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The Theaters of Manila - II

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The Theaters of Manila

JUAN ATAYDE

TRANSLATED BY CONCEPCION ROSALES
AND DOREEN G. FERNANDEZ

VII. THE SMALL THEATERS (21 OCTOBER 1892)¹

After the description of the theater of Binondo, all other theaters cannot but be smaller — those which remained, or those which followed in the first years of its complete ruin.

Ever since our first article about the Tagalog theater, we have mentioned the quasi-theater of Tondo, which was constructed of light materials on the same site as the fragile one that still stands today. This was meant to give residents of the North of Manila, as that of Quiapo did for those in the South, the type of spectacles which the Tondo theater continued to present, and were familiarly termed *Tagalog*. Eventually the building was transformed into a wooden edifice with an iron roof, for other more serious presentations.

Gradually, the theater was improved; the decorations of massive or artificial mountains were replaced by the wings and backdrops of European theater. The lengthy dramas, purely Tagalog, gave way to bilingual productions, sprinkled with entr'actes of playlets or excerpts from Spanish zarzuelas. Included in the troupe for this purpose were special Tagalog actors who had come from the

1. The dates of the first six articles by Atayde, published in our First Quarter issue, were mistakenly left out. They are as follows: I — 21 August 1892; II — 28 August 1892; III — 7 September 1892; IV — 21 September 1892; V — 28 September 1892; VI — 7 October 1892. — Eds.

Spanish-Filipino companies of Arroceros and the beginnings of the Binondo theater.

Here in the Tondo theater gathered the dissidents of Escosura's time, like the old director Basora and the well-known leading man Alvaro Corazo, who had formed a company with other hastily-recruited actors. This lasted briefly in belligerence, because of internal weakness in the organization.

Also in the guise of separatists was the rebel part of the Ariza company when this divided into two factions, with the orthodox half remaining in the Casino salons. Both groups, because of disunity or lack of enthusiasm, soon dissolved, this being the history today and always [of such organizations].

In that period, the Tondo theater was not only the field of rebellion of the factions of actors of companies which had come from Spain; free-lance actors or those in transit in other types of presentations also performed in Tondo, then and at present the largest theater.

There we saw a false Turk who called himself Ali-Ben-Sualle, and came to present two musical instruments which he claimed to have invented. These were called the *turcofon* and the *turcofonini*, and were no different from what are today generally known as the *saxophone* and the *saxofonini*, and are played in bands. This man also conducted very lengthy concerts on a grand scale, with four Regimental bands of many members, something never before seen in Manila.

The above French charlatan was indeed an excellent musician. He took advantage of the recent invention of the sax instruments, and the obsession for anything Turkish (a result of the Eastern war), to come to the distant lands of Oceania, which, isolated from the European world without a Suez Canal and telegraph cables, candidly believed in the grand Turkish musician and his *turcofon* and *turcofonini*.

The first theatrical magician to come to Manila also appeared at the Tondo theater at that time. Equipped with many and mysterious pieces of equipment, he enthralled the public with magic acts. He was known as Mr. Debar; he not only made money in the theater and in private shows, but also in the sale of gadgets and in giving lessons in the art of magic, an art which has been perpetuated among enthusiasts till the arrival of Piñon in our day. Later

came other necromancers, including specialists of the black box and transformations, but no one can take from Mr. Debar his having been the first true prestidigitator to step on Philippine soil.

Aside from the theater in Tondo, other theaters of the period were the Sibacon or that of Appiani, which we have already mentioned, and that constructed in Gunao (Quiapo) over the site of the old Tagalog theater, used by the bilingual company which migrated from Tondo.

These two small theaters were the equivalents of the present Principe, but being so lightly constructed, they were short-lived and ended in ruins.

There were theater groups for all types, divided and subdivided, with mobile or shifting personnel, as the custom has been.

With this, we have described the theaters which followed the ruin of the theater of Binondo.

VIII. THE FIRST CASINO ESPAÑOL (14 NOVEMBER 1892)

At the start of these articles, we mentioned the presence of theatrical societies or groups of theater enthusiasts in old Manila, even before the existence of the first theater in Arroceros, which, although constructed of wood and nipa, boasted of being the first Castillian theater in the city of Legazpi. We find confirmation in the work of the old chronicler Fr. Delgado, who states that the performers in the past "played their roles well."

But let us cease rambling about those times in which the incidents and customs of the social life in Manila have been erased. This is due to the lack of a journalistic press and of social chroniclers, who should have written, even if it be on Chinese paper, about the life of their times, so as to satisfy our curiosity, and allow study and comparison with these days of progress and refinements. We leave all these, which are now details of history, to the new science of Folklore, since the first historians hardly mention that there were dramatic entertainments then.

We begin, therefore, with what is within reach of memory, whether heard from old predecessors, or vaguely recollected from what we saw as children.

Falling within what is projected as the first historical period reached by these notes, was an association called the Casino Es-

pañol, which inaugurated its literary-dramatic presentations in an impressive residence on the calle de Anda, corner of Cabildo — a mansion which belonged to the old Casal family. Since occupancy by this association, it has come to be known till today as the Casino, as we mentioned in the fifth article, when it was transformed into a theater by the Lopez-Ariza Company.

