

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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## **The Theaters of Manila: 1846 - 1896**

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 27, no. 1 (1979) 5–37

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## The Theaters of Manila: 1846-1896

CRISTINA LACÓNICO-BUENAVENTURA

This study centers on the theaters and theatrical activities in Manila from 1846 to 1896. It examines the buildings and the presentations and spectacles enjoyed by Manila's Spanish elite, both peninsular and Filipino, the native and mestizo elite, the simple townfolk of the arrables, and also the Chinese whose exotic, colorful, and noisy shows never failed to attract *indios* and Spaniards alike. These shows included legitimate Spanish plays and *zarzuelas* presented in a formal theater, *comedias* and *moro-moros* held in the open air, *carrillos*, gymnastic exhibitions, equestrian shows, and *comedias chincas*.

A variety of theaters proliferated in Manila's environs in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ranging from formal edifices with the magnificence characteristic of the time to portable constructions put up provisionally for an occasion like a town fiesta, these theaters featured musicals, dramas, short plays, magic shows, bullfights, puppet shows, and the like. Whatever the presentation, no matter the edifice, they attracted an enthusiastic audience.

### EARLY THEATERS

Sources consulted do not agree when the first structures specifically for theater purposes came into existence, but they could have been built in the 1820s or the 1830s. Rivera's account of interviews with relatives and friends of Huseng Sisiw points to the fact that Teatro de Tondo was in operation before 1829, the year Huseng Sisiw died.<sup>1</sup> Domingo Celis, owner or manager of Teatro de Tondo, made it a point to consult Huseng Sisiw on *comedias* or *moro-moros* that were to be shown. Only *moro-moros* which

1. Jose Ma. Rivera, *Huseng Sisiw* (Manila: Balagtas, 1933), p. 13.

passed his scrutiny went on stage. However, Retana marks 1834 as the year when these theaters which he calls *primitivos teatros de Arroceros y Tondo* came into existence.<sup>2</sup>

It could have been a few years later. The *Ceremonial de las asistencias y funciones*, regulations issued by the Municipal Council of Manila on festivals and celebrations in 1836, contains an article which organizes the distribution of boxes and the placement of the stage in the plaza where fiestas were to be held. From this, Barrantes infers that no building existed specifically for theatrical presentations at the time.<sup>3</sup>

Atayde mentions a *coliseo* or theater on the site of Arroceros. Very near Puente Colgante,<sup>4</sup> this nipa-roofed theater was put up for Tagalog presentations but it also had tragic Spanish dramas, *comedias de capa y espada*, and *sainetes* with mestizos as actors. Considering that Atayde was already an old man in 1892 when he wrote his *articulitos*, and that this theater was a part of his childhood, it is possible that it dates back to the 1840s or earlier. When the Gran Coliseo de Binondo was built in 1846, this provisional theater disappeared from the scene.<sup>5</sup>

Mas came to the Philippines in 1841 to investigate conditions in the country. He proposed theaters for both natives and mestizos.<sup>6</sup> Both the *teatros* in Arroceros and Tondo were in existence then, but Mas must have thought that with the natives' fondness for theaters, there was a need for more.

Except for a brief note on Teatro Comico, the old chronicles are silent on formal theaters for Spanish presentations and dramatic societies in the eighteenth century. If there were stage presentations, they were part of programs for royal festivities, religious celebrations or grand civic occasions. While the native populace indulged their love of theater in *teatros al aire libre* (open air

2. Wenceslao Emilio Retana y Gamboa, *Noticias historico-bibliograficas del teatro, en Filipinas desde sus origenes hasta 1898* (Madrid: Libreria General de Victoriano Suarez, 1909), p. 62.

3. Article 117—*Ceremonias de las asistencias y funciones de la noble ciudad de Manila*, Don Andres Joseph Roxo del Ayuntamiento in Vicente Barrantes, *El Teatro Tagalo* (Madrid: Tipografia de Manuel Gines Fernandez, 1891), p. 32.

4. Spanning the Pasig river, the Puente Colgante served the Quinta market but was demolished in the mid-1930s to give way to Quezon bridge.

5. Juan Atayde, *Los teatros de Manila* (a series of articles published in *La Ilustracion Filipina*, 1892) from the collection of Jose Maria Rivera, p. 8.

6. Sinebaldo de Mas, "Internal Political Conditions of the Philippines, 1842," in Emma H. Blair and James A. Robertson, eds., *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, 55 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1901-1904), 3:65.

provisional theaters) the Spanish populace must have had theirs in some spacious hall or patio borrowed for the occasion until the establishment of Teatro de Binondo.

*Coliseos tagalo*, or native playhouses of light materials for Tagalogs came before *coliseos castellanos*. Documents are available attesting to the existence of a *teatro tagalo* as early as 1842 which pertain to a theater in Tondo. Among these are a petition of Mariano Morante informing the *alcalde* of Tondo of his acquisition of a nipa and bamboo theater, and his desire to present shows in Tagalog there; and a communication from Tondo's *alcalde*, Pedro Encina, to the governor-general forwarding a report from the parish priest of Tondo about a scandalous scene presented at Teatro de Tondo.<sup>7</sup>

Mentioned in Atayde's memoirs is a form of roving spectacle much loved by Manila's indigenous population.<sup>8</sup> *Pantomimas* and *panchitos* were held in the streets of Manila and its suburbs during the Christmas season and extended to the end of the holidays in January. Pantomima players roamed the streets of the capital with a drum and a portable prop which Atayde called *un bastidor en forma de castillo* (stage frame showing a castle and accompanying scenery). Stopping in front of residential houses where an enthusiastic audience could be gathered, this portable theater showed fight scenes, moro-moro style, for which players were rewarded with food, money or drink. Panchitos which had gigantic pasteboard figures called *mojigangas gigantones* dancing and singing to the music of two small guitars and a larger one provoked hearty laughter from a wide-eyed audience, thus providing a welcome respite from the din and fury of the fight.

Atayde's recollections include mention of an actual theater for the natives.<sup>9</sup> This must have been the one in Arroceros, although the Tondo theater could have looked the same. Made of nipa and bamboo, the huge theater barn which Atayde called *camarin-teatro* had two parts: a stage and a patio. The stage had a painted mountain backdrop adorned with natural foliage and a castle in the background from which the "warriors" descended toward

7. *Teatros* (microfilm copy of holographs and prints at the Rizal library, Ateneo de Manila University), Reel 306; and "Patronato—Sobre haber usado en el Teatro de Tondo ropas clericales y que el Corregidor censure las comedias que alli se representen," Reel 308.

8. Atayde. *Los Teatros*, p. 4.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

the "battlefield" (the proscenium). The patio had long unnumbered benches which could accommodate unlimited spectators as long as there was room. Anyone could come in provided he paid a few coins at the door (the system of tickets was not yet in vogue). Lighting came from coconut oil lamps. Under the flickering lamps, the crowded plebian audience sat or stood.

During the last act, the management would shout — *A la verde!* and anyone could come in for free. Those who did not have enough coins waited for this outside. At the sound of the much-awaited call, they rushed in for the free show.

## TEATRO DE BINONDO

### EARLY BEGINNINGS AND ORGANIZATION

The year 1846 saw the first Spanish theater in the archipelago. Teatro de Binondo was built under the management of two men filled with a passion for the theater: businessman-engineer D. Jose Bosch and lawyer, D. Manuel Ponce.<sup>10</sup>

Situated at the present San Vicente street, between San Jacinto and Nueva in the heart of Chinatown, Teatro de Binondo occupied a lot formerly filled with nipa houses. When the flimsy structures went up in flames one day, the government forbade their being erected again, thus giving way to the Teatro.<sup>11</sup> The street fronting the theater building was then named Plaza del Teatro. To its right was Calle de los Angeles, to its left, Calle de los Empresarios, and right behind it was Calle de la Soledad.<sup>12</sup>

A real Spanish theater from the very beginning, Teatro de Binondo was truly magnificent by the standards of the era. Made of brick, stone, and wood, its construction seems to have cost around ₱30,000, the major part of which came from the Obras Pias and Caja de Carriedo.<sup>13</sup>

The main theater building had an impressive facade of graceful

10. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 70.

11. Rafael Diaz-Arenas, "Memorias historicas y estadisticas de Filipinas, particularmente de la grande isla de Luzon" in Barrantes, *El Teatro*, p. 38.

