

**TONIGHT: ZARZUELA AT 8 O'CLOCK
(IF THE WEATHER ALLOWS IT)
(ZARZUELA SCENES IN MANILA BETWEEN 1852
AND 1898)**

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One of the first known references to the zarzuela in Manila speaks of the presence of the Compañía del Teatro del Balón de Cádiz, with Manuel López de Ariza as its director. This account is dated 1852 and, based on the records, this is the first time a Spanish theatre company, composed exclusively of professional artists, came to visit the Philippines. The group performed at the Teatro Binondo and its repertoire included mostly dramatic plays (*Isabel la Católica*, *Diego Corrientes*, and *sainetes* by Ramón de la Cruz), as well as a good number of short works with music. For instance, the group staged *El Tío Caniyitas*, a two-act Spanish comic opera, with music by Mariano Soriano Fuertes and libretto by José Sanz Pérez (Retana 1909, 73). It was a good idea that this theatre company included, among its performances, some theatre productions written in Manila. Thus, that same year, on May 18, 1852, *Salir a tiempo de pobre*, a one-act comic play in verse form written by Antonio Robles, made its debut at the Teatro Binondo. Besides promoting works by local artists, the company also introduced

the use of the “season ticket” in the Philippines at the beginning of a season in early 1853. Later, when the Teatro Binondo became rundown, the company had to hold its performances in the hall of a private house, in order to continue its stay in Manila. This house used to be occupied by the “Sociedad de Recreos,” a cultural institution created in 1844 by Governor Narciso Clavería (ibid., 75).

On June 11, 1865, the Teatro Príncipe Alfonso, popularly known as the Nuevo Teatro de Arroceros¹ became the venue of another locally-produced presentation, witnessing the debut performance of *La conquista de Joló*, “a most spectacular historical drama” written by Antonio García del Canto (ibid., 84). It was not until 1880 that the *costumbrista* genre saw its beginning within the history of theatre in the Philippines, with a one-act verse comedy in Spanish which depicted “typical Manila customs.” *José el carpintero* was written by Juan Zulueta de los Ángeles, who thus became the first Filipino to write a *costumbrista* comedy. The libretto continued to be sold until 1882 as could be seen on the first page of an issue of *La Oceanía Española* (2 June 2 1892), available at the newspaper administration office for *cuatro reales fuerte*, equivalent approximately to one Spanish peseta.

During this time, there were other lyrical genres that were developing in the Philippines which coexisted with the dramas and zarzuelas. We read, for instance, about the presence of a French operetta company that performed, first at the small Quiapo Theatre, and later moved to the Teatro Príncipe Alfonso (Retana 1909, 83). In the latter venue, in 1868, there was also an Italian opera company which, according to some historical documents, was considered the best in Manila during that period, and which returned to Manila four more times.² Despite the simple and rather wobbly provisional venues, the city had much theatre activity and staged performances even within their limited possibilities. Some, in fact, were quite ambitious, for example, the Teatro Circo de Bilibid which had an opera company that arrived directly from Italy (ibid., 97).

But the history of zarzuela in the Philippines during this specific period is linked to Darío Céspedes, a public official who worked both for the Philippine government and for Spain. He made his interest for the zarzuela very much compatible with his bureaucratic life. He wrote the text for the three-act play *El toque de las ánimas*, with music by Emilio Arrieta, which had been staged for the first time at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid on January 31, 1872. When Céspedes arrived in Manila, he already had ample experience working with the genre. At the Coliseo Artístico, formerly called Teatro de Variedades,³ he managed a zarzuela company which he himself brought from Spain. This group made its debut performance towards the end of 1878 and the early part of 1879 with *Jugar con fuego*. Subsequent titles were mostly works which belonged to the category of the major zarzuelas, like *El barberillo de Lavapiés* (Retana 1909, 98).

