ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 10| October 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

PRESERVING HERITAGE: THE ATI'S DINAGJANG BEAT OF CALVARIO, LOAY, BOHOL

Chrystel Mariz R. Gementiza
College of Education, Holy Name University, Tagbilaran City, Bohol, Philippines

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra24186
DOI No: 10.36713/epra24186

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to document and preserve the Dinagjang Beat of the Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol, through rhythmic notation and analysis of its musical structure. The Dinagjang Beat, performed during rituals and festive gatherings, serves as an essential expression of the Ati community's devotion to the Santo Niño and as a marker of their cultural identity. Despite its cultural importance, scholarly documentation of the beat remains scarce, particularly in terms of rhythmic structure, tempo, and instrumental interplay. Addressing this gap ensures the preservation of an indigenous musical tradition that has long been transmitted orally.

A descriptive-qualitative design was employed, combining participant observation, interviews with Ati musicians and culture bearers, and rhythmic transcription using standard notation techniques. Data analysis followed Aquino's (1976) approach to rhythmic notation and Sinaga's (2019) Music Composition Process, enabling a systematic interpretation of the rhythm. Findings reveal that the Dinagjang Beat is characterized by a 2/4 meter, Allegro tempo, and percussive layering of bass drum, two-headed improvised drums, and kalatong. Each instrument contributes distinct rhythmic patterns, with the bass drum providing the pulse and the improvised drums and kalatong supplying syncopation and textural variety.

By documenting and analyzing the Dinagjang Beat through rhythmic notation, this study contributes to Philippine ethnomusicology, cultural preservation, and education. The results not only safeguard an intangible cultural heritage but also provide a valuable resource for future comparative studies, music pedagogy, and efforts to integrate indigenous sounds into contemporary performance and scholarship.

KEYWORDS: *Dinagjang Beat, Ati Tribe, Ethnomusicology, Rhythmic Notation, Indigenous Music, Cultural Preservation*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Dinagyang Festival of Iloilo City, Philippines, is one of the country's most prominent cultural, economic, and social events, celebrated annually in honor of Señor Santo Niño. The term "Dinagyang", derived from the Ilonggo word for merry-making, reflects the festival's jubilant spirit (Blanza & Paborada, 2024b). As both a religious and cultural celebration, it represents a fusion of Roman Catholic traditions with the indigenous culture of the Panayanons, showcased through the Ati-Ati street dance competition performed by various tribes (Panaguiton et al., 2015). For the Ilonggos, Dinagyang has become a source of cultural pride, with festivities beginning in December through the Pamukaw (Awakening) and culminating in January. The highlights include the tambor trumpa martsa musika, fluvial procession, the Kasadyahan Regional Showcase, the Sadsad religious ritual dance, and the highly anticipated Dinagyang Ati Contest featuring competing "Ati tribes" (Pison, 2019).

Parallel to this, the Ati Tribe of Calvario in Loay, Bohol, practices Dinagjang, a local form of merrymaking that also honors the Santo Niño. While distinct from Iloilo's Dinagyang Festival, the Dinagjang of Bohol shares similar devotional roots, underscoring the deep cultural and spiritual ties of Visayan communities to the Child Christ. This connection highlights the widespread significance of Ati-inspired celebrations as embodiments of both religious devotion and cultural identity.

Music, as a universal medium of expression and communication, is deeply embedded in community traditions worldwide (Rehfeldt et al., 2021). Ethnomusicological research consistently emphasizes the role of traditional music in safeguarding intangible heritage and reinforcing communal identity (Nanjundaswamy & Chethana, 2025). McKerrell (2021b) further argues that ethnomusicology should not only portray performance as a means of understanding social and cultural contexts but also employ music and dance as methods of translation—tools for theorizing and communicating artistic performance aesthetics while generating research outcomes grounded in performative knowledge. Similarly, Blum (2023), as cited by Yust (2024b), stresses that music must be studied within its cultural context to fully capture its societal functions. In terms of documentation, Sinaga's (2019b) Music Composition Process offers a systematic framework for analyzing rhythmic structures and the development of indigenous beats such as Dinagjang.

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In the Philippine setting, Aquino (1976) pioneered the use of rhythmic notation to standardize indigenous beats within traditional dances, contributing to their transmission and preservation. However, despite these early initiatives, systematic efforts to document local music traditions remain limited (Doi, 2018). More recently, C. M. Gementiza (2023b) underscored the importance of documenting cultural expressions not only as a means of raising public awareness but also as a strategy to strengthen heritage preservation initiatives at both local and national levels.

