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The Theaters of Manila

Juan Atayde

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The Theaters of Manila

JUAN ATAYDE

TRANSLATED BY CONCEPCION ROSALES
AND DOREEN FERNANDEZ

I. THE TAGALOG THEATER

The article on *The New Theater*, accompanied by a plan of construction, which we published in the previous issue, does not fully resolve the burning issue raised in the Manila Ayuntamiento by the proposal of Sr. Conde de Caspe. However, by gathering records and previous data, we shall continue to bring forth in *La Ilustracion* other articles on the present status of, or concerns retrospectively relevant to, the theaters of Manila. On this matter of current importance, we shall continue to delve deeply, with the help of other colleagues and authorities, into the theater history of these distant islands. As we have not seen anything written nor summarized on this matter, we have had to rely, as we have mentioned before, on records and data gathered from childhood, using the hindsight given one by the sad passing of years.

Therefore, in continuing our work on the mentioned brief history of the theaters of Manila, we have to start with Tagalog theater, which existed and reached its peak before theater in Spanish. The present article will deal only with the former.

We shall not concern ourselves meticulously with the details of the enormous theater halls of bamboo and nipa which were erected, provisionally or permanently, in the suburbs of the walled city, except for that in the commercial district of Binondo. The latter was primarily for the presentation of the protracted dramas of Tagalog literature, which lasted ten or twenty nights, and had an innumerable number of acts.

These huge theater halls with pyramid-shaped roofs reminiscent of present-day cockpits, have disappeared completely from Manila,

the cultural capital. They only appear in the capital towns of distant provinces, with all their stage props of mountains and real trees. Along these peaks the bold warriors, long-bearded and dressed in whimsical costumes of glittering embroidery (reminiscent of those still worn by those playing Jews in the Holy Week processions in Tondo), march in rhythmic pace and wind snake-like along paths which lead to the stage battlefield, the Christians distinguished by the Roman helmet and the Moors by the turban.

All this scenic display of mountains, and the armies of great number with their dances and imitation warriors, what with the *moro-moro* [a dance] and Spanish fencing, needed half of the theater area. This was divided into two equal parts: the acting area and the audience portion, where there were continuous bamboo benches that had neither numbers nor a set limit of spectators. For a pittance, all the world was admitted, since at that time, tickets were unknown, nor were they used even after having been introduced. It was impressive to see a theater filled to capacity like a cockpit, lighted up by glasses of coconut oil suspended from hoops of bamboo or attached to the trunks of palm which supported the entire structure. The crowd, in motley garb, packed the theater, and in the final act, when free entry was signalled by the call "A la verde!" it was indeed a matter of turning green from the pressing and pushing, and truly it was . . . the end of the world!

In this final act, parades by the Moors and the Christians and general combat by the company, or rather, the battalion, were *de rigueur*. One has to admire how well rehearsed were the pairs of combatants engaged in blows and parries which, with the clash of weapons, the battle cries and the leaps of the warriors, provoked the enthusiastic public to a frenzy.

It is a fact that before the lengthy Tagalog drama, already in existence in the eighteenth century, when the idea of having theater in the Spanish fashion had not even been thought of, some *autos sacramentales* [religious plays] had already been translated by indigenous poets. From these, along with the *libros de caballeria* [tales of knighthood and chivalry], and the natives' characteristic love for battle, was created their drama *sui generis*, which took on a distinctive identity of its own for more than a century in the capital of Manila.

We still have seen traces of what are generalized here, modified to the taste and conditions of the country. The above-mentioned staged *autos* are performed on platforms erected during town fiestas (a custom still in existence in the provinces). In them children with artistic talent enact a religious scene, or a little angel may present a laudatory poem, emphatically declaimed and sung with alternating arm movements. We have also been able to see survivors of the ancient taste for warlike spectacles when, on the nights of Christmas, retinues of Moors and Christians carrying a drum and the frame of a castle, presented a battle scene on Manila streets in front of houses, the owners of which generally gave some monetary contribution.

These spectacles were properly known as *pantominas*, and on the same nights, alternated with masquerades of giant figures called, we know not for what reason, *Panchitos* (a name imported from Mexico). The figures danced and sang to the accompaniment of two small guitars and a large one. These comprised the street entertainment, and were the most popular events through the merry nights of December up to the January holidays. Unfortunately, the Suez Canal, or rather, civilization, has completely eradicated these customs.

However, the traditional presentations of Moors and Christians are still kept alive in the provincial towns during the feasts of patron saints. These spectacles were undoubtedly half the cradle of Tagalog theater.

About the lengthy battle dramas adapted from such chivalric tales as *Bernardo del Carpio*, *Los Doce Pares de Francia*, and other traditional books of chivalry, which were distorted and augmented by more bellicose scenes, much has been said in the lengthy articles published in *La España Moderna* by the academician of language and history, Don Vicente Barrantes. According to authoritative sources, he tried with little success to criticize and even conduct the autopsy on the incomprehensible Tagalog theater. We have dared to qualify these articles, with the full assurance that nothing can prejudice the well-earned fame, nor belittle the prestige of that distinguished man of letters, since he deals with an exotic literature. The language is unknown to the critic; he has undoubtedly had to rely on inferior translators. Inferior they would have to be, since the Tagalogs do not possess a good enough knowledge of Castilian to translate faithfully the

flowery phrases, figures of speech and metaphors of these Oriental dialects of Malaysia, which do not have precise equivalents in the cultivated languages.

Hopefully the day will come when a capable Filipino man of letters, philologist and *tagalista*, with perfect knowledge of the traditional style of the language of the province of Bulacan, which is that used in the literary works of *Catagalugan* (the Tagalog region), and with a perfect mastery of Spanish language and criticism, can engage in the study of the language of these dramas which so interest and enthuse the native population: of the *corridos* [metrical romances], which are their story books and novels, where among amorous scenes and intrigues the taste for the marvellous and terrifying is seen to predominate; of the *romances*, which are in reality love verses; and of the religious [works], such as the celebrated *Pasion*, which is still sung, exciting the barrios of Manila during the forty days of Lent.