In the eighties, after working in the Bufos Madrileños, Elisea Ragner arrived in Manila with her lover Alejandro Cubero (ibid., 117). The latter worked as a stage director in the company which he formed, which had scheduled performances at the Teatro Filipino built in 1881 in the vicinity of Quiapo. This couple played a very significant role in the history of zarzuela in the Philippines. Elisea Ragner played the role of Kitty in the first performance of *Los sobrinos del Capitán Grant* in 1877 at the Teatro Príncipe Alfonso in Madrid, while Alejandro Cubero (then called Ramón) played the role of Captain Grant. As reports had it, Ragner arrived in Manila in 1880 to follow her beau as he started a new life in Asia. Ragner remained in Manila until the death of her partner in 1897, during which time she returned to Spain (Lopez García 1999, 122, 125). When she arrived in Manila, she was around forty years old. Retana describes her as a blonde lady with blue eyes, elegant, graceful, and with a great talent for dancing and for light opera. She was good at acting and had a very pleasant voice (Retana 1909, 118). Undoubtedly, her physical features and her artistic talents impressed and fascinated the public, and eventually, in the course of time, she was hailed as the longest running actress of the Spanish zarzuela in Asia. Ragner, together with Cubero, started to teach local artists who later dominated the Filipino theatres with their presence.

Cubero's work, on the other hand, followed the tradition of the Spanish zarzuela, since he was a member of the company that performed when the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid was just starting (Casares Rodicio 2002, 527). This was said of him:

A man of great talent, with a good baritone voice, who could also sing bass, invaluable on account of his flexibility to assume all types of contrasting roles and opposing characters; of unfaltering memory in order to remedy, in any tight situation, the absence of a sick member, and of incalculable charm, fit for the comic roles in which one had to invent or add something to the written text. (ibid., 591)

Cubero was born in Valencia in 1825. When he arrived in Manila, he was fifty-five years old. Such was his determination to mentor actors and actresses that the Filipino newspaper *El Renacimiento* called him "the Father of Spanish Theatre in the Philippines". From 1880 until his death in 1896 or 1897 he never ceased to work in favor of the theatre arts (Retana 1909, 118).

This same troupe counted on the remarkable presence of Práxedes Julia Fernández, born in Manila on July 21, 1871, and died on August 22, 1919. Also known as "Yeyeng," she made a name during her theatre career with *La gatita blanca*, *La mascota*, *El perro chico*, *La puñalada*, *Bohemios*, *El húsar de la guardia* and *El barquillero* (ibid., 119). A disciple of Elisea Ragner, she was well-loved by the public because of her charm and ingenuity. Together with Venancia "Chananay" Suzara, the two were the first Filipina divas of the regional zarzuela. There are records that state that by 1912 she was already staying in Spain and already carried the name Práxedes Fernández de Pastor (*El imparcial* 25 July 1912, 5). In the same magazine, we read that she started her theatre career at the age of eight in a children's company, and perhaps it was she who acted in the gala performance of *La viuda alegre* in Manila, since it was with this play that she bade goodbye to the public before she left for Spain in 1912. Speaking of her talent and versatility, the following was written about her. She was:

Attractive, expressive, talented, she had a wonderful voice, and a vigorous chest, shapely and with generous turgidity; she learned how to dance all types of dances with so much attractiveness and gracefulness, as though she were an Andalusian with French ways or a Flamenco French; from tango to cancan, she poured out in these dances her hot and spicy graceful poses which very much excited men. (Retana 1909, 118)

Another noteworthy actor of this troupe was Nemesio Ratia. Given his qualities, he provided the Bohemian flavor of the *género chico* to the stage. He was also the only Filipino actor reported to have worked in Spain (ibid., 119).

Another member of the company who stood out as a comic actor was José Carvajal, known for his extraordinary intuition and ability to play any role, even those which were impossible for him to know, like the *murguista* (bandit), the *rata* (pickpocket), the *guapo* (ladies' dream man), etc. These characters were very typical in Madrid, but unknown to those who had never been to the Spanish capital. Unlike Ratia, his comic acts did not border on what was vulgar; rather, his art was distinguished for its naturalness (ibid., 119-120).

