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The Arts: 1960

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Survey

The Arts: 1960

In Manila, the Muses annually come alive during the sunny season (April to June). This survey therefore, without being chronological, covers a period beginning thereabouts, when leisure allows a certain measure of profitable activity whose momentum carries through to December and, sometimes, even beyond. The areas covered, in alphabetical sequence, are the Dance, Music, Painting and Sculpture, and Theater.

THE DANCE

To ballet-starved Manila, the outstanding dance event of the season was probably the arrival in August of *The Dancers of Ceylon*, then tripping along through Southeast Asia on a good-will tour sponsored by the Asian Artists' and Speakers' Bureau. The much decorated troupe (three gold, two silver, two bronze medals at international dance competitions during Moscow's 1957 World Youth Festival; also, assorted huzzahs from critics the world over) presented a program of traditional and ritual Kandyan dances which quickly became the subject of animated conversation over *café espresso* during the weeks following.

There was some debate as to whether the dances were indeed dance or mime, abetted—it is assumed—by balletomanes whose loyalties allow them not so much as a *glissade* from

a world whose boundaries have been largely determined by Fokine, Balanchine, and Graham. But mime or dance, there was unanimity, confirmed by enthusiastic press notices, on the excellent quality of the performance, especially of the *premier danseur*, Kalaguru Nittawela Mulyakdessalage Guneya, who (apart from having been a teacher of Ted Shawn) is the direct descendant of generations of royal Kandyan dancers: in fact, according to Faubion Bowers, "the greatest of living Kandyan dancers."

Mr. T. P. Amerasinghe, director of *The Dancers of Ceylon*, is to be congratulated for bringing to Manila an art form over 2,000 years old. In having *Kalaguru* (Ceylonese for "Great Teacher") N. M. Guneya and his group perform for us dances indigenously Asian, Mr. Amerasinghe has enabled those among us who may have taken offense at Faubion Bowers' comments on Philippine dances to re-evaluate their reaction. Or, alternatively, to remain confirmed in the same.

Earlier, in July, the Ever Theater showed a British film of the Bolshoi Ballet's performances during that company's trip to England. After two days of rather lean audiences, the theater reverted to standard fare—proof, in view of yesteryears' mammoth turn-outs for both the San Francisco and the New York City Ballets—that celluloid is not an adequate substitute for live dancers.

Better attended was this year's premier concert of the Manila Ballet Company, held August 27 at the Far Eastern University auditorium. Featuring Totoy de Oteyza's choreography, the concert served as a farewell curtsey for one of the company's danseuses. Soloist Lulu Puertollano left soon after to serve her scholarship at the School of American Ballet, and thence, to audition with the New York City Ballet Company.

Folk dance aficionados can now avail themselves of the services of two organizations. After its eminently successful world tour, the *Bayanihan* of the Philippine Women's University resumed its monthly recitals August 27. The very next day, the Philippine Folk Dance Society began weekly workshops

Sunday mornings at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum. The workshops are open to any individual or group—but especially to foreigners—wishing to learn any of the dances in the society's repertoire. Eventually, the organization hopes to open a little museum where authentic dance costumes can be displayed. Technical adviser to the society is Mrs. Francisca Aquino. Miss Salud Datoc is president.

MUSIC

In Boston, it would have been unthinkable. But in the sweltering heat of Manila, it seemed the proper thing to do. And so, for three nights of unjacketed comfort, the shirt-sleeved members of the visiting Boston Symphony Orchestra swung bows, now gaily, now dourly, but always breath-takingly, through a repertoire that spanned the history of music from Purcell and Haydn to Piston and Copland.

A different conductor at every performance forced music-loving Manilans to forsake all other projects during the orchestra's visit. Richard Burgin, associate conductor, enchanted the opening-night audience (June 1) with Tchaikovsky's popular *Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64*. Charles Münch, dividing his program between a classical master and two moderns, closed the series on June 3 with a memorable *Eroica*—although, to many, it was Walter Piston's *Symphony No. 6* that really displayed the maestro's command of his music. Sandwiched between the two regulars was composer Aaron Copland, who was noticeably at his best when directing his own *First Symphony* and his own *Orchestral Suite from the Opera, "The Tender Land"*. It was to him that the audience, revelling in the spectacle of a composer giving energetic interpretations of himself, responded most enthusiastically.

Once again Manila has reason to be grateful to impresario Alfredo Lozano and the directors of the American National Theater & Academy. If only for three nights, they brought to the basketball court of the Rizal Stadium some of the magic, perhaps not of Symphony Hall, but certainly of the Esplanade along the Charles.

By the time of writing, the Manila Symphony Orchestra has so far had two performances: the Pops concert at the Fleur de Lis Auditorium on July 9, and the first regular concert, which opened the season formally on August 16.

