

Choreographic Documentation of Sarimanok: A Multi-Modal Dance Analysis of Scene-Based Performance Structure

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Abstract

This study documented and analyzed the choreographic structure of *Sarimanok* choreographed by Sir Jess de Paz through movement organization, spatial design, music, costumes, props, and dramaturgical progression. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study examined seven major scenes of the performance to identify how choreographic elements function cohesively in constructing the dance narrative. Data were gathered through repeated video observation, scene documentation, and movement analysis guided by selected concepts from Laban Movement Analysis (LMA).

Findings revealed that the choreography demonstrates a progressive development of movement and spatial organization, beginning with centralized and protective formations and transitioning into pursuit, confrontation, and climactic elevation. The performance integrates ballet, contemporary, ethnic-inspired, and acrobatic movement vocabularies, creating a hybrid choreographic system that supports both technical precision and expressive communication. Spatial arrangements such as circular, diagonal, linear, and symmetrical formations were consistently used to establish hierarchy, tension, and ensemble relationships. Costumes, props, and musical structures further reinforced rhythmic coordination, visual focus, and continuity across scenes.

The study concludes that *Sarimanok* is a systematically structured choreographic work where movement, space, rhythm, and production elements operate interdependently to construct narrative coherence and expressive performance.

Keywords: Sarimanok, choreography, dance documentation, Laban Movement Analysis

1. Introduction

Dance documentation plays an important role in preserving choreographic works and promoting the study of movement practices in the performing arts. Through documentation, dance performances can be analyzed, archived, and utilized as educational and cultural references (Whatley, 2017). In the Philippines, many contemporary choreographic works remain insufficiently documented despite their contribution to the development of Philippine dance traditions and contemporary performance practices.

One example is *Sarimanok*, choreographed by Jesus De Paz. The choreography combines theatrical staging, ensemble movement, and mixed dance vocabularies that reflect contemporary Philippine choreography. Although the dance has been presented in cultural performances and theatrical productions, limited scholarly studies have focused on documenting its choreographic structure and production elements.

Existing studies on Philippine dance often focus on folk dance preservation, festival performances, and cultural interpretation. However, there remains limited documentation of contemporary choreographic works in terms of movement structure, dance techniques, music, costumes, props, and staging composition. The absence of systematic documentation may contribute to the gradual loss of choreographic knowledge and performance practices over time.

Anchored on Rudolf Laban's Analysis (1971, as cited in Wu et al., 2024), this study aimed to document the choreographic structure of *Sarimanok*. Specifically, the study examined the dance elements, movement techniques, music, costumes, props, and staging observed in the choreography. Through multi-modal dance analysis and qualitative content analysis, the study contributes to the preservation and documentation of Philippine contemporary choreography.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using multi-modal dance analysis and content analysis. The study focused on documenting the choreographic structure and production elements of *Sarimanok* through systematic observation, interpretation, and descriptive analysis of recorded performances.

Content analysis was utilized to identify, classify, and organize recurring choreographic components observed in the dance, including movement patterns, dance techniques, spatial formations, music, costumes, props, and staging. Through this method, the researcher systematically examined the visual and auditory elements present in the performance and categorized them into thematic components for documentation.

The study was anchored on Rudolf Laban's Movement Analysis (LMA), which guided the analysis of body, space, time, energy, and relationship elements within the choreography.

2.2 Data Source

The primary data source consisted of recorded video performances of *Sarimanok*. The recordings were repeatedly viewed and analyzed to identify movement patterns, dance techniques, music, costumes, props, and staging elements.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researcher served as the primary research instrument in conducting observation, coding, content analysis, and descriptive interpretation of the recorded performances. Observation guides based on Rudolf Laban's Movement Analysis were utilized during the analysis process to ensure systematic documentation of choreographic components.

2.4 Data Analysis

The recorded performances were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and multi-modal dance analysis through the following procedures:

1. Repeated viewing of recorded performances;
2. Identification and coding of recurring choreographic components;
3. Classification of dance elements, movement vocabulary, music, costumes, props, and staging patterns;
4. Organization of findings into thematic categories and descriptive tables;
5. Interpretation and documentation of the choreographic structure of the dance.

