

Can the Subaltern Sing, and in a Power Ballad?

Arnel Pineda and Ramona Diaz's

Don't Stop Believin': Everyman's Journey

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Abstract

Ramona Diaz's latest documentary, *Don't Stop Believin'* (2012), chronicles the discovery of Arnel Pineda by legendary American rock band Journey and his "evolution as a star." While his story can be read as a Cinderella tale of transnational stardom, I argue that much more is going on in this story and in the specific way it is being told. Through documentary, not only do the subalterns speak English, but he can sing and she can make movies. These voices and their respective media tell us about subalternity and global media today. Specifically, the documentary form is used to cross distances of geography and structural location. It confronts new global realities and shows audiences the different and unequal ways in which we relate to each other. In other words, the documentary film by and about Filipina/os in the diaspora explores what bonds are possible in today's new social encounters as they are enabled by new media. In attending to the manifold voice that emerges from the film, I focus on the possibilities not only of empathy for the subaltern condition that Arnel Pineda's performances enable, but of the de-centering of the West by Ramona Diaz the filmmaker. By evaluating how and of what they speak, I reflect on what today's transnational Asian Pacific/American documentary cinema is capable of doing: not only presenting new subjectivities and songs, but also setting the stage for new empathetic relations across difference.

Keywords

Arnel Pineda, Journey, Ramona Diaz, transnationalism, subalternity,
popular music, Asian documentary practices

Global mass media presents the story of Arnel Pineda as a rags-to-riches fantasy. The talk show host Ellen DeGeneres can't pronounce his name, but says it's cool that Arnel Pineda, discovered on YouTube, joins the legendary American rock band Journey as its new lead singer. *People Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *CNN*, *CBS*, *60 Minutes*, and *Oprah* all feature his fairy-tale story. The phenomenon of Arnel Pineda as the now-international band's frontman is possible only within the context of increased global access to online media such as YouTube and the rising prominence of filmmakers like Ramona Diaz. In her film, *Don't Stop Believin': Everyman's Journey* (2012), we learn that despite the conditions of the digital divide, including not owning a computer, a die-hard fan named Noel Gomez believed so strongly in Arnel's talent that he painstakingly spent hours in an Internet café to upload mere minutes of Arnel's live performances, mainly of 1970s and 1980s cover songs by Survivor, the Police, and Journey. On the other side of the world, guitar-god Neal Schon searched YouTube and Google, believing that the live performances on these sites will help him find his band Journey a new singer. When keyboardist Jonathan Cain heard Arnel Pineda, he affirmed that he sure could sing. In the documentary, Cain confesses his concern: Could he speak English? Could he endure the "circus" of life in their band? "He's from the other side of the world!" When Arnel Pineda was interviewed for an American visa so he could go audition with the real band, the immigration officer asked him to prove himself and sing Journey's famous song, "Wheel in the Sky." The officer wrote about the experience in an email, which then circulated in the Filipino diaspora.¹ Philippines-born-and-raised, U.S.-based filmmaker Ramona Diaz realized she had to follow Arnel and attempt to represent this new Internet-powered social encounter, and to see what happens.

Ramona Diaz's latest documentary, *Don't Stop Believin'* chronicles the discovery of Arnel Pineda by legendary American rock band Journey. Formerly a homeless teen in the Philippines and a Hong Kong-based migrant entertainer, Pineda joined Journey just as he was on the verge of giving up his musical career. The film covers his three-day audition for the band; his debut on stage in front of 18,000 live audience members (and 25 million television viewers) in Chile, South America; and the way he relates with his band mates, crew, and fans in what his

¹ Filmmaker Ramona Diaz describes this story onstage with Journey at the Q&A of the San Francisco International Film Festival Closing Night Screening of the film in May 2012. See the consul's account on <http://wrkshy.multiply.com/journal/item/34/Arnel_Pineda_-_A_US_Consuls_Story>.

bandmate calls “the evolution of a star.”² The film closes with his return to the Philippines, where he is welcomed home by the country’s president and where the band joins him in Manila for a special concert in front of thousands of people, including his own family. The band once again becomes a new international phenomenon, selling out international concert tours like never before, and their new album *Revelation* (2008) goes platinum. This incredible series of events transforms not only Arnel Pineda’s life, but the lives of his bandmates, and, through a foundation Pineda was able to start, the lives of homeless youth in Manila. While all of this can be read as a Cinderella story of transnational stardom as global media tells it, I argue that much more is going on in this story and in the specific way it is being told. Through documentary, not only do the subalterns speak English, but he can sing and she can make movies. These voices and their respective media tell us about subalternity and global media today. Specifically, the documentary form is used to cross distances of geography and structural location. It confronts new global realities and shows audiences the different and unequal ways in which we relate to each other. In other words, the documentary film by and about Filipina/os in the diaspora explores what bonds are possible in today’s new social encounters as they are enabled by new media.

In her classic essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines the subaltern as the radically unrepresentable other. Here, the encounter between the subaltern and those with access to representation is a contested one: the famous American band and the disenfranchised Filipino singer bond as musicians, but are confronted with fans who accuse Pineda of mimicry and poverty of originality. I will show how this accusation of mimicry directly relates to his subalternity and provides very fertile ground for the documentary’s attempt to complicate and update how we understand the subaltern’s ability to speak today. Even Arnel Pineda himself struggles with the demand for the legacy sound of former lead singer Steve Perry, in terms of what his own voice must learn to do in order to fulfill it. He asks, in the face of this requirement: What will happen to my real self? As he confronts thousands of fans every time he gets on stage, and as he discloses his anxieties and concerns while relating to his band and his family, the documentary charts what I call his manifold voice.

