DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
national university of singapore

DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

The Invention of Folk Dance in the Philippines: Who are the ‘Folk’ and Who are the ‘Natives’?

Dr. William Dwight Peterson
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CHAIR
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History/Political Science Lounge, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Block AS1, #04–01, 11 Arts Link, Singapore 117570

Abstract
This talk will consider how folk dance as a category came to be invented in the Twentieth Century in the Philippines, and how it became linked to the nationalist project in the period immediately prior to and following independence from the US in 1946, particularly through the pioneering work of Francisca Reyes-Aquino and the national dance company, Bayanihan. In the 1970s, First Lady Imelda Marcos took an active and often controversial role in developing the arts in the Philippines, and under her watch local dance ‘traditions’ became fixed further and identified with a particular region, while the infrastructure of the national Department of Tourism provided the framework and the mechanisms for these dance forms to re-package themselves as elements of a strong national culture, one that drew strength from its diverse traditions. As politics came to shape and contain local expressions of dance and extend those representations internationally, particularly through the model repertory of the Bayanihan company, the categories of ‘folk’ and ‘tribal’ dance have become increasingly problematic. Looking largely at the cultural impact and legacy of Bahaniyan and Reyes-Aquino, this paper will consider how the Philippines represents itself to itself and to the world by unpacking these complex, problematic categories of dance.

About the Speaker
Dr. William Dwight Peterson is a Senior Lecturer and former Director of the Centre for Theatre and Performance at Monash University. He served as foundational academic staff in the Theatre Studies programme at the National University of Singapore from 1992-95 and has also taught at the University of Waikato and California State University San Bernardino. He is the author of Theatre and the Politics of Culture in Contemporary Singapore (Wesleyan 2001). In the last decade his work has focused on community-based performance in the Philippines, much of it related to festivals where religious ritual, theatre, and dance come together in mass participation events. His Visiting Senior Fellowship at ARI follows on from a Visiting Fellowship at IIAS in Leiden, both of which have been devoted to completing the manuscript for Emplacing Happiness: Community, the Self and Performance in the Philippines. He will return to Monash in March where he supervises one of the world’s largest cohorts of PhD students from Asian countries pursuing research on Asian performance topics.

For enquiries, please contact the Seminar Coordinator,
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