The findings were presented descriptively to provide detailed documentation of the choreographic composition of *Sarimanok*.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study ensured ethical standards in research by properly acknowledging the choreographer and source of the performance material. The video recordings used were analyzed strictly for academic purposes. No alteration of the original choreographic work was made. Proper citation and academic attribution were observed to respect intellectual property rights of Jesus De Paz and other contributors involved in the production. Confidentiality of any unpublished production details was also maintained.

2.6 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, credibility was established through repeated viewing of recorded performances and systematic coding of data. Triangulation was achieved by analyzing multiple performance components such as movement, music, staging, and costume. Peer review was also conducted to validate the consistency of thematic classifications. Detailed documentation through tables enhanced the dependability and transferability of findings.

2.7 Reflexivity

The researcher acknowledged her role as a dance educator and practitioner, which may influence interpretation of movement and staging. To minimize bias, reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the analysis process. Continuous self-reflection was employed to ensure that interpretations remained grounded on observed data rather than personal assumptions or stylistic preferences.

3. Results and Discussion

Choreographic Documentation of *Sarimanok*: A Multi-Modal Dance Analysis

This section presents the choreographic documentation of *Sarimanok* using a multi-modal dance analysis framework. The work is organized into seven scenes and examined in terms of choreographic structure, movement vocabulary, formation, pathways, levels, music, instrumentation, costumes, and props. Each table is followed by a discussion grounded in dance composition and performance analysis literature.

Table 1. Scene 1: *Sarimanok* Crowned in Protection by Her Maids

Component	Documentation
Choreographic Structure	Sarimanok positioned at center; maids form protective surrounding formation
Movement Vocabulary	Chassé, arabesque, pas de chat, relevé, bourrée, soutenu, jump turns
Formation	Circular and staggered ensemble arrangement
Pathways	Circular and lateral pathways
Levels	High (Sarimanok), low (maids)
Music	Free meter, festive rhythm
Instrumentation	Kulintang, marimba, bamboo tubes, chimes
Costumes & Props	Silk costumes, Maranao okir motifs, fans, headpiece

Table 1 presents the opening scene as a structured introduction that immediately establishes the *Sarimanok* as the focal point of the choreography. Her centralized placement defines the spatial hierarchy, while the surrounding maids form a circular arrangement that frames and supports the visual composition. Minton (2017) note that centralized and circular formations are commonly used to create clarity of focus and organize ensemble relationships within stage space, which is evident in this scene.

Furthermore, the movement vocabulary, chassé, arabesque, pas de chat, relevé, bourrée, soutenu, and jump turns, constructs a technically grounded opening sequence rooted in classical dance principles. These movements provide alignment, control, and continuity in execution. Skubisz (2025) explain that classical ballet vocabulary contributes to structural clarity and consistency in choreographic development, particularly in establishing foundational movement identity.

In addition, the use of circular and lateral pathways supports continuous spatial flow while maintaining the centrality of the *Sarimanok*. The contrast between high and low levels further strengthens spatial readability, as the elevated position of the *Sarimanok* distinguishes her from the surrounding ensemble. This layered spatial arrangement allows the scene to maintain both visual balance and clear hierarchical structure.

Moreover, the integration of silk costumes with Maranao okir motifs, alongside the use of kulintang, marimba, bamboo tubes, and chimes, contributes to a cohesive aesthetic environment. These elements support the choreographic design by reinforcing visual rhythm and cultural texture without disrupting spatial organization.

Overall, Table 1 demonstrates how formation, movement vocabulary, spatial pathways, and production elements work together to construct a coherent opening structure. The scene effectively establishes clarity in staging, ensemble coordination, and central focus, which anchors the progression of the choreography (Tkachenko, 2025).

Table 2. Scene 2: The Prince and Warriors Begin the Relentless Hunt

Component	Choreographic Description
Choreographic Structure	Forward-moving V-formation led by Prince
Movement Vocabulary	Grand battement, chassé, grand jeté, chaînés, tour en l’air
Formation	V-formation hierarchy
Pathways	Diagonal and forward travel
Levels	Mixed levels with elevated Prince
Music	Fast 5/4 rhythm (Singkil pattern)
Instrumentation	Kulintang, marimba, bamboo percussion
Costumes & Props	Structured royal costumes, headdress, belt

Table 2 presents a choreographic structure that clearly establishes forward momentum through a V-formation led by the Prince. This spatial configuration places the Prince at the forefront, guiding the direction of movement while reinforcing a visible hierarchy within the ensemble. Shaffer (2023) highlight that V-formations are frequently used in choreography to communicate leadership and organize group spatial relationships, which is strongly evident in this scene.