Not only does this manifold voice ultimately defy accusations of mimicry, but in both its subjective and diasporic expressivity it recasts the band’s music,

² See “Arnel Pineda & Journey Post-Screening Interview—SFIFF” on the YouTube site F4BBEST: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_G_SKq0VPk>.

especially its signature power ballad. The delivery of this genre requires intimate labor, in the bringing forth of his body, and calls up its history with a defiant will that asserts his unique, particular presence as yet another Filipino laboring in the international scene. This time, in serving up the precious gift of his voice. In the process, Pineda challenges accusations of mimicry as well as simplistic notions about the “universality” of music. In attending to the manifold voice that emerges from the film, I focus on the possibilities not only of empathy for the subaltern condition that Arnel Pineda’s performances enable, but also of the de-centering of the West by Ramona Diaz the filmmaker, who asks us to center the other. By evaluating how and of what they speak, I reflect on what today’s transnational Asian Pacific/American documentary cinema is capable of doing: not only presenting new subjectivities and songs, but also setting the stage for new empathetic relations across difference.

Mimicry of Talent? Poverty of Originality? Arnel Pineda and the Legacy of Steve Perry

In their latest platinum selling album *Revelation*, Journey broadcast to the world Arnel Pineda’s unusual talent for singing the “legacy sound,” the vocally-driven songs that feature the tenor voice of former lead singer Steve Perry. The fans’ attachment to Perry’s legacy sound tainted Arnel’s emergence, in the form of racially-tinged accusations of mimicry and a lack of originality. For example, the filmmaker interviews fans, who have never before seen the new singer, in the parking lot of one of Journey’s shows in the U.S. They express their doubt. Noting that the new singer is not Steve Perry, one white man says he’s “all right.” “He’s supposed to be pretty good and supposed to sound and look just like him.” In other words, it’s all right that he’s a mimic; an unoriginal copy will suffice. One fan relies on the greatness of the music: “It’d be nice if it was the original band, but it’s still music, and it’s still just as good.” So, as long as the music sounds the same, in the sense that there is no difference, and Arnel remains invisible and perhaps even nonhuman in robotic sameness, it’s okay. Another demonstrates trust in the band’s decision: “If they picked him, he should be somewhat good.” As if the person chosen does not also dare to choose to join the band for particular reasons that can transform them together. A group of young adults discusses Pineda as a foreigner and eventually comes to a cosmopolitan understanding of Pineda as the lead singer of their beloved band. One interviewee says, “He should be from here.” Her friend counters, “Are you racist?” She responds, “Not at all, but it would be better if he

was [from here].” Another friend interjects, “I like that he’s not. It gives them more variety. Brings in more people.” While all of the fans interviewed are white, this conversation shows differing awareness of racial politics of representation or identity, and this acknowledgment of difference emerges as an expanding of their community into one that is indeed more cosmopolitan.

These responses to Arnel Pineda include accusations of mimicry and poverty of originality as well as a resistance to his contributions beyond the legacy sound. Such a contentious encounter requires us to revisit theorizations of colonial mimicry so as to better understand how the subaltern can emerge in today’s global media. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha describes how colonized subjects appropriate the ways of the colonizer in a way that fails, for they will never measure up to criteria designed to suppress and exclude them. Racial visibility performs a role in this dilemma. Bhabha cites Freud who describes the mixed-race person who may be close to passing—but if one revelation of racial difference emerges, the deprivation of access and privilege certainly dawns. Bhabha famously terms this curse “almost the same, but not quite” (85) or “not quite/not white” (131) when referring to the colonized who attempt to look, act, and be like those with power. The results of such acts are revealing of the ambivalent and fractured quality of the life of those who live under colonial rule. In the colonizer’s mission to “civilize” the colonial state, “another knowledge of its norms” is produced (86). Here, when colonial subjects engage their interpellation as primitive, we see their resistances, and this is exactly how Ramona Diaz shows us Arnel Pineda’s response to his critics.

In the film, Pineda reports that “there are people out there who want me to fail. . . . They call me monkey, garbage, impersonator, karaoke boy. If I take it seriously, I will get hurt. They are just die-hard fans who got used to Steve Perry’s voice. I am also a very big fan of Perry. From where they are coming from, I understand.” As he speaks, the viewer sees a computer screen scrolling the following text: “Only Pilipinos will support this crappy singers [sic]. Pinoy monkeys! Garbage impersonator!” Here Ramona Diaz inserts the racial disparagement that confronts Arnel Pineda, who clearly chooses not to engage in it. Pineda’s response indicates his understanding of the fandom surrounding Journey: he has more than once remarked admiringly that Steve Perry has “one of the most beautiful voices” he has ever heard. And for self-preservation, Pineda “will stick with those people who believe in [him].” So unlike Arnel Pineda, who will not confront his fans for racializing him, the filmmaker chooses to make us aware of this encounter and to acknowledge it for him. The documentary film Ramona Diaz

makes is part of the Third World-U.S. woman of color's filmmaking and its empathetic strategy. She shows us how, from a background of poverty, homelessness, and dwindling opportunities, Pineda "converts the haters." She centers his experiences of dire poverty such as losing his home as a thirteen-year-old and trying to "understand this all at a young age." She does so in order to show how not only the fans expand their idea of themselves as part of a global community, but the band and the music are transformed by Arnel Pineda's presence as well.

The band understands the significance of incorporating Pineda, a Filipino. Bassist Ross Valory claims, "With the advent of Arnel Pineda, it changed the band's image. . . . Having engaged someone on the other side of the world, it changed our reputation to be more international, beyond an all-American rock band." Indeed, Pineda brings new attention to the band when drummer Deen Castronovo says it was Arnel who led them to sell a platinum record for the first time in decades. What may be new too are audiences who belong to the Filipina/o diaspora. Guitarist Neal Schon notices that Filipinos now comprise about twenty percent of all Journey concerts. The film richly details the band's relations by tuning in to Arnel Pineda's voice—as a singer, a bandmate, and a Filipino. The band considers his background and his experiences as precious. "Arnel brings authentic, soulful personality. We have respect for what he's gone through. I think it comes out in his passion from what he sings. It's something to get behind." This observation is important because it relates directly to the anxieties about mimicry that even Pineda professes to have. Yet his bandmates see and hear the authorship, its originality and authenticity, every night when he performs. Here, we can see that the band does not see him as a mimic.

