NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Philippine teens reach for interfaith harmony through music

Megan Fincher | Sep. 26, 2013
Kansas City, Mo.

A group of young Muslim and Christian Filipinos are seeking harmony in their nation by making music together.

Thirteen Filipinos, with the help of an American musician and a lay-led Catholic charity, started a band several years ago to produce musical harmony using the traditional instruments of the Philippines. One of them is in the United States this month to promote a recently released documentary about their effort.

"Filipinos really love music," said Ryan Sumicad, a 26-year-old from Zamboanga, Philippines. "When going to school, we sing a couple of lyrics. When we're going to eat, when we're in the bathroom, we do practicing. And we don't forget God."

Sumicad and Barclay Martin, a Kansas City, Mo., musician who is the director of the band, visited the Midwest last week and are traveling to New York City this week to promote their film "Rise and Dream [1]."

Produced by the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging [2] (CFCA), "Rise and Dream" focuses on the struggle for harmony -- musically, religiously and socially -- in the city of Zamboanga. The coastal city, home to almost 1 million people, is predominantly Catholic, but Muslim rebels have fought for an autonomous homeland in the region for almost half a century.

Wiping away tears, Sumicad described his hometown to a group of Notre Dame de Sion High School students Sept. 17 in Kansas City.

"In Zamboanga, there is a mix of humans, a mix of attitudes. Christians and Muslims live in the same neighborhood," he said. "If our main goal is education, peace, love, everything that's good, that makes us united."

Violence escalated in the last few weeks when Muslim rebels seized parts of Zamboanga, and Sumicad was able to board one of the last flights out of the city before it was forced to shut down. He assured the students, many of whom sponsor CFCA families, that his own family was safe.

"There has been a pretty extreme rebel insurgency in the last eight days," Martin told the students. "Though the area is dangerous, what we discovered in this really interesting mix of humanity were families working things out."

"Rise and Dream" documents CFCA's efforts to unify Muslim and Christian families in Zamboanga, focusing specifically on a free concert the group hosted in 2011 for more than 10,000 Muslims and Christians. Traditional Filipino musicians performed, and the 13 teenagers, all sponsored by the CFCA, volunteered to form the headlining band.

The teens had three months to learn how to play traditional Filipino instruments. They practiced four hours a

day, every day, and soon developed an intimate bond. Martin, a dedicated CFCA volunteer, directed the band and coordinated with teachers of traditional instruments.

Working on the film was "the perfect confluence of my love of music and my belief in the power of creativity," Martin told *NCR*. "It's that conversation that's beneath words that music can reach."

Traditional Filipino music has a profoundly spiritual aspect, which helped the teenagers unite with each other and with their idea of God, whether it's Allah or Jesus.

The teachers of the traditional instruments "had a great, deep respect on a spiritual level for the instruments and for the ancestors," Martin said.

The universal ancestors of the Philippines are said to reside in the *kulintang*, an instrument consisting of eight gongs, which figured prominently in the band. When the *kulintang* is played, everyone must respect the ancestors with concentration, exuberance and unity.

Playing the *kulintang* is like "a spiritual conversation that occurs when playing it in community with one another," Martin said.

"It has the sense of spirit, that divinity in it, that, to me, I respect so much and I wish that was more prevalent in our own culture."

Similarly, a guitar-like instrument called the *kudiyapi* must cover one's heart when it is strummed. In this way, the musician's love can flow through the strings.

"In the Philippines, there is a passion for music that I had rarely seen in other countries," Martin said.

Sumicad agreed: "Without music, life is empty."

[Megan Fincher is an *NCR* Bertelsen intern. Her email address is mfincher@ncronline.org [3].]

Source URL (retrieved on *04/30/2016 - 17:47*): http://www.ncronline.org/news/art-media/philippine-teens-reach-interfaith-harmony-through-music

Links:
[1] http://riseanddream.com/
[2] http://www.cfcausa.org/
[3] mailto:mfincher@ncronline.org