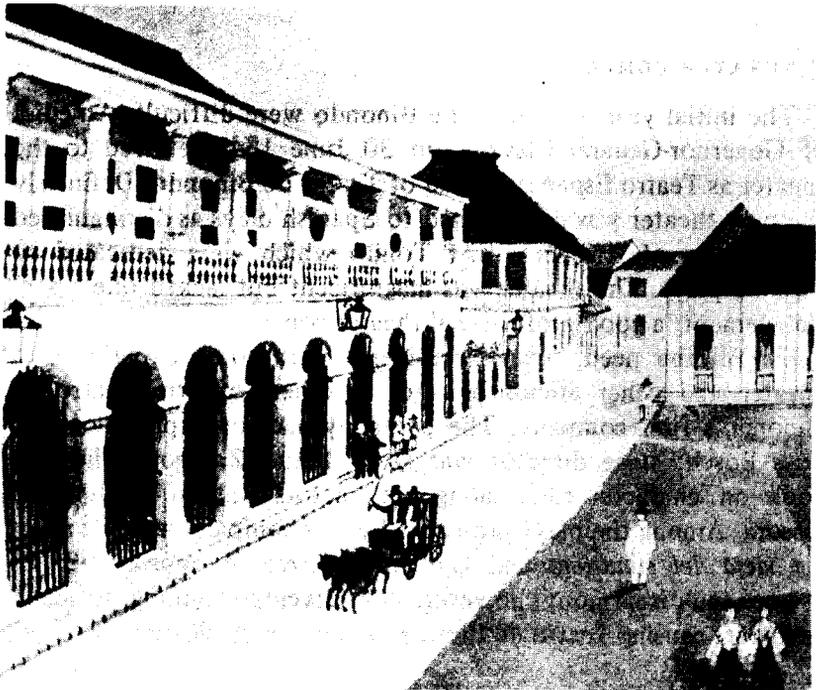
12. Report from the Inspector General de Obras Publicas to Gobernador Superior Civil Don Manuel Ramirez on Teatro Viejo de Binondo, 15 May 1871 — *Teatros*, Reel no. 306. Diaz-Arenas in his *Memorias historicas* gives the name Calle de la Comedia to Plaza del Teatro.

13. Diaz-Arenas, "Memorias historicas."

arches and columns. Theater-goers were brought by their carriages to the main entrance leading to a wide lobby. Above the lobby was a balustrade balcony where people could air themselves during intermission time. The posterior part of the balcony housed the gallery.

The theater building also had two symmetrical wings. Each wing had one floor in the anterior part and two floors in the posterior. The first floor called *salon bajo* was for coffee and billiards. *Salon alto* or the room on the second floor was set up for dancing and concerts which unfortunately were never held. Hence, the two *salones altos* were used as theater offices and living quarters instead.

The stage was so spacious that it could accommodate presentations of spectacular proportions. The auditorium itself was extensive, too; in the words of Atayde, *un amplio patio en hemiciclo*, meaning a large patio in semi-circular form. The spacious amphitheater contained several kinds of seats from which theater-



The Teatro de Binondo as it was constructed in the 1850s (Robert MacMicking, *Recollections of Manila and the Philippines*. [Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1967]).

goers could select depending on their social rank and, of course, their ability to pay.

*Palcos* or commodious boxes were the most expensive and were of two kinds, *principales*, first class, and *segundas*, second class. Graduated or tiered seats on the parquet were called *plateas*, while the gallery was called *tertulia* or *paraiso*. Cheapest of the three, the gallery was also of two kinds, the center space reserved for those of higher rank while the sides were occupied by mestizo families or those who came dressed in very casual clothes. In fact, they even had a separate entrance.

Magnificent as the theater was, there were complaints heard from the audience regarding its configuration. Portions of the theater were said to have very poor acoustics and limited viewing capacity. Certain quarters also raised questions about its solidity, which resulted in an inspection and judicial survey. Diaz-Arenas who reported on the matter in 1850 states that the complaint seemed to be without basis.<sup>14</sup>

#### THEATER COMPANY

The initial years of Teatro de Binondo were difficult. An edict of Governor-General Claveria on 30 June 1847 referred to the theater as Teatro Español instead of Teatro de Binondo. Definitely the new theater was consecrated to Spanish plays as distinguished from those of Arroceros and Tondo which were dedicated to Tagalog plays. The theater was magnificent but lacked one essential element: a good professional theater company.

To fill the need, Spanish residents with some experience in theater and other aficionados got together to form Teatro de Binondo's first company. The company had for impresario, Don Jose Bosch; stage director was Don Manuel Zaragosa who also took on character roles along with actors Ramon Valdez and Basora. Among the plays presented by this company were Zorilla's *La vieja del candilejo* and Garcia Gutierrez' *El trovador*.<sup>15</sup> Intrigues and disharmony, however, soon developed among company members causing Teatro de Binondo's temporary closure.

14. The description of the theater given in the foregoing paragraphs is based on information provided by Atayde; Diaz-Arenas; and the Inspector General's Report, 15 May 1871, *Teatros*, Reel No. 306.

15. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, and Atayde, *Los Teatros*, pp. 12-13

In 1848, Spain's numerous deportations brought more Spaniards into the islands. Basora invited the arrivals to join some former members of the theater's first company and set up a new one. The mixed group began work right away. Their presentations had intermission song numbers, sleight-of-hand tricks, and juggling. Manila's elite were entertained with tangos from Spanish-America and Andalucian songs for the first time. The company however, did not have that unity of a well-knit and disciplined organization.

A second group of deportees brought D. Narciso de la Escosura and his wife, the well-known actress Carlota Coronel, into the company in 1848. Emerging as a leader of theater art, Escosura also attracted actors of professional calibre to join the group. With la Coronel, he brought the theater to greater heights with such presentations as *La conjuracion de Venecia*, *La pata de cabra*, and *La redoma encantada*. Love of the theater was greatly encouraged during Escosura's time. It did not last long however, for as soon as the ban on political deportees was lifted, the celebrated couple went back to Spain.

Soon after, news about the successes of Escosura's company reached Spain. It must have been so encouraging that the entire Compañia de Teatro del Valon in Cadiz, headed by Manuel Lopez de Ariza transferred to the Philippines. For the first time, the country had a real professional company.<sup>16</sup>

The group presented great dramatic spectacles like *Isabel la Catolica*, classic sainetes of D. Ramon de la Cruz, dramas like *Diego Corrientes*, *La flor de la canela*, *El tio Canillitas*, and little Andalucian pieces. Dance intermissions were provided by the Compañia Infantil de Baile under an Italian, Maestro Apiani. Together, Ariza and Apiani presented enjoyable shows at the capital's theater. Their programmes were published in a Manila publication, *Boletin Especial de Filipinas*.

Ariza's group did not last long at the Teatro. They moved to the Casino, a house on Anda street, at the corner of Cabildo in Intramuros, which once served as a salon for the Sociedad de Recreo.

Lopez de Ariza's performances seem to be the last in the theater. Neither Retana, Barrantes nor Atayde mention any theater productions after that. In February of 1854 the governor-general and the municipal council were already toying with the idea of build-

16. Atayde, *Los Teatros*, p. 17 and Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, pp. 72-75.

ing a new theater. In the words of the governor: "un coliseo de buen gusto, comodidad, y seguridad," spacious, in good taste, and strong, the necessary attributes for the new theater. Obviously, Teatro de Binondo's faulty construction taught them a lesson.<sup>17</sup>

Four sites were proposed for the new theater — the plaza in front of the Cathedral, barrio Gunao, Arroceros, and San Jacinto Street. After long deliberations, the proposal to reconstruct the ruined theater won out.

Architect Nicolas Valdez made plans to construct a theater four yards longer and five yards wider than the former one. He reckoned it would take him seven months to finish the job. The budget, ₱21,990 for the actual construction and ₱6,041 for the acquisition of the site and demolition of the old theater, was approved. The contract was awarded to Juan Contuan, a Chinese, but when it was found out that he had a pending criminal case, the contract was awarded to D. Diego Viña who offered a lower bid.