We shall not proceed further without citing several titles of the most famous corridos, such as *Baldovino*, *Crisalda*, and *Florante*. From the latter a beautiful drama (not a lengthy one) has evolved, with fluid and epigrammatic verses and already in the form of Spanish drama. This was presented for many nights on the stage of the Tondo theater which, because of this particular work and others of modern style, was called the fountain of Tagalog theater. The old indigenous theater began to enculturize itself through the translation of *comedias de magia*,¹ such as *El Embajador y Hechicero* and *La Pata de Cabra*, marvellous spectacles which helped the masses forget their love for scenes of combat. Giant original works were also presented, like *Loco por el Viento*, a title sufficient to prejudice the production.

But going back to our general judging of Tagalog literature, we believe that there definitely has been an initial effort towards this valuable work in the mentioned articles of Sr. Barrantes. Whatever critical worth they may have, they will have rendered a real service to the conscientious study to be made of this semi-spontaneous and semi-cultivated literature, for the folkloric fulfillment of the Filipino race which, in reacting to any stimulus,

¹ Literally, a play of magic. The term *comedia* which has been used since the time of Lope de Vega to designate a play in three acts of *jornadas* and in verse, does not necessarily indicate a comedy. — *Eds.*

seems to show a congenital artistic germ, and thus a designated place in the future.

II. BEGINNINGS OF SPANISH THEATER

It is an undeniable fact that upon the establishment of Spanish society here, at the time of the Golden Age of our dramatic literature, a love for theater was among the customs brought in. If theaters were not built due to a lack of Spanish patronage, this enlightened pastime was pursued at one time or another in social gatherings and in private clubs, in the form seen in Spain, of family theaters or societies of amateurs [aficionados].

The early chronicles do not mention any theater, private club or dramatic society before the present century. Vague references are made to theatrical portions in the programs for feasts or solemn civic affairs during the last decades of the eighteenth century.

Undoubtedly, these spectacles at grand feasts, in which Spanish and American groups participated, were what gave embryonic stage form to the lengthy Tagalog dramas, which we have described in the previous article, a fondness for dramatic farce infiltrating the native taste, including that for combat.

Because of this, due to the lack of a Spanish audience, theaters for Tagalog productions were erected before the Spanish theaters. These were made of fragile materials, with bamboo and nipa roofs, and were the first temples of Spanish dramatic art in the Philippine capital.

The first theater was installed in the Arroceros area, which seems to be the locale destined or chosen with great frequency for theaters, before and after the construction of the Quiapo thoroughfare through the Puente Colgante. Now, with more reason, it is the popular site of the new theater, with the construction of the wide avenue of the Ayala bridges, which shorten the distance from the aristocratic districts of San Miguel and Sampa-loc, and with the major thoroughfare to be brought about by the great bridge being constructed from Arroceros to Santa Cruz.

In our boyhood days, we saw the first theater of nipa, which by virtue of repairs and pillars, survived till 1840 or 1845, if we remember right. Here, the tragedies, *comedias de capa y espada*,

sainetes and *entremeses*² of the start of the century were presented by Spanish-Filipino actors, who at that time had nothing to fear from the critics of the press.

The old provisional theater disappeared when the grand theater of Binondo, constructed of stronger materials, was erected. A street was built especially to service it, the *Calle del Teatro*, which name is still preserved. At present the ruins of that imposing edifice have been profitably transformed by the owners through a series of sheds and awnings, into small living units and outbuildings for a swarm of Chinese. Such is the transformation that one can hardly guess or understand the original purpose of the edifice, or what had been there in the beginning.

However, we who remember the magnificent theater of Binondo, which rose beyond what the capital then needed, see delineated in those ruins so rapidly disfigured, the wide arcades and open gallery entered from its tall two-storied facade supported by arches and columns; that spacious semi-circular pit dominated by ample principal and secondary boxes; the orchestra section composed of seats in tiers called *anfiteatro*; the upper gallery [*tertulia*, *cazuela* or *paraiso*] on the second floor, with the higher seats in the center to leave the sides for the boxes, which were preferred by the mestizo families or those who came in casual wear, as these had separate entrances and stairs. On both sides there were halls on the lower floor for refreshments and billiards; in the upper area, on the main floor, place for dances and concerts (which were never presented); and on the second floor the auxiliary theater offices and rooms. All these halls and the galleries in the front were recreation areas and promenades for the spectators, aside from the luxurious gardens on both sides of the edifice. The stage was so spacious that spectacular plays of magic were presented . . . but let us leave the life and history of this theater for another chapter, only dealing here with how the theater was, which is as it should be in these times when the *New Theater* is in its planning stage.

²*Comedias de capa y espada* were cloak-and-sword dramas about concealments, mistaken identity, disguises, and supernatural occurrences. A *sainete* is a one-act farce; an *entremes* a one-act sketch deriving from the mime tradition, and relying for humor on some stock comic type. A *sainete* was often used as a curtain-raiser; an *entremes* as an entr'acte. — Eds.

III. THE FIRST DRAMA COMPANY AT THE BINONDO THEATER

We have presented in the previous article the conditions of the first and best theater building Manila has had. This daring venture and its expensive execution were not due to the credit of any municipal corporation or particular association, but solely to that of two men of initiative with a passion for theater and for the prestige, development and culture of this capital, which had as Temple of Thalia a pretentious hut of bamboo and nipa.

These two worthy citizens were the famous lawyer, D. Manuel Ponce de Leon, who invested the greater part of the capital, and the art-loving engineer and well-known businessman, D. Jose Bosch, who in turn put in the greater part of the work. We record these names here so that they do not get buried in the ruins of their work, and so that they may serve as example and stimulus to the timorous who at present are reluctant to embark on such projects.

Perhaps in the enthusiasm and energy of the above-mentioned pioneers, foresight may have been lacking. They were involved in achieving the best in external form, comfort, beauty and all the flights of art, in the construction of the new edifice, considered colossal for those days. Since it was made of stone, open, with its extensive facade supported by light archways and columns, it was not possible for it to withstand the horrendous earthquake of 1863. It collapsed, as did all the buildings in Manila then which had less height and less weight of rubblework even though built on firm foundations and wide groundwork.

The theater of Binondo, however, existed for some time, enough to present a diverse repertory of plays, although it did not deviate from the accepted types of Spanish theater. This article will concentrate on the first epoch of this theater history.

Worthy of note was the transformation, not only of the site, but of the *atrezzo*, the costumes, and everything as would be proper, from the night of the inauguration on which was presented, if we remember rightly, the play translated from the French, *La Hija del Regente*. The choice of play was criticized as not being one of the national works of our traditional theater; but one has to consider that plays of this nature had been much liked on the Arroceros stage, and at that time, translated plays from across the Pyrennees were well-received in Spain.