Thus, we appreciate how this theatre company, composed of talented artists, contributed to the history of the zarzuela both in the Philippines as well as in Spain. Their prestige within the Philippine society was patent, as was exemplified by the mention of some of them in a book of primordial importance in the Hispanic-Filipino culture, Rizal's *Noli me tangere*;⁴ so it was not surprising that they were sought out to present new works. Hitting the stage at the Teatro Filipino on March 1, 1881, this company made a debut performance of the zarzuela composed in the Philippines *Una novia de encargo*, in one-act and verse, with libretto by Ricardo Castro Ronderos and music by Goré, perhaps of Catalonian origin (Retana 1909, 146).⁵ This play was quite a success, and even though it was created in Asian soil, its theme and music, characters and setting (Madrid) were all Spanish.

The summer of 1882 is a good example of the dynamic theatre life in the city of Manila. One of the more prominent companies in the country was that managed by Alejandro Cubero, composed, as was mentioned earlier, of the following members: Elisea Ragner, Práxedes Fernández, José Carvajal, Nemesio Ratia and Tronqued. Their performances were held at the Teatro Variedades on Arroceros Street. It seems that this venue was used for operas and for zarzuelas, causing some conflict among the companies from both musical genres. Thus we read about an episode when the Compañía Filipina de Zarzuela, led by Cubero, found the dressing rooms closed the day after the Compañía de Ópera Italiana performed.

It was also common to hold the performances in other places near Manila, such that the zarzuela company would perform in the capital during the week, and in improvised theatres located in Tondo or Cavite on weekends. (Tondo was on the northern part of the Manila Bay and Cavite was on the south.) Apparently, the Cavite theatre was open only in the summer. The functions depended much on the climate. It is for this reason that often functions had to be suspended due to unexpected tropical rains; sometimes performances had to be moved to other venues, thus eliciting odd commentaries:

-Did you see that? What a transfer!

-Oh well...

-We can't do anything... The opera is going to Tondo for the debut performance, and we are so upset.

-But do you have a season ticket?

-No sir, but I listen to the show from outside the venue, and for me it's the same, because, anyhow, I am always adversely affected (*La Oceanía Española* 6 June 1882).

The functions in Tondo and Cavite had special entrance tickets. Aside from being cheaper than those in Manila, they also had an added feature: every ticket entitled the spectator to a raffle draw. The prizes were "a lottery ticket and a fighting cock," "a piece of Japanese furniture" or even "a magnificent gift made especially for the *beneficiado* by a Mandarin Chinese."⁶

The Teatro Variedades in Manila had its own peculiar characteristic: the play could be listened to from outside the venue on the neighboring streets. For this reason, passers-by and, in some cases, those in horse carriages could enjoy the functions without paying a ticket. Later, a solution was proposed: some watchmen were stationed outside to make sure the public would not stay there and listen for free. The watchmen were tasked to ask the passers-by to continue walking down the street.

The Teatro Variedades also had a peculiar building structure with a kind of roofing that was a real enemy of the lyrical arts. When incessant rains fell, it was impossible to hear what was happening on stage. Thus, on several occasions the functions had to be cancelled.

During this period of indecision, whether to favor plays of Spanish peninsular origin or Tagalog theatrical plays, the work that most represents change is the sainete entitled *Cuadros filipinos*, composed by Francisco de P. Entrala in 1882. Entrala was known as “the most Filipino of the *peninsulares*, because of his habits and interests.” His *cuadros* are a strong and open criticism against the typical plays depicting the “clash between Moros and Christians” and have as clear “objective that of presenting how boring this type of play is, a genre which I consider outmoded and not according to modern taste, in the hope that Tagalog poets and actors give up these works and, instead, explore new avenues to reap laurels and applause” (Retana 1909, 111).