All these grandiose plans led to naught. Instead of construction, intramural disputes ensued. The question of the theater's presidency took precious time and attention. In April 1857, it was suggested that the officials concerned be questioned on why they had not executed the project agreed upon. Whether these troubles arose because of self-esteem or profits involved in the contracts, it is hard to tell. The fact is the theater was never rebuilt.<sup>18</sup>

#### PRESIDENCY OF TEATRO DE BINONDO

The question of governance of the theater shows an interesting development. The records of *Superior Gobierno y Capitania General* contain an inquiry made by the alcalde of Tondo as to why he was not notified about the new theater in Binondo when by regulation the presidency of the theater was his prerogative. With the impending inauguration of the theater, Governor-General Claveria quickly settled the question by issuing a decree on 28 July 1847 in favor of the alcalde.<sup>19</sup> Hence, after 1847 the presidency of Teatro de Binondo or Teatro Español resided in the office of the Tondo alcalde. On 3 June 1856, the municipal council wrote

17. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

18. *Teatros*, Reel no. 307.

19. *Ibid.*

the governor-general recommending that governing policies concerning the theater, both political and economic, be decided by this body. In other words, the presidency of the theater should be taken over by the municipal council. It also recommended that the honor of presiding at the theater's functions be given to a commission composed of the two *alcaldes de la 1<sup>a</sup> y 2<sup>a</sup> eleccion* taking turns, two *regidores* or town councilors taking turns also, and the secretary of the municipality. It took the governor-general six months to settle the matter. By 10 November a decree was signed confirming the municipal council's recommendation. The governor-general's memorandum to the *alcalde* instructed him to preside over theatrical functions only in the absence of the governor.

Separated by a century from Teatro de Binondo, it is difficult to imagine that such matters could occupy the attention of high government officials at a time when the theater had no productions to speak of.

#### THE DECLINING YEARS

Less than 20 years after its establishment, the magnificence that was once the Teatro de Binondo degenerated into decrepitude. In fact, it was no longer referred to as Teatro de Binondo or Teatro Español, the name which gave it distinction. Documents of the mid-1860s refer to it as Teatro Viejo de Binondo or Teatro Antiguo de Binondo.<sup>20</sup>

After the earthquake in 1863, Teatro Viejo de Binondo fell into disuse. D. Antonio Enriquez who was now its owner converted the edifice into numerous lodging spaces which were rented out to the Chinese. It was even rumored that the theater had become a site of immorality and unhygienic practices.

The obvious condition of the theater plus the rumors spurred the corregidor and civil governor of Manila, D. Jose Maria Diaz, to initiate an inspection and survey of the building. The completed report recommended that the theater be vacated, the upper portion, which was in imminent danger of collapsing, be demolished, and the rest of the building repaired.

20. Ibid.

The action of Diaz in January 1856 inspired a letter the following month from the owner to the governor-general citing the precautions he had taken regarding his theater. Enriquez excused himself from attending to badly needed repairs by citing "unavoidable circumstances." The letter had its desired effect, for the matter was temporarily shelved.

It was not until a year later that Governor-General Vives directed Sr. Regidor D. Baltazar Giraudier to form a commission to look into the building, decide on repairs needed, and designate a limit on the number of people who might live there.

The commission as formed was composed of a representative from the municipal council, the provincial physician of Manila, the city architect, and a representative of the owner. No document has been found on the action taken by the commission. Was the job done? No one can tell. The fact is, five years later, Teatro Viejo de Binondo was still there, decaying but providing shelter for 257 persons and serving as garrison space for some government troops as well.

A new commission was formed in May 1871 under the auspices of the office for public works. City Engineer D. Castro Alano acted as chairman with D. Eduardo Lopez Navarra as assistant chairman. A voluminous report was handed in by the commission after a thorough inspection. D. Antonio Enriquez was dispossessed of his building and promised return of his property only after the repairs were attended to. By July, the repairs were done and the theater was submitted for inspection. The repairs were reported passable after which the corregidor elevated the matter to the governor-general. Another inspection by no less than the inspector-general for public works was decreed. Again the repairs passed scrutiny and won approval. On 4 August 1871, the owner got his theater back.

It should be noted that the preceding legalities were all geared toward rehabilitating the Teatro. While Teatro Viejo de Binondo lived its final days as a slum area, its original purpose as a staging area for art and culture was relegated to oblivion.

Smarting from the embarrassment of his theater's closure, Enriquez revived the case a year and a half later. He asked the governor-general for a final disposition of the matter and requested him to impede the departure of D. Jose Maria Diaz for Europe. Diaz, as corregidor and civil governor of Manila, Enriquez stated,

was liable for the denunciation and destruction of his theater under Article 270 of the Penal Code 1850.

On 25 January 1873, the State ended the matter. The handling of the case of Teatro Viejo de Binondo was declared proper and fair. No just cause had been found to impede Diaz' departure. The verdict was final.

#### TEATRO DEL PRINCIPE ALFONSO

On 4 January 1861, Sociedad anonima, an organization of military officers and government employees devoted to the theater, presented a formal request to the municipal council about a lot at Campo Arroceros. The Sociedad intended to build a theater of light construction on the lot for which they were willing to pay the usual 6 percent annual rental fee. On 12 April 1861, the governor-general granted the request. The lot which had a frontage of 40 yards and a depth of 70 was given rent-free provided it was used solely for theater purposes.<sup>21</sup>

With a capital of ₱41,300 representing 359 full shares and 93 half shares, the society was incorporated. By June 1862 the society was properly registered with Eusebio Salcedo as president and A. de Zarate as secretary. Sociedad Anonima, the name by which it was first known, was changed to Teatro del Principe Alfonso which applied to the theater they constructed.

December 1862 was an exciting month for the Teatro del Principe Alfonso. The building had just been completed, its equipment properly installed, and the avenues around it aglow with 18 brand new gas lamps. In addition, the Compañia Dramatica de España under the able direction of young Rafael Llanos of the Conservatory of Madrid was arriving.<sup>22</sup>

The 1860s were productive years for the theater, except for a brief respite when the theater was forced to close. The earthquake of 1863 destroyed so many buildings that the offices of the governor-general's secretariat had to occupy the theater temporarily.<sup>23</sup>

Besides Llanos' Compañia Dramatica, other companies were featured at the Teatro. A French operetta company moved over

21. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306. This place is approximately where the present Ice and Cold Storage Plant stands at the south approach of Quezon Bridge.

22. *Teatros*, Reel no. 309.

23. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 83.

to Arroceros from a little theater in Quiapo when the secretariat vacated the Teatro. Then came a company of aficionados with the Filipino, D. Jose Dayot, as impresario and Juan Barbero, a well-known actor.

Theater fever heightened. By 1869 the theater was no longer called Teatro del Principe Alfonso but Teatro Español (some documents refer to it as Teatro Nuevo de Arroceros). It was a home not only for the Spanish theater but also for the Italian opera. A major Italian opera performed at Arroceros was so successful that it made four repeat performances and proved to be a great financial success at the box-office.<sup>24</sup>

#### TEATRO'S RECONSTRUCTION

At this point, however, some imperfections of the theater were quite apparent. Repairs had to be made. The visit of the Prince of Edinburg to the Islands in 1870 necessitated remodelling of the theater. Since the theater was the site of festivities for the visiting prince, a portico, a reception hall, and a kitchen were quickly constructed for the occasion.

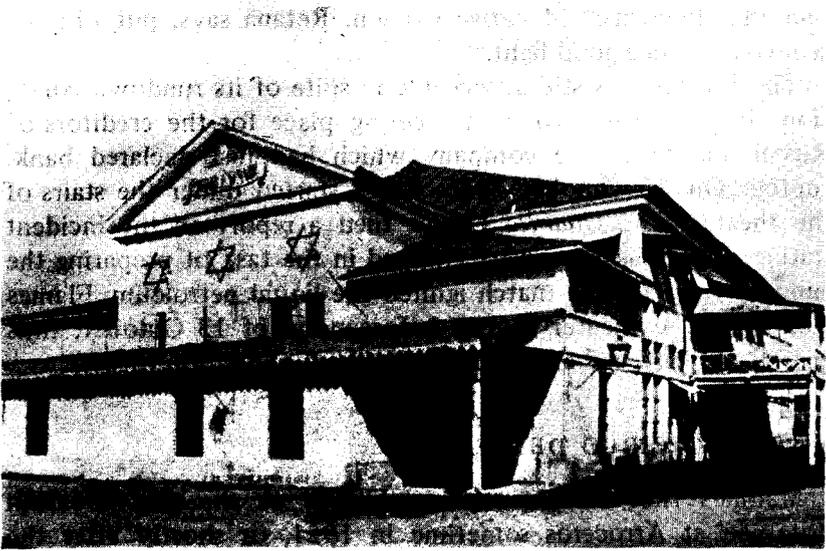
After the departure of the royal visitor, the management of the theater requested the civil governor of Manila who was the chairman of the committee on festivities to have the new constructions demolished and the theater's original facade restored. In his instructions to architect Cespedes, the civil governor pointed out that the theater was already in a deteriorating condition, hence he should be careful to minimize the expense of restoration. Eight years of active production in Teatro Español had taken its toll. The restoration was accomplished in November 1870.