It was not possible then, that in this theater, others besides the impresarios of the first dramatic company should tread its boards. Rather they were the proprietors themselves, and other possible actors they could recruit in Manila. These had to be the same people from Arroceros, chosen, added to, and directed by D. Manuel Zaragoza, who became the first character actor and stage director of the old company. The over-all direction was handled by the impresario, Sr. Bosch, who had great knowledge of theater art.

From among those who signed up for this large Spanish-Filipino dramatic company, one has to make special mention of D. Ramon Valdes, a well-known dramatic actor. Since a certain Sr. Basora had arrived from the Peninsula and was supposed to replace Zaragoza in his double position of character actor and director, the two were able to present elegantly the early plays of the romantic theater which were current in Spain. We recall *El Trovador* by Garcia Gutierrez, and *La Vieja del Candilejo* by Zorrilla.

With the departure of Valdes and the other actors, who often "cooked up stews" among themselves, since there is often disagreement and disharmony among "gentlemen of the boards," the company began to decline until the Binondo theater finally closed, marking the end of its first theatrical period, or rather that of the Spanish-Filipino troupe.

IV. THE SECOND PERIOD OF THE BINONDO THEATER

The theater of Binondo had its period of closure until an unexpected event occurred. The numerous deportations of 1848 brought to the country highly qualified stage personnel. The veteran Basora, who was at that time on reserve or substitute status, opened a casting office. To it came former members of the old troupe who had dispersed, and some who had just arrived, to form the company which we will term as mixed.

Undoubtedly, Basora was not the man nor the personality to impose discipline on a company; and that which was formed of heterogeneous elements did not have enough cohesive force to hold and sustain them. With the fluidity of personnel, the company could not achieve the unity of organization nor public acceptance which a well-formed theater company deserves.

It was necessary to put on intermission numbers of songs and magic acts, and even the spectacle of a fire-proof man, to sustain

the theater of Binondo. There for the first time were heard sung to the guitar by Crear and Puig, the Andalucian music of Iradier and the first American tangos.

A true theatrical milestone was not missing, however, and this was the production of *El Zapatero y El Rey*, in which one D. Alvaro Carazo, of gallant presence and sonorous voice, did justice to the magnificent verses of Zorrilla. He also possessed the masterly art that gave life to the haughty character of D. Pedro of Castille.

Indeed it was a memorable play in the annals of the Binondo theater, and enthused the Manila audience. We regret that we cannot recall the names of the other actors who contributed to the rousing success.

This unexpected event brought to recognition the capabilities of the troupe for high drama and for building up and maintaining the theater. Since a second group of political deportees had arrived, and included D. Narciso de Excosura, he came to head the company, which was not too well organized. His name was sufficient to keep the company disciplined; he attracted even better actors, and instituted reforms and changes in the female cast. He changed it even further when he invited Doña Carlota Coronel and another actress from Spain. He thus became the grand master, as actor and stage director, and the grand impresario for the governing and disciplining of the numerous members of the company under this authority.

His theater company presented as its premiere play the spectacular drama *La Conjuracion de Venecia*, and continued from triumph to triumph, mining the rich lode of plays of magic, for which he brought over stage machinists and painters.

These attractions, never seen before, drove the public wild, and a great number came from nearby provinces, replenishing the audience. Escosura renovated the Binondo theater to fit the type of production he presented, and the growing public which patronized it.

The plays that followed, *La Pata de Cabra*, *La Redoma Encantada*, *Embajador y Hechicero*, and some other plays of magic earned equal acceptance. The public was awed by the extravagant costumes and set decorations, and the astonishing precision of the stage devices.

We shall not speak of the other spectacles which the memorable Escosura presented on the stage of the Binondo theater. Worthy place was given to dramas of manners, to high comedy, and to playlets, and even to *El Duende y el Sacristan de San Lorenzo*, a parody of the opera *Lucia*. Escosura was given ample protection and support by Manila's elite, since he was considered one of them, having been recommended by his name, and the social position he had enjoyed on the Peninsula.

The change of cabinet in the Spanish government brought about amnesty for the deportees, and Narciso de la Escosura was urgently recalled by his political commitments.

Many members of the company went with him, not only those granted amnesty, but other Spanish citizens who wanted to follow him like good disciples. The master offered them his protection in appreciation for the affection they had for him, and the aptitude they had shown.

With this dissolution, the theater or Binondo was closed once more.

V. THE THIRD AND LAST PERIOD OF THE BINONDO THEATER

News of good theater in Manila, and of Escosura's prosperous campaign had reached the Peninsula. This aroused desire and hope in theater people eager to come and seek their fortunes in this country. The decisive coup was the arrival in Cadiz of D. Narciso with an entourage which had formed part of the dissolved company. They encouraged the group performing in the theater of Valon, and influenced them to come.

The director and leading actor of this large company was D. Manuel Lopez Ariza; the cast was complete, including dance partners and a prompter. The whole group literally filled the ward-room of one of the frigates that made the voyage past the Cape of Good Hope.

There was no further need for those who had stayed behind as substitutes, and the second closure of the Binondo theater was interrupted. The theater opened with the grand attraction of a new and genuinely peninsular company transported from a famous theater in Cadiz, a center of culture.

With all the necessary elements for all types of dramatic presentations available, the productions ranged from the dramas of great

range and spectacle like *Isabel la Catolica*, to the classic short comedies of D. Ramon de la Cruz and above all the dramas and small pieces from Andalucia, which were popular at that time. These the Ariza company brought from the ambient air of Cadiz, having imbibed them at the Balon [sic] theater, the most proper and characteristic of all in *the land of the Blessed Mary*.

Seen here were theater works like *Diego Corrientes*, *La Flor de la Canela y El Tio Canillitas* and others of their type, which had perhaps not been presented in many Spanish capitals of the first order. The plays of magic which had been so popular and were produced so often, were not seen again with the loss of the theater magician, the director Escosura.

Also eventually lost was the luck of the *Necromantic*, such that the company found the theater ruined. It had been distorted when Escosura attempted to remodel the proscenium arch to achieve more stage space and allow the plays of magic to show more brilliantly, with their stage machinery and spectacular effects.

With the lack of a theater, the Ariza company resorted to the use of a hall in a private home which had been used as a private club in the past, for a brilliant *sociedad de recreo*. This is situated on the corner of Anda and Cabildo, and is the manorial home of the old Casal family.

