

We meet at Tsunami, a Silverlake coffee house known for its art performances and cozy atmosphere. Dulce Capadocia wears a floppy camel cap and a long black coat. I recognize her smile and quickly our dialogue turns to dance. A smart enthusiasm circles around her as we talk about *Silayan Dance Company*. This 33-year-old Filipino-American choreographer easily dismisses her toil and exults her triumphs as the company's Artistic Director for the past five years. We also manage to chat about life in Los Angeles; this place beyond the Philippines she calls home.



FLIP: When did you start dancing?

Dulce: I left Iloilo City when I was 8 years old and came to Los Angeles. At that time my mother, a grade school teacher, had just started *Silayan*. She got together a bunch of local high school and college students, pushed back the furniture in our small apartment and taught them how to balance baskets on their heads and go in and out bamboo sticks. I sat there every night and watched and listened and practiced the movement. I knew all the steps so when the company went on stage I performed them. I was performing Philippine traditional dance long before I had any formal training. It was very exciting, especially when the company toured California. I was the only kid in the show.

FLIP: Where and when did you receive formal dance training?

Dulce: When I was in college at Loyola Marymount I took a modern dance class for fun. I was hooked. I changed my major from English to Dance. When I graduated Loyola I went to Temple University in Philadelphia. I graduated with my Masters of Fine Art in dance at the age 25. I was one of the youngest students in the department.

FLIP: Was your dance training completed entirely in the United States?

Dulce: In 1987, I completed a three month independent field study in the Philippines. As part of my Degree I was able to live with the Igorot tribes in the Northern Luzon region of the islands. This tribe is responsible for the irrigation and construction of the rice terraces. I also studied their religious rituals. The area where the Igorot live is very remote and secluded. This was really something I wanted to do for a very long time. My mom ingrained the importance of Philippine culture and tribal customs into

me at a very young age.

FLIP: How did this experience change your dance work?

Dulce: It was a very moving thoughtful time for me. Before I always believe there was Mom's traditional folk dance and there was modern dance. I separated Mom's dance from what I learned in college. After living with the Igorot people in the Cordillera Mountain Range I was able to integrate these two forms of dance into a single expression. In the beautiful wilderness of my birth country I learned to blend all of myself into my choreography. My heritage and my training were married.

FLIP: How does this marriage translate into choreography?

Dulce: I am incredibly proud to be a Filipino-American. I feel like I have this enormous responsibility to go out there and convey my culture in my work. *Gatherer*, my most recent solo, really speaks about the transformation that occurred when I lived with the Igorots. It's about the spiritual journey I took to find this indigenous, carnal, beautiful, animal identity. In the piece I sing an Igorot chant called *Istai Man*. It's a chant that summons people to come up the mountain for a peace pact. This choreography was a challenge for me. Once it was finished, so much of my anguish was released.

FLIP: Beyond the task of producing new work, what unique challenges face you as a Filipino-American artist in Los Angeles?

Dulce: To stage traditional Philippine dance I really need to have a lot of dancers in my company. Most modern dance companies have five or six dancers. For

me it's either a solo or an epic. *Silayan* is a 20 member company. That makes it very difficult financially. There's really not enough money to give my dancers what I feel they deserve for their time and effort. Also I travel in two worlds, I'm not strictly a modern dancer choreographer nor am I a traditional folk dancer choreographer. Strategically, this is a great place for me. I can create from the past and the future at the same time. It's also wonderful because it gives me a very unique voice.

FLIP: What is that unique voice?

Dulce: As a Filipino American my work is a celebration of my heritage. It's like a tree. My Filipino culture is the trunk and the branches are the many ways my choreography is in the tradition of the Philippines. I want to share my culture with everyone because I have a great respect for myself and my birth country. For so many Filipino-Americans that respect is lost in the translation.

FLIP: Is it a loss of respect or a desire to homogenize?

Dulce: Filipinos are a very adaptable people. We've been conquered many times by many different groups of people. The Philippines are a blending of Japanese, Spanish, African, Chinese and Malay. As a people we've really adapted well to embrace all these aspects of our culture which also includes indigenous groups, like Igorot people. Sometimes I have a problem with my cultures lack of aggression. In the Philippines we are trained as children that the best and smartest child is the quietest one. There's a real strong bend toward obedience, and tolerance almost to the point of subservience. I was raised in the Philippines so I can compare. There's a certain disrespect

that is present in Filipino-American kids growing up in Los Angeles that is not tolerated in the Philippines. Once the parents come to America they don't seem to teach their children respect in the old way.

FLIP: Do you have any advice for young Filipino-Americans in the Arts?

Dulce: I think they should really take a clear look and decide what that means in terms of responsibility. They should have a plan and know what they are getting into. A lot of an artist's time is spent looking for funding to do your art. You must strip yourself of the things you need and want and make your art. You must fully understand that in making art you are doing something for your culture no one else is doing. Remember people don't go to the theater, museums, and art galleries as often as they should. Art audiences are hard to get and one can't be easily discouraged.

FLIP: What are your perceptions of the future for yourself and *Silayan*?

Dulce: I would love to be the first Filipino-American performing arts group to tour nationally. We've performed in France and the Basque Region of Spain and I hope we can return to Europe on a regular basis. As an individual, I aspire to help in establishing a Filipino-American Cultural Center in Los Angeles. Such a place is desperately needed. Too many Filipino kids are growing up without a clue of the culture of their parents and grandparents. Sometimes I get really disheartened because I see too many Filipino-American kids that ignore who they are and have no sense of cultural identity. Establishing a Filipino-American Cultural Center would increase awareness in young people and that translates into self respect and cultural pride which is really the only way to stop crime and gang warfare.

FLIP: Will you always be a dancer?

Dulce: Yes, for me dance is the purest form of expression. Movement is the language I really speak. My dance comes from a deep place. I was once one of those good quiet Filipino children. My dance has made me Boisterous, loud and expressive about my culture and myself. I love it now and I know I always will.

Silayan Dance Company will perform The Gatherer on August 23 at the Water Court of the California Plaza as part of its California Plaza presents series under the artistic direction of Michael Alexander. The concert showcases the work of Asian Women Choreographers including Hiroko Hojo (Cai Arts alum) and Karen Woo (Bella Lewitsky's Dance Company). For more information on upcoming events call Silayan Dance Company at 213.957.4778.