

# Singkil Dance

MARANAO, LANA DEL SUR PROVINCE, NORTHWESTERN MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *This is done with the dancers stepping in and out between bamboo pole clappers. The singkil is a royal variant by the Maranao of Lanao del Sur province in Mindanao. It has been made popular internationally by the Philippine National Dance Company, the Bayanihan.*



THERE ARE THREE versions but all have the same basic steps: the *singkil* step, the *sadoratan* step and the pause, all executed with fan movements.

According to people from Rumayas Maguing, a place considered the seat of Maranao culture, the singkil was brought to Lanao by Alongalong Maranoalong dindaon a olan, a man from Cotabato. There is, however, no evidence to this claim. Similar dances may be found in the island and mainland Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Philippines. It is popular in the Basak regions of Lanao del Sur. Mythologically, however, the dance purportedly originated from an incident in the epic, *Darangen*. The hero of the epic, Bantogen, was a notorious lothario. The *tonongs* or *divatas* (fairies) tried to prevent Bantogen from his frequent search for women by bewitching him with a local princess, Gandingan. She was kidnapped by the *tonongs* and placed on a rocky spot where the prince was to pass beneath spreading trees. Then, they caused an earthquake to occur. Frightened, she fled skipping gracefully among the rocks and trees. Bantogen sees the princess and runs after her, hoping to lead her to safety. The chase is the inspiration behind the singkil, with bamboo clappers substituting for the rocks.

(opposite page) Formal entry of Maranao dancers of the singkil, an intricately delicate royal dance that involves the stepping through a maze of clapping bamboo poles by a lead female performer, followed by others.

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The Philippine National Dance Company, Bayanihan, in a singkil performance.

The name “singkil” also means hurdling. It is also what they call the heavy brass leglets and bells worn by the dancer. There is usually only one dancer, or two, at the most. Originally, handkerchiefs were used but now fans are common; one, two, even four are wielded. There are variations in the number of bamboo poles used: two in parallel arrangement; four, crisscrossed; or six, star-like. The dancer steps in and out of the clapping poles while wielding the fans, occasionally stamping her feet. In the early versions, the princess is ushered in by a male relative with an umbrella, but he does not dance. Tradition does not allow men and women to dance together; even the bamboo clappers are women.

*Minerva S. Sani and Edna C. de los Santos*