In such limited space, the Ariza company had a somewhat feeble existence, till exigencies were followed by desertions, on top of which came contracts and commitments. It is indeed difficult to sustain for a long period the cohesion of a theater company in the Philippines!

With the dissolution of the Ariza company, we conclude the history of the Binondo theater, to continue with the other theaters and companies.

VI. MAESTRO APPIANI AND THE CHOREOGRAPHIC ART IN THE PHILIPPINES

The vicissitudes of life, in which figured a *prima ballerina assoluta* who was the toast of Madrid, resulted in the arrival of an Italian named Appiani, who called himself and proved to be a reputable master of the dance. When foreign dance of great spectacle, sponsored by the banker Salamanca, was presented with

great success in the Circo Theater,³ he came without any means of support, alone, in search of the farthest place in which to seek refuge.

In this country of proverbial hospitality, where the love for dance is as proverbial, Appiani was well received. Soon a school of ballroom dancing was organized among the youth of the aristocratic society of Manila in order to give the master an adequate number of students. Certainly the fees were not at all moderate, since the main object was to make the unexpected stay of Appiani worth his while.

He formed a good school, and his good students popularized the choreographic lessons they learned from the competent master at balls and social gatherings. They danced difficult quadrilles like the *gavotte*, etc., and other dances for pairs, like the *crakoviana*, the *redowa*, the *schotis*, just as the revived minuet is now being danced in Europe. These required a master to teach the steps and figures, along the principles of the rigorous art of Terpsichore. Through these dances, our fashionable ancestors showed their elegant education at the grand balls which were the pleasures of their epoch, or at the aristocratic soirees of our old Europe. For this reason, dance masters were as numerous as school masters. Now that the *rigodon*, the only surviving quadrille, is danced with no definite step nor rhythm, and without knowing when a figure starts or ends, dance masters are not needed and have disappeared, after having been depicted in the comedies of Moratin during the first third of the century.

As we have no knowledge of any dance masters with proper credentials who may have arrived in the Philippines before Appiani, we have to acknowledge him as the first one in the annals of choreography in the archipelago.

Here people danced much, and danced well, from an inborn instinct. Modifications, changes, were brought in by each boatload during the annual monsoons of the Acapulco route, and later that of the Cape of Good Hope. However, there was no knowledge of what a *batiment* was, nor an academic dance position, until Appiani taught us the art with all its theories and technical nomenclature. These were much more than what we general-

³ Possibly the Teatro Circo de Bilibid, which existed from about 1851 to 1880 and was later transformed into the Circo del Juego de Gallos, for cockfights. — *Eds.*

ly knew, and for this reason, the students of the Italian master distinguished themselves both in dance and in speaking of the art.

However, the society quadrilles were not sufficient to satisfy the artistic vocation of the master who had made flights in higher levels of dance, and who had come to teach the choreographic art in all its sublimity. He took advantage of the promising talents he had found in this country, the ties he had established in Manila, and the rewards of his work, to establish a dance academy for children. He sought out the most promising and affable among those he had associated with, his object being to make them theater performers, members of a large company of young dancers that could present grand dance productions. He achieved this in a short time, winning the admiration of those who witnessed the progress and the final success of his teaching.

The children's company made its debut with several dance numbers, of which we remember *El Cornetin y La Grizeta* and *El Paso Stirio*, on the large stage of Binondo, which the Lopez Ariza company had ceded, for a trial or rehearsal of this new spectacle.

The company moved from there to the Tagalog theater in Tondo, again on a provisional status. Appiani, seeing from the successful presentations that the existence of the dance company was insured, no longer wanted to depend on the favors of other groups. With the earnings of the few productions in the two theaters, he set up a small theater in the Sibacón district, where he fully lived up to the contract *a la italiana* which he had made with the members of his children's company. This meant that he would teach them free of charge, after which they were to perform for a certain period of time for his benefit.

The Manila audience so favored and patronized the small Sibacón theater, that Appiani could have complete authority, and freedom to realize the artistic ideal he sought.

It was also to his advantage that the maestro was a musician, both composer and violinist, and with this he made full use of the talents of his students. He began to create dances with plots, developed in acts. It was a joy to see these wonderful children, expressing through mime and pirouettes true-to-life situations and emotions. They were costumed in great splendor, and the stage scenery was proper to such enchanting and marvellous presentations. This was prepared by a native stage painter of wide repute, Lozano by

name, who had distinguished himself, and had perfected the art, in the plays of magic produced by Escosura.

With the attraction of these beautiful spectacles, the young artists, the semi-magic scenery, you readers of today can well imagine the wide acceptance then of the *Bailes de Appiani*. The ultimate proof was the presentation of the same dance at twenty or thirty successive performances, when the third presentation of the best opera would be performed before an empty theater.

Performed at the Sibacon was *El Sargento Marco Bamba*, a comic-mime-grotesque dance. However, the most successful presentation was *La Mariposa Encantadora*, which was the master's final production. He had to return to Europe, due to some insidious grief encountered in the country. Time had made him forget the reasons which had brought him here, and he had raised sufficient capital to be satisfied with the fruit of his labors.

We remember that night, when the theater of Sibacón was caught in a truly wild frenzy. The master was called to the stage a countless number of times. The audience stood on the seats, and bouquets of flowers were bought at exorbitant prices, in order for a rain of roses to fall on the stage.

That same night, the children's company was dissolved, and the Sibacón theater passed on to a different destiny. We saw Appiani, after several years in Spain, directing a large dance company in the *Isabel la Catolica* theater in Granada, where the celebrated Pitteri, who was called Queen of the Wind, was idolized.

It was then that we realized the value of Maestro Appiani, who has left here the seed of choreographic art.

From his students emerged the masters who are at present the comic, lyric and choreographic artists of Philippine theater.

Los teatros de Manila

I.

EL TEATRO TAGALOG



o solamente con el artículo de *El nuevo teatro*, que acompañado de un proyecto de construcción, hemos publicado en el número anterior, vamos á cumplir con la cuestión palpitante que ha levantado en el Ayuntamiento de Manila la proposición del Sr. Conde de Caspe, sino que, allegando noticias y recuerdos, seguiremos dando á luz en *LA ILUSTRACIÓN* otros artículos respectivos, ó retrospectivos, á los teatros de Manila, para que, en este que es ahora importante asunto, vayamos ilustrando, con ayuda de los otros colegas y personas conocedoras de la historia teatral de estas extremas tierras: pues nada hemos visto curiosamente escrito y resumido, teniendo que acudir, como hemos dicho, á noticias y recuerdos de la infancia, por la facultad que dá el triste privilegio de los años.