One of the final scenes Ramona Diaz uses certainly drives this point home. In a hotel room in Manila, Neal Schon and Jonathan Cain write lyrics about Arnel Pineda. They want him to add these new lyrics to their classic song "Don't Stop Believin'" so as to celebrate how his presence transforms the songs to include those like him: the homeless and hungry, and those others who sacrifice and are too often disregarded. The songs, through Arnel Pineda and these new lyrics, become about the visibility of the margins, including the Filipino condition: the people's absence in the images and sounds of transnational popular culture. Here we see the music itself transform to represent the specificity of a people and a nation, embodied in Arnel Pineda as both a representative and exception. So we can see that if there is mimicry at work, it is not just a one-way mimicry of the colonized mimicking the colonizer. It is not just a one-way assimilation of the minor into the major. But the

major subsumes the lessons from the other in order to transform oneself, to be more conscious, and to see beyond oneself the conditions of others. The filmmaker emphasizes this as the ground for better understanding how Arnel Pineda helps to illustrate the condition of the subaltern subject today as he struggles to be heard.

According to Bhabha, “The question of the representation of difference is . . . always . . . a problem of authority” (89) where the desire for colonial mimicry is an “interdictory desire” (89). This formulation helps me to show how Ramona Diaz’s filmmaking is the claiming of authority in the narration of Arnel Pineda’s life. She focuses on the crossroads Arnel Pineda occupies. He has a powerful voice that is met with accusations of colonial mimicry. Indeed, using Bhabha’s words, he is a “subject of racial, cultural, national representation” (90). However, instead of letting the racialized epithets tell his story, she intervenes by inserting his story and reality and thus challenging mimicry as too simple a hailing for what Arnel Pineda brings to the band and the audiences.

Despite the band’s support and their stated respect for him, which are reinforced in the truly collaborative performances Diaz includes in the documentary, I ask if Pineda is still just a cover band singer. Is he like the black man, who Bhabha describes as one who “stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem” (88)? “Mimicry conceals no presence or identity beyond its mask” (88). And if so, isn’t it a particularly masochistic torture? The film documents how the band was direct about their need to retain the “legacy sound”: “[O]ur catalog is etched in stone as classic rock. The [audiences] are used to hearing it one way and they want to hear it that way.” As Neal Schon says, “Steve Perry left some big shoes.”

In the beginning of the film, we are told that this demand for mimicry makes Arnel “uncomfortable.” He has the opportunity to come into voice, over the largest loud speakers, but is it his voice? Indeed, not only does Arnel Pineda recognize that the voice the band ultimately hires must sing their legacy sound, or the tenor voice of Steve Perry that their fans expect, but he also realizes that he must bring the passion and pathos that the band’s characteristic power ballads require. As the film unfolds, he is able to do this—and much more. The voice is a privileged venue, and the form of song allows for the subaltern not only to speak but to be heard and seen, to generate empathy for the subjectivities within the Filipino diasporic condition. And it is the filmmaker who uses the documentary form to bring us the other who is unlike us, just as what Robert J. Flaherty does in *Nanook of the North* (1922). But unlike the distance between Flaherty and his subject, the filmmaker Diaz relates more closely to the subject Pineda. David Palumbo-Liu, in his new book *The*

Deliverance of Others, identifies literature's ethical role of bringing to light the existence of others different from the self. He finds the distance by which we view the other to be an important factor in our ability as "observer[s] to act" (18). Like Asian American documentary filmmakers before her, Diaz utilizes film and video to dramatize, document, and advocate lives determined by inequality. In the past five decades, Asian and Asian American documentaries perform political and aesthetic work—a social movement of films that critics like Russell Leong describe as "imagery for action" in the Introduction to his edited book, *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts*. It aims not only to make contributions to historical and cultural knowledge but also to move audiences to transform, change, and save lives. Asian American documentaries present compelling new voices and visions of the U.S. using lenses that prioritize the importance of race in social experience. But Filipino subjects, according to Rolando Tolentino, are a challenging subject for documentaries, for their archives are limited and their voices are marginalized by "the prominence of certain groups . . . in the category" (112). For Diaz to bring Arnel Pineda to new light and to prioritize racial critique in documentary offers a better way of understanding the phenomenon of his rise. It is through her filmmaking that we come to find what I call his manifold voice.

The Manifold Voice: Bodily, Subjective, and Diasporic

Indeed, Ramona Diaz's film demands recognition for Arnel Pineda as a singer by bringing to the fore his manifold voice, which comprises the bodily, the subjective, and the diasporic. The singing body has power in its ability to mobilize the emotional and physical response of a crowd. The documentary shows this to us and goes beyond by emphasizing the body's particular history. This is the subjective voice that Ramona Diaz reveals to us as Arnel Pineda reflects on and analyzes his position and his various encounters as a Filipino singer. Pineda emerges as a voice of his people, in the sense that he speaks of a Filipino diaspora in the way Journey's woeful songs of exile and displacement are rendered anew. This becomes his particular diasporic voice, which reaches the visibly increasing numbers of Filipino fans in the audience who interpret in his performance their own pathos, passion, and pain. By revealing this manifold voice, which the new adoring fans clearly affirm, the film protests the claims of mimicry and lack of originality that haunt Filipina/os and Filipina/o Americans beyond Pineda.

