMu), then Dean Reynaldo T. Paguio tasked me to revive the University Orchestra via the Orchestra

Laboratory classes as base. I followed his orders and started to form a string orchestra which is every established orchestra's backbone. Thus was born, the UP Arco–The University of the Philippines String Orchestra, formerly called the “UP String Chamber Orchestra”. Sometime in 2011, together with the student members, we decided to rename our amateur string orchestra to **UP Arco-The University of the Philippines String Orchestra**. We embraced our mission of using our discipline and craft in music in honorable and excellent ways towards a deeper and more meaningful appreciation of music in life. With *“Unity in Virtuosity and Harmonious Cooperation”* as code of practice, the UP Arco has since been striving to make meaningful contributions thru its music and connectedness to different people communities. In October 2023, the group marked its 25th year of establishment.



Figure 1-4. UP Arco, File Photo 2012



Figure 1-5. UP ARCO Gold Award, 2nd Music Festa Firenze 2016 Florence, Italy



Figure 1-6. UP ARCO at the 2024 UP Diliman Arts Month for the UP Diliman Community

The continuous effort to collaborate and learn from other amateur orchestras like ours as well as other types of performing groups has always been an important part of UP Arco's growth and development. We realize that to have a meaningful existence, we need to collaborate with groups of like-mind and in the effort of music performance and cultural exchange, realized its benefits go far beyond joyful music making. It teaches young amateur musicians specially, the value of team spirit, of dedication to one's craft and work, of appreciating the contribution made by every person for the benefit of many others, and the value of sharing music and rendering service to the greater community.

These values are what we recognized and now share with the Federation of Japan Amateur Orchestras (JAO) and the Non Profit Organization – World Federation of Amateur Orchestras (NPO-WFAO), which I consider a strong Asian model in building and sustaining the life of community-based amateur orchestras. Our string orchestra's first encounter with JAO and NPO-WFAO was in the First Asian Amateur Festival held in Fukuoka in 2011. It was a very impressive but moreover an inspiring experience for I and the four student string musicians with me then. To take part in a huge amateur orchestra festival which showcased the three full symphonic orchestras brought much excitement and challenge. Challenge not in the sense of competing against the other players but rather, the challenge of playing to the best of one's ability and contribute to the beautiful and fulfilling experience of music-making. After that encounter, it was followed by more fruitful exchanges with JAO and NPO-WFAO thru another festival in Shizuoka and the equally prestigious TOYOTA YOUTH ORCHESTRA CAMP (TYOC), which selected student members from the UP Arco has been fortunate to take part in for several seasons, even before the COVID lockdown, and in its 40th Anniversary camp this year.

In these encounters, cultural exchanges and musical collaboration that we shared with JAO and NPO-WFAO, for over a decade, we learned and understood what both organizations cultivated among

its members and subsequently, the communities that each amateur orchestra belonged to. Both federations' primary focus was not the facility or independence and ease of procedures, essential to organizing concerts. Rather, JAO values good influence in the community, by its members building ties and serving their respective communities. Orchestras that come from less-urbanized locales and the rural areas were observed to have better relational skills, kept stronger ties with members of the community, were good influences in the community, and valued the federation's outreach programs. This is because they had to co-depend on their community to carry out not only their personal goals but that of the federation's as well. Thus, the support of the orchestra has become a shared endeavor between the amateur musicians and members of their respective communities, of contributing time and effort in promoting culture and arts among themselves. Japanese amateur community orchestras through their regular performances and charity concerts have brought both them and their music closer to the people. It is this strong sense of community which I believe, is the thread that joins the mindset and the being of the Japanese. It is the idea of doing and achieving things as one group of people that developed in them a shared culture for change specially after going thru various challenges of socio-political and socio-economic events as borne in their nation's history.