However, in two years' time, they had allowed numerous sheds to proliferate and crowd its premises. This led to an order by the civil governor on 12 April 1872 to "clean up their premises and demolish all sheds within ten days or else." They were also cautioned against throwing waste material into the Pasig river and littering the theater's premises.<sup>25</sup>

Some shows presented at the Teatro were outstanding. One of these was *La conquista de Jolo* by D. Antonio Garcia del Canto.

24. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305 and Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 89.

25. *Teatros*, Reel no. 308.



The facade of Teatro Español that was previously named Teatro del Principe Alfonso (*Views in Manila*, a picture album of the Eugenio Lopez Filipiniana Collection).

Premiered on 11 June 1865, this drama in three acts and in verse had a large cast of practically all Filipinos. *La vuelta del marino* by Enrique Tovar was another. It was written to honor the victory of the Pacific squadron of the Spanish armada.<sup>26</sup>

Another outstanding presentation was *Una pagina de gloria*, a play on the campaign in Jolo under General Malcampo. Its authors, Federico Casademunt and Regino Escalera, were peninsulars, public servants, and newspapermen. They seemed to have predicted the victory of Spanish arms in Jolo since the operations in Jolo ended on 18 April 1876 and the play was presented on 23 April. It is hard to believe that the work was conceived, planned, written, and rehearsed in the short span of four days.<sup>27</sup>

One of the last significant plays shown at the Teatro Español at Arroceros in 1878 was a play on the customs of Manilans entitled *Republica . . . domestica*. With an all-male cast, the story revolved around three bachelors who got themselves into all sorts of scrapes until their landlord advised them to get married if they wished to put order in their lives. The three fellows found “provi-

26. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 84.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

dential angels," married them, and lived happily ever after. The fact that they married native women, Retana says, put Filipino womanhood in a good light.<sup>28</sup>

The theater was still serviceable in spite of its rundown condition. It was even used as a meeting place for the creditors of Russel and Sturgis, a company which had just declared bankruptcy. On 13 October 1878, a fire started under the stairs of the theater. The *Guardia Civiles* filed a report on the incident stating that houseboys were engaged in the task of preparing the lamps when a lighted match ignited the liquid petroleum. Flames consumed the theater shortly before noon of 13 October, thus ending the 16 years' existence of the home of Spanish theater.

#### TEATRO CIRCO DE BILIBID

Manila's first bullring was established at the site of Jardin Botanico at Arroceros sometime in 1851, or shortly after the triumphant return of Urbiztondo's forces from Jolo. Some experienced soldiers worked in the bullring as fencers and horsemen. One, a corporal of the cavalry named Quesada, excelled over the rest of his companions. The bullfights fizzled out after a time. Quesada turned rancher and later became a councilor of Manila. After 10 years or so, the former corporal returned to his love of bullfights.

Quesada not only organized a society of bullfight lovers, he also constructed an amphitheater of bamboo and nipa at Sibacon.<sup>29</sup> Inspired by success, he built a better amphitheater of wood with a metal roof, located on a vacant lot across from Bilibid Prison.<sup>30</sup> The enthusiasm for bullfights died down but Plaza de Toros remained, transforming itself overnight into a theater. With its circular umbrella-like roof of iron, the plaza was aptly named Teatro Circo de Bilibid.<sup>31</sup>

It is not exactly known when Quesada relinquished ownership

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

29. Sibacon is in the area of Plaza Sta. Cruz very close to the Puente de Sibacon near Escolta.

30. Prior to its transfer to Muntinlupa, Rizal, Old Bilibid Prison was formerly located in the present area of Central Market and Children's and Maternity Hospital in Sta. Cruz district.

31. Telon, "Algo de Teatros," *La Ilustracion Filipina*, 7 February 1893.



The Teatro Circo de Bilibid or Teatro Español de Bilibid as it was sometimes called (*Views in Manila*, a picture album of the Eugenio Lopez Filipiniana Collection).

of Teatro Circo but this took place before 1874.<sup>32</sup> In 1874, Sr. Carlos Assi and Sr. Panades, impresarios of the recently arrived Compañía de Opera, requested the office of public works for an inspection of the building to determine the safety of the structure. Assi and Panades made other complaints, but the engineer who attended to the inspection thought the complaints within the province of the courts and so did not include them in his report.

A special program presented in the Circo on 3 February 1876 was in honor of King Alfonso XII and his representative, the governor-general Sr. Marques de San Rafael. Well-received, it consisted of three one-act comedies in Spanish, interspersed with musical numbers and gymnastic acts, all of which were preceded by an unveiling of the king's portrait and royal salutations.

Symphonies, zarzuelas, short comedies, and vocal solos or duets were the regular fare of Teatro Circo in the late 1870s. Groups of young aficionados headed by veteran actors alternated with professional companies from the Peninsula. The Campini sisters,

32. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305. Some 20 documents pertaining to Teatro Circo from the offices of the Tesorería de Propios y Arbitrios, the municipal treasury, the Juzgado de Bienes de Difuntos, the public trustee for property of deceased persons, and the office of Manila's civil governor dated 1874 to 1884 are still available. Ownership of Teatro Circo is recorded as pertaining to the deceased D. Manuel Martínez. The travails of a theater owner are also clearly pictured in these documents.

Cecilia and Carolina, and the well-known comedian and actor, D. Juan Antonio Barbero, under the able director, D. Antonio Garcia-Ecija, were the toasts of that era.<sup>33</sup>

Ramon Abarca, lawyer-trustee of Manuel Martinez' estate, filed in court an account of the situation of Teatro Circo in February-March 1879. The Teatro was in a quandary, financially. Lessees failed to pay the rent on time or if they did, paid directly to the municipal treasury. Consequently, Abarca had no funds with which to pay the salaries of the personnel in charge of cleaning the building. Abarca earnestly implored the court to grant him authority to attend to these matters promptly.<sup>34</sup>

Besides the above problems, Teatro Circo owed the government the staggering amount of ₱435 for its lighting and the maintenance of its premises. In arrears for six years, 1874-1880, the Teatro was now being held for nonpayment of debts. Abarca referred the matter to the *Juzgado de Bienes de Difuntos* which held in its treasury enough funds of the intestate to cover the debt.

By then, Teatro Circo, or Teatro Español de Bilibid as it was sometimes called, had assumed a new role. In 1880, it was no longer a theater but a cockpit known as Circo del Juego de Gallos run by a contractor named Jose Tan-Chuanco. Tan-Chuanco was ordered by the court to turn over his rent to the treasury. Meanwhile the management of Circo was threatened with seizure proceedings if the debt was not settled soon. The bill was finally paid, 10 years after the proceedings started. A report dated 31 March 1884 informed the corregidor, or civil governor of Manila about the complete settlement of obligations of Manuel Martinez' estate. The estate paid a total of ₱654 in back accounts for taxes, light bills, and maintenance services.<sup>35</sup>

The bullring, turned theater, then cockpit, came to its tragic end on 20 October 1882 following a strong typhoon that hit the capital.

#### TEATRO DE SIBACON

The area of Sibacon or Sibakong is a stone's throw from busy Plaza Sta. Cruz and about a block or so away from Ongpin street.

33. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

34. *Teatros*, Reel no. 308.

35. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305.

heart of Manila's present Chinatown. Sibacon's theaters existed at different times within three decades. Of light construction, they were provisional theaters of nipa and bamboo. The variety and popularity of shows presented made Teatro de Sibacon a by-word in Manila households. Manilans looked forward to the comedias, programs of European dances, choreographic shows, and exciting bullfights.