Ramona Diaz establishes Arnel Pineda's subjective voice by bringing his personal history to the fore. She opens the film with Arnel Pineda visiting his elementary school after twenty-nine years. He is very respectful, in Filipino cultural terms, when he acknowledges the older woman, presumably the principal, with the deferential "po." When asked if he sings well, he answers without sarcasm, "Hindi masyado, po, konti lang" or "Not really, *po*, just a little." Though she does not recognize the name of his band, the principal nonetheless requests a picture and asks him to repeat his name. Already the filmmaker establishes her subject as a man of humility, who is frequently described in popular media as "unassuming," and "slim," in reference to his diminutive stature. Yet at the same time that she shows us his ordinariness, he also enjoys exceptional status.

Filmmaker Diaz uses the introduction montage to make this incredible movement in one lifetime tangible. The move from a childhood of poverty to transnational stardom and success may not be preposterous after all. Diaz seizes a close-up of his derriere as he walks up the narrow passages of his old childhood home. He wears designer jeans, with a chain hanging off the back. He looks around with a kind of melancholy. The camera cuts to the golden Manila night sky from a plane, to gargantuan billboards of his band towering over the city streets. Then, we are on the shadowy and dirty streets of crowded Manila slums, as the brown ashy knees of young boys walk together in flip-flops, passing the shirtless bums negotiating bottles in the dark narrow alleys. This scene is intercut with footage of the original Journey band with big hair and denim suits, bowing to adoring fans in large arenas in the early 1980s. This is exactly the time when Arnel Pineda's mother died and he became homeless in Manila. In these opening scenes, the film very deliberately juxtaposes the different statures of the subjects. Journey commands stadiums of adoring audiences while Pineda is a subaltern subject. For him to come into voice on stage with them is a time and space collapse of epic proportions. He sings a well-known power ballad called "Separate Ways" whose lyrics unfold to emphasize this coming together of disparate subjects: "Someday love will find you / break those chains that bind you / one night will remind you / how we touched and went our / separate ways." And we see him signing autographs for all the young kids at his old school, already his background informing the song anew. The words and music, or what Roland Barthes calls the "diction" of the song (183), gain new meaning with the intercutting of this seemingly disparate view of life in the Philippines with Arnel Pineda taking the stage to voice this song with new layers, and give a different meaning to the band's affective sounds.

This is how the film highlights Arnel Pineda's subjective voice. Not only does Diaz present him singing within the context of his own downtrodden experiences and his inspired rise from these circumstances, but she also demonstrates his ability to analyze his circumstances so that his perspective and understanding emerge in the film. Because of her focus on his interpretation of events, he is centered by the film. And in doing so, we as the audience are made to have a better understanding of voice—in terms of the difference between speech and song, especially as it exceeds mimicry and the limits of that frame.

In "The Grain of the Voice," Barthes asks us to write about music with a better understanding of its relationship to other forms of expression, such as language and its writing. I extend his call to documentary, which I argue aims to express the conditions by which subjects live in the world. Barthes asks how language can do justice to another "semiotic system" such as music or documentary when the facile default is its adjectival descriptions (179). Intimacy in music, according to Barthes, is established by diction (the very structure of the sounds) and the body that expresses it, through a performance that makes us confront the body that generates that song. To attend specifically to the vocal is to isolate the "very precise space [genre] of *the encounter between a language and a voice*" (181; emphasis in original). Using Julia Kristeva's conception of pheno-song (or the physical expression) and the geno-song (the diction of music), Barthes says it is the "body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" that must make up our expression of music and our relation to it so we can strive to a "new scheme of evaluation" (188). Barthes is helpful in my understanding of Pineda, for he uses his body unlike any other Journey singer in the past. And this bodily voice comes into fruition when it expresses the subjective and diasporic voice.

Today, years after his discovery in 2007, Pineda continues to perform in this intensively bodily way that makes the songs entirely personal. He produces them with his body in the here and now. And that contemporary moment is composed of his movement from obscurity and poverty to wealth and fame. In this new position, the ever self-effacing Arnel Pineda says, "Why me? I'm not even cute. I'm short. And I'm so Asian. . . . It does not seem real. It seems impossible." He says that the posters of him with the band look like he has been edited in: "Like someone used Adobe Photoshop to say, 'Hey, look, I'm with Journey.'" He describes it as a shocking feeling that words cannot capture—such as in the movement from marginality to centrality. The band demonstrates great faith in him and reassures him that the fans will love him. We soon find out.

It is an astounding event to absorb that he can stand in front of thousands, command their attention, and orchestrate their experience, similar to the position of the DJ in the South Asian diasporic youth cultures described in the work of Sunaina Marr Maira in *Desis in the House*. As a singer Arnel Pineda is entirely expressive of the music, and it is this power that shapes the crowd's response. From the videos on YouTube, we see Arnel Pineda at the Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View, California in October 2011, moving across the stage, reaching down to the crowds, or belting out the song with both arms up in "Any Way You Want It." He steps backwards on his toes while knees are bent. He leads the audience who sing loudly and orchestrate their own singing by using his arms to invite them to emote towards the stage. And while running, bending, and leaning back, he unleashes his own voice singing with such strength. All the while, the crowds attend to him fully—standing, dancing, and deploying their own singing. With each song, a relentless and energetic exchange between the crowd and the band transpires, and this results directly from the frontman's bodily voice: small, brown, and Filipino, and moving them all, powerfully and intimately. In their December 2012 concert in Las Vegas, Arnel Pineda certainly asserts his connection with Filipinos in the crowd, speaking in Tagalog throughout the show, calling the "Pinoys!" several times.

The film shows us the strength of Arnel Pineda's bodily and subjective voice coming together, apparent in the powerful delivery of the band's signature power ballads like "Open Arms," "Separate Ways," "Don't Stop Believin'," "Lights," and new songs like "City of Hope." This voice makes thousands of people swoon. In watching Journey concerts in the film, or in any of those available on YouTube, the crowds sing along to these specific songs ferociously. And they bow to Arnel Pineda's amazing range and powerful delivery. It is a palpable feeling, even online, when men and women tear up at the sight of him, standing in the audience to expose themselves to the power of his voice. They give themselves up to his song. And as Neal Schon says, you can see the Filipinos in the crowds. An individual Filipino man in Shoreline stands alone, his entire body intensely riveted and spotlit. Not only does he move the crowd, but the filmmaker highlights the presence of Filipinos in the crowd. A community is built through the shared experience of music and its pleasures, but here too we see identification with the singer at work. A community for Filipinos through his representation is made. It is visible to Schon from the stage and to us as the audience.