Soon, Entrala produced a comic play depicting typical Filipino characters. However, though written by a great lover of the Filipinos, the play was misconstrued as a mockery of Philippine society. This was a rather strange and ironic, because the Filipinos themselves would attend Spanish plays and enjoy watching typical characters from Spain represented as object of caricature:

The sainete *Cuadros al natural* was confirmed as *Cuadros filipinos* by expressed indication of D. Alejandro Cubero,

a zealous enthusiast of his creation, undoubtedly to the advantage of this play. Its aim was to present a parody of the Comedia tagala, justifying –no more, no less– that, in all countries, even the best of productions are converted into a parody. And in order to achieve this objective, I made it in such a way that the theme of the first cuadro or scene coincided with the cuadro of the parody being portrayed, in a way that, like in some modern plays, the verses and situations of the Comedia tagala are the best expression of the strong romantic feelings of Don Juancho –contrary to what many think– and the cigarette vendor, Fuensanta. The wife of the former attended the performance from a theatre box and from there watched her husband, who would eventually fuel the fire in the final scene, thus developing into a shouting bout, with Doña Cándida, Doña Nicolasa and the public shouting at the top of their voices. (ibid, 113-114)

These words of *Entrala* are best understood from the theme of the play. In the first cuadro, called *En el palenque*, Don Juancho, a Tagalog, is a professional womanizer who tries to win the heart of Fuensanta, a young lady who is a cigarette vendor during the day and an actress performing for the “Moros against Christians” plays at night. As part of his ploy, Don Juancho decides to disguise himself and take part in Fuensanta’s performance. In the second cuadro, *La comedia tagala*, the action takes place in the very stage during a performance. Fuensanta comes out as a princess, and Juancho as an impromptu Moro. Doña Nicolasa, wife of Juancho, is surprised when she recognizes her husband on the stage. Thus, the great squabble unfolds.

From the historical documents, we know that the two *Cuadros filipinos* were created in 1882. Retana comments that the play was never restaged, but *La Oceanía Española* provides data that state otherwise. On Thursday, June 8, 1882, Alejandro Cubero’s Compañía Filipina de Zarzuela announced the debut performance in Cavite on Sunday, June 11, of the second part of *Entrala’s Cuadros filipinos*, a “humorous comic play”. This second part entitled *De*

Tondo a Binondo, in turn, had two parts: I *Nuevos tipos* and II *El bailujan* [sic] (*El baile*). It was scheduled to open the function, to be followed by *La media naranja* by Castro Ronderos (who was honored that night because he was a resident of Cavite), and to end with *El viaje redondo*. But the whole function had to be cancelled because of the untimely death of the tenor Vanzetti, who died of a pernicious cerebral fever on Friday, June 9. He was a member of the Italian opera company that was visiting Manila at that time. As a sign of solidarity with their companions in the profession, the local zarzuela company offered to give the functions that the opera company already had programmed. After the cancellation of the Sunday performance in Cavite, Cubero's troupe performed the following Thursday, June 15, but did not stage *Cuadros filipinos*.

That summer, the *Compañía Filipina de Zarzuela* had a better season compared to that of the Italian opera company. It continued with its functions, without the presence of the Italian company posing any threat to its success. In fact, its repertoire was even more versatile, according to the circumstances of the genre. Likewise, it was able to perform in both the *Tondo* and *Variedades* theatres a series of varied plays between June 24 and August 10: *El hombre es débil*, *Una vieja*, *Tres ruinas artísticas*, *Torear por lo fino*, *La casa roja*, *Aquí León*, *Ya somos tres*, *El último figurín*, *El bandido*, *Tocar el violón*, *Música clásica*, *Frasquito*, *Casado y soltero*, *Piccio*, *Adán y Co.*, *Para una modista un sastre*, *Monomonía musical*, *La calandria*, *Un pleito*, *Nada entre dos platos*, *En las astas del toro*, *Viaje redondo*, *I feroci romani*, *Memoria de Carriedo* and the first performances in Manila of *El lucero del alba* y *La soireé de Cachupín* (*La Oceanía Española* June-August, 1882). There were fewer representations at the *Variedades* Theatre and a more remarkable audience in the *Tondo* during the weekends. Yet, the Cubero company had more activity than the Italian opera company. It was somehow to be expected, since the zarzuela had long been established in Manila, while the opera company was simply passing by for a visit.