The beginnings of the first theater at Sibacon are documented in a request of D. Mateo Trinidad to be allowed to put up a *comedia tagala* in the area. The comedia, *El amante desgraciado o General Perseo* was scheduled for a two-night run, 10-11 June 1848. But a check as to decency and propriety was required prior to the issuance of the governor-general's approval.<sup>36</sup>

Maestro Apiani, a famous Italian dance teacher in Madrid, was also featured at the Sibacon. Once in Manila, he put up a dance school and taught Manila's elite the *gavotte*, the *schottische*, the *redowa*, and other difficult dances, then the current craze in Europe. Through Apiani, the aristocratic minuet was danced in some of the elegant homes in the capital.<sup>37</sup>

Later, Apiani organized a Compañía Infantil de Baile and coordinated with Lopez Ariza in putting on presentations of comedy and dance at Teatro de Binondo. Apiani also had a short stint at Teatro de Tondo, after which he put up his little theater in barrio Sibacon in the early 1850s and called it Teatrito de Sibacon.

At the Teatrito, Apiani taught his pupils for free. In return, they worked for him in his shows for a period of time without pay. Apiani's shows were so appreciated that he averaged some 20 to 30 performances per show. The scenery was prepared by a native painter named Lozano who had also worked previously for Escosura's comedias de magia. *Sargento Marco Barba* and *La mariposa encantada* are two long-remembered shows at the Teatrito.

During an evening in 1853, just a few hours after Apiani and his dancers had a show, the little theater collapsed. The disaster plus ill health moved the maestro to go back to Spain leaving his well-trained disciples to carry on.

36. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306. Nothing is said about the nature of the show in the documents. Based on the title, it can only be presumed that this was of the moro-moro type, one of those dramones tagalogs about which Atayde and Santos-Cristobal wrote.

37. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 76. See also Atayde, *Los Teatros*, pp. 21-23.

Another Teatro de Sibacon was set up following a decree dated 15 April 1857 which allowed D. Mariano Farrell to present choreographic shows there. Farrell who may have been an associate or a disciple of Apiani was given permission on condition that his shows would not offend sound morals.<sup>38</sup>

Sibacon was a site for Apiani's choreographic programs as well as for Quesada's fiery bullfights. An amphitheater of bamboo and nipa became the temporary home of toros and toro aficionados in the 1870s until Quesada moved his bullfights to a more permanent site at Bilibid.<sup>39</sup>

#### TEATRO DE VARIEDADES

Teatro de Variedades, formerly called Teatro de Novedades, traces its origin to a big octagonal kiosk, the Quiosco, built for public dances across from the Teatro del Principe Alfonso. The first dance at Quiosco was so scandalous that the Teatro was declared off-limits to Spanish soldiers. Subsequent dances were also banned. When Teatro del Principe Alfonso burned down in 1878, Quiosco was transformed into a theater and named Teatro de Novedades. Of the new theater, J. P. Gutierrez-Gay wrote in 1881: "when its doors open, Manila's refined society comes in" and he promptly called it a real *coliseo artistico*.<sup>40</sup>

The first company presented at the Teatro de Variedades was a French company under the impresario D. Zacarias Deplace.<sup>41</sup> The municipal council leased the theater to Deplace for eight years starting 23 May 1879 for a monthly sum of ₱40 for the first four years and ₱70 for the last four. The lessor agreed to shoulder expenses for the maintenance and cleaning of the theater and its equipment, while Deplace bound himself to taking good care of it.

Explicit provisions on safety required the storing of petroleum outside the building, the availability of sandboxes to put out fires, and secure attachment of hanging lamps. It strictly prohibited personnel in charge of lamps from smoking while on duty and

38. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

39. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 96.

40. J. P. Gutierrez-Gay, "Manila en el Bolsillo" in Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 97.

41. The contract signed by Deplace and Corregidor Ripoll dated 4 July 1879 is still available. See *Teatros*, Reel no. 308.

provided that the insurance company, Martin Dyce y Compañía, could send a representative to the theater anytime to inspect its premises. (After the fire which gutted Teatro del Principe Alfonso in 1878, it was fool-hardy to be complacent.)

The contract limited the shows which Deplace could present to dramas, musical programs, dance presentations, and gymnastics or acrobatic shows. Outside of these, special permission had to be obtained. On the other hand, the Ayuntamiento reserved the right to use the theater for certain festivities. The lessee was to be duly notified and relieved from payment of rent during such periods.

The theater was still leased to the French company when a typhoon struck on 20 November 1879. Damage to the building was promptly repaired at the cost of ₱121 which was promptly deducted from the rent the following month.<sup>42</sup>

The French company was followed by the Compañía de Zarzuela organized in Spain by Dario Céspedes, well-known poet and writer. Céspedes presented *Jugar con fuego* and *Barberillo de lavapies* among other successful zarzuelas. After a year, theater patronage of Céspedes' zarzuelas dwindled to an insignificant number; the company ended in squabbles with each member going his own way.<sup>43</sup>

When the earthquake of 1880 ruined many buildings in Manila, the office of the captain and governor-general transferred to the Teatro, closing Teatro de Variedades temporarily.

In September 1881, the theater was leased anew to Liceo Científico, Artístico, y Literario de Manila under terms similar to the ones given Deplace. Liceo was freed of rent for the month of November when the city used the theater for the commemorative feast of St. Andrew.<sup>44</sup>

No document mentions shows presented by Liceo at the Teatro de Variedades.<sup>45</sup> Three months after the lease, Agustin Miro, Liceo's treasurer, notified D. Jose Franco of the Ayuntamiento that Liceo was no longer in operation. Finding difficulty in paying the rent, the society paid in February 1882 the rent due the previous December and severed its connections with the theater.

42. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

43. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 98.

44. *Teatros*, Reel no. 308.

45. Retana's and Atayde's accounts are silent on this matter, too.

Failure and disappointments stalked the last companies which leased the Teatro. An Italian opera company which came in 1882 had hardly disembarked when its first tenor and one soprano died. However, the opera *Faust* still ran on schedule with aficionados substituting for the deceased actors.<sup>46</sup>

While precautions were taken against fire, it was wind and water that brought down the theater. On 20 October 1881, a violent typhoon struck the city and destroyed Teatro de Variedades, ending its short four-year existence.

### TEATRO FILIPINO

A request to put up Teatro Filipino at Calle San Roque, corner Calle Gral. Echague was filed by a peninsular, D. Ramon Mulet, on 10 May 1880. With a frontage of  $15\frac{2}{3}$  varas,<sup>47</sup> a depth of 42 varas and 7 varas in height, the new theater would be made of wood with a roof of galvanized iron. The new theater would replace the portable theater with a cloth roof then existing at San Roque.

The permit was granted two weeks later on the condition that modifications would be made in the plan recommended by the city architect, and no bamboo or other easily combustible materials would be used in the construction.

Five years later, Teatro Filipino underwent a government inspection regarding safety and security. The report made to the corregidor of Manila, 17 April 1886, states that the Teatro situated at Calle Echague had convenient exits on the front and right sides. Narrow corridors lead to the boxes near the stage. The left side of the theater had no convenient exit; however, the problem could easily be solved by opening an extra door toward a patio, the patio cleared of odds and ends stored there during the inspection and a door cut through the patio's wall toward the street.<sup>48</sup>

Retana frequented Teatro Filipino between 1887 and 1889. He described the Teatro as rather average, poor in ornamentation and lighting, with a wooden railing along its one and only tier of theater boxes. Rated average or perhaps even shabby compared to the magnificent Teatro de Binondo or the Teatro del Principe

46. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 98.

47. A measure equivalent to 2.78 feet.

48. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

Alfonso which was fit for a visiting prince, Teatro Filipino was nevertheless serviceable. It entertained the residents of Manila for almost two decades. Its well-attended presentations went on practically every night.<sup>49</sup>

Teatro Filipino has the distinction of being the first in Manila to show a play with a local theme. Presented in 1882, *Cuadros filipinos* was a sainete in two scenes with typical characters and typical sights of Manila. The author, peninsular but confirmed Filipinist D. Francisco de Entrala, equipped his light theatrical piece with such familiar mobile figures that his spectators were highly amused for two or three nights. After that, the audience thought the whole thing a big joke on them. They booed Entrala and practically pelted him with stones.<sup>50</sup>

Other well-loved pieces presented at the theater were *Un vals de Weber*, a play in one act and in verse and *Al borde del abismo*, a monologue in prose about a man contemplating suicide, both by Manuel Romero y Batalla de Aquino. These were shown in 1884.

