

TRAVELOGUE

ASEAN Cultural Youth Camp 2011: A view of my one-week stay in Borobudur, Indonesia.



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A few months ago, I attended the ASEAN Cultural Youth Camp 2011 held at Borobudur Indonesia last November 20 to 27. The amazing events and memories that I have experienced made the whole process of qualification worthwhile. I submitted a resume, was chosen by the school to represent and even had a short-noticed interview and audition at the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Unexpectedly and to my surprise, I was given the honour to be chosen for the camp. Three other people were chosen for the different fields, namely Cyril Santos (Archaeology-National Museum), JericPalispis (Dance – from NCCA’s School of Living Treasures), Paul Quiambao (Photography – UST) and our head of delegation, Noe Fuentes of NCCA.

Overall, I am extremely grateful for such an opportunity to have the chance to go through such a cultural experience.

This is a documentation of the things that happened, the things we did and my thoughts about our activities which occurred during the camp.

November 20, 2011: The Trip

The Philippine delegates and I left the place we overnighed in at around 4:00 am. It was a long traffic on the way due to fun run events. Luckily, we got there on time and waited for our flight at the NAIA Centennial Terminal.

On the way, our travel was fine. We were given the proper service and not much turbulence occurred while we were on our way. It took us about 3 hours to get to our first stop. We stopped over at the Changi Airport at Singapore for our connecting flight. Then, we changed to Garuda Airlines on the way to Jakarta, Indonesia. It took us 4 hours to get to the Jakarta airport. There, we met the ASEAN Secretariat and the Thailand delegates for the Youth Camp while we were waiting for our flight to Yogyakarta, Indonesia. On the way to Yogyakarta, we found out that there was a storm. So we travelled with grey clouds, heavy rains and constant turbulence. But despite the heavy rains, we managed to arrive safe and on time.

It was around 6 pm when we arrived at the Yogyakarta airport. The delegates from the different countries were gathered for land travel to Borobudur. Multiple vans and mini buses were used for an hour drive from Jogja to Borobudur. On the way, I can’t help but see many similarities to the Philippines. It felt as if I was still in my own country only the language was different. Even most of the people looked the same. Due to jet lag, we all fell asleep on the way to the hotel leaving little interaction for a first time.

We arrived at the hotel at 7 pm. It wasn’t a building but merely just a quaint place, similar to an outdoor resort. It was called PondokTingal. We were greeted warmly by the organizers and the crew who helped us with our luggage. A small dilemma occurred with the Philippine delegates during registration. The event organizers realized that my name was not on the list of delegates. Therefore, I didn’t have a printed ID for the camp nor was my information included at the collection of delegates. It made it hard to assign me a room since I was the youngest delegate and the organizers wanted me to be alone in a room. While they figured it out, Ate Cyril Santos offered to be my roommate just for the night. It was the rule of the camp to have a roommate from a different country but as an exception, they agreed for just one night.

We were given a small module about the camp rules, the schedule of activities, information about Indonesia and a unifying t-shirt. Ate Cyril and I settled in at room 33 and slept with the first activity in mind for tomorrow.

November 21, 2011: Country Presentations

We woke up early in preparation for the opening ceremony. All of us dressed in our semi-casual clothing with a hint of our cultural influences. The mayor of Magelang was represented by the governor, and gave a speech. Also, the camp director, Mr. Bambang Paningron, gave a touching speech about his intentions for the camp and about unity in the diversity among the different countries. It was formally opened by the hit of a gong by the ASEAN officials and representatives. Like most programs, it was followed by a photo op of the whole members and delegates of the camp; a picture where none of us knew who the others is and where everyone else is a complete stranger.



When afternoon came, all of the ASEAN countries presented their country paper presentation. It is a presentation wherein you showcase your culture through dance, music or any kind of medium. This is in order to introduce the countries and the people who are participating in. The Philippine delegates and I have been rehearsing a lot for this, hoping to create a good impression of our country. We even held a pre-camp at Baguio a few weeks before the camp to rehearse for such a presentation. We prepared a cordillera dance and a dance featuring the different tribes of the Philippines with a unifying song entitled "Kulturang Pinoy". A dance instructor from Sining Kumintang, a dance troupe from Batangas, helped us. His name is Sir Rique who happens to be a friend of sir Victor Flor.

Countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Singapore made quite an impact on me for they were all very good. It made me feel rather intimidated because of their skill and also their age, yet I know I was chosen for a reason.



When our turn came, my fellow delegates and I were all very nervous. Even if not all of us were dancers, we simply gave it our all. While we were performing, I noticed that everyone was quiet in awe. When the climatic part came, where we all united into one routine and I began singing (or rather vocalizing) for added effect, everyone clapped and started cheering. I even looked at the audience and I saw some of them with jaws dropped as they listened to me. It made me feel better and much more confident to see such a reaction. We were interviewed by the host and the camp director afterwards to ask about what we presented.



Upon watching the presentations, it made me realize that there are many similarities among the ASEAN countries. From the dances, the music, the patterns, the clothing and even in the language, all of us have something in common. But there was one thing the camp director said in his speech that morning which still rings in my ears today: *"Harmony can only come from different things"*; simply implying that difference can create something beautiful if united.

When night came, everyone seemed much more eager to get to know each other. A Vietnamese delegate named, Trung Nguyen, kept telling me that my voice was something special. He was the first foreign friend I made in the camp.

Also, to my surprise, the conductor for the Singaporean Chinese Orchestra, Mr. Quek Ling Kiong was there. I asked him about the music conservatories in Singapore and without hesitation, he began listing down the Art Colleges in Singapore. He offered his help for me to audition to the Nanyang Academy for Fine Arts (NAFA) for he was once a teacher there. Also, the representative for music was an alumnus making it such a good opportunity. Although, when I recently checked it, the scholarships have long been closed.

The event organizers fixed my nameless dispute during that night also. I was transferred to a different room while Ate Cyril was placed downstairs. My foreign roommate turned out to be the Photography delegate of Singapore, named Jamie Chan. She made quite an impression on me because her shots were very good during the presentation. We got to know each other through the rest of the night and before I knew it, I was already calling her “big sister” or “ate”. She is such an amusing and inspiring person. Also, I found out that she’s also a singer just like me. She performs with a choir and her voice is very beautiful. We promised to exchange songs during the camp.

I was so glad to end the day with new people and new opportunities. I slept through the night, knowing that the camp has only begun and that more events will be happening the next day.

November 22, 2011: Borobudur Temple

The next day, we woke up early and had breakfast in Magelang. We also went to a vocational school for culinary arts for high school students in Indonesia. There, we introduced ourselves and shared the food and flavours of our country. We also helped the students make an Indonesia delicacy called “Kolopon”. It’s made out of *kamote* powder, sticky rice with molten sugar inside and is rolled in dry coconut. It was very delicious.



After the visit, we went to the famous Borobudur temple. I learned a lot about its structure, the meaning and the panels. Mr. Budi, a member of the organizing committee, served as our tour guide and I managed to chat with him that day. I learned that the temple is not a place of worship but merely a place for meditation. It was established to promote Buddhism in the country through the use of visual aids such as the panels surrounding the temple. The panels told about the story of SidarthaGautamma or Buddha and how he reached nirvana. The temple has three square levels which is travelled from the east to west, following the story. The last level or the top of the temple is

circle which signifies that nirvana is never ending. It is surrounded by a lot of small pyramid-like structures called 'stupa' which encases a statue of Buddha in each. In the main or the largest "stupa", no statue can be found which signifies that nothing of you is left once you reach nirvana, no desires and no selfish thoughts. All of these really enlightened me and how the same principle of selflessness applies to Christianity. We had numerous photo-shoots in the temple.



After that, we went to a small park near the temple and had a tree planting activity. Each country gets to plant a tree to signify the unity in one area. Also, if ever we return, those trees have established its roots.



We also went to a museum and watched a movie about Borobudur temple, and how it was found and was excavated in the early 1900's. Afterwards we went to a museum featuring a traditional ship which circled the globe. The structure of the ship was inspired by a boat found in a panel in the Borobudur temple.

When night came, we ate at a restaurant which features a purely mushroom menu. With Indonesia being an Islamic country, their consumption of other foods is prohibited. During dinner, there was a story telling and a sharing of traditional games. I learned that one of Singapore's games is the *cungka* (pronounced "chungka.") and it is exactly the same as the game, Sengka, in the Philippines.

When we returned to the hotel, we had a brief meeting about the different workshops we'll be doing the next day.