The encounter with the fans is a form of community building emanating from the band. The white family of the band opens up to include the brown singer. And the fans must wrestle with this insertion of difference. Palumbo-Liu asks, "what

happens when strangers, particularly strangers of different races, enter and insinuate themselves into these domestic spaces [of family], both forming a common bond and yet destabilizing as well those alliances built into family structures” (22). The fans are a large throbbing and demanding family for the band, they who travel to each other. They have faces Pineda can see and whose thunderous noise he finds overwhelming. In Chile, as he is about to go on stage in front of 18,000 people, he asks Neal Schon if he can just go home:

That night, I heard 18,000 people and their thunderous applause. How will I face them all? Live on TV in front of 25 million? I started being terrified. I got weak. The tips of my fingers went numb. My breathing faint. Neal kept asking, “Are you okay?” My lips are trembling. Then they said: two minutes. Oh my god, I’m dead. You know, the vertigo feeling. The edge of the cliff some one taps me and I’d fall off. You know in a movie, suddenly silent, everyone stops and goes in slow motion. Even my heartbeat was like that. I told Neal Schon, “I want to go hooooome.” I just want to “hug my family and just be with them.”

Here, he calls up his family. Soon, however, Schon comes to serve as his brother in facing the family of his fans. When he goes on stage, however, it was like an “adrenalin shot” and he is running like a video game character, speeding across and all over the place. Ross Valory is laughing. Schon says he never imagined “in a million years” Arnel would find the air to sing and run around. Drummer Deen Castronovo says he did not know what Arnel Pineda would be like on stage, but definitely not expecting that he was like “David Lee Roth and Bruce Lee combined.” An awareness of racial difference is obvious here, as the band struggles to formulate their bond.

Jonathan Cain echoes the manager John Baruch’s concerns about Arnel’s wild debut performance and his longevity. Baruch encourages Arnel to stand in one place and sing. Arnel accepts the critique coolly and says he becomes “downhearted.” He does express his understanding that they don’t know him yet, and he has not proven himself to be able to continue with his particular actions on stage. His anxieties appear here, not only to be about his voice, but perhaps also to be about the inadequacy of his racialized body as the representative of the band’s music. Perhaps he did not hear Jonathan Cain’s liking of his “look” during the auditions. By the end of the film, however, we see his physical capabilities to do so,

and the band's acceptance of his particular bodily presence and his movements. Moreover, his leadership as frontman on stage is also accepted. At the end of the film, he thanks his bandmates for entrusting him with that form of original speech. He also affectionately calls them the "big boys"—men who are all fit, yet definitely much bigger than him. Indeed, his subjective voice materializes, as the band becomes brothers on stage and off. They relate through their craft, work closely and affectionately with each other, and care for each other's well-being. Arnel Pineda's confidence, background, personality, and humor solidify their friendship and contribute to their collaboration as a family and community. This camaraderie is also apparent in how it renders anew the music and sound that fans expect, as they feverishly sing along in sold-out stadiums across the world. Arnel sings with great emotion and moves the audiences as well as the band, as they now write new songs together, even ones that center around Arnel and what they have learned about the world through him. The subjective voice—Arnel Pineda's ability to analyze his experiences with the band and the fans—traces for us how Pineda's racial difference is engaged in the formulation of their family through music. Diaz emphasizes this voice and focuses on his racial experience to confront directly the "limits of mimicry and poverty of talent" claim. The story of others coming together across radical inequality can lead to new relations. She uses the documentary, like what Palumbo-Liu identifies in literature, as a way to create empathy for the situation of others.

The diasporic voice amplifies the power of the bodily and subjective voice. The body connects him to the diaspora, and the subjective voice names the quality of his contributions to the band's new music. From the life of homelessness in the streets of Manila to leading an internationally celebrated band, the documentary tells of the intense subalternity of Arnel Pineda, who stands in to represent Filipinos, especially when accused as mimics who possess no originality. Spivak's critique is relevant here for she argues that the subaltern cannot speak within the language available for representation. In Arnel Pineda's case, he makes the power ballad newly relevant with his history and context. He is a subaltern subject who can only come to voice within the limits of the available songs and how they are expected to sound: like Steve Perry. Burdened by the power ballad, it becomes Pineda's anthem. It is the most appealing genre to Filipino diasporic audiences as well. The words are poetic, in that they are sparse, and they convey male emotion and vulnerability. It is a highly generative genre for this cover singer of Filipino descent. The songs describe a kind of loss and displacement that perhaps rock stars who travel and Filipinos who migrate share, though in very different circumstances. That is, the

power ballad, which Journey is known for, passionately expresses feelings of exile and displacement for a band whose touring schedule takes them away from their families. In a kindred maturity, Arnel Pineda sings with the understanding of the pain of such separation from beloved ones.

Arnel Pineda's diasporic voice emerges in the increased embrace of Journey by Filipinos all over the world. The film's mention of this phenomenon teaches consciousness of the changing population around the band. Pineda as bearer of Filipino identification with his story and his voice makes the community's passion for recognition in new media heard. That is, Filipinos not only want to be seen but also want to be understood. The diasporic voice increases the impact of the band's music on new groups of people. Journey does not know that Filipinos, die-hard power ballad fans, have always been in their crowds. Only now do they see them because Filipinos approach them with special passion. Neal Schon describes driving on the freeway as Filipinos recognize him, fist pumping, yelling "Filipinos!" in an acknowledgment of his discovery of Arnel and its significance beyond the stage.