Moreover, the movement vocabulary, grand battement, chassé, grand jeté, chaînés, and tour en l’air creates a continuous sense of propulsion across space. These expansive locomotor actions allow the dancers to travel with clarity and energy, supporting the narrative of pursuit and structured movement progression. Xu et al. (2026) explain that such expansive movement qualities enhance spatial direction and dynamic flow, which aligns with the forward-driving character of this sequence.

In addition, the use of diagonal and forward pathways reinforces the sense of urgency and controlled advancement. This is further supported by mixed-level execution, where the Prince maintains a higher physical presence, visually strengthening his leadership role. The rhythmic structure, based on a fast 5/4 meter inspired by the Singkil pattern, introduces complexity that requires precision and collective awareness. Sawicki (2025) notes that asymmetric rhythms challenge performers to maintain coordination within irregular timing structures, which is reflected in the ensemble’s synchronized execution.

Taken together, the interaction of formation, movement vocabulary, spatial design, and rhythm demonstrates a cohesive choreographic system. The scene constructs a clear directional flow and structured hierarchy, where movement and rhythm work together to sustain clarity, discipline, and organized group progression.

Table 3. Scene 3: Sarimanok in Graceful Flight with Her Devoted Maids

Component	Documentation
Choreographic Structure	Expansive flowing ensemble movement
Movement Vocabulary	Piqué turns, attitude turns, sautés, fan flicks

Formation	Diagonal and circular transitions
Pathways	Curved and flowing
Levels	Mid-level with light elevation
Music	Fast majestic rhythm
Instrumentation	Kulintang, marimba, percussion
Costumes & Props	Flowing silk costumes, fans

Table 3 presents an expanded and fluid choreographic design characterized by continuous ensemble movement that emphasizes grace and spatial continuity. The Sarimanok and her maids are arranged in dynamic formations that shift between diagonal and circular patterns, allowing the group to transition smoothly across space while maintaining visual coherence. According to Yao (2024) circular pathways are frequently used in choreography to establish continuity and sustained visual flow, which is clearly evident in this scene’s spatial organization.

In addition, the movement vocabulary, including piqué turns, attitude turns, sautés, and fan flicks, supports a light and continuous movement quality that enhances the sense of elevation and fluidity. These technical elements contribute to a consistent flow of motion that reinforces the ensemble’s coordinated presence on stage. The integration of fan work further extends the dancers’ spatial reach, creating broader visual lines and enhancing overall movement articulation.

Moreover, the curved and flowing pathways strengthen the impression of seamless transitions across the stage, while mid-level positioning with moments of light elevation maintains balance between groundedness and lift. The fast majestic rhythm, supported by kulintang, marimba, and percussion instrumentation, provides a structured yet flexible temporal framework that aligns with the movement dynamics.

Importantly, the observed movements in Sarimanok in Graceful Flight with Her Devoted Maids clearly reflect the intended choreographic direction of the scene, as the continuous flow, coordinated group transitions, and expansive use of space directly align with the documented narrative of graceful flight and ensemble unity. The consistency between movement execution and spatial design demonstrates how the choreography is effectively structured to support the scene’s documented movement quality.

Furthermore Garland (2023) explain that flow qualities in Laban movement principles emphasize continuity and sustained energy, which is strongly reflected in the uninterrupted movement sequences and smooth spatial transitions observed in this scene.

Table 4. Scene 4: Prince and Warriors Close in as Sarimanok Seeks Shelter

Component	Documentation
Choreographic Structure	Opposing directional staging
Movement Vocabulary	Lunges, bourrée, pirouettes, diagonal escapes
Formation	Split-stage opposition
Pathways	Forward vs backward linear travel
Levels	Contrasting grounded and lifted movement
Music	Moderate expressive tempo
Instrumentation	Kulintang, marimba, woodwind
Costumes & Props	Consistent across scenes

The documentation in Table 4 presents a clear use of spatial opposition through a split-stage choreographic design, where the Prince and his warriors advance while the Sarimanok and her maids retreat. This arrangement creates two clearly opposing movement fields that operate simultaneously within the same performance space. Bardes et al. (2025) note that split-stage structures are effective in highlighting contrasting actions and strengthening visual clarity in choreography.