November 23, 2011: Workshop 1 (Musical Imrpovisation)

We woke up fairly early in time for breakfast outside the hotel in Magelang. Afterwards, we rode an *Andong* which is a kind of transportation in Indonesia somewhat similar to a *kalesa*. We went around the town of Magelang which looked a lot like a province. The weather was very nice and the views reminded me of the Philippines, rice fields, mountains and small homes. What was amusing were the children who waved at us whenever the *andong* pass by their homes. There was one little girl who even chased us with smiling eyes. We came to our destination in a small place called Desa Candirejo.

There, we met the dance and the music held their workshops. For music, we were led inside a small room with numerous gamelan instruments. Gongs and drums of different sizes were. It was fascinating also to see the other Asian instruments being set up by the other countries such as the Chinese flutes, the Cambodian xylophone ("Ranard"), the Erhu (a three-stringed instrument) and many more. While they were all setting up, I was there, silent and nervous of what I could sing. Obviously, my voice clearly sounded with Western influence and I was afraid it won't fit in.



We met Mr. Subowo, the instructor for music workshop. He told us that we will be having two repertoires; one is the gamelan (gong) improvisation and the other is the music accompaniment for dance. I was rather confused about the first repertoire because I didn't know how to play the gamelan. When we tried the improvisation, I was assigned to a small xylophone. Mainly, Mr. Subowo simply conducted and pointed to the instrument he wishes to hear. He gave numbers with his fingers to indicate the panel in the xylophone which we'll be striking and gave a consistent rhythm. When he pointed at me, I didn't know what to do. So I just imitated what I was hearing at the moment and felt the pounding beat of the gongs. I let out a short vocalization which is made up of the notes I wanted to feel at that very moment. It was then that I realized that improvisation was something magical because of its spontaneity. The identity and musical knowledge of the person really shows. I still cannot forget the feeling of singing along with the other Asian instruments. I guess I managed to fit in after all.

For the rest of the day, we were just rehearsing and improvising. We were supposed to visit a local home industry of pot makers and weavers but unfortunately it rained. Everyone was able to go except for the musicians.

At night we had a storytelling by Indonesia, Thailand, Laos and the Philippines. It was a bit on-the-spot since our Head of Delegation assigned me to read a book. I was telling a story like I was reading to kids only most of them are above twenty. Luckily, my childish innocence made it amusing and sweet which managed to help me.



As I slept, the sound of Asia still ringed in my ears which made me more eager to wake up for another workshop the next day.

November 24, 2011: Workshop 2 and Midnight Jamming

For this day, we once again went to DesaCandirejo for our music workshop. This time, we tried to make our music for the collaboration with the dancers. It was very fun to do because we get to make music according to the dances of the different nations and what's fascinating is a different music of an Asian country is incorporated to a different Asian dance. It's very interesting to see how it matches and flows beautifully. Mine, I get to sing for the music of a Cambodian dancer. During the workshop, I also get to meet the dancers. I also made a close Singaporean friend during day, named Norhaizad Adam.

We worked for our music until 3:00 p.m. and went back to the hotel where we rehearsed some more. After dinner, we once again had a story telling and shared a traditional game. By the end of the night, we once again rehearsed with the dancers for the gala performance. It was a very exhausting day.

As I was about to go back to my room, Shelly Oktarini, and Indonesian dancer and also an avid singer, came to me and said that we will be performing at the gala performance along with Jihad, a musician from Brunei. She said to meet with the event organizers to ask and rehearse what it is. When we went there, the event organizers have set up an electronic keyboard and had a bunch of song hits. They want us to sing after the performance with a keyboard accompaniment. I went to the room of my friend from Myanmar since I remembered he was good in playing the piano. I called him and our jamming session began. The night was very memorable because it was such an unlikely experience for me to sing along with different people. As it prolonged, more and more event organizers and some other delegates came. All in all, we were twelve people jamming until 1:30 in the morning. There were nine Indonesians, the Head of Delegation from Brunei, my Myanmar friend, Thawadar, and me. It was rather flattering because they really like my voice and the sound of it. After every song, they keep telling me to sing more. I did a duet with Shelly, played the keyboard and sang a pop Tagalog song and laughed along to their jokes. I even tried singing along to an Indonesian song of theirs. It was a very memorable experience to feel such equality among different

people because of music and for complete foreign strangers to appreciate my voice really boosted my confidence. I never thought in my whole life that I'd be able to jam for three hours straight with people from a different country. I guess music is so magical that it really brings people together.

