

This is a transcript for Jennifer Sano-Franchini, Margaret Fernandes, Jonathan Adams, and Michelle webtext “Sounding Out in a PWI: Circulating Asian American Sound for Institutional Change” published in *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, 26(1), available at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/26.1/>

A Conversation on Listening to Ruby Ibarra’s “Us

This transcript is of a conversation among the authors about listening to the song “Us” by Ruby Ibarra.

Michelle: We also had this *amazing* Filipina rap song at the end

[🎵 Music plays: “Us,” by Ruby Ibarra, featuring Rocky Rivera, Klassy, and Faith Santilla]

Maggie: I mean we listened to Ruby Ibarra,

Michelle: Yes! Yes.

Maggie: and I think we had a really interesting conversation about how what she was doing with rap was kind of different from some of the things that Awkwafina does.

Michelle: Mmhmm.

[🎵 Music continues: “Island woman rise, walang makakatigil
Brown, brown woman, rise, alamin ang yung ugat
They got nothin’ on us...”]

Maggie: Most of the time you listen to a song it’s like oh, this is a nice song and it’s not like necessarily that different from anything else you’ve heard but when you hear that song it’s like I’ve never heard anything else like this before, and it kind of felt like that for me.

[murmurs in agreement]

Jon: I think that song really sort of encapsulates the success of the event if you could label it as such. [0:57] Because that was a song in a moment where unprompted—though we prompted for a song—but unprompted to us, the student brought forth a song that wasn’t just a song but sort of a message for the room rhetorically about everything that they were feeling in that moment. They could have, of course, chosen any song, and I’m sure there were all of your standard love songs, pop songs, songs about being at a party and how cool it was. But instead, we got this very poignant, very purposeful song sort of put forth and offered for the rest of the room to listen to. It was a really cool moment.

Jen: That’s just so funny to me because it also reminds of one of the other songs on there—“My Vag” [laughs] by Awkwafina. Which I also love that someone put that there, especially that it was a professor. It was, I think very—it would have been a really different experience if we had chosen “My Vag” over “Us” to listen to together.

Jon: [2:01] Right. I was thinking “Like a G6” was also one that was thrown out,

Jen: Oh, really? [laughs]

Jon: which while a wonderful, amazing song is not—it doesn't have the depth.

Jen: It's a party song.

Jon: Right, it's a party song! It is. It's about having a good time, whereas Ruby Ibarra's song is very purposeful, it's very impactful, especially in that moment.

Maggie: And the fact that it was like this feminist, anti-imperialist song about Pinay women not taking any shit [laughs], I think listening to it, especially where we are, where we were at a military university, it was such a weird convergence of things that made it really powerful.

Jen: I also remember that after listening to that song we had a really interesting discussion extending the earlier conversation about appropriation and use of African American Vernacular English in relation to the song. [3:06] I thought that was really interesting because it brought up really difficult questions about when do we call something appropriation? What does it mean? How can we even say, as people who are either Asian American or white but not necessarily ourselves African American? So I thought that led to a really interesting question in that moment.

Jon: I think that's a neat thing about group listening in general too is that group listening demands those reverberations we've talked about. You can't listen to a song that's that impactful and then just let the whole room fall silently completely and then go up and stand up and leave for the day. It invites commentary, it invites growth when you listen to a song as a group. [3:58] Even if it was something like "Like a G6," it would have had some sort of commentary afterward, and I think that's one of the cool things about this sort of event is that it doesn't just provide a space for listening, but it provides a space for a response to that listening, as well.

Jen: Yeah, that makes me think of after the song, I feel there was a moment of quiet that was like, "dang, what did we just watch, like that was amazing," and I think people started saying that, and then we had that conversation. I think you're right that I can't even imagine going through that experience together and then just leaving.

Jon: [Laughs] Saying goodbye, right, that was it!

Maggie: I guess maybe one of the nice things about listening in community is it's so different from listening to these people just in your headphones from Spotify, by yourself, completely decontextualized. Or like, maybe it is like you can listen to Asian American women in indie, like there's a Spotify playlist for that, but then when you take a moment to listen to that with people, it's just different.

Jen: [5:02] Mmhmm. And I think also too because that was such an empowering song, and they presented Filipina women in such a strong way. And I think that's part of what made it different too. And then to have it be almost like a collective empowerment moment. Like you're saying, it's kinda different from if you were to just hear it by yourself and be like yeah this is great or something like that.