Then again, the staging of *Escenas filipinas*, the second part of *Cuadros filipinos*, was announced for Saturday, August 12, at the Teatro Variedades. The program consisted of the following four parts: a Symphony; *El lucero del alba*; *Cuadros filipinos*, “a pastime in two acts and in verse” (*Escenas Filipinas: Nuevos tipos y El Bailajún*)⁹ and *Soiré de Cachupín*. The *El Bailajún* was to highlight a tribute to Mr. Entrala, the author of the play, with special guest first soprano Doña Elisea Raguer, who had been invited to sing a beautiful *cundiman* (sic), a Tagalog folksong, and a *balitao* from the Visayas. She was accompanied by other artists (*La Oceanía Española* 11 August 1882). Due to the rains however, the function had to be cancelled and it was not until the August 14 that the restaging was confirmed, this time with an Alberoni stage backdrop.

Although the August 12 performance was cancelled, a proof of the artists’ versatility and flexibility is that the troupe went to Tondo on the 13th to perform *El hombre es débil*, *La calandria*, *La soireé de Cachupín* and *Torear por lo fino*. It is worth mentioning that, within the repertory, both the Spanish zarzuela and the French operetta were present, especially in *La soireé de Cachupín*. The next day, the artists were once again at the Variedades in Manila to stage the functions that had been cancelled earlier, that is, the second part of Entrala’s work. Once again, on August 15, they went to Tondo to perform *Frasquito*, *El bandido*, *Soireé de Cachupín* and *Ya somos tres*. On August 17, once more at the Variedades, they staged other works of the repertoire—*Un pleito*, *Aquí León* and *Piccio, Adán y Co.*—and still could afford to hold an extraordinary function which, after an opening symphony, included the complete work of the *Cuadros filipinos*, that is, cuadros 1 and 2 of the first part (I *En el palenque* and II *La comedia tagala*) and the second part called *Escenas filipinas* (I *Nuevos tipos* and II *El Bailajún*). That night, the Marquis of Estella attended. As was expected, since it had already become the custom, this same performance was repeated the following day in Tondo. This event is a clear proof that, at some point, the complete work of *Cuadros filipinos* managed to be performed, even if it had to be staged but once.

The libretto of the second part of the *Cuadros filipinos* contained Spanish and Tagalog texts. It represented characters from different social classes and professions in Filipino society. Samples of vernacular music were also introduced in the work. If previously, these regional tendencies had already been manifest in theatre drama, *Cuadros filipinos* marked the genesis of what would be the future of the flourishing Philippine sarsuwela. This proved that Entrala's initial intent paid off despite the criticisms and hostile reaction towards his first cuadros, which perhaps were compensated the second part. Unfortunately, he never enjoyed this favorable turn of events, because that same year of 1882, he died of cholera.

It is worth pointing out the type of public who appreciated the works of the Company formed by Cubero. At the start of the nineteenth century, the theatres were typically Spanish for the Spanish, whether peninsulares or insulares; the Tagalogs, on the other hand, had their own specific mode of theatre expressions. With the performances of the company in Manila, and in Tondo or Cavite on weekends, even if these were for reasons of profit, Cubero helped build the initial sense appreciation for the zarzuela, despite different existing peculiar expressions and prevailing attitude toward the same. Rizal (2008) describes the atmosphere of said events in Tondo:

In the town plaza, a platform has been prepared, a stage made of reed, nipa and wood: there, the Tondo comedy will utter marvels and will compete with other gods in improbable miracles: there, Marianito, Chananay, Balbino, Ratia, Carvajal, Yeyeng, Liceria, etc. will sing and dance. The Filipino loves the theatre and passionately watches dramatic representations; he listens silently to the song, admires the dance and the mimicry; he does not whistle, but neither does he applaud. And if he doesn't like the representation? Well, he chews betel nut or he leaves the place quietly so that he does not distract the others who might be enjoying the show. Only rarely do the less educated people howl when the actors kiss or embrace the actresses, but they do not go beyond that.