Continuando ahora, pues, nuestros trabajos, pertinentes á la dicha corta historia de los teatros de Manila, tenemos que partir del teatro *Tagalog*, que existió y estuvo en apogeo antes que el castellano, y sólo se concretará á aquel el presente artículo.

No nos detendremos minuciosamente en los detalles de los grandes camarines de caña y nipa que se levantaban provisional ó permanentemente en los arrabales de la ciudad murada, salvando el comercial barrio de Binondo, para la representación de los monstruosos dramones de la literatura tagala, que duraban diez ó veinte noches, con innumerable número de actos.

Aquellos inmensos camarines-teatros de techos piramidales, como son ahora las galleras, desaparecieron por siempre de la culta capital manileña, y solo aparecen en las cabeceras de lejanas provincias, con todo el aparato de montes y árboles naturales, por cuyas cúspides marchan á paso acompasado y bajan serpenteando en senderos que conducen al campo de batalla (proscenio) los enfáticos guerreros con trages caprichosos de relucientes bordados y luengas barbas, como todavía se viste

la escolta de judíos de Tondo en las procesiones de Semana Santa: distinguiéndose los cristianos por el casco romano, y los moros, por el turbante.

Todo aquel aparato de montes y las huestes de comparsas con sus bailes y simulacros guerreros, entre *moro-moro* y esgrima española, necesitaban la mitad del camarín-teatro, que quedaba dividido en dos partes iguales, para escenario y patio, en el que había bancos corridos de caña sin numeración ni limitación de espectadores, que allí entraba todo el mundo que pagara algunos cuartos á la puerta, pues todavía no se conocía ni se usó, después de conocido, el billeteaje. Imponente era ver un teatro lleno, á guisa de anfiteatro de gallera, á la luz de los vasos de aceite de coco, colgados en aros de caña ó sujetos en los harigues de palma que sostenían aquella enorme armadura. Bajo ella se apiñaba la plebe en masa compacta y abigarrada, y en el último acto, que daban entrada libre con la voz de "A la verde!," era efectivamente cosa de ponerse verde entre empujones y apreturas, y aquello era... ¡La fin del mundo!

En este acto final eran de rigor los desfiles de moros y cristianos y el combate general por toda la compañía, ó mejor dicho batallón, siendo de admirar lo bien ensayadas que estaban las parejas de combatientes en los golpes y paradas, que con el choque de las armas, los gritos del combate y los saltos de los gladiadores, ensordecían al público entusiasmado hasta la locura.

Es de creer, que antes del drama tagalog, que ya existía en el siglo XVIII, cuando no se pensaba siquiera en tener coliseo castellano, ya se hubiesen traducido algunos *autos sacramentales*, por donde los poetas indígenas, con los libros de caballería y la afición guerrera de los naturales, crearon su drama sui generis, que tomó carta de naturaleza por más de un siglo en la Capital de Manila.

Todavía hemos visto rezagos de lo que se generalizarían aquí, modificándose al gusto y condiciones del país, los dichos *autos escénicos*, en los tabladillos que se levantaban con motivo de las fiestas de los pueblos (todavía se hace en provincias) para representar por los niños más despiertos alguna escena religiosa,

ó lanzar una *luz* por algún *angelito*, con declamación enfática y cantarla y con alternado movimiento de brazos. También hemos alcanzado restos del antiguo gusto en espectáculos guerreros, en unas comparsas de moros y cristianos que, llevando un tambor y un bastidor en forma de castillo, salían en las noches de Pascua á representar un paso de batalla por las calles de Manila frente á las casas, donde les gratificaban.

Tenían estas comparsas con toda propiedad el nombre de *pantomimas* (pantomimas), y alternaban con ellas, en las mismas noches, unas mogigangas de gigantes, llamados, no sabemos porque razón, *Panchitos* (nombre importado de México), que bailaban y cantaban al son de dos guitarras y un guitarrón; siendo unos y otros la diversión callejera y la más popular en las alegres noches del mes de Diciembre hasta las fiestas de Enero. Pero el canal de Suez, ó mejor dicho la civilización, ha borrado por completo estas costumbres.

Mas todavía se conservan en los pueblos de provincias, que celebran sus fiestas patronales con la tradicional comparsa de moros y cristianos, los cuales espectáculos fueron indudablemente la mitad de la cuna del teatro tagalog.

De aquellos guerreros dramones tomados de las caballerescas historias de *Bernardo del Carpio*, *Los dos Pares de Francia* y otros antiguos libros de Caballería, desfigurados y aumentados más belicosamente, para que á cada diálogo se arme un combate, en que entran espada en mano las princesas y los infantitos, ya ha hablado bastante en largos artículos publicados en *La España Moderna* el académico de la Lengua y de la Historia don Vicente Barrantes, que ha querido hacer, con poca fortuna, según los inteligentes en la materia, la crítica y hasta la autopsia del incomprensible *Teatro Tagalog*. Hemos aventurado el calificativo que han merecido estos artículos, en la seguridad de que en nada puede perjudicar á la bien adquirida fama ni molestar al amor propio del eximio literato, pues se trata de una literatura exótica, cuyo idioma no peca el crítico, habiendo tenido que farse indugablemente de malos traductores, pues malos serán siempre los tagalos que no dominan bien el

castellano, para traducir fielmente los caprichosos giros, figuras y metáforas de estos dialectos orientales de la Malasia, que no tienen equivalentes precisos en los lenguajes cultos.

De esperar es, que un buen literato filipino, hiklogo y tagalista, con perfecto conocimiento del lenguaje castizo de la provincia de Bulacán, que es el que se usa en las obras literarias del *Catagalugan* (la región tagala), y con dominio perfecto del idioma y la crítica castellana, haga el estudio del escogido lenguaje de estos dramas que tanto interesan y entusiasman al pueblo indígena, de los *corridos* que son sus libros de cuentos y novelas, en los que entre escenas é intrigas amorosas predomina el gusto á lo maravilloso y terrorífico, y de los *romances* que son efectivamente versos dedicados al amor, y á lo religioso, como la célebre *Passión*, que todavía se canta, alborotando los barrios de Manila, en los 40 días de Cuaresma.