For the first time in years, the MSO will go through a season without the Zippers; many wonder, therefore, whether it will stay together or fall apart. So far, Professor Bernardino F. Custodio has done creditably on the podium from which Doctor Herbert Zipper had conjured one successful season after another. But because Trudl Dubsky-Zipper goes where her husband goes, there will be no opera from the Manila Symphony Society this year. Mrs. Zipper, a fine stage manager, has always been generous with her services: she understood that the society is not affluent, and she loved both her art and Manila.

In October, however, W. Kaufman will be visiting Manila. This conductor of many competent German orchestras will perform at the program closing the 1960 MSO season.

A note on the August concerts of the MSO: featured on the program was Augusto Borromeo, soloist for Chopin's *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor*. Young Borromeo, winner of the 1960 Chopin contest sponsored by the Manila Symphony Society, is Europe-bound on a scholarship from the Vienna Conservatory of Music.

The *pièce de résistance* of the September concerts was Brahms' *Double Concerto for 'Cello and Violin*.

Visiting pianists have always been lionized in Manila where up to about two decades ago most living rooms were built around a piano, usually upright, sometimes off-key. Gerd Kaemper, once a pupil of the great Walter Gieseking, was thus royally received when the West German government sent him to the Philippines in August. Though he was supposed to give a limited number of recitals, he was constrained to schedule an extra performance at St. Cecilia's Hall on September 4, when he played Mozart and Beethoven with the assistance of the University of the Philippines Symphony Orchestra.

A summer Gregorian Institute was begun this year at the Colegio de La Concordia. Directors of the institute are the Rev. John van de Steen, C.I.C.M., and Dom Isidoro López Otazu, O.S.B., who will doubtless set for the chanters of the institute the standards of the Singers of Solesmes.

The Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City, a giant sports-entertainment emporium reputedly possessing the biggest dome of any building in the whole world, featured the American folk-singer, Harry Belafonte, in the first week of August. Belafonte was forced to abandon his original repertoire of carefully chosen folk songs when sections of the first-night audience yelled boorishly for his more popular Calypso interpretations even while he was singing *John Henry*. Mr. Belafonte stopped the music and properly castigated the rabble. But on the nights following he sang mostly Calypso, to the great loss of earnest music-lovers who had thought of avoiding a first-night rush.

PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

In confirmation of the view that since World War II an increasing number of Filipino artists have become aware of advanced developments both in Europe and in America, and have brought to the Philippines the full revolutionary impact of modern art abroad, a number of junior-sized galleries devoted to contemporary art have opened recently in the Manila-Quezon City area. Most are little more than salons where struggling painters may exhibit their works—in a sort of democratic camaraderie—alongside better established artists. Others (private collections, really) are more selective, and are often displayed only to people whose tastes are as esoteric as the collector's own. Such private collections, in fact, are what should be made available to the public for they have a way of setting tone, of providing a more or less determinable standard of taste, and of educating, eventually, a wider and wider public towards an intelligent appreciation of what modern art is all about.

It is matter for rejoicing therefore, when private collections eventually become public domain. Mr. Fernando Zóbel, painter, art critic and businessman, deserves the gratitude of the public

not only for donating his collection of Philippine paintings to the Ateneo de Manila but for making it possible for University authorities to exhibit the paintings properly in a gallery tastefully designed by the young architect, Mr. Roberto Regala.

The Ateneo Gallery, with a permanent collection of 45 frames and two sculptures to date, opened August 15 with an exhibit that included some of the biggest names in modern Philippine painting: Aguinaldo, Ang Kiokuk, Luz, Manansala, Mag-saysay-Ho, Ocampo, Rodríguez, Tabuena, and Zóbel himself. The curator of the new gallery, which is open all day every Sunday to the public, is Mr. Emmanuel S. Torres of the Ateneo faculty.

At this writing, news also comes that the painter, Arturo Rogerio-Luz, is opening his own gallery in October. Regular exhibits reaching into 1961 have even now been scheduled.

From August 26 to September 2 the Third General Assembly of the International Society for Education through Art (INSEA) met in Manila. The city blossomed into a garden of art exhibits of one type or another during the week. The Northern Motors' display room housed three: the Art Association of the Philippines' show of representative Philippine paintings; the INSEA-UNESCO-AAP exhibit of International Children's Art; and the Shell Company-AAP exhibit of entries in Shell's annual student-art competition. Three universities (Sto. Tomás, University of the Philippines, Philippine Women's) threw open their schools of fine arts, even as one of them, that of Santo Tomás, was celebrating its silver jubilee. Some of the visitors themselves got into the spirit of things: Korea's Lee Hang Sung and Lee Sang Wooc whipped out oils and graphic prints for display in local art galleries.