In the film, a middle-aged, attractive, and stylish Filipina woman named Pearlita, an artist, stands by the large banner she made for the band. Filipinos approach her to sign it and send messages, mainly to Arnel. She also sells hand-made designs of Journey T-shirts. She draws portraits of the band members and auctions them off to other Filipinas gathered in large numbers before the show. She is proud of Arnel, but adores Jonathan Cain as many other women do. "Jonathan, Jonathan is all mine!" one screams. Pearlita says it precisely: "It's totally incredible. Arnel Pineda made the world smaller. The impact on the Filipino community all over the world and in the Philippines! When Journey found him, they did not realize they inherited a nation. It's totally crazy, it's phenomenal!" While the story of the shirts and the women fighting over them seems silly, it is connected to this important observation made by Pearlita. The audience watching the documentary laughed so heartily in this scene, for we see the ways in which fans identify with the band in romantic ways. The women demonstrate love for Arnel not only as a Filipino but also as a man and an ideal object of desire. Their admiration extends to Jonathan Cain as well. The love for Arnel, however, is greater for the significance he brings to the community: he has emerged as a voice for them. So the women may fight for the shirts, but it is the large banner upon which they thank Arnel that stands most prominently among them. It is the fabric upon which they thank him for bringing their stories and situations to light.

Arnel Pineda surely discovers this when he comes face-to-face with his people. Unable to get a signal at the amphitheatre in Los Angeles, he wanders around

backstage until he opens a door to the outside. To his surprise, the crowds gathered there recognize him. He acknowledges them with a small bow and the respectful “po.” He accommodates requests for autographs—on ticket stubs, on shirts the fans have just taken off. He responds graciously to all these requests and soon a bodyguard stands by him as the crowds become overwhelming. Later, he says, “I thought they were not going to recognize me. I feel weird about how they flock around me, to try to get my autograph or just shake my hand. It’s unbelievable. I was just like them, just a fan. I can’t believe people like them would act overwhelmingly about me, for me. It’s weird really.” The security crew prepares and gets in place for his fans at the shows, acknowledging his special status with the Filipino diaspora. “Arnel is like Elvis to the Filipino people. If there is a Filipino in this town, he or she will be here tonight. Which is great. They don’t take no for an answer. Oftentimes, in the meet-and-greets, one thing can be signed but then it’s five. Another picture with Arnel! It’s irritating, and it’s beautiful. It’s everything it should be and it’s rock and roll.” This is precisely what the diasporic voice means: Arnel, in singing so well, in reaching so many, comes to be the voice of his people, the voice of a diaspora longing to be seen and recognized. For him, the performance is his calling. He thrills to their response, “so loud it’s like World War!”

Arnel Pineda is literally the “pride of the nation,” as Pearlita describes it, as hundreds of people greet him at the airport in the Philippines. The president welcomes him and his family at Malacañang Palace. Despite this ascension to legitimacy, their picture with the president appearing in the paper and their living in what he calls a castle, especially compared with his old home, he insists on the importance of maintaining humility. In a van, Arnel Pineda and his wife Cherry look around their old neighborhood and recall how they used to think of these places as the ultimate goal of home buying. Now, Cherry Pineda says, they all look so small and undesirable. Arnel says he worries about getting spoiled and accustomed to excess. The film concludes with the band’s coming to Manila for a concert. Arnel sings “Don’t Stop Believin’” and is so overwhelmed with emotion that he lies on the stage to absorb the feelings. His wife looks on from a distance, calmly and quietly observant among a frenzied crowd. Only later does she smile, as she surveys the scene, in acknowledgement of the collective happiness emanating from the crowd. The originality of Arnel Pineda’s diasporic voice comes through here—he holds the feelings of his people. Filipinos project upon him great feelings of accomplishment. Audience members hold back tears as if overwhelmed to see a close image of themselves on this grand stage. To see him, one of them, rise from a position of abjection, to change the music we thought we already knew, is a unique

way to transform the music and to transform knowledge for those watching the documentary as well.

The Argument of the Third World Woman- U.S. Woman of Color Filmmaker

The film is a complex story of margins and centers colliding and cohering. It focuses on Arnel Pineda as he attempts to make his way into the band and as they try to fit him in. Unexpected lessons about manhood and rock stardom are only unveiled because the filmmaker attends to the subjectivities of all the players, including their relations with each other, their work, their audiences, and their intimate relations with women, as part of the valorized male life. This attention to privilege, location, and unequal positioning comes from a filmmaker who is part of the transnational Filipina/o diaspora. Spivak is relevant here again, for she argues that it is up to the Third World woman intellectual to intervene in the representation of the subaltern. The interventionist must, however, not be uncritical about her intellectual role in valorizing the concrete experiences of the oppressed (275). A documentary filmmaker trained in Stanford's venerable documentary program, Ramona Diaz maintains a career as a working filmmaker who enjoys significant funding and distribution from Sundance, and Public Television's *Point of View*, while devoting her entire career to representing myriad issues from and about the Philippines and Filipino people, including a film about Imelda Marcos and teachers immigrating to work in the Baltimore school system. In an interview at the San Francisco International Film Festival with *APEX Express*, she describes making films about Filipinos: "it's what I know."³ In 2008, when she was able to have her manager contact Journey and make them allow her to follow Arnel's story, we see that the filmmaker occupies a structural location where she is ready to represent and fight for the opportunity to tell this story. Diaz then made a film that makes legible a subjectivity bound by a language he is unfamiliar with, something she and he both attempt to change. In the process, the criterion used to judge his mimicry and lack of unique talent is revealed as a simplistic understanding of the voice. Diaz helps prove Arnel's authorship in his singing and, further, brings to light his cultural contribution in defining a manhood alternative to rock star macho. We see this in

³ Interview by No-No Girl and RJ, *APEX Express*, Pacifica Radio Station, KPFA 94.1 FM, Berkeley, California, 7 June 2012.

his sense of responsibility to his family, community, and to his country, and the ways in which he forms a brotherhood with Western men.