No seguiremos adelante sin significar algunos títulos de los más famosos *corridos*, cuales son *Baldovino*, *Crisalda* y *Florante*, del que se ha hecho un precioso drama (no dramón) con flúidos y conceptuosos versos y ya con el corte del drama castellano: por lo que se ha puesto muchas noches en el escenario del coliseo de Tondo, que por éste y otros dramas de su corte moderno, se llamó en un principio teatro Tagalog. A esto tendió culterizándose el antiguo teatro indígena, empezando por la traducción de las comedias de magia, como *El Embajador y Hechizo* y *La Pata de Cabra*, cuyo maravilloso espectáculo hizo olvidar las aficiones guerreras. Pero también aparecieron monstruosas obras originales, como *Loco por el viento*, cuyo título es bastante para prejuzgar la producción.

Pero volviendo á nuestros juicios generales sobre la literatura tagala, creemos que de todos modos, hay ya un comienzo hecho para encaminar este precioso trabajo, en los mencionados artículos del Sr. Barrantes, que sea cualquiera el valor crítico que tengan, siempre habrán prestado un verdadero servicio al concienzudo estudio que se haga de esta literatura semiexpontánea y semiculta, para el complemento folk-lórico de estas razas filipinas, que al sentir

galcerías del frente, eran esparcimientos y paseos para los espectadores, además de dos frondosos jardines que había á ambos lados del edificio. El escenario era tan espacioso, que se dieron comedias de magia de gran espectáculo... pero dejemos para otro capítulo hablar de la vida é historia de este teatro, quedando en éste consignado las condiciones que tenía el edificio que es lo que debe ser de preferente oportunidad en estos momentos en que se está proyectando el NUEVO TEATRO.

III

LA PRIMERA COMPAÑÍA DRAMÁTICA DEL TEATRO DE BINONDO



EMOS dado á conocer en el anterior artículo las condiciones del primero y mejor edificio que para teatro ha tenido Manila, cuyo alevado proyecto y costosa ejecución no se debieron á corporación municipal ni á sociedad alguna, sino solamente á dos hombres de iniciativa y pasión por el arte escénico, y por el prestigio, fomento y cultura de esta capital, que estaba presentando por todo templo de Talía un soberbio barracón de caña y nipa.

Eran aquellos dos buenos ciudadanos, el notable abogado D. Manuel Ponce de León, que aportó la mayor parte del capital y el aficionado ingeniero y conocido comerciante D. José Bosch, que puso á su vez la mayor parte del trabajo: cuyos nombres consignamos aquí, para que no queden enterrados, en las ruinas de su obra, y para que sirvan de ejemplo y estímulo á los timoratos que ahora se asustan de tales empresas.

Faltó tal vez la previsión en los entusiasmos y energías de los mencionados emprendedores, ofuscados al dar la mayor esbeltez, comodidad y belleza, con todos los vuelos del arte de construcción, al nuevo edificio, colosal para aquellos tiempos; y no era posible que siendo todo de piedra, abierto y sostenido en su estensa fachada por ligeras arquerías y columnas, resistiese al horrendo terremoto de 1863, y cayó, como cayeron todas las edificaciones de Manila, que tenían menos elevación y menos

peso de mampostería sobre firmes cimentaciones y amplios emplazamientos.

Pero no dejó el teatro de Binondo de existir bastante tiempo para tener su variada historia escénica, por más que ésta no haya salido del campo ameno del teatro español; y la primera parte de esta historia, es la que vá á ser motivo primordial del presente artículo.

Bien se notó la transformación, no sólo en el local, sino en el *atrezzo*, vestuario y todo, con propiedad, desde la noche de la inauguración, en la cual se representó, si no recordamos mal, la comedia traducida del francés, *La hija del Reyente*, lo cual es de criticar, por no haberse escogido una de las obras nacionales de nuestro teatro antiguo; pero hay que considerar que éstas se habían gastado mucho en el escenario de Arroceros, y que en España predominaba el gusto trasparentado de las traducciones.

No era posible entonces que para aquel coliseo fueran otros los empresarios de la primera compañía dramática que pisara sus tablas, sino los mismos propietarios del teatro, con los elementos que pudieran reunirse en Manila; y estos tuvieron que ser los mismos que había en el teatro de Arroceros, elegidos, aumentados y dirigidos por D. Manuel Zaragoza, que venía siendo el primer actor de carácter y director-escénico de la antigua compañía. Pero la alta dirección la llevaba el empresario Sr. Bosch, que poseía grandes conocimientos teatrales.

Entre los que fueron alistándose en aquella que era numerosa compañía hispano-filipina, hay que citar á don Ramón Valdés, notable actor dramático; y como entonces había llegado de la Península un Sr. Basora (Barba auténtico) que debía reemplazar á Zaragoza, en su doble condición de actor de carácter y director de escena, pudieron ponerse gallardamente las primeras obras del teatro romántico que predominaba en la Península, y recordamos *El Trovador* de García Gutierrez y *La Vieja del Candilejo* de Zorrilla.

Por ausencia de Valdés y otros actores, que "en todas partes y tiempos cuecen habas" y siempre hay disidencias y desarmonías entre la *gente de tablas*, fué debilitándose la compañía *romántica*, hasta que se cerró de una vez el es-

cenario del coliseo de Binondo, dando fin a su primera época teatral ó sea la de la *Troupe* hispano-filipina.

IV

SEGUNDA ÉPOCA DEL TEATRO DE BINONDO



tuvo su período de clausura el coliseo binondeño, hasta que un acontecimiento inesperado, la numerosa deportación de 18,8, trajo al país valiosos elementos para las *tablas*, y entonces el veterano Basora, que estaba de *reemplazo*, levantó *banderín de enganche*, y á él acudieron los de la antigua *troupe* que se hallaban dispersos y algunos de los recién llegados, para formar la Compañía que llamaremos *mista*.

Pero indudablemente no era Basora el hombre ó el carácter para tener disciplinada una Compañía, y la que formó de elementos heterogéneos no tenía cohesión bastante para fijarlos ó sostenerlos, y con aquel personal movable, no podía buscarse la unidad de organización y la aceptación pública que merece una bien formada compañía dramática.