QANTAS, the Australian air transport company, will soon take an exhibit of 38 Philippine paintings first to London, then to Rome, and finally to Sydney, to commemorate the inaugural flight of its DC-7 cargo service between Europe and Australasia. The paintings, gathered by the Philippine Board of Travel and Tourist Industries, have a total worth of \$9,550. A Manila preview was scheduled for late September.

Other exhibits up to the time of writing included several one-man shows. At the Club Filipino: Zny Laygo on June 25 (a preview of her Tokyo exhibit which was sponsored jointly by the Philippine Cultural Center, the Philippine Art Gallery, and the Philippine Society of Japan). At the Northern Motors' display room: Fernando Amorsolo, from July 21 to August 4—a retrospective show in honor of the grand old man of Philippine painting, full of nostalgia and, according to a minority view, immoderate adulation. It was sponsored jointly by the AAP and the Insular Life Assurance Company, which last was celebrating its golden jubilee with the exhibit. At the Philippine Art Gallery: Virginia Ty-Navarro, from July 16 to 23. At the Contemporary Arts Gallery: Rosario L. Bitanga, from July 9 to 23 — sponsored by the AAP, the show included both paintings and sculpture, mostly the result of her work at Cranbrook; finally, Patrocinio Oben, from August 6 to 12.

Art classes of the Ateneo de Manila, the University of the Philippines, and the University of the Santo Tomás had the good fortune, in July and August, of working with Mr. William Bailey, up-and-coming U.S. painter from Yale University's Fine Arts faculty. Mr. Bailey was brought to the Philippines by the American Specialists Program of the U.S. government.

AAP board member Manuel A. Rodriguez, owner of the Contemporary Arts Gallery, left August 16 for the United States and other countries for advanced studies in the graphic arts. A one-year grant had been awarded him by the Rockefeller Foundation.

THEATER

With the end of summer, there was much about which Manila theater-goers could complain. Or be satisfied. Or just talk. There had been, for instance, the first staging in the Philippines of a play by Gabriel Marcel. Some very brave youngsters of The Summer Playhouse, drawn towards a name redolent with fashionable existentialism, had thought of putting *The Funeral Pyre* on the boards. Under the direction of Mr. Rolando S. Tinio, dramatics instructor at the Ateneo

de Manila, the drama—a trifle dated in subject though not in theme nor treatment—had attracted what might be called an extremely select audience on the first night; and on the next, both young people (some bewildered, some intense) and professors. This was also the last night. Also noteworthy was St. Paul's College of Manila's *Ladies in Retirement*, a middle-aging but reliable whodunit that the school exported first to Baguio, then to Bacolod. Finally, there was the Ateneo Graduate School's production of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, which refreshed audiences wearied by imitations of Elia Kazan's reading. Or, for that matter, wearied by Williams himself.

In league with Del Rosario Bros., Inc., the Barangay Theater Guild has undertaken a series of dramatic readings which, having started in May, continues to draw audiences every other Tuesday to the DRB Social Hall on Sta. Mesa. The readings have enlisted the talents of veteran actors and actresses from both stage and screen, such as Daisy Hontiveros-Avellana and daughter Marivi, Isabel Sevilla, Barbara Pérez, Rita Gómez, José Avellana, Nick Agudo, Butch Josue, Pancho Magalona, Ronald Remy, and others. Some of the prestige scripts that have so far been presented trippingly on the tongue are Noel Coward's *Private Lives*, Ferenc Molnar's *Liliom*, Anton Chekov's *The Boor*, Josephina Niggli's *Ring of General Macías*, and—it seems, inevitably—Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Some other works were by local playwrights, e.g. Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero's *Frustrations*, Carlos Moran Sison's *The Affair*.

Penmouth Players, silent since 1958's *The Diary of Anne Frank*, found an angel in The Manila Speech Clinic and forthwith buckled down to work. They began with *Blue Denim*, which they tailored slightly to fit local styles. Four scheduled shows in August were literally washed out by disagreeable weather (two typhoons, one flood), but in true theatrical tradition the producers insisted that "the play must go on."

Sitting through Lerner and Loew's *Brigadoon*, several miles and several years removed from Broadway, engenders "a rare

mood." But it nevertheless is "almost like being in love." Cheered for three nights (August 22 at the University of the Philippines, August 23 at the University of the East, August 24 at the Far Eastern University) by Manilans, the student troupe of the University of Kansas represented the first notable group of visiting Americans to bring before local footlights a live performance of a Broadway musical since 1945, when the USO ferried the entire original cast of *Oklahoma* across the Pacific.

ANTONIO G. MANUUD