Indeed, we see the filmmaker's attention to the location where her subjects form new ways of validation. The empathetic documentary form emerges best in the attention she as the filmmaker places on his manhood and his shared identity with Journey as male rock stars. Arnel Pineda acknowledges his need for his wife to support him as well as her need for him to be faithful. In the film's conclusion, we see the couple hugging quietly in bed, as he expresses his heavy-heart in the face of pressure. And we recall how he always acknowledges those who work for and support him, whether it is with the touch of a shoulder, a verbal expression of gratitude, or a quiet appreciative acceptance when he is assisted. The circus Jonathan Cain mentions—"how are we going to bring him in to the circus of the band's life"—is not so crazy for Arnel to navigate when he conducts himself with a manhood of responsibility and kindness. Rather than the rags-to-riches Cinderella story, what emerges in Diaz's filmmaking is this story of an alternative rock star manhood as the basis of the band's relationship with each other.

In this movie the filmmaker's interviews with Arnel Pineda are mostly conducted in Tagalog. Unlike the interviews on *Oprah*, *CNN*, *60 Minutes*, *Ellen*, and the like, he is much more precise about describing his experiences, subjectivity, and perspective in Diaz's film because of the sustained attention of the documentary camera. Not only because of the length of time, but also because of the ability of the filmmaker to understand him, he articulates himself in the transformative moments that the documentary crew is there to capture—for instance, when he sings live for the first time in front of tens of thousands of people, with millions more watching on television at the same time. Through Ramona Diaz's film, Arnel Pineda can express himself in this extraordinary situation, using his own language and its more precise phrasings, as well as his bodily gestures and facial expressions that show his emotions more specifically. We can hear how his original voice translates his transformation through this extraordinary experience. The Third World woman of color filmmaker indeed facilitates this translation; nowhere else can we hear this deep knowledge from and through him.

The film's most unexpected contribution, however, is its dismantling of accepted forms of rock stardom through a filmmaking keen on representing male privileges and possibilities. This comes through in the focus on the intimate brotherhood that forms among the band members, with their forthright discussions of male stardom and candid accounts of the price of fame on their private lives. As Jonathan Cain discloses: "After *Frontiers*, we were gone so much. Everyone's

personal lives started unraveling. I know I was going through a divorce. We paid the price for our success. We took time, to chill out. We drifted apart. After *Raised on Radio*, we tried to come back but the brotherhood dried up.” Diaz’s decision to play the song “Be Good to Yourself” over this discussion reminds us of the characteristic way Journey makes songs of life on the road for rock stars. Their famous ballad “Faithfully,” for example, recounts rock-star life on the road and the challenges they bring to their families. Ross Valory attests to the difficulty of maintaining intimate relations on the road: “The American dream of the rock and roll quest to be rich and famous? A lot of people think they’re immune to what happens when you get that much money. You burn yourself out getting there. . . . You really just let go of relationships that require presence and constant nurturing. You say goodbye to people. People get sick and die when you are gone. Lots of things go by the wayside when you are gone.” The camaraderie among the band members rests on their shared experience of displacement, then and now. Arnel Pineda experienced this loss before Journey, and its painful lessons keep him focused while he is so far away from his family in the Philippines. Interesting here of course is the ability of the filmmaker to use Journey’s songs to express this alliance among the men. The band worked to give her permission to use the songs.

The film addresses this self-discipline and faithfulness in one tour scene. During a meet-and-greet with fans, a woman approaches Pineda and very strongly and suggestively encourages him to find her after the show as she rubs herself up against him. Gone are the days of “sex, drugs, and rock and roll,” as Pineda testifies:

I don’t want to lose my family. I should always be on guard. It’s always here. “Arnel, guard yourself, guard yourself.” There’s more opportunity to commit sin. It’s just there. With drugs, I have larger tolerance. It’s really more with the women that go around. You have to look away. You pray you don’t get hit. You have to look away. . . . I tell myself you have to pay the price. You work hard to have a complete family, a happy one. There will be hatred, anguish, regrets, and blame. You don’t want to go through that process again.

As he speaks, the film cuts to the sweetest moment in the Philippines. Between shows, back with his family, Arnel sings “Faithfully” with such sincerity to Cherry Pineda, as their cheeks press together. She blushes shyly, before they jump into the pool, laughing wildly. She says, “We made a promise to each other. No matter what happens, no one lets go. We will fight together. . . . It will never last with a different

kind of woman. Others won't understand; his world is really different." She concludes, "His world is full of temptations." In this scene and the interviews with the other band members, the film highlights unexpectedly tender familial moments like these and the unlikely, affectionate rock-star brotherhood that develops among the band members. We see the kindhearted and loyal manhood that they ultimately advocate.

Diaz also decenters the Western perspective when she privileges Arnel Pineda's view. In one scene, Ross Valory and Arnel Pineda leave the luxurious Sunset Marquis Hotel in a van along with male crew members and girlfriends. One woman addresses Arnel, "I just love your story, [which I learned] from YouTube or My Space." Arnel responds by fabricating a story that fulfills typical expectations of the poor Third World person discovered and saved by the West. Still sick, as this is the day after the Los Angeles Greek Theatre concert, he plays up his sniffles as he recounts a sorry story:

Arnel: Yes, I was once a hooker. At nine, I started selling myself. (Arnel slyly and quietly laughs.) I almost sold my soul to the devil, just to get this far.

Woman: Somehow I doubt that.

Arnel (smiling): I was young, I was nine. He played with my mind and my heart. (Arnel laughs more obviously as the camera pans to Ross Valory, smiling too.)

Ross (off-screen): How about them '49ers!