Y hubo necesidad de poner intermedios de canto y prestidigitación y hasta el espectáculo de un hombre incombustible, para que se fuera sosteniendo la escena de Binondo, y allí se oyeron por primera vez cantar á la guitarra, por Crear y Puig, las tonadas andaluzas de Iradier y los primeros *tangos* americanos.

Pero no faltó un verdadero acontecimiento, y este fué la representación de *El Zapotero* y *el Rey*, en la que apareció un D. Alvaro Carazo, de gallarda presencia, de sonora entonación para los grandiosos versos de Zorrilla, y de arte magistral para dar á conocer el soberbio personaje de D. Pedro de Castilla.

Aquel fué un drama memorable en los anales del teatro de Binondo, que entusiasmo al público manileño, y sentimos no recordar los nombres de los demás actores que contribuyeron con su mérito á este ruidoso éxito.

Este inesperado acontecimiento, dió á conocer los valiosos elementos que había en Manila para el alto drama

y para levantar y sostener el teatro; y como entonces había llegado de España, en una segunda expedición de deportados políticos, D. Narciso de la Escosura, pásonse éste al frente de la no bien organizada Compañía, tomó su nombre para subyugarla, atrajo aún mejores elementos, reformó ó cambió el personal de damas y lo volvió á cambiar cuando hizo venir de España á D.^a Carlota Coronel y alguna otra, resultando ser el gran maestro como actor y Director de escena y el gran empresario para el gobierno y disciplina del numeroso personal que tenía bajo su férula.

Inauguró su campaña teatral con el drama de gran espectáculo *La Conjuración de Venecia*, y ya siguió de triunfo en triunfo, hasta encontrar el filón de las comedias de magia, para lo cual mandó venir tramoyistas y pintores.

Tales atracciones, nunca vistas, enloquecieron á estos naturales y venían de las provincias cercanas á renovar el público del Teatro de Binondo, que fué reformado por el mismo Escosura, para la clase de espectáculos á que se destinaba, y para el mayor público que á él acudía.

Tuvieron la misma aceptación, *La pata de cabra*, *La redoma encantada*, *Embajador* y *Hechicero* y alguna otra más comedia de magia, que admiraba ver el lujo de trajes y decoraciones y la sorprendente precisión de la tramoya.

Ya no diríamos nada de los otros espectáculos con que el memorable Escosura bordó la escena del teatro de Binondo, donde también tuvieron digno lugar el drama de costumbres, la alta comedia y las piecitas cortas, y hasta se puso *El duende* y *El Sacristán de San Lorenzo*, parodia de la ópera *Lucía*. Contando con la protección de la buena sociedad de Manila, cuyas simpatías tenía Escosura, por estar dentro de ella, relacionado con la recomendación de su nombre y la posición social que trajo al venir de la Península.

Cambió el Gabinete del Gobierno de España, se dió la amnistía á los deportados, y llamaron á D. Narciso de la Escosura apremiantemente sus compromisos políticos.

Con él se fueron muchos de la Compañía, no sólo de los amnistiados, sino otros insulares que quisieron seguirle como buenos discípulos, á quienes el

Maestro ofreció su protección, apreciando el afecto que le tenían y las aptitudes que habían demostrado.

Y con esta disolución, volvió á entrar en clausura el teatro de Binondo.

V

TERCERA Y ÚLTIMA ÉPOCA DEL TEATRO DE BINONDO.



NOTICIAS que ya se tenían en la Península del buen teatro de Manila y de la próspera campaña de Escosura, habían levantado allí en la *gente de tablas* deseos y propósitos de venir á probar fortuna por estas tierras, y el golpe decisivo fué la llegada á Cádiz de D. Narciso con los acompañantes que llevó de su disuelta compañía, que fueron los que animaron á la que actuaba en el teatro del Valon, la cual se vino en peso á Filipinas.

Era director y primer galán de esta numerosa compañía D. Manuel López Ariza, sin que le faltara parte alguna, con pareja de baile, y hasta trajo apuntador; y este personal llenó literalmente la cámara de una de las grandes fragatas que hacían el viaje por el Cabo de Buena Esperanza.

No tuvieron necesidad de ninguno de los elementos que aquí habían quedado de *reemplazo*, y se interrumpió la segunda clausura del coliseo de Binondo, con la gran atracción de una Compañía nueva y genuinamente peninsular, transportada de un afamado teatro de la muy culta ciudad de Cádiz.

Con elementos para todo género de representaciones dramáticas, víéronse interpretadas, con toda propiedad, desde los dramas de gran desempeño y espectáculo, como *Isabel la Católica*, hasta los clásicos sainetes de D. Ramón de la Cruz, pero sobre todo, se prodigaron mucho los dramas y las piezas andaluzas, que estaban muy en boga en aquel tiempo, y que trajo la compañía Ariza del ambiente de Cádiz, saturada en el teatro Balon, el más propio y característico de toda la *tierra de María Santísima*.

Viéronse aquí, con otras de su género, á *Diego Corrientes*, *La flor de la canela* y *El Tío Canillitas*, como

no se habrán visto quizás en muchos teatros de capitales de primer orden en España; pero las comedias de magia, que tanto gustaron y tanto produjeron, ya no volvieron á verse desde que salió el *mago escosura*, el Director Escosura.

También salió la muerte de aquel *Nigromante*, y encontró á esta compañía la ruina del teatro, que se había falseado, por una obra que hizo Escosura, al reformar el arco de proscenio y dar más espacio al escenario, para el mejor lucimiento de las dichas comedias de magia, de mucha tramoya y gran espectáculo.

Ya sin teatro, se habilitó un salón de una casa particular, que llamaban del Casino, por haber servido para una que fué brillante sociedad de recreo, y es el casarón que existe en la calle de Anda esquina á la de Cabildo, palacio solariego de la antigua familia de los Casales.

Allí tuvo, en tan pequeño sitio, raquítica existencia la compañía Ariza, hasta que empezaron las exigencias y siguieron las deserciones, por encima de los contratos y compromisos, que muy difícil es que se sostenga por mucho tiempo la cohesión de una compañía dramática en Filipinas.

Y con la disolución de la de Ariza, acaba nos la historia del teatro de Binondo, para seguir con las de los otros teatros y de otras compañías.