In early August 1886, an incident took place in the house of Don Justo Martín Lunas, Civil Governor of Manila. During a performance of the play of Pascual Bailón, the actors Valentín Fernández and Práxedes Fernández danced the cancan “without reservation.” This provoked even the ecclesiastical hierarchy to publish a note in the local press criticizing that kind of spectacle (Retana 1909, 150). With regard to freedom of expression and how the works affect the public, Retana (*ibid.*, 151) wrote:

It is right to adjudge that the plays which were predominant in Manila during that time were the greener ones of the Spanish repertoire. Censorship had opened its doors generously and had been lax in this regard, and the Manileños had nothing to be envious about in terms of being colorful, and in comparison with any other town of the metropolis. In fact it could even be said, as far as some details were concerned, that the theatres in Manila surpassed those in Spain. In some zarzuelas, cordial relations had been established between the public and the actors, and perhaps a comic actor would talk to a spectator, and a spectator to a comic actor or actress, without anyone protesting against the practice.

The theatre was part of the leisure activities favored by the Filipinos, who not welcomed different theatre genres and foreign companies, but also became very much involved in the activity and even created their own artistic modes of expression. In Pandacan, a district in the outskirts of Manila, the Franciscan parish priest Fr. Cipriano González built a theatre at his own expense to provide a venue for opera from 1887 till 1888 with Tagalog musicians and singers (*ibid.*, 155-156).

Local production continued to increase and to become more diversified. It also gradually made clear reference to regional culture. On Thursday, September 15, 1892, the one-act zarzuela featuring Tagalog customs ¡Quién vive! by Conde y García del Rey, and with music by Maestro Ruiz, was staged. Performed by the Compañía Fernández at the Teatro Filipino, this was the second work of the function, with Soledad as the first, and Un capitán de lanceros as

the last (*La Oceanía Española* 15 September 1892). The public was very much familiar with these works. Before a rather huge crowd, the work of these “two residents of Manila” was staged, but it did not have the success they thought it would have. The *La Oceanía Española* (17 September 1892) news reporter wrote two days after the performance:

The work did not appeal much to the public. The audience was simply listening with cold indifference. In our opinion, the failure was due mainly to the character in the story who seemed more dramatic than comic, and was cold at the end of the story. The first cuadro, however, had an interesting local flavor, was well written and had good effects, as well as a new stage design.

Since the authors of the script have shown on other occasions their aptitude and skill for this type of plays, we believe that they should not get discouraged on account of the little success that the work had.

Said work had some beautiful parts, but was rather unoriginal, and this is expected because its author had been influenced earlier by the study of the masters and could not help being inspired by their compositions.

The Teatro Zorrilla, with its beautiful frescoes and oil paintings by Santus, Tur and Toribio Antillón, was inaugurated on August 17, 1893. A few months later, on October 25, the zarzuela *El diablo mundo* was staged there, with libretto by Emilio and Rafael Val and music by the Filipino José Estella (Retana 1909, 168). This work of average quality falls under the category of local works, but still followed the model of the zarzuela “à la española,” that is, of Spanish influence, as the action takes place in a Madrid setting. The opening of the Teatro Zorrilla marked the close of the significant period of the Teatro Filipino.

Another interesting play, but staged outside Manila, is *A 7 con 7 el pico o La llegada del “peso insular” y el fin de los contratos usurarios*. It was a “lyric-comic light spectacle” in one act and two

scenes written by Eduardo Saavedra, with music by Don Ramón Roco. It appeared for the first time at the Teatro de Iloilo on March 22, 1896. What the title suggests is that “7 pesos with 7 reales fuertes” and “pico” is a unit of weight equivalent to sixty-three and one-fourth kilograms. The amusing play portrays the introduction of the “insular (Spanish) peso,” created in 1896 by Minister Don Tomás Castellanos in order to replace and remove from the Philippine market the Mexican peso, since this was causing a deep economic crisis. The first cuadro describes Don Lucas, a businessman from Iloilo who all throughout the play complains to two friends and to his wife about the economic situation. Then, Agricultura, who also finds himself affected by the current situation, appears in the scene, followed by the Peso Mexicano (or the Mexican Peso) who also laments, but then Porvenir (the Future), who happens to be the local newspaper, brings good news. In the second cuadro, all run towards the dock wanting to hear about the latest news. The Peso insular comes in and, while singing, tells everyone about the advantages of change, such that, at the end of the play, all band together to kick the Mexican peso out (Retana 1909, 173-175).