Moreover, the movement vocabulary such as lunges, bourrée, pirouettes, and diagonal escape actions establishes the physical intensity of pursuit and evasion. These movements are reinforced by forward and backward linear pathways that sustain direct spatial opposition

throughout the scene. As Roth (2021) explain, opposing directional movement enhances narrative readability by making contrasting intentions visible through spatial design.

In addition, the contrasting levels between the grounded, forceful actions of the Prince’s group and the lighter, evasive responses of the Sarimanok further intensify the sense of conflict. Rather than existing as isolated technical features, these level differences interact with directional movement to produce a layered spatial tension that continuously shapes the scene’s dramatic progression. Likewise, the moderate expressive tempo, supported by kulintang, marimba, and woodwind instrumentation, provides a controlled rhythmic structure that allows both opposing movement streams to remain clearly distinguishable.

Overall, Table 4 demonstrates that the documented spatial organization does not merely serve as staging but actively constructs the perception of conflict. Through the integration of opposing pathways, levels, and formations, each group’s movement continuously defines and heightens the presence of the other, positioning spatial opposition as the central organizing principle of the choreography.

Table 5. Scene 5: Clash of Strength — Sarimanok, Prince, and Warriors in Battle

Component	Documentation
Choreographic Structure	Full-stage combat choreography
Movement Vocabulary	Bamboo strikes, stomping, chaîné turns, chassé-strike
Formation	Symmetrical confrontation
Pathways	Sharp linear cross-stage movement
Levels	Alternating combat positions
Music	Fast warlike tempo
Instrumentation	Bamboo percussion, modern percussion
Costumes & Props	Bamboo sticks

The documentation in Table 5 presents a full-stage combat choreography where movement, space, and props converge to construct a heightened sense of conflict between the Sarimanok, the Prince, and the warriors. Bamboo sticks function as extensions of the dancers’ bodies, shaping both rhythmic articulation and physical intensity within the performance.

The movement vocabulary, bamboo strikes, stomping, chaîné turns, and chassé-strike sequences creates a sharp and forceful kinetic language that reflects the demands of direct confrontation. These actions are further intensified through rapid transitions and alternating combat positions, which sustain a continuous state of tension and readiness throughout the scene. Roslan & Tedjosaputro (2023) explains that the integration of props expands movement vocabulary and increases kinetic complexity, which is evident in the way bamboo transforms the dynamics of interaction in this section.

Moreover, the use of sharp linear cross-stage pathways and symmetrical confrontation reinforces the visual clarity of opposing forces. Balint & Pangaro (2017) notes that linear spatial design strengthens the perception of tension by directing focus toward collision points within the stage space. In this scene, such spatial organization supports the intensity of the battle while maintaining a clear structure of opposition between groups.

Overall, Table 5 demonstrates that the choreographic structure relies heavily on prop-driven movement and spatial directness to heighten dramatic impact. The interaction between bamboo work, linear pathways, and symmetrical staging constructs a tightly controlled environment of conflict where physicality becomes the primary medium of narrative expression.

Table 6. Scene 6: Authority of the Prince Through Pas de Deux

Component	Documentation
Choreographic Structure	Centralized pas de deux with framing ensemble
Movement Vocabulary	Adagio, pirouettes, mirrored transitions
Formation	Central duet with framing group
Pathways	Contained and centralized
Levels	Elevated Prince
Music	Slow controlled tempo
Instrumentation	Minimal percussion, expressive orchestration
Costumes & Props	No props

Table 6 presents a centralized pas de deux structure that emphasizes hierarchy, restraint, and controlled interaction within the choreography. The duet format positions the Prince at the center of the stage while the surrounding ensemble frames and reinforces his visual dominance. According to Pakes (2020), pas de deux structures are commonly used in choreography to communicate relational authority and formalized interaction between performers. In this scene, the centralized arrangement directs audience focus toward the Prince and establishes a clear organizational hierarchy within the ensemble.

The movement vocabulary, composed of adagio phrases, pirouettes, and mirrored transitions, contributes to a restrained and deliberate movement quality compared to the earlier battle sequences. Adagio movements emphasize balance, control, and precision, while mirrored transitions create synchronization between the Prince and the supporting warrior. Liu (2021) explain that ballet-based movements often reinforce technical discipline and compositional clarity within performance. Furthermore, the contained and centralized pathways limit excessive stage travel, concentrating attention on the duet and reinforcing controlled authority. Tsuchida (2024) note that contained spatial pathways strengthen compositional focus and precision in choreography.