The Casino Español was the setting of glittering programs featuring the most cultured and distinguished members of Manila society. These were well-attended, and alternated with balls and soirees, dramatic presentations and literary teas. They were supported by a pleiade of lyric and witty poets, who then abounded in Manila, in a time when Zorrillas and Villergases were the vogue.

The great flights of the Casino soon made the Casal mansion, enclosed within the walls of Manila, too small and cramped. It was necessary to transfer it to a more sumptuous and centrally-located house in the business district. Obtained at a high rental was a locale divided between two big buildings (recently reconstructed after a fire) on Rosario street at the corner of Sacristia, in front of the Binondo Church.

The Casino in its new location was furnished in rare luxury; regal curtains, Persian carpets and palatial chandeliers lent a high aristocratic tone to the halls and rooms. From then on, rigorous etiquette had to be observed,² and this was one of the effective reasons for the death of this most pleasant association. The original statutes had called for simplicity and familiarity. This ambient air was asphyxiated in silks and velvets, and forgotten in the attempt to bring over the ambience of the European capitals, which banished the vaporous muslins and the economical jusi.

This greatly contributed to the disappearance of the Casino, the survival of which depended on its being the center of gatherings of the aristocracy. In these times, the grand soirees and parties of high society take place in the residences of the elite, who prefer to stay home. Another factor that contributed to the decline of the Casino was the attraction of the theater, which the good theater companies from Spain helped to develop as a social custom. We have mentioned this in the previous chapters.

2. The word *etiqueta* is also used to refer to formal attire. Thus, "rigurosa etiqueta" may also mean a requirement of formal wear. — Eds.

The above companies, however, also met their end, and then came the decline of theater and the loss of interest by the audience. Again a need was felt for social clubs, and those which followed the Casino will be the topic of another chapter, as the interval before the second period of Manila theaters, or as the seed which had to develop in order for this period to come into existence.

IX. DRAMA AND MUSICAL SOCIETIES BEFORE THE
TEATRO DEL PRINCIPE ALFONSO (21 NOVEMBER
1892)

The last dramatic societies declined or were dissolved, as we have mentioned, till the only remaining director was Don Juan Carballo, popularly remembered as an unfortunate comedian, in spite of having once been appreciated as an actor and organizer of other spectacles, gymnastic and acrobatic, as well as magic or sleight of hand acts. For all these served Don Juan, then popularly known as El Romea Filipino. He came into such bad luck, however, that he had to seek his fortune in the interior of China, where to date the valiant magician is still remembered.

In this period of the weakening of theater, drama societies were formed by enthusiasts, starting with one called La España, participated in by peninsulars of renown.

This society was not formed for a definite club, and with no fixed locale, as the Jockey Club and the Musical Society of St. Cecilia now have. In this manner it lasted for a long time, and was only dissolved by the departure for Spain of the more distinguished enthusiasts who had become necessary and indispensable to the moderate-sized and somewhat improvised company.

La España performed in the small theaters which we have mentioned, the Sibacón and the Quiapo. It introduced modern theater, which we now term as dramas about society,³ and high comedy.

In this way these worthy *aficionados* aroused public enthusiasm, such that without any difficulty, an association of influen-

3. *Dramas de sociedad* are roughly the equivalent of the comedy of manners, since these eighteenth-century plays were about the ways and foibles of the young and the old, their values and predicaments. These plays were influenced by French comedy, especially by Moliere, and considered "modern" in comparison to the classical Spanish drama in the manner of Calderon. — Eds.

tial members of society was formed to construct a theater, more spacious, with better facilities, and worthy of Manila's elegant society.

Some sixty thousand pesos was raised as capital; the Ayuntamiento donated the land in Arroceros where had stood the first theater of fragile materials, which we described earlier. No arguments were raised against it; the project was headed by two expert military engineers, and in 1860 the Teatro del Principe Alfonso was constructed.

We have mentioned the drama society which was the principal stimulus in effecting the construction of a good theater. Other worthy groups, however, made their contributions, in that interval when there was a lack of actors' companies. These societies helped sustain public interest in spectacles, and the desire to see a fitting theater in the capital of the Philippines.

In a residence on Barraca street, a modest lyric-dramatic society was formed. It gradually increased in size, such that it had to be established in its own club, with the name La Alianza. It was formally installed in a private home in the Isla del Romero, which today houses the editorial offices of *El Eco de Filipinas*.

Dramatic and poetic programs, and vocal and instrumental concerts were presented in this small theater.

However, the young students who had founded it had to yield leadership to the more respected persons who joined the group. The society eventually died from an excess of formality and the loss of familiarity.

Similar to the above, another recreational society called La Confianza began at a gathering of young music enthusiasts. They formed an orchestra and later, a small drama group. Following the steps of the previous society, they later organized into a more permanent association, and installed themselves, with all the apparatus and the offices of a large recreation center, in an impressive residence on Plaza Santa Cruz, now called Goiti, where now are the Schuster Pharmacy, the Meyer tailoring shop, and the auction rooms of Abraham. At that time, it was one big house which faced four streets, making it the most appropriate site for the future Teatro Real de Manila.