The Manileño musical life also counted on other forms of expressions. Musical events were not only circumscribed to the lyrical representations. As such was the custom during the nineteenth century, there were military bands which provided outdoor concerts. The repertoire included transcriptions or new arrangements of overtures and zarzuelas that were in fashion then. The place par excellence for this type of activity was the Paseo de la Luneta, where the Banda del Regimiento de Infantería de Visayas # 5 played frequently and included among its works the Introduction of Jugar con fuego by Barbieri or the Symphony and Quartet from Marta by Flotow (*La Oceanía Española* 6 June 1882).

In Manila, there was also the Colegio de Tiples de la Santa Iglesia Catedral under the supervision of the Archbishop, the Dean and the canons of the cathedral. The professors of the said college were Blas Echegoyan, Ramón Valdez and Manuel Garrido. The

following sample examination shows the kind of learning imparted in the school: in the first part, solfeggio in vocalizations and instruments, and in the second part, quartets of Ravina; O salutaris of Bordesse; works by Calahan, Flotow and Beriot, La gata de Mari Ramos for chorus and piano by Oudrid, El siglo que viene by Caballero and La calesera from the Barberillo de Lavapiés, and some other zarzuela pieces.

If *La Oceanía Española* announced that “Zarzuelas para canto y piano con sus libretos [que] acaban de recibirse en esta administración” (Zarzuelas for voice and piano with their librettos, which the office has just received) were on sale, it is presumed that these arrived in Manila directly from Madrid. But it seems that there also existed a local music printing press, because the local newspapers had similar advertisements, for example, the music edition of the *Melodía* for piano by Ramón T. Valdez, dedicated to his father (*La Oceanía Española* 29 June 1882), a mazurka by Arcadio Enríquez entitled *Una noche en el Edén*, as well as the aforementioned José el carpintero libretto. All this indicates that the musical life in the city was so active both in its theatres as well as in domestic life; thus, showing similarities with the musical activity in other busy Castilian-speaking cities around the world, like Mexico City, Buenos Aires or Madrid itself.

Records show that lyrical companies that visited Manila also passed by Hong Kong, Shanghai and Batavia (now Jakarta), and that there was a certain demand for musicians who played western instruments, as could be deduced from an announcement in the *La Oceanía Española* (11 July 1882), which read as follows:

Aviso a los músicos. Se necesita para la banda municipal de Shangai un clarinete primero, uno id. segundo. Se les dará muy buen sueldo. Los que quieran contratarse pueden entenderse con los encargados. Elzinger Hnos. (Notice to musicians. Wanted for a town band in Shanghai: one first clarinet and one second clarinet. Good pay. Those interested may contact the people in-charge. Elzinger Bros.)

This music store sold pianos “de excelentes voces y elegantes formas” (of excellent tunes and elegant styles) on Escolta number 8, near another shop Secker y Co., located on the same street, but number 35, which sold Staimvay (sic) pianos.

Because the Philippines was a country on the other side of the Western World, music would reach the islands coming from either side of the globe, perhaps more logically from the West after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. It is important to explain up to what extent the maritime routes towards the Americas affected the Philippines when the Spanish colonies in Latin America became independent in the 19th century. The famous route of the Chinese vessels, better known as the Galleon of Manila, which took the Acapulco-Manila route twice a year, connecting later on with the Veracruz-Havana-Cádiz/Seville route, was closed after the 1815 Mexican Independence movement. At that time, the Philippines had been governed through the New Spain, but after México’s Independence they were administered directly from Spain. Manila was the farthest place where the Spanish zarzuela arrived and where it had a remarkable cultural and artistic influence. However, appreciation for this legacy within the context of the cultural events in the Philippines during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is viewed according to the political situation of the islands during those moments:

The implantation of American sovereignty in the Philippines has afforded new orientation to Philippine music. During the Spanish regime, the tendency was for the local author to blindly imitate foreign music. However, under the American occupation, the spirit of nationalism, fanned by the struggle for freedom, developed a sense of love and admiration for what is native and autochthonous. Thus, the success of any composition was measured by the perfect blend of modern forms and elements from the past. (Santiago 1931, 15)

By re-reading historical records, as well as discovering new ones, we can properly assess and evaluate how much had been forgotten and relegated pertaining to the history of the zarzuela in the islands.