However, it can also be argued that the reduced spatial expansion and slower tempo lessen the kinetic intensity established in previous scenes. Instead of relying on spectacle or aggressive movement, the choreography shifts toward measured execution and formal structure. This restraint may reduce visual dynamism, yet it effectively highlights hierarchy, discipline, and strategic control. The slow tempo, minimal percussion, and absence of props further emphasize bodily alignment and partnered coordination, allowing the duet itself to function as the central choreographic statement of authority within the scene.

Table 7. Scene 7: Sarimanok and Prince Rise Above in Final Confrontation

Component	Documentation
Choreographic Structure	Elevated symmetrical tableau
Movement Vocabulary	Sustained poses, arabesque, static extensions
Formation	Dual elevation on bamboo platforms
Pathways	Minimal movement (stillness)
Levels	Highest elevation
Music	Climactic resolution
Instrumentation	Full ensemble
Costumes & Props	Bamboo platforms

The documentation in Table 6 presents a centralized pas de deux structure where the Prince is positioned at the core of the performance space, supported and framed by the surrounding ensemble. This arrangement establishes a clear focal hierarchy, with movement directed toward the central duet to reinforce authority and control.

The movement vocabulary , adagio, pirouettes, and mirrored transitions emphasizes precision and restraint rather than expansive motion. These controlled qualities shape the

interaction between the Prince and the supporting warrior, where synchronized and reflective actions strengthen the perception of structured leadership. Tol (2025) note that *pas de deux* structures often communicate relational hierarchy, particularly when supported by framing ensembles, which is evident in this scene's choreographic organization.

Additionally, the contained and centralized pathways further restrict spatial dispersion, directing attention toward the duet and reinforcing its significance within the overall structure. The elevated presence of the Prince enhances this hierarchy, positioning him visually above the surrounding group. Mirrored movement patterns also contribute to a sense of coordination and discipline, sustaining a controlled dynamic that aligns with the scene's thematic focus on authority.

Meanwhile, Table 7 shifts the choreographic focus toward elevation and stillness as concluding devices. Both the Sarimanok and the Prince are positioned on bamboo platforms, creating a symmetrical and elevated tableau that defines the final visual structure of the performance. Sun (2025) emphasize that elevation in dance often signals climax and resolution, while stillness functions as a compositional closure that allows meaning to settle. Together, the mirrored elevation and controlled stillness establish a balanced final image. The symmetrical arrangement reinforces visual equilibrium, while the absence of movement heightens the impact of the concluding moment.

Synthesis of the Findings

The findings reveal that the Sarimanok choreography is built through a progressive and highly structured integration of movement, space, rhythm, and production elements. Across the seven scenes, the performance consistently shifts from centralized and protective formations toward increasingly complex configurations involving pursuit, conflict, and eventual elevation. Early scenes emphasize circular and symmetrical arrangements that establish hierarchy and unity, while later scenes transition into diagonal, linear, and opposing spatial designs that intensify tension and narrative confrontation.

Movement vocabulary evolves in parallel with this spatial development. Ballet-based techniques establish structural clarity and refinement in the opening scenes, while contemporary movements introduce emotional fluidity and grounded expression. Ethnic-inspired gestures reinforce cultural identity, and acrobatic techniques heighten physical intensity and spectacle in climactic sections. These movement systems operate together as a hybrid choreographic language rather than isolated styles.

In addition, props such as fans and bamboo, along with consistent costume design and rhythmic musical structures, reinforce character identity and support the progression of scenes. Overall, the choreography demonstrates an interconnected system where all elements function cohesively to construct narrative development, spatial meaning, and expressive continuity.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Sarimanok choreography is a systematically constructed performance that integrates multiple choreographic elements into a unified expressive framework. Its structure demonstrates a clear progression from protection and order to conflict and climax, and finally to resolution through elevation and stillness.

Moreover, the choreography effectively employs a hybrid movement system combining ballet, contemporary, ethnic-inspired, and acrobatic techniques, which collectively shape both its technical precision and expressive depth. This integration allows the performance to communicate narrative, emotion, and cultural identity in a layered and coherent manner.

Ultimately, the Sarimanok dance functions not only as a theatrical performance but also as a structured choreographic text where movement, space, and design elements work

interdependently to produce meaning, highlighting the richness of Filipino-inspired contemporary choreography.

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