*El secreto de un medico* was premiered on 8 November 1892. The September before that, *El cercado ajeno*, a humorous piece by Emilio del Val with music by Maestro Estella, had been shown and given, it was reported, an overwhelming ovation.<sup>51</sup>

Another effort to stage episodes from local scenes was *Apuros de un pedaneo* by physician and playwright D. Mariano Garcia del Rey and employee and newspaperman D. Jose Conde y de la Torre. Though not a satire, it showed the humor or absurdities of local scenes. *Quien vive* shown in September 1892 was another zarzuela on Tagalog customs by the same authors, but it proved less successful than *Apuros*.<sup>52</sup>

The early 1890s had luminaries like Alfredo Ratia, Praxedes Fernandez, Alejandro Cubero, Venancia Suzara, Patrociño Tagaroma, Juan Antonio Barbero, and Eliza Ragner on the stage of Teatro Filipino. As to theater companies, there were Compañía Ragner, Compañía Fernandez, followed by Compañía Zarzuela Carvajal in 1895.<sup>53</sup> The latter presented zarzuelas, orchestral symphonies, and excerpts from operas in the old rickety theater.

49. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 108.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-13.

51. Telon, "Algo de Teatros" *La Ilustracion Filipina*, 21 September 1892.

52. *Ibid.* and Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, pp. 162-63.

53. Telon, "Algo de Teatros." See also Raymundo Bañas, *Pilipino Music and Theater* (Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Company, 1969).

By 1893, Teatro Filipino was tagged "very old." The year before that, festivities for the fourth centennial of Christopher Columbus were scheduled at the repaired Teatro de Tondo since Teatro Filipino was "not good enough for such a solemn occasion."<sup>54</sup>

The theater may have been "very old" then but it was still definitely serviceable. In fact in August 1896 Joaquin Lafont, a peninsular and co-owner of Teatro Filipino, made arrangements with an electric company called Amperiana to have electric lights installed the following January.

The last document found on the Teatro Filipino is dated July 1897. It is a communication from the office of the alcalde of Manila inquiring from the office of the corregidor and civil governor about a permit granted to an acrobatic company holding nightly shows at Teatro Filipino.<sup>55</sup>

#### TEATRO CIRCO DE ZORRILLA

Teatro Circo de Zorrilla, located at Calle Iris and the corner of San Pedro, was inaugurated on 17 August 1893.<sup>56</sup> Of grand proportions and luxurious appointments, the new theater surpassed the three other permanent theaters existing then. Teatro de Tondo was big but antiquated; Teatro Filipino was not much of a theater, architecturally speaking; and Teatro Principe<sup>57</sup> was small and unimpressive. Zorrilla had a seating capacity of 1352 divided into the following categories: 4 seats in the box of honor, 48 in tiered boxes, 400 orchestra seats, and 900 in the gallery or general admission.<sup>58</sup>

Its impresarios and proprietors were D. Ramon Santos, D. Valeriano Santos, D. Andres Frois, and D. Federico Fernandez Ortiz. Its proud owners had beautiful frescoes and oil paintings installed which easily became the center of attraction during the grand inauguration. The inauguration was followed on 25 October by a

54. Telon, "Algo de Teatros," *La Ilustracion Filipina*, 14 August 1892.

55. *Teatros*, Reel no. 307.

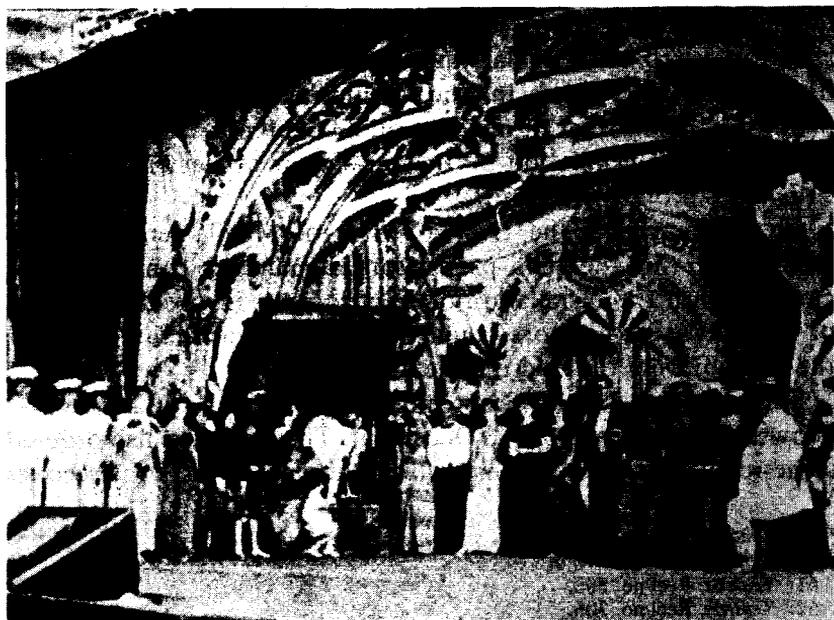
56. Iris was renamed Azcarraga and presently bears the name Recto Avenue. Zorrilla was located at a spot approximately a block away from Quezon Boulevard.

57. A theater for all social classes near the wharf of San Nicolas.

58. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, pp. 167-68.



*Above*, the audience that attended presentations at the Teatro Zorilla. *Below*, a stage presentation in the Teatro Zorilla (*El Teatro Semanario Artístico* 1, 1 [22 January 1916]).



premiere of *El diablo mundo*, a zarzuela by Emilio and Rafael del Val with music by Jose Estella, all Filipinos.

During the performances, the route of carriages bringing theatergoers and their parking area merited a note of instructions to the commandant of the Civil Guards from no less than the civil governor of Manila himself.<sup>59</sup> Without doubt, Teatro Circo de Zorrilla was a theater for the affluent and powerful elite.

From the very start, presentations at Zorrilla were memorable. The year following its inauguration, there was the farewell concert of Maria and Lucia Gavallini on 12 September 1894<sup>60</sup> and a presentation of two zarzuelas *El duo de la africana* and *Cadiz* on 13 December, which the management billed as super shows.

Antonio de Kontski, a Polish concertist appeared on stage in 1895 in an instrumental and vocal concert. Two weeks after the concert, Zorrilla had an unusual variety show including several numbers: a symphony, songs to the accompaniment of a harp, sleight-of-hand acts, a monologue, disappearing acts and other magic fare were all part of the night's entertainment. *Sobrinas del Capitan Grant* under the impresario Narciso Pons had a large cast of characters representing dancers, mariners, priests, gauchos, Chileans, savages, crocodiles, and of course, musicians.<sup>61</sup> Copies of programs for the 1895 shows cited above still exist at the National Archives.

Teatro Circo de Zorrilla was organized at the time when electricity was introduced in the archipelago. When the Gaceta published the Circular de Teatros on 23 September 1894 ordering the immediate installation by theater owners of electric lights, the company's problems began.<sup>62</sup>

On 2 November, the civil governor of Manila sent a memorandum to the theater's proprietors demanding compliance or closure. Since the installation of electric lights involved thousands of pesos, the proprietors could not comply immediately. Thus, the civil governor ordered the theater closed.

Somehow the civil governor must have relented, for a show was allowed to take place on 13 December. The governor also ordered some renovations in the theater like the removal of theater boxes

59. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

60. Bañas, *Pilipino Music*, p. 214.

61. *Teatros*, Reel no. 308.

62. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

that formed an obstacle to free passage or to comfortable viewing, the opening of a passageway through orchestra seats and the use of a door that had been closed permanently after the inauguration.

Barely a month after the renovations suggested, another memorandum from the civil governor with more detailed recommendations arrived. At this point, the theater management had started negotiations with the company, La Electricista, on the installation of electric lights. The governor's recommendations included a marquee at the entrance to the main lobby, rearrangement of seats in the patio to clear a passageway, removal of petroleum gas lights on the stage and installation of more washrooms for both men and women.

Concrete arrangements with La Electricista failed to materialize. On 26 November 1895, the office of the civil governor sent another reminder on the matter. Tomas Guerra, representative of the management, Frois y Compañía, worded a reply to the governor on 28 November stating the company's financial incapability to comply due to multiple obligations and several litigations with creditors. The governor relented and gave his blessing for the scheduled December shows. On 3 January however, the governor sent a strongly worded memo to the management ordering immediate installation of electric lights and threatening closure.