Because he is sniffing, Arnel looks vulnerable, and his voice adds a funny intonation to the telling. The camera pans across the interior of the minivan. Ross Valory looks amused. He knows it is not true, but he may still be unsure. The woman next to him is directly behind Arnel and is not laughing at all. Her lips pursed, she is shocked until Arnel reveals that he is obviously joking. In this scene, the Westerners are not quite in on the joke. They cannot quite tell what he is doing. But they are listening. They want to be in on the joke, as we see in the popular response to Psy and "Gangnam Style" today; Westerners are unsure of the references but they sure find the song catchy and worth not only mimicry but tribute. This scene, as well as the knowledge that the filmmaker, like the subject, is Filipina, makes us even more aware that the power of representation is in their hands.

With his chest out and standing tall, an older Filipino American man at the San Francisco International Film Festival's Closing Night screening of *Don't Stop*

Believin' expressed his pride at being Filipino that night, thanks to both Ramona Diaz and Arnel Pineda, who shared the stage with the rest of Journey at the sold-out Castro Theatre in San Francisco on May 3, 2012. The context for such gratitude is of course the lack of visibility in transnational popular culture, as well as the lack of images in history, of Filipino American life and migration experiences. On stage at the Castro, the band members flank Arnel Pineda, and Jonathan Cain articulates the "priceless" value of the film. It is history making for them—to hear Arnel "speak about his emotions about his fears and challenges." Neal Schon expresses his pride for Arnel whereas Ross Valory affirms the documentary's project which required years of following the band. He says, "that's not something that can be done in a few shows or part of a tour; it takes a while to see the change, to see his hair grow, see moustaches appear and disappear." Arnel's response to the question of how he coped with the camera and life on the road is revealing: "I was always scared . . . always worried what's going to happen tonight, for the next night. . . . I have to be strong the next night. What kind of energy should I give tonight?" He expresses his gratitude to the audience: "But then the bottom line: I've done it, you guys embraced it . . . you looked beyond my physical imperfections and instead you guys listened to your heart and . . . [he can't continue as he chokes back tears]." At this point, the drummer Deen Castronovo shakes his head, the bassist Ross Valory pats him on the back, and Jonathan Cain and Neal Schon are applauding with gazes of affection and facing him with devoted attention. Ramona Diaz embraces him. And the audience collectively swoons, sharing the band's warm regard for him. His humble declaration oozes self-deprecation that compels screams from the audience declaring their love. "We love you!" says the camera woman, repeating the many sounds of support surrounding her. She is shaking when she says, "Oh no. . . . I'm going to cry!"⁴ The crowds express their love with a loud repetition of "We love you, Arnel!" as the band does, for the man whose humility crosses into a profound self-hate. Indeed, as he says in the documentary, "Why me? I'm so short, not even cute, and so Asian." But then he credits "the big boys" behind him, for their "massive, massive musical genius . . . that's larger than us": "it's the force that keeps us going." Ultimately, he concludes as the band's leader: "We just want to do [the music]. As long as you guys want us to do it, [we will]." The subaltern, whom we now know so much, now speaks for and with the band.

The making and screening of this film reminds us of the power of film and of how documentary's specific confrontation with reality utilizes the power of both

⁴ "Arnel Pineda and Journey Post-Screening Interview—SFIFF," YouTube site F4BBEST <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_G_SKq0VPk>.

imagination and myth-making—not only to create empathy for others but to create identification and to recognize new forms of creativity. Here, the story of a Filipino claiming his voice eventually tells broader stories about marginality, inclusion, and the unique achievement of originality. Both Pineda and Diaz tell of new realities in their media. In Arnel Pineda’s voice I hear yearning for recognition, and the attempt to claim this recognition, whereas in Ramona Diaz’s voice I see the intervention of the filmmaker as she presents Pineda’s manifold voice as an important contribution that lambasts any accusation of mimicry. And both make a theoretical contribution to our understanding of the power of film, and of music, from their locations of authorship.

What if we assume, as Michel Foucault suggests in a much too preliminary way in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, that there are no universals (3)? That is, rather than assuming the universality of a practice, what if we take the practice to reveal not a universal but a real condition in the world? Let us not say Arnel Pineda’s story proves that music has the power to give voice to a subaltern subject. In other words, let us deflate the old adage that music is the universal language of people. If we analyze the work of Pineda by saying his musical practice refers to a real use, what can we learn? When we drop the universal as a “grid of intelligibility” (Foucault 3), what can we say about music’s power to express Pineda’s reality?

Ramona Diaz’s film focuses on the specificity of Arnel Pineda, not his universality. She stays close to his body because that is where the music comes from. She highlights this by including a shot of him, on his stomach, naked, with a towel barely covering his butt as he gets massaged. The film presents this powerful body, glorious and naked. It tells us: this is where the voice that moves you forms. And Diaz, as a Third World woman of color filmmaker in the United States, uses this shot, of the massaging of his body, to represent her own care for him through her powerful work. She is committed to projecting his specificity and to giving him a voice beyond the song, as his original and authentic emotional interpretations of the unusual events that occur in his life make the music reach us intimately and individually. So, to assume that the universal exists, especially in terms of music’s ability to express a person, is to neglect the very different life that leads one to musical expression. If we used the universal lens to understand Pineda, he is nothing more than a copy of Perry. We would not hear the difference in the voice, and the very different life brought to bear on the lyrics.

Thus, *Don’t Stop Believin’* is not simply a rockumentary, but a documentary about the particularity of music to represent the pains of invisibility and the ways in which the subaltern can transform for the better those who possess the power of

speech. Pineda's song, and our adoration of this small, beautiful man who is "so Asian," can express for us feelings of great yearning and show us that a world we so desire is already here. This is a world where subaltern people can represent the deepest feelings of all others because their particular histories and experiences are not denied. Diaz's alternative to the claim of universality, then, is to insist on the specificity of a voice so we can appreciate the life it expresses, which we may have not seen before, though it has always been there. Arnel Pineda's voice demands a new listening, which Ramona Diaz amplifies with her own filmmaking.

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