A painting done by Juan Luna y Novicio, *España y Filipinas*, can well represent the same metaphor of these forgotten pages in the history of Filipino lyric theatre in the nineteenth century, wherein a vast horizon lies, waiting to be discovered. Presently, there are still many events to uncover and explore. Their discovery would then complete the “painting” of a most exceptional period in the history of arts in the Philippines and Asia.

Close to the end of summer 1882, there was a troupe, the *Compañía Dramática Peninsular*, which appeared in Manila under the guidance of a certain Mr. Rodriguez, who was organizing and recruiting actors and singers in the area. The new company made a debut performance of *El diablo a cuchilladas* and, although it was announced days before that they would represent *La trompa de Eustaquio*, in the end this was changed to *La casa de campo*. Critical reviews appeared immediately (*La Oceanía Española* 25 August 1882):

La función de anoche muestra a la nueva compañía el camino que debe seguir si quiere prosperar, déjese de dramas, cuya interpretación ha de ser flojilla siempre, dados sus pocos elementos, y dedíquese a la comedia de costumbres, y al género alegre, en el que algunos de sus actores sobresalen. (Last night’s function teaches the new company the direction that it has to follow if it wishes to prosper: it has to forget about those dramas, whose interpretation is always weak due to lack of elements, and should concentrate on plays which speak of customs, the happy genre, in which some of its actors stand out.)

A new company was annexed to the entertainment activities of Manila, but of course, if and only when weather allowed it.

Mérida (México) October, 2009

Notes

- 1 There was a first rustic Arroceros Theatre, made of nipa palm and reed that lasted for a few years. It was described by Mallat (1846). The new one was built in 1862.
- 2 Atayde, Juan, *La Ilustración Filipina*, Manila, December 21, 1862. In Retana 1909, 83. Its name is not mentioned.
- 3 It was built right across the Teatro de Arroceros shortly before the construction of the Teatro Príncipe Alfonso in 1869 and was popularly called “Español.” It was destroyed in a fire on October 13, 1878. It seems that Retana made a mistake in naming it “Novedades” on page 97 of Retana 1909, but in others lines he wrote “Variedades,” its real name.
- 4 In the book’s Chapter 26, “La víspera de la fiesta”.
- 5 The characters were Faustina (Mrs. Raguer), Candelaria (Mrs. García), Rosa (Ms. Suzara), Luis (Mr. Ratia), Felipe (Mr. Carvajal), D. Matías (Mr. Tronqued).
- 6 Functions in Tondo: June 29, July 15, and “beneficio” of Cubero July 21, respectively.
- 7 In the function in honor of Ms. Fernández on July 4 in the Variedades Theatre. Dedicated to and under the patronage of her “Excma. Sra. Condesa de Aznarcollar y la presencia del Gobernador Gral. Excmo. Sr. D. Fernando Primo de Rivera, Marqués de Estella.”
- 8 “Función de beneficio” of Elisea Raguer, Variedades Theatre, August 2.
- 9 Characters and actors:
- 10 *Nuevos tipos*: Doña Nicolasa (Mrs. Raguer); Bata 1 (Ms. Fernández); Doña Cándida (Ms. R. García), Bata 2, Criada y Pariente de Fuensanta (Ms. Tagaroma); Don Juancho, Matandá sa nayong y lavandero (Mr. Carvajal); Perico-criado tagalo y chico mercader (Mr. Ratia); Picapleitos (Mr. Arrieta) y Don Toribio Ráfagas (Mr. Tronqued).

- 11 *El Bailajún*: Doña Nicolasa (Mrs. Raguer); Fuensanta y Doña Chaleng (Ms. Fernández); Doña Cándida (Ms. R. García); Chata (Ms. Tagaroma), Don Juancho (Mr. Carvajal); Castila matandá (Mr. Ratia); Bago (N. M); Don Toribio (Mr. Tronqued) y Don Benigno (Mr. Arrieta).

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