The theater was closed but there is no record of the exact date. *Sobrinas del Capitan Grant* was featured on 7 March 1896. Whether such was a mere grace period or closure came after the show, is difficult to ascertain. The fact is it was still closed on 12 August 1896 when Spanish transients, D. Jose Castañer, D. Manuel Cala, and D. Carlos Freixas in behalf of Compañía de Zarzuela Española begged the government to waive its order. Besides the usual reasons like lack of funds and nonavailability of materials for the installation, their petition included an appeal calculated to touch the heart of the governor. The appeal ran thus:

(The officers and members of the Compañía de Zarzuela find themselves) "... without the means to earn not only for their own subsistence but what is more painful, the sustenance of their beloved families . . . consequently they cannot return to the beloved mother country (much as they want to) for lack of means."<sup>63</sup>

63. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305.

There is no information as to the result of the petition. Meanwhile, the Revolution broke out that very month interrupting momentarily all activities in the capital.

#### TEATRO TAGALO DE TONDO

Teatro Tagalo de Tondo<sup>64</sup> sometimes called Teatro de Comedias Tagalas or simply Coliseo de Tondo existed as early as the 1840s as a theater of light materials for *dramones tagalos*. Later reconstructed of wood and galvanized iron, it continued to serve the inhabitants of the northern part of the province of Manila until the 1890s.

Its crude mountain backdrop of painted castles and natural foliage was later fashioned in the style of the Spanish theater. Presentation of *dramones tagalos* were spiced with intermission pieces from Spanish zarzuelas.

Popular corridos like *Baldovino* and *Crisalda y Florante* were staged many nights at the Teatro. Interminably long plays of chivalrous tales in verse form, these corridos, now comedias, shared center stage with the shorter dramas of Spanish theater in its later years. *La pata de cabra* translated from Spanish into the Tagalog dialect, the original work, *Loco por el viento*, and the *El embajador y hechicero*, a *Comedia de magia*, were among such presentations enjoyed by its theater patrons.

Coliseo de Tondo's troupe was of varied composition. Among its members were indigenous artists and special artists who were the durable remnants of the Hispano-Filipino companies of the defunct Teatros de Arroceros y Binondo.

The Coliseo's existence of more than half a century speaks well of its versatile troupe and dynamic management. Its dynamism is evidenced by a document dated 3 October 1848, containing a set of rules and regulations prepared by the management to insure good order in the establishment. Consisting of eight articles, it was submitted to Governor-General Claveria for correction, modification, and final approval. General Claveria approved the set of rules and referred it to the Tondo alcalde for proper publication and posting on the theater doors.<sup>65</sup>

64. Atayde, *Los Teatros*, p. 25.

65. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305.

Permission to put on dramas in Spanish was requested on 1 July 1855 and granted immediately by the governor-general. Less than a month later, the office of the governor-general noted the Teatro's posters and handbills bearing the royal insignia and coat of arms. The office of the Tondo alcalde was notified about the governor's disapproval of the practice and ordered that henceforth such materials should be submitted to the *Juez Censor de Teatros* prior to distribution.<sup>66</sup>

The theater must have been closed for sometime, but the dates cannot be definitely ascertained. The theater underwent inspection in January 1885 and in April 1886. The commission which undertook the inspection gave its approval on the repairs and reforms undertaken. It also recommended its reopening as soon as possible.

The last recorded activity at the Coliseo de Tondo was the celebration of the fourth centennial of Christopher Columbus in October 1892.<sup>67</sup> Four years later the Revolution broke out. Nothing has been found to ascertain whether the theater closed or kept going to satisfy its loyal patrons.

#### THEATERS FOR TEATRO TAGALO

The last few years before the outbreak of the Revolution saw a proliferation of theaters for *teatro tagalo*. Among these were Teatro Infantil de Dulumbayan, Teatro Guiñol, Teatro Infantil Tagala, Teatro Tagalo de Tanduay, and Teatro Infantil de Aguila. These provisional theaters were of the type described by Juan Atayde.

Teatro Infantil de Dulumbayan had a frontage of 24 meters and a depth of 34 meters. It had a facade of *sawali*. Its bamboo stage had a nipa roof and a flooring of wood and bamboo. The two dressing rooms were also made of *sawali*.<sup>68</sup> There were 14 balcony seats, 8 in front of the stage and 3 on its side; 30 orchestra bamboo seats attached to the ground and 12 in the orchestra pit; and general admission seats also of bamboo in 5 levels.<sup>69</sup>

Teatro Guiñol on the other hand was a roofless affair, only 6 x

66. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

67. Telon, "Algo de Teatros," *La Ilustracion Filipina*, 14 August 1892.

68. Strips of bamboo interwoven to form materials for wall panelling.

69. *Teatros*, Reel no. 307.

14 meters in size and transferable to sites of fairs and fiestas. The entrance fee was pegged at half a *real*. In June 1886, Guiñol's owner, Ignacio del Villar y Ramirez requested the civil governor's permission to set it up at Bagumbayan. The civil governor granted approval on condition that the theater be decorated and made presentable, since Bagumbayan was much frequented by those who came to enjoy the cool breeze of adjoining Manila Bay.<sup>70</sup>

Compañía Infantil de Trozo under the management of Roberto Gabriel, more popularly known as Mang Berto, was active in the presentation of popular comedias at Teatro Infantil de la Calle Diaz.<sup>71</sup> Located at the arrabal de San Jose Trozo, Teatro Infantil had *La verdadera amistad* on 26-27 October 1894, *El principe Gallardo* on 27-30 January 1895 and *Loco por viento* on 29-31 January 1896. During San Jose's town fiesta, two comedias were put up by Saturnino Barranta. His petition to extend his shows up to twelve midnight was denied in favor of a permit allowing his presentation up to 11:00 P.M. only.<sup>72</sup>

A block away at calle de Magdalena,<sup>73</sup> was Teatro Infantil Tagala where comedias and zarzuelas were being presented. *El Conde Parti-nobles*, a tragedy in three acts was shown on 14-16 April 1894 and *El Principe Baldovino* five days later, were followed by these zarzuelas in May: *Viva mi niña* by D. Eduardo Castro and Maestro Balbieri, *El lucero del Alba* by Sr. Navarro and Maestro Balbieri and *Un baile de suscripcion*.<sup>74</sup>

March to May of 1894 was theater season for the indigenous population of the province of Manila. Tagalog theater societies staged shows at provisional theaters in Malate, Arranque, and Tanduay to the great enjoyment of Manila's natives.

*Historia del Rey Lizardo de Navarra, Infante Segismundo* and *La verdadera amistad de dos amigos D. Alejandro y D. Luis* were presented that summer by a company called Comedia infantil Malateña, while Teatro tagalo de calle Arranque en Sta. Cruz had *Rolante* which ran for six nights.<sup>75</sup> Compañía Dramatica Tagala

70. Bagumbayan is now called Luneta or Rizal Park.

71. Julian Cruz Balmaceda, "Philippine Drama" (Manila: Institute of National Language, 1943 (typescript)).

72. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

73. Calle de Magdalena has been renamed Guillermo Masangkay.

74. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305.

75. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

Infantil de Aficionados at Teatro Tagalo de Tanduay had a variety show to complement the usual comedia. On 25-27 April 1894, Teatro tagalo de Tanduay offered vocal numbers, gymnastics, and dance music from string instruments besides the main fare, a tragedy entitled *Principe D. Fernando del reino de Sevilla*.<sup>76</sup>

In Tondo, Teatro Tagala e Infantil de Barrio Aguila had varied companies and impresarios managing its varied shows. Compañia Ratia-Carvajal presented zarzuelas in 1894 while impresario D. Luis Cucullo had comedias in July 1895. The following month, impresario D. Mariano Martinez announced intermission songs by Srta. Juana Molina with an additional price in the ticket involved. Anticipating the songs, people packed the theater, but songstress Molina failed to appear. The impresario's failure to refund the additional payment prompted the *Guardia Civil Veterana* to report the matter to the governor-general.<sup>77</sup> On the occasion of Tondo's town fiesta in January 1896, peninsular D. Aurelio Garcia, owner and manager of Teatro Infantil de Aguila, petitioned for permission to prolong his shows up to twelve midnight during the novena. It was to accommodate the great number of people who wanted to see his show but had to attend to certain religious activities during the first few hours of the evening. Garcia was allowed to extend his show up to midnight but only on the day of the fiesta.<sup>78</sup>

Teatro del Principe was constructed by an old actor and stage director, Juan Barbero, at Calle Principe near the wharf of San Nicolas. The theater presented zarzuelas and varied dance numbers from the can-can to the tango. With the beauteous and graceful Patrociño Tagaroma as principal dancer, the small and modest theater had people of all social classes coming every night.<sup>79</sup> At times, it was even necessary to call in a force of *Guardia Civiles* to keep order.