November 25, 2011: Tour around Jogjakarta

We woke up early for our trip to Jogjakarta. We were once again grouped into two for the trip where I decided to have a different seatmate. I sat beside my Singaporean friend, Haizad to know more about the Singaporean culture. Apparently, based from what he said, Singapore is a very clean country and the lifestyle is also very urban. Some even envy the other countries which have mountains, rivers, and other natural sights which are not seen in Singapore. But what they are proud about is the multiculturalism of their country, having roots from Malaysia, China and India. It makes it a boiling pot of different cultures in one place. For the whole trip, I spent most of my time talking to my seatmate and exchanging thoughts. He even taught me how to count in Malaysian and I taught him how to count in Tagalog.

For our first stop, we went to the Sultan's Palace in Jogjakarta. The weather was very hot which is why it was pretty hard to focus on the tour guide. We were toured around the palace showing the royal family's gifts from the different nations and their beautiful golden belongings. It was a sight to see.



We had our lunch break at a very posh Indonesian restaurant. The ambience was very high end and it was rather sophisticated. Me and my group of friends ate together and exchanged jokes and magic tricks which left us laughing the whole time. We were very noisy and we had so much fun. It seemed as if we knew each other for a long time when we've only known each other for four days. Some of us there even met only on the day. After lunch, a radio DJ who was observing asked to interview some of us. He said that we looked so close to each other so he gave us a live challenge to state the full name and country of the person randomly beside us. We began looking for pen and paper to cheat and write our full names. This made us all laugh. Luckily, Haizad was beside me and I knew him enough for the challenge.



For the next sight, we went to a place where they make authentic Batik. I didn't know it was such a tedious process. There were people assigned for the making of the print, the waxing, the dyeing and the designing of the fabric. I really liked the women who were creating the patterns and design with the wax. Their imagination on the blank canvas was incredible and their attention to detail for the fabric was just astounding. When we went to the Batik store, I was in shock. Rows upon rows of beautiful batik products was neatly hanged and folded for us to buy. But then, the price was also shocking because some prices ranges from 50,000 RP to 3 Million RP. I didn't get to buy any authentic Batik since I was saving for a batik bag which I might see. The event organizer told us that the all the products were discounted by 50% just for us. I can't imagine that at 3 Million, it was already half the price.



For our next stop, we went to the shopping district of Malioboro where we were given free time to shop for our souvenirs. It was an incredibly long stretch of souvenir shops and street stores which sells mostly Batik products (bags, t-shirts, wallets, keychains, everything!) I guess Malioboro is somewhat similar to Quiapo here in the Philippines only it's cleaner. I went with my friends, Shelly and Haizad to shop. Luckily, they both speak Bahasa which is why it became easier for me to buy and haggle with the vendors. We spent hours walking the whole stretch and along the way something always catches my eye. From time to time, we get to see some delegates from the camp. Thawadar, from Myanmar, eventually joined the three of us. I ended up buying a lot of keychains, pens, wallets and finally, a batik bag.



After dinner, we went to our final stop which is another souvenir shop only this time it's full of Indonesian delicacies. One thing I will never forget in that store is their candied grasshopper snack. It was really strange to see although I didn't find it disgusting. I bought a few Java coffees for my parents and candied coconuts for my batch mates.

We went back to the Hotel, tired and exhausted yet, my whole experience of the day opened my eyes to the beautiful Indonesian culture. Not to mention, I also became really close to my seatmate where we even established a secret handshake.

November 26, 2011: Gala Performance

It was the day of the Gala Performance. Most of us were groggy from yesterday's activity but we knew that today was the culminating event of our week stay in Indonesia. We went to the *Karmawibangga* Museum where the performance will be held. The place also holds the other fragments of the Borobudur temple which hasn't been figured out yet on where to put. When we came, the people are setting up the stage. The hut-like structure which holds a square stage in the centre has a roof lined with dried palm leaves. Indonesia is really leaving such an impression to the other countries. They're really going out for this event which is why we should also show its worth. Yet, everyone was very sleepy while setting up.

We were told to gather by the camp director and he announced that some changes will be added to the program. He said that he will include a short skit as a transition between the musical improvisation and the dance collaboration. He wanted a skit where people from different countries talk in their own languages like they understand each other. He chose a few delegates and included me. A delegate from Thailand, three delegates from Indonesia, my Singaporean friend and I "rehearsed" for this short skit and it was very difficult. I can't understand anything. I simply smiled and played along.

