

# Kambuyok / Kambuyoka Song Joust

MARANAO, LANA DEL SUR PROVINCE, NORTHWESTERN MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. An institutionalized singing joust, the *kambuyok* is held during festive occasions, the main object of which is to entertain and to praise the families or personalities involved.



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AMONG THE MARANAO, as in other groups, one of the most efficient ways of forging an alliance is through marriage, one feature of which is the *kapanivaka* ceremony of gift-giving. This is usually held in a *torogan* (royal Maranao house) during the course of the wedding. One of the most entertaining parts in this event is the singing repartee called the *kambuyok*, wherein the two families bring their own *pababayok* (singers) to compete. The *torogan* is fabulously decorated and festooned, as is the wont of the Maranao. The groom's party comes in a parade to the venue bringing all sorts of ceremonial gifts: food and fruits, cosmetics, chewing materials - whatever that will please. Traditional seating arrangements are observed within the *torogan*: groom's party (*banto*), the bride's close relatives or hosts (*magonay*) and the rest of the public (*tutanggisa*).

The *torogan* is partitioned into: the floor mattresses reserved for guests and selected hosts (*sundigan*) and the living room floor (*lowakatan*) for the general public. Within the *sundigan* is the *panggao* (central *torogan* bed) where the ladies gather. Near them are the mothers and wives. Close behind the *panggao* is the *lamin*, where the bride and maids usually hide until they are due to appear. The other half of the *sundigan* is occupied by the important male guests and entourage. There is a clear separation of the sexes. Children are allotted their place in the *lowakatan*. The usual exchanges of formal speeches, presentation of gifts, heavy lunch, repartee or a *kasukba*, or watching a *kasipa* game while the gifts are being removed for distribution are done during the good part of the day. The actual singing of the *kambuyok/kambuyoka* by the *pababayok* is staged after dinner.

There are usually two male and two female singers who alternate in singing. They are called *onor*. The female *onor* is the first to sing

(*tantol*). She gracefully leaves the *sundigan* with an entourage: her *morit* (understudy) and an old woman who acts as her chaperone. She then sits on a centrally located chair. The entourage sits about the chair of the *onor*. Delicately arranging her *malong*, she positions a fan or handkerchief near her mouth and starts humming (*kakurum*). She looks over her audience who solemnly sit cross-legged as prescribed by decorum. She starts the humming with wordless vocalization until someone in the audience urges her to sing the lyrics (*kapamusug*). Only then will she vocalize the lyrics invoking the spirit of literary inspiration. In honor of the families, she then sings the basic structure of Maranao genealogy, focusing on the "four brethren" of the four encampments by the lake, the ancestors of the first sultans of the *pangampongs* (encampments), followed by the fifteen descendants, down to the specific living descendants, to the two clans involved in the wedding.

Another person from the audience may call out again for her to keep on singing to show appreciation. The singer goes into the genealogy proper (*podil/sindil*), praising the two families, mentioning important names particularly of those in the audience, extolling their lineage (*bangsa*). She also praises the betrothed, ascribing to them the merits of mythological characters, as in the epic, *Darangen*. Another from the audience may call out again to encourage her. She mentions the presence of other competing singers. After about an hour, she ends her song. The female of the other side then starts singing, on a parallel theme, filling in things not covered by the previous singer (*kasimpala*). The singers refer to each other as *simpala*. The male singers then take their turn on the eulogistic theme. In the following rounds, they might shift to purely entertaining the audience, singing war songs or other familiar topics.

(opposite page) With a delicate black fan near her mouth, the female member of the *pababayok*, starts the wordless vocalization of the singing joust until the audience urges her to sing the lyrics.