Despite the continuous performance of the Dinagjang Beat in the Ati community of Loay, scholarly documentation of its rhythmic structure remains scarce. This study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing the Dinagjang Beat in terms of its notation, tempo, time signature, and instrumentation. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the preservation and scholarly understanding of the Ati Tribe's musical heritage in Calvario, Loay, and to support broader efforts to safeguard indigenous traditions for generations to come.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to document and analyze the Dinagjang Beat of the Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol, as part of ongoing efforts to preserve indigenous musical heritage. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Describe the structural features of the Dinagjang Beat in terms of its meter and overall rhythmic framework.
2. Identify the rhythmic patterns performed by the different instruments—bass drum, two-headed improvised drums, and kalatong—to highlight their individual and collective contributions to the beat.
3. Determine the fundamental musical elements of the Dinagjang Beat, including its time signature, tempo, and instrumentation, through rhythmic notation and descriptive analysis.

Document systematically the Dinagjang Beat through rhythmic notation, positioning it as a cultural resource that contributes to the preservation, transmission, and scholarly understanding of indigenous music traditions in Bohol.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive-qualitative research design to document and analyze the rhythmic features of the Dinagjang Beat of the Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol. This design was appropriate for capturing the indigenous rhythm in detail, allowing systematic description of its beat structure, rhythmic patterns, tempo, time signature, and instrumentation.

3.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in Calvario, Loay, Bohol, the home of the Ati Tribe in the province. Loay is a significant cultural site where the Ati community continues to perform the Dinagjang Beat during rituals and festive gatherings in honor of the Santo Niño. As the residence of the Ati people in Bohol, this community plays a central role in safeguarding and transmitting the Dinagjang tradition to succeeding generations.

3.3 Research Participants

Using purposive sampling, the study selected Ati elders, cultural bearers, and musicians who actively participate in the performance of the Dinagjang Beat. Their direct involvement in the practice provided reliable insights into the rhythm's structure and ensured cultural authenticity in the documentation process.

3.4 Research Instruments and Materials

The following instruments were utilized in the study:

- Audio-visual recordings of live Dinagjang performances in community rituals.
- Interview guide for semi-structured conversations with musicians and elders regarding rhythm, tempo, and historical practice.
- Music notation software (MuseScore) for rhythmic transcription and visualization.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Fieldwork in Calvario involved multiple stages:

1. Observation and recording of live performances of the Dinagjang Beat.
2. Conducting interviews with Ati elders and musicians to validate the rhythm and provide historical-cultural context.
3. Transcribing the beat into rhythmic notation using established methods.
4. Subjecting the transcriptions to analysis to identify beat structure, tempo, time signature, and instrumentation.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through descriptive and notational analysis. The process included:

- Transcribing the rhythms into Western notation using Aquino's (1976) approach to rhythmic notation, as applied in her dance literature studies of indigenous Philippine traditions.
- Applying Sinaga's (2019b) Music Composition Process as a framework for systematic organization and analysis of the beat.
- Identifying the pulse, rhythmic variations, and instrument interplay to highlight both the structural features and performance practices of the Dinagjang Beat.

This combined approach ensured that the Dinagjang Beat was not only transcribed accurately but also contextualized within established methods of Philippine ethnomusicology and indigenous music documentation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical research practices were strictly observed. Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Cultural sensitivity and respect for Ati traditions were upheld

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throughout the study. Participants were also given the opportunity to review the transcriptions and findings to ensure accuracy, credibility, and alignment with community perspectives.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on the Dinagjang Beat of the Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol, organized according to the research objectives. Data were analyzed using Aquino's (1976) method of rhythmic notation and Sinaga's (2019b) Music Composition Process to ensure systematic documentation.

4.1 Structural Features of the Dinagjang Beat. The Dinagjang Beat is built upon a 2/4 time signature, a simple duple meter that provides a steady framework for performance. Its structural form is repetitive yet flexible, allowing performers to sustain rhythmic consistency while incorporating minor variations. The overall rhythmic framework demonstrates a layered percussive texture, where a bass drum pulse anchors the rhythm while other instruments add syncopated and complementary figures.

4.2 Rhythmic Patterns of the Instruments. Each instrument in the ensemble contributes distinct rhythmic roles that, when combined, create the characteristic Dinagjang sound:

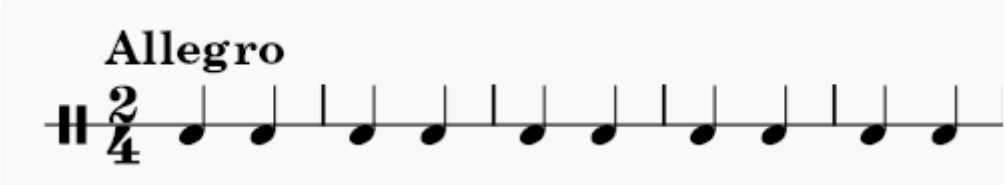

Figure 1. Rhythmic Notation of Bass Drum of the Dinagjang Beat of Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol

4.2.1. Bass Drum – plays two quarter notes per measure, acting as the pulse of the rhythm.

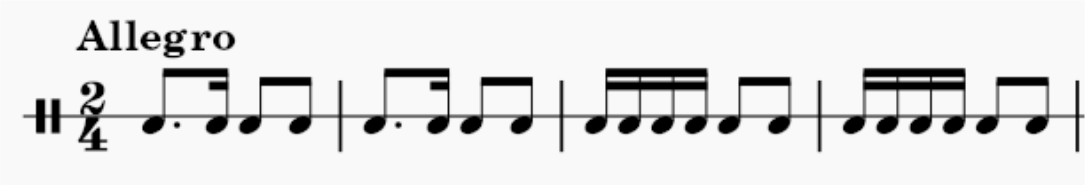

Figure 2. Rhythmic Notation of the Two-headed Improvised Drums of the Dinagjang Beat of Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol

4.2.2. Two-headed Improvised Drums – alternate between:

- Two Measures of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes, and
- Two Measures of four sixteenth notes with two eighth notes.

These patterns inject rhythmic drive and syncopation, giving the beat a dynamic quality.

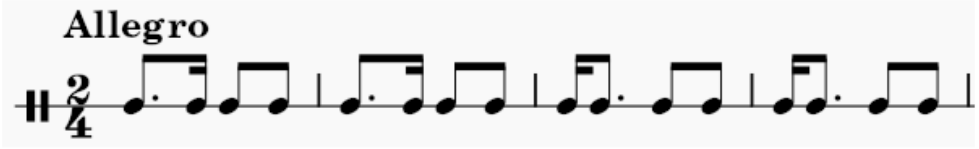

Figure 3. Rhythmic Notation of the Kalatong (Percussive Bamboo Instrument) of the Dinagjang Beat of Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol

4.2.3. Kalatong (Percussive Bamboo Instrument) – mirrors and counters the improvised drums with:

- Two Measures of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes, and
- Two Measures of a sixteenth note with a dotted eighth note plus two eighth notes.

This counter-rhythm enriches the percussive dialogue and provides additional texture.

The interplay between these instruments results in a layered rhythmic structure, where the bass drum ensures stability while the improvised drums and kalatong supply rhythmic variation.

4.3 Fundamental Musical Elements

The Dinagjang Beat is characterized by the following elements:

- Time Signature: 2/4, establishing a duple rhythm.
- Tempo: Allegro, producing an energetic and festive mood.
- Instrumentation: a small ensemble consisting of a bass drum, two-headed improvised drums, and the kalatong.

These elements collectively define the beat as fast-paced, percussive, and community-driven, making it suitable for both ritual and festive contexts.

4.4 Systematic Documentation through Rhythmic Notation. The beat was transcribed into standard rhythmic notation using

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MuseScore, following the method proposed by Aquino (1976) in her dance literature studies. This transcription documented the meter, tempo, rhythmic figures, and instrumental interplay in precise detail. By presenting the Dinagjang Beat in notated form, the study ensures that it may serve as a cultural resource for education, archiving, and ethnomusicological scholarship.

This systematic documentation contributes not only to the preservation of the Dinagjang Beat but also to its transmission across generations. Furthermore, it strengthens the inclusion of indigenous Boholano music within broader discussions of Philippine ethnomusicology.

5.0 SUGGESTIONS

The documentation of the Dinagjang Beat demonstrates its potential not only as a community tradition but also as a valuable educational resource. It is recommended that music educators, cultural practitioners, and policymakers integrate the Dinagjang Beat into classroom instruction, workshops, and cultural programs to strengthen awareness of Bohol's indigenous heritage. Beyond the community of the Ati Tribe of Calvario, Loay, rhythmic studies of similar traditions across Bohol and the Philippines should be encouraged to build a wider archive of local music. These initiatives will benefit from the collaboration of cultural agencies, local government units, and academic institutions to ensure that preservation is systematic, community-driven, and sustainable.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study provided a systematic analysis and notation of the Dinagjang Beat of the Ati Tribe in Calvario, Loay, Bohol. The findings established its 2/4 meter, Allegro tempo, and distinct instrumental layering of bass drum, two-headed improvised drums, and kalatong. Together, these elements produce a rhythm that is both structured and dynamic, embodying the resourcefulness and artistry of the Ati community. By transcribing the beat into rhythmic notation, this research contributes to safeguarding an intangible cultural practice that has long existed orally and performatively. More than a musical form, the Dinagjang Beat reflects the living heritage of the Ati Tribe of Calvario, Loay, Bohol, and its preservation ensures that their cultural identity continues to resonate with future generations.

7.0 AREA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research may extend this study in several directions. Comparative analyses with other Boholano beats that would highlight both shared cultural traits and distinctive rhythmic features. Another important avenue is the exploration of oral histories, community narratives, and performance contexts that shape the transmission of the Dinagjang Beat. Finally, future studies might investigate how traditional rhythms like Dinagjang can be adapted or integrated into contemporary Philippine music and arts education, ensuring that indigenous sounds remain relevant, innovative, and accessible in modern cultural life.

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