Pandacan was fortunate to have a parish priest who loved opera. Franciscan Father Cipriano Gomez built a theater at his own expense sometime in 1887 or 1888. Here only operas were shown. Many people including high government officials went to Pandacan

76. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305.

77. *Teatros*, Reel no. 307.

78. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

79. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 153.

just to see Father Gomez' operas. Save for the Italian voice teacher, all his musicians and singers from Ladislao Bonus, the conductor, down to the last chorus boy were pure Tagalogs. Even after ceasing to be a priest, the exclaustated impresario kept his company, the Circulo Musical, going.<sup>80</sup>

Teatro Tagalo de Oroquieta at Sta. Cruz and Teatro Colon at barrio Palomar were homebase for Compañia de Zarzuela Carvajal in 1895. Constructed in April 1895, Teatro Colon presented the following month such zarzuelas as *Niña pancha*, *Como esta la sociedad*, *Los aparecidos*, and *Robo y envenamiento*.<sup>81</sup>

Teatro de Cervantes under the directorship of D. Jose Hernandez was the defunct Teatro Infantil de Dulumbayan. Revitalized, Teatro de Cervantes had the Compañia de Zarzuela Chananay presenting zarzuelas like *Con permiso del marido* by Ramiro Blanco and Maestro Laymaria, *Un capitan de lanceros* by Laymaria and lyricist Reisos, and the *Comici tronati*, a musical burlesque by Sennon Navarra and Maestro Chapi from December 1894 onwards. *Principe Fedalfio* and *Princesa Adela*, a moro-moro presented on 23-24 March 1895, is remembered for the unique manner in which its showing was announced to the public. Comedia players, both men and women made the round of surrounding suburbs in colorful costumes, announcing the show to the accompaniment of gay music.

### CARRILLOS

Favorite spectacles of the natives, *carrillos*, were little open air theaters made of bamboo about one square meter in size showing a shadow play. The stage had crudely painted scenery prepared by indigenous artists and decorations of vegetables, potatoes, Chinese onions or camote. Its characters were cardboard figures held before a lighted lamp and projected against a white sheet. These figures were held up from beneath the poorly constructed stage by means of wooden sticks. They moved at the proper time here and there in a sort of pantomime cadence. With the aid of dialogue furnished by the manipulators, they interpreted themes from religious plays or chivalrous and historical romances. In between scenes, native songs were sung.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 155; and Balmaceda, "Philippine Drama."

81. *Teatros*, Reel no. 305-06.

Calle Magdalena at San Jose de Trozo was the site of a popular carrillo theater run by Navarro de Peralta. Navarrito, as he was affectionately called because of his small stature, found difficulty getting a job with the theater companies in Manila so he decided to dedicate his efforts to puppetry.<sup>82</sup> Navarrito's repertoire included *Don Juan Tenorio*, *Ibong Adarna*, *Siete Infantes de Lara*, *La tia Norica*, and *Los sudores del Rey Momo* shown to an audience made up mostly of youngsters of the locality.<sup>83</sup>

Usual fees charged at the gate were from two to four *cuartos* for those without seats (they usually sat on their haunches before the low stage), half a real for benches, and one real for chairs.<sup>84</sup>

Not all carrillos were paid shows. Vicente Letran's and Natalio Pascual's *carrillo de sombras* were free shows. Letran's was put on from the window of his house for the enjoyment of his friends and relatives while that of Pascual's was staged in the district of Dilao. Pascual's free show ran for three weeks from 8-11 P.M. Gabriel Mercado, a laborer and *carrillo aficionado* utilized the carrillo to develop young boys in his locality and keep them from mischief. His show was run by young amateurs under training. Letran's, Pascual's, and Mercado's shows were approved by the government on condition that an officer of the Guardia Civil Veterana would come for regular inspections to make sure their shows were not offensive to morals.

Mentioned as early as 1720 by San Agustin<sup>85</sup> in his letter on the Filipinos, the carrillos survived almost two centuries. This much loved and much enjoyed spectacle was last heard of toward the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>86</sup>

## COMEDIAS CHINICAS

The enjoyment of carrillos was not confined to the province of Manila's indigenous residents. The Chinese also had their *carrillo*

82. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 153.

83. Balmaceda, "Philippine Drama."

84. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

85. San Agustin, "Letter," in Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, col. 55, p. 291.

86. Retana, *Noticias del teatro*, p. 155. See also David, "The Roots" in Isagani Cruz, ed., *A Short History of Theater in the Philippines* (Manila: Philippine Educational Theater Association, 1971), p. 46.

*chinico*. A very long one put up by Jose Garcia Chua Tiaco, a Chinese Christian, on 30 September 1888 was one of these.<sup>87</sup>

Barrantes notes that comedias chincas were so noisy that they brought great disturbance to the neighborhood. To remedy the situation, the city government offered to build a theater for the Chinese at 5 percent interest on the capital. Nothing came of the plan. It is not known whether the Chinese refused or the city government simply lost interest.<sup>88</sup>

In 1863, Antonio Olona made a proposition to the city government. He offered to construct a theater of light materials, not of bamboo or nipa, for Chinese shows. After 25 years, he would cede the building free to the government. He also proposed an alternative in case the first proposition was not favored, that is, to be allowed to put up shows at Teatro de Tondo paying the necessary taxes. Olona's first proposal was approved.<sup>89</sup>

Records of government receipts in 1867 testify to the income derived from comedias chincas. There were 129 presentations in September and 160 presentations in October with a ₱5 tax for each presentation. These presentations were not confined to the suburb of Binondo where the Chinese community was concentrated. The suburbs of San Fernando de Dilao and Tondo provided settings for afternoon presentations of comedias and carrillos chinicos.<sup>90</sup> There must have been some proliferation of this kind of spectacle since the Overseas Ministry saw the need of a royal order to the colony's governor-general to look into the morality of Chinese theater. In the same order, the governor-general was instructed to reduce the fee paid by the Chinese to the same amount paid by teatros tagalos.<sup>91</sup>

Shortly before the Revolution broke out, the Chinese had a more or less permanent theater at no. 13, Sacristia, Binondo. A stone's throw from Binondo church, the theater was managed by D. Ignacio Billar,<sup>92</sup> an inspector in the office of *Policia Secreta*. This Teatro Quiñol-Chino gave nightly shows with a great number of Chinese in attendance paying an entrance fee of 10 to 20 centavos per head.

87. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

88. Barrantes, *Teatro Tagalo*, p. 40.

89. *Teatros*, Reel no. 307.

90. *Teatros*, Reel no. 306.

91. *Teatros*, Reel no. 307.

92. *Ibid.* Billar must have been the same Ignacio del Villar who put up the portable Teatro Quiñol at Bagumbayan in 1886.

## OTHER SPECTACLES

Teatro español, teatro tagalo, carrillos, and comedias chincas notwithstanding, other forms of public spectacles roving Manila's streets were held for the enjoyment of the indigenous population. Among these were an ambulant circus-barn with an exhibit of children's toys, an exhibit of birds and fowls, gymnastic shows, magic shows, a cosmorama, and a show of wax figures, all of which attest to the people's love for theater and spectacle.<sup>93</sup>

## CONCLUSION

An overall view of the theaters in Manila from 1846 to 1896 reveals a remarkable and obvious unfolding of theater art founded solidly on the people's inherent musicality and love of plays and spectacles. The archipelago's socioeconomic progress in the nineteenth century brought on by the development of commercial agriculture as well as domestic and foreign trade spurred the formalization of theater art. So did the concurrent political events in Spain, especially the inroads of liberalism and the frequent changes of ministerial governments which brought to Manila quite a number of theatrically-inclined deportees. This rapid development of theater art in the archipelago's capital is evident in the proliferation of structures specifically for theater purposes during the 50-year period, the uncommon growth of theater and musical societies, the emergence of Philippine-born professional artists as well as the impressive collection of statutes and regulations on the theater to insure effective state control. With this remarkable development, the theater was firmly established in the archipelago's capital. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become truly and obviously a part of the sights and sounds of Manila.

93. *Teatros*, Reel nos. 306 and 308.