This, I believe, is the same spirit that sustains the life of the amateur and community orchestras of Japan. The idea of doing things together, so as to influence and thereby effect change in each other's lives, has found its parallel in community orchestra-playing. It may not be measurable in terms of financial economics, but holding on to the values of community life and living with shared resources is perhaps that intangible thing that the Japanese amateur musician feels when in the context of the orchestra. Notes withstanding, no matter how difficult and challenging passages of Mahler, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich might be, if done in the communal spirit then every rehearsal or performance is worth it; \ an achievement any team would be proud of.

For the Federation of Japan Amateur Orchestras, participating in community orchestras is a way for amateur musicians to enjoy togetherness more than just music-making. It is an avenue for them to develop the mind, the body, and especially the soul: a person's complete well-being, not in solo playing, but in the context of the community. In so doing, JAO and its arm NPO-WFAO has not only created an impact in their communities and nation but to a wider scale, has influenced nations and cultural societies of the world by their undertakings.

The Philippines, thru our string orchestra UP Arco, has gained much wealth in terms of learning and playing orchestral music in a very friendly and encouraging atmosphere. Participation in the JAO Festivals and TYOC has strengthened our mission of using our discipline and skills in music to create a meaningful appreciation of music in life. It has also encouraged us to find purposeful activities both in

music performance and as civic volunteers (such as when some UP Arco members joined me to volunteer for the victims of super typhoon Haiyan) that will uplift those among our people who have less in life but are rich in the spirit of community life and shared experiences. And music-making is one of the avenues that we see as a vehicle to uplift them, especially since Filipinos are a very musical and music-loving people. This way, the gift of music has become an equalizer among our people. Engaging in music activities like an orchestra, allows participation of more than one or two persons, thus inculcating interdependence and shared social responsibility and accountability. One could only imagine the multiplier effect orchestra playing could have in society, brought about by persons whose lives were shaped in the practice and discipline of shared experiences they had as orchestra players. An entire nation would actually benefit from the goodwill that such members of society could contribute in their different spheres of influence.



Figure 1-7. UP Arco member representatives to First Asian Amateur Orchestra Festival, Fukuoka 2011



Figure 1-8. UP Arco member representatives to Toyota Youth Orchestra Camp (TYOC), Gifu 2018

So now, that we, UP Arco is celebrating our 25th Year of founding, we look forward to spread the positive influence of music as it did to a number of its members beginning with myself, who were trained in small children's string ensembles and string orchestras and eventually the larger amateur orchestra of schools and university we attended. Together, current members with some alumni of UP Arco (specially those who are alumni of TYOC and the JAO Festival), are celebrating the culminating year by starting a small children's orchestra in our immediate university community. We hope to start with a number of children who have the same interest in ensemble music

playing and who would eventually fall in love with the discipline and joy of playing music together; thereby preparing them to be our nation's future influencers and movers. This, much in the same way that Japan gained thru the years of dedicated and passionate efforts of the JAO and the NPO-WFAO in sustaining the amateur orchestra life, shared by hundreds of communities in Japan.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share my insights and learnings. May we all spread the good that amateur orchestra music playing has for all people of the world.

Prof. EDNA MARCIL "Michi" MARTINEZ



Prof. Edna Marcil "Michi" Martinez is a graduate of the U.P. College of Music. She holds a Teacher's Diploma in Viola, a Bachelor's Degree in Music Literature, and a Master of Music Degree in Musicology. She received her a Ph.D in Philippine Studies (Philippine Art and Culture) from the UP Ph.D Philippine Studies Program of the Tri-College (AC, CAL, CSSP) at UP Diliman. Prof. Martinez holds the distinction as the first Viola graduate of the University of the Philippines. Dr. Edna Marcil Martinez was former Chair of the Department of Strings and Chamber Music of the University of the Philippines College of Music.

In 1998, she founded the U.P. Arco – The University of the Philippines String Orchestra (then called the UP String Chamber Orchestra and brain child of the late UPCM Dean Reynaldo Paguio. Since its founding she has passionately led the group in discovering the wealth of repertoire in string orchestra music performance. Prof. Martinez has led the group on various concerts inside and outside UP Diliman as well as in representing UP and the Philippines in international music festivals and competitions, winning top awards in the string orchestra category.