



The History of LK as 2009 marks Lahing Kayumanggi's 15th year

Promoting Filipino culture & heritage through dance, music & song
▪
Banaag Award recipient - 2006 Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals & Organisations Overseas



Our anniversary logotype will be used on all our communications in 2009

It's hard to imagine what leaps and bounds Lahing Kayumanggi (LK) has had to go through to get this far. LK is seen to be the UK's, and arguably Europe's most polished and best known Filipino folk dance group.

What began as 'fun' weekends in 1992 to learn Filipino folk dances was inspired by Rose Carlos, who was then chair of the fundraising committee for The Filipino Women's Association (FWA) and Gloria Bognot, chair of the cultural committee for The Philippine Centre. Rose's idea was simple. Why not a group of friends learning folk dances so that they did not have to invite artists from the Philippines which costs money? She asked Gloria if she knew anyone who could teach. Luckily, Gloria knew Ronnie del Barrio through the Philippine Baranggay Folk Dance Troupe when they were invited to perform in London. Ronnie agreed to come down from Northampton to teach Filipino folk dances to a small group of friends consisting of Gloria and Rose, the late Victor Ubal, Ronnie and Pampee Rivalles as their dancing partners. Soon after, others joined - Zeny Tiglao, Bong Forouzan, Espie Josol, Mitzie and Tom Finney Lito Maggay, Clem Rumley, Merry Rose Carlos and Digi Sikat. At the same time, Gina Reid, who was a lead dancer for Baranggay was already living in Aberdeen so she was a welcome co-teacher and lead dancer whenever they needed her. Gina later became LK's Associate Artistic Director.

there were some organised folk dance groups already starting and performing in Filipino Fiestas, their only criteria for people who wanted to join was their love of dancing and commitment to learn. There could be no fees. There would be no restrictions to age, size or dance experience. They started with no money, no resources, and above all, scant knowledge of Filipino folk dance. What they had was boundless energy and enthusiasm to learn. Ronnie travelled from Northampton every weekend to teach the group for the small remuneration of transport fees and pocket money.

"It was tough. Most of them had two left feet!" recalls Ronnie. With patience and perseverance, he started to teach them 'Bakya' (wooden clogs), Pandanggo sa Ilaw, (dance of the lights) Polka sa Plaza and Salakot (coolie hat). "It took two months to teach them these dances. We practiced and practiced every week until I felt they were ready to face an audience." Indeed they did, and that was during dinner dances hosted by the FWA and Philippine Centre. The group's performances were well received and applauded which gave them enough confidence to ask for more and more dances until they were able to form a small repertoire.

In 1993, the group decided to hold a fundraising event at Jean's in Holland Park so they could buy badly needed costumes. They raised £300 which was enough to buy Igorot costumes and some props.

The aim of the group was and is, to promote Philippine culture and heritage through dance, music and song in the UK and eventually, Europe. Although

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LK is a member of



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After that, the group was consolidated by other members of the FWA, among whom were: Teresa Silo, Eliza Bertini, Clarita Richardson (initiated LK's constitution) and Christine Weinstein. The male members were: Dean Hussain, Andre Saet, Rey Quevedo, Alan Aldana, and Louie Szikora. They still had no financial resources and worst of all, they could not afford to pay for space but thanks to Tom who was caretaker of many buildings in Mayfair, they had exclusive London addresses as rehearsal spaces! The group also enjoyed having Mitzie and Tom's house close by for home made cooking in between rehearsals.

They learned more dances, Kuracha (a fast polka), Banga (clay pot) and Paligo (Bathing before courtship) from the Cordilleras; Lanceres de Lingayen (dance from Lingayen) from the Spanish legacy; the world famous Tinikling, and Asik (court dance) from Mindanao. By December of that year, they had performed full 45 minute shows during the Philippine Centre's and FWA's famed annual Philippine National Day Dinner Dances.

By June 1994, the group's development led them to believe it was time they formed themselves as a dance company with an appropriate name. There were many names submitted but it was Ronnie's suggestion, Lahing Kayumanggi (Brown Race) that won the consensus. Thus started a Filipino folk dance group in the UK. Ronnie was appointed Chair, Artistic Director and Choreographer. He attributes LK's growing confidence and his own emergence as choreographer and artistic director to the many years he spent as lead dancer with The Baranggay Folk Dance Troupe, under the direction of the founder, Dr. Paz Cielo A. Belmonte and Eugene Ticson, Artistic Director. Efforts to make the group more professional were to appoint other officers, Gloria Bognot as Vice Chair, Louie Szikora as Secretary, Mitzie Finney as Treasurer and Lito Maggay as Marketing officer. Clarita Richardson as LK adviser wrote LK's constitution. Presently, LK is a company with five professional artists leading 35 enthusiastic dancers and musicians from the community. Many original members are still active dancers, some have retired but still present in LK activities, with children of older members growing up as lead dancers, and younger ones waiting in the wings for their turn. New members continue to sign up.

LK continues to develop and grow as a dance company rooted in the folk culture and traditions of the Philippines by demonstrating its rich and diverse culture, enriched by the influences of its Southeast Asian neighbours, the legacy of Spain's 400 years of colonisation and not least, the many indigenous groups that are still alive and thriving up and down the country.

Their increasing reputation for quality, authenticity and innovation has led them to receive wide acclaim for performances all over the UK in venues including the Philippine Embassy, World Travel Markets, Filipino Barrio Fiestas and community events, the prestigious Queen Elizabeth Hall and Royal Festival Hall, as well as some countries in the continent. For four years running, LK was a regular and popular feature on BBC TV's Generation Game.

Their infectious enthusiasm for their material, amazing colourful costumes, their sense of rhythm, verve and energy are always sure fire winners that leave audiences clamouring for more.

It is not surprising that LK is considered as informal ambassadors for the Philippines, projecting the truly positive image of the country and its people, that in December 2006, they were awarded the Philippine Presidential Banaag Award "in recognition of its unwavering dedication to artistic excellence, raising the cultural awareness and ethnic pride of the Filipino community in the United Kingdom, and supporting cultural and humanitarian activities in the Philippines".

Ronnie del Barrio – Chair, Artistic Director and Choreographer
Laurence Stirton – Vice Chair
PJ Exler – Secretary
Mitzie Finney – Treasurer
Noemi White – Treasurer
Avery (Sunshine) Magaoay – PR
Goyit Landicho – Marketing & Publicity

Ends

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