

# WORLD KULINTANG INSTITUTE

**Art Form: Music**  
**Style: Traditional**  
**Culture: Filipino**

## MEET THE ARTIST:

The **World Kulintang Institute** (WKI), led by virtuoso artist *Eleanor Academia*, was founded in 1988. She is a professional musician, ethnomusicologist, composer and recording artist. The group is dedicated to the preservation and presentation of "Kulintang," the traditional gong/drum ensemble music from the Southern Philippines. WKI has the distinction of educating people about this rare, ancient music through their engaging and skillful performance.

*Guro Academia*, a highly regarded world music artist, is one of the principal musicians in the group. He is a recipient of the 2000-2002 Master Musician Award from the Durfee Foundation, and the California Alliance for the Arts Master/Apprentice Award in 2001. *Guro* has received grants from both the National Endowment for the Arts and California Arts Council, and was presented an Artist of the Year award by former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Wearing beautiful, woven attire called *malongs*, the World Kulintang Institute performers engage students with their lively, short pieces that feature gongs and drums. Colorful narration highlights the historical and cultural aspects of Kulintang and provides an introduction to the five different instruments. The audience learns about the Kulintang, the main melody instrument consisting of eight bronze/brass gongs laid in a row. Also demonstrated are the supporting instruments: the *Agungs*, two large kettle gongs; *Dabakan*, a goblet shaped drum; the *Babandir*, the time keeping gong; and the *Gandingan*, four graduated hanging gongs. Audience participation includes a hands-on experience in which a few students play the instruments as their peers observe and learn. The performance concludes with a question and answer period.



## PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Kulintang music is a unique combination of an organic, village tradition seamlessly balanced with sophisticated intricate rhythms and elegant melodies. Tightly woven arrangements provide a structure that enables these melodies to be played with clarity and purpose. This balance is achieved through three distinct and essential elements: the oral tradition, a focus on individual parts, and improvisation.

**Oral Tradition:** "Oral tradition" is a powerful verbal communication tool where music is learned through sounds, rhythm patterns and words rather than being written down. The transference of music relies upon imitation, memorization, spoken language, signs, gestures and highly developed listening skills. Kulintang music is acoustic, which means it is not electronically modified. The rhythms are created organically and are inspired by natural sounds in the environment and from the players' expressions of emotion.

**Focus on Individual Parts:** Every part and player is crucial to the success of the whole piece. Although one player is playing what appears to be a simple pattern on the *Babandir*, the time-keeping gong, everyone relies heavily on this individual to be precise. If the player of the *Babandir* is slightly off in the timing, the entire ensemble becomes disjointed. In a competitive virtuostic group, the most advanced *Babandir* players will purposefully attempt to "confuse" the other player. The tricky beats are meant to lure the other player into making a mistake, thus showing the masterful handling of the *Babandir* part.

**Improvisation:** Highly skilled Kulintang musicians are regarded for their adept ability to improvise on all instruments, while working within a structure. However, students of the Kulintang may improvise only when the *Guro*, or *Teacher*, gives them permission to proceed. This comes after they have memorized thousands of rhythms and melodies and have achieved the complex listening/response criteria. As these instruments are learned, each player creates a mosaic of rhythms from which fresh ideas can spring.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What were your impressions upon hearing and experiencing this rare musical tradition for the first time? Explain.
- What did this music remind you of? What aspects of the music seemed familiar or foreign?
- What did you observe about the way the players responded to each other? How would you describe the way the different parts worked together as they were played?
- What feelings did you get while listening to this music? Was it soothing? Did it make you feel energized? Describe.
- If you lived in a village hundreds of years ago with no electricity, video games, cell phones or basketballs, would you have been interested in learning to play Kulintang music? Why or why not? Are you interested now? What other activities do you think ancient people might have done for expression or entertainment?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - SOCIAL STUDIES & LANGUAGE ARTS:

Think of a natural environment inhabited by traditional people. It could be in a desert, forest, mountains, island, etc. What natural resources are available for making musical instruments? For example, if the environment is a rainforest the following natural resources might be found: tree logs and rocks struck together for percussion; hollow reeds for flutes, blades of grass for reeds; dried up leaves and seeds for shakers, etc. Pick out possible sounds heard in the environment that could be incorporated or imitated in the music -- waterfalls, raindrops, bird and animal sounds, etc.

Decide what purpose the music will serve (ceremonial, entertainment, etc.). Consider the following questions: Who is the music for? Where will the music be played? Is the tempo fast or slow? Is it rhythmic? Does it have a melody? What instruments are involved? What natural sounds are involved? Is it loud or soft? Are there many musicians or a few? Discuss these ideas as a class or divide into smaller groups. If small groups are chosen, have them organize and present their answers to their peers.

- Legend:
- Artistic perception
  - ❖ Creative expression
  - ▮ Historical & cultural context
  - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
  - \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

• Have students bring in favorite contemporary songs that feature drums. Focusing on the role of the drum in each piece, have students try to recognize some of the following: the kick drum (low drum) part; the high-hat (the time-keeping cymbal); toms (additional tuned-pitch drums) and crash/ride cymbals. Listen for each drum and identify when it is used and not used. Help students understand that the drum lays down the pulse for each song. Make note of how each drum part adds to the dynamics (force or energy) of each song at different times.

▮ The Philippines is made up of many diverse ethnolinguistic groups with 87 major languages and over 280 dialects. Many groups have their own word for Kulintang. Here are some examples: "Kulintang" (Maguindanaon), "Kolintang" (Maranao), "Kwintangan" (Yakan), and "Kulintangan" (Tausug/Samal.) These names all describe the same main melody instrument. Ask your students to identify objects that have more than one name. For example, "Car-Auto-Vehicle" or "Television-Telly-Tube", etc.



⇒ Rhythm is universal, but is influenced by culture, historical time period, beliefs and environment. Listen to a variety of selections featuring percussive music, both traditional and contemporary. For example, drum music from African countries or Brazil; Gong music from Indonesia or Malaysia; contemporary Hip Hop, Jazz and Progressive Rock music from America, etc. Note the similarities and differences in each. Have students clap along with some of the selections.

\* In a music ensemble, it is crucial that each member does his or her best so the song will work. Have students make a list of two or three jobs (e.g. baseball player, construction worker, waitress, firefighter, bus driver, teacher, etc.). Have them brainstorm all the people who would depend upon that person doing a good job and why. Lead a discussion about how an individual's contribution is important to a team.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Maceda, Jose. Gongs & Bamboo - A Panorama of Philippine Music Instruments. University of the Philippines Press, Quezon City, Philippines. 1998.

Philippine folklore web site:

<http://folkloreandmyth.netfirms.com/philippines.html>

This site summarizes parables and fables:

Philippine folklore web site: <http://folktales.webmanila.com>