We had our lunch break at a restaurant within Magelang. I ate lunch with my friends for the last time and mostly with the Indonesian delegation. Mainly, all of them understood each other as they spoke in Bahasa and I was simply there, trying to understand bits and pieces of their sentences like what I've been doing since day one. It's not really that hard. I guess what's important is in listening. We talked, they talked and I listened. It was such a memorable sight especially being the last day of camp.



After lunch, we rehearsed for the rest of the afternoon. We did some sound checks and had a full run. By late afternoon, we still had a few hours left to spare. Me, Haizad and Shelly went shopping again at some nearby stores where I get to buy another bag, a skirt and a few bracelets for souvenir. When we returned to the site, I saw the photographers getting ready for their exhibit, setting up their printed photographs.

When night came, we all changed into our costumes and did our make-up. I wore the *terno* we borrowed from NCCA. When the event organizers saw me, they didn't expect that I was that person. They said they were speechless. One of them even said it reminded them of Imelda Marcos. Some of the people even asked to take a picture with me. It flattered me a lot and I appreciated it all. I had my dinner outside a bench in front of a fountain along with a friend before the show.



The time of the gala came. I wasn't there to fully witness the full program because I was backstage with my fellow performers. But from what I remember, before us, there was a presentation by a group of young boys doing a traditional Indonesian dance. They were wearing bells around their feet which reminded me of a Filipino tradition dance. But overall, it was very fascinating to see.

When the time of the performance came, I was very nervous especially with the improvisational music. In the end, I didn't get to improvise which disappointed me because I did fine during the rehearsals. My friend tried cheering me up. Afterwards, we did the skit which was still very awkward to me but I just gave it my all. I nodded; I smiled and said what I could. In the end, everyone was laughing and found it enjoyable. But my favourite part of the night was the collaboration. It was simply a beautiful experience to see it all come together; to see our differences

become a similar one and still, each to be distinct. I sang, we played and in the end, everyone even us musicians was enjoying as memorable melodies and beats culminate our week stay. After the whole show and program, we all danced, rejoiced and took memorable pictures. I sang with my roommate, with Shelly and my Myanmar friend as everyone sang along. I guess it paid back to my disappointment earlier. I looked around at all the smiling and laughing people and promised to myself that I'll never forget the feeling and privilege I had in sharing my music and culture for these people. It was such a memorable night. It's the night fell in love with Asia.



We came back at the hotel at around 11:00 p.m. tired, exhausted and happy. In the end, my friends and I decided not to sleep until the next day. We wanted to cherish our last remaining hours with each other before going back to our own countries.

November 27, 2011: Departure

My friend helped me bring down my luggage. It was five in the morning and me along with my fellow Philippine delegates are supposed to be at the airport. No breakfast was prepared, no tea to greet me in the morning and most of the people are still asleep. It was a foggy morning which made it all the more sad to leave. The Singapore delegation was awake and they were the last people I get to say goodbye to. My roommate, Jamie, gave me a letter for me departure as she tears and up and hugged me. While putting up my bags in the van to the airport, I opened the letter and there I saw the lyrics to an inspiring song she taught me. I began to cry and I ran to her and hugged her tightly before going. I hugged Haizad, shook hands with Qing Lun and took a last picture with them. I remember crying as we drove away to the airport.



The trip on the way back to the Philippines was the same as going. I spent most of my time sleeping because of exhaustion. As I looked out on the window, with the clouds and the beautiful sight of Indonesia underneath the airplane, I began to reflect. My one week stay has been an incredible experience for me not only culturally but also as a person. It made me open to new things and to be unafraid in trying what is different. It also made me realize that I am capable of reaching out to people through my music and through myself, which inspired me to love my craft even more. The whole experience has inspired me to keep pursuing further in the hopes of one day, travelling again and probably see the friends I made. Either around the world or around Asia, the camp made me realize that I am built for greater things in this world as I go from one destination to the next. The Philippine delegation took a final picture before going our own ways. They've become such a family to me.



I will never forget the experiences I had, the memories I made and the wonderful people I met. It has been an amazing cultural journey which I promise to keep and forever cherish.



Terimakasih! (Thank You)