VI

EL MAESTRO APPIANI Y EL ARTE COREOGRÁFICO EN FILIPINAS



OR VICINIDADES de la villa, en las que jugó una célebre y afortunada bailarina, *Isabelita*, que hizo las delicias de Madrid, cuando llevó al teatro del Circo el baile extranjero de gran espectáculo el Banquero Salamanka, y buscando el más lejano sitio donde retirarse, vino aquí solo y sin recursos de ninguna especie, un italiano llamado Appiani, que se tituló y demostró ser un notable maestro de baile.

En este país de proverbial hospitalidad y también de proverbiales aficiones coreográficas, fué Appiani afablemente

recibido, y pronto se organizó entre la juventud de la buena sociedad de Manila una escuela de bailes de salón, para dar al maestro buen número de discípulos, y por cierto que las cuotas no eran nada moderadas, pues el principal objeto era hacer productiva á Appiani su accidental venida.

Buena escuela formó y buenos discípulos generalizaron en bailes y reuniones las lecciones coreográficas del competente maestro, y bailáronse aquí difíciles cuadrillas, como la gavota, etc. y otros bailes de parejas, como la crakoviana, redowa, schotis, así como se está bailando ahora en Europa el resucitado *minuet*, para lo cual se necesitó indispensablemente un maestro que enseñe los pasos y figuras por los principios del riguroso arte de Terpsicore, que es como demostraban su esmerada educación nuestros currutacos ascendientes en los bailes de sociedad que hacían las delicias de su época, ó en los aristocráticos saraos de nuestra vieja Europa; y por eso abundaban entonces, como los maestros de escuela, los de baile. Que ahora en que se baila el rigodón, la única cuadrilla subsistente, sin paso y sin compás y hasta sin saber como empieza y como acaba la figura, para nada se necesitan los tales maestros, que han desaparecido, después de haber sido retratados en las comedias del teatro de Moratin en el primer tercio del siglo.

Y como no sabemos que ninguno de éstos, con reconocido título, hubiese llegado á Filipinas antes que Appiani, hay que darle á éste la primacía histórica de su profesión, en los anales coreográficos del Archipiélago.

Aquí se bailaba mucho y bien, por instinto tradicional, con las modificaciones que trala cada barcada en las anuales monzones de la línea de Aca-pulco, antes, y de la del cabo de Buena Esperanza, después; pero sin saber lo que era un *batiment* ni una *postura académica* etc., hasta que Appiani nos dió á conocer el arte con todas sus teorías y su nomenclatura técnica, lo cual ya era mucho más de lo que generalmente sabíamos, y por esto se distinguieron bailando y hablando del arte los discípulos del italiano maestro.

Más no eran bastantes las cuadrillas de sociedad, para satisfacer la vocación artística del que había volado por más

altas regiones, del que había venido para ensayar toda la sublimidad del arte coreográfico; y aprovechando las excelentes disposiciones que encontró en este país, las relaciones que se había hecho en todo Manila y los ahorros que iba reuniendo con su trabajo, creó una academia de baile para niños, buscando los más dispuestos y simpáticos entre sus dichas relaciones, siendo su objeto hacer bailarines para el teatro, y dar aquí los bailes de gran espectáculo ó de representación, con una numerosa compañía infante, lo cual consiguió en poco tiempo, con admiración de los que veían el progreso y el éxito final de sus lecciones.

Debutó la compañía infantil, con varias piezas de baile, en las que recordamos *El cornetín* y *la Griseta* y *El pasu Stirio*, en el gran escenario del teatro de Binondo, cedido por la empresa de Lopez Ariza, para prueba ó ensayo de este nuevo espectáculo.

Pasó de allí al teatro *Tagalog* de Tondo, también cedido provisionalmente, hasta que viendo Appiani, por éxitos ruidosos, que ya estaba asegurada la existencia de la Compañía de baile, no quiso depender del favor de las otras empresas, y con el producto de las pocas funciones que dió en dichos coliseos, levantó un pequeño teatro en el barrio de Sibacón, donde explotó el contrato á la italiana que había hecho con los discípulos que formaron su infantil compañía. Esto es: enseñarles gratuitamente, para que después trabajasen en beneficio suyo, por cierto determinado tiempo.

Muy favorecido fué del público manileño el teatrillo de Sibacón, donde pudo Appiani mandar en jefe, desarrollar por completo el pensamiento y realizar el ideal artístico que se propuso.

Era también el maestro un aventajado músico, como compositor y como violinista, y con estos elementos, apropiando á las facultades de sus discípulos, que componiendo bailes escénicos argumentados por actos, y era de ver aquellos preciosos niños, expresando con la mímica y con las *piruetas* escenas y pasiones de la vida. Se vestían con extremado lujo, así como el aparato escénico era propio de aquellas representaciones encantadas ó maravillosas, que

preparaba un indígena llamado Lozano pintor escenógrafo de gran estima, que se perfeccionó y se distinguió en las comedias de magia que puso Escamora.

Con estos alicientes del precioso espectáculo, los infantiles artistas y la semi-magia escenográfica, figúrense nuestros lectores del día, lo que gustarían entonces aquellos que se llamaron *Raius de Appiani*: hasta el extremo de que se daban veinte ó treinta funciones consecutivas de un mismo baile, cuando aquí se vé el teatro desierto á la tercera representación de la mejor ópera.

En Sibacón se puso el baile mímico-bufo-grotesco *El Sargento Marco Bamba*; pero el que tuvo más éxito fué *La Mariposa encantadora*, y con él se despidió el maestro, cuando tuvo que regresar á Europa, obligado por insidiosa dolencia adquirida en el país, habiendo borrado el tiempo los motivos que aquí le trajeron, y con capital bastante para estar satisfecho del fruto de sus trabajos.

Recordamos aquella noche en que hubo una verdadera locura en el teatro de Sibacón: llamaron al maestro innumerables veces á la escena: los espectadores se pusieron de pié sobre los asientos, y se pagaron á precio exorbitante los ramos de flores, para la lluvia de rosas que cayó en el escenario.

Aquella misma noche se deshizo la Compañía infantil, el teatro de Sibacón pasó á otro destino, y vimos á Appiani, al cabo de algunos años en España, dirigiendo una gran compañía de baile en el teatro de *Isabel la Católica* en Granada, donde era idolatrada la celeberrima Pitteri, á quien llamaban *La Reina del aire*.

Entonces comprendimos lo que debía valer el maestro Appiani, que ha dejado aquí la semilla del arte coreográfico.

De aquellos discípulos salieron los maestros de los que son ahora nuestros artistas cómico-lírico-coreográficos del teatro Filipino.