The stage was the long *caida* (internal gallery) of this residence, and there zarzuelas and concerts were performed. With the start of

the grand balls, however, La Confianza declined, just as the first Casino Español had ended, with its entry into aristocratic life.

During that period of artistic attempts and entertainments, there were, besides the above, other groups for dances and social events, like one that lasted for a long time in the picturesque district of Sampaloc. This was before the construction of the boulevard, and it should be well remembered by the impressive gentlemen dandies who strutted in the salons of what may well be called gay Manila, which was the title of a renowned newspaper, the father of festive and humorous weeklies which are today in publication.

However, we now have constructed the Teatro del Principe Alfonso, and to it we dedicate the next chapter.

X. THE TEATRO DEL PRINCIPE ALFONSO, FIRST PERIOD (7 DECEMBER 1892)

We mentioned in the previous article that this theater had been constructed with capital from shares, on land in the Arroceros area donated by the Ayuntamiento.

The theater turned out beautiful, spacious, well-ventilated, and proper in every way for the needs of this city.

It was inaugurated, as mentioned, in 1860 by the company La España, made up of amateur theater enthusiasts. They performed in a program jointly with the violinist Rubios, who left a name in Manila as the best concertist yet seen here. The inauguration was rather hurriedly set, to take advantage of the violinist's stopover here while on a concert tour around the Orient. The stage sets necessary for a theater had not yet been completely painted.

The company La España continued presenting shows in the new Arroceros theater without any objections from anyone. Their use of the building was deemed a moral right, since the group had been the seminal reason for its construction, and had the obligation to sustain the dramatic taste and interest it had originally aroused in the public. It had to be dissolved because of the division of its actor-members who, as military officials and civil servants, had to be assigned to other posts. Thus, the first musical company to come to the Philippines eventually took over the theater.

This was a French opera company directed by Monsieur Mogard, impresario and second tenor of the company. The *prima-donna absoluta* was his wife. She was an attractive figure and had a flexible voice capable of reaching the most difficult *fioritures*, previously unknown here; the canary-like trills thoroughly enthralled the public. She was the soul of the company, giving a masterly performance in the role of Norma, as *soprano absoluta*, and that of Lucia as lyric soprano. Her aria in the mad scene is remembered as not being matched till the interpretation many years later by Sra. Pierreti.

This company had started to perform in the small theater of Quiapo, until La España left the Arroceros operahouse free. There the group had, on a more appropriate and more brilliant stage, its real triumphs.

Vexations arose between the public and the company because of the demands of the former and the temperament of the director. These caused the departure of the whole troupe, which had already achieved its peak on a grand scale.

A new drama company immediately occupied the Principe Alfonso. This was formed by remaining members of previous companies and some new ones. They gave satisfactory theatrical presentations of the modern school, of the type originated here by the brilliant company La España. Standing out in this company were Don Tomas Escudero, character actor, and Don Angel Rivera, comic actor.

When Escudero retired because of an acute illness that eventually took him to the grave, the company was dissolved, and another one was immediately reorganized by enthusiasts, among *peninsulares* and *insulares*. Worthy of mention were Sra. Doña Amalia Fabre, Señores Beltran and Delgado, and the comic actor Don Manuel Ortiz. The impresario was Señor Don Jose Gomez de la Serna.

This company also had an ephemeral existence, and gave way to the third mixed company directed by today's veteran and much-applauded comic actor, Don Juan Barbero. The impresario was Don Jose Dayot.

This too ended after a brief existence, and Barbero, with part of his company, merged with a fourth group formed by Don Rafael Llanos, who, as a prize-winning declaimer from the Madrid Conservatory, was director and leading actor.

In the last two companies, Angel Rivera still performed.

We close this chapter, to open the second epoch of the Teatro del Principe Alfonso, with the first Italian opera company to come to the Philippines.

XI. THE TEATRO DEL PRINCIPE ALFONSO, SECOND PERIOD (21 DECEMBER 1892)

While drama companies that performed in this theater succeeded each other rapidly, as mentioned in the previous article dedicated to the first period, an oboe concertist named Pompey came and saw the possibility and the beneficial results of bringing to these islands the spectacle of Italian opera.

In fact, without any previous announcement, and when least expected, the above Pompey appeared with a troupe of opera singers. He went into partnership with the brothers Don Eduardo and Don Diego Jimenez, who were proprietors of the newspapers *El Porvenir Filipino* and *Diario de Filipinas*, and the illustrated weekly *El Oriente*; founders of *La Oceania Española*; and later directors-proprietors of the *Boletín de Cebu* and *Porvenir de Bisayas*, respectively.

The company's debut was expected to be a success, in a country so fond of music, and above all of *bel canto*. However, with the death of the baritone Colombo upon arrival, the incompleteness, unequal strength and disagreements of the ensemble, and a weak partnership base, the company was soon dissolved. Some members left the country; others remained to await reinforcements requested from Italy for the other roles still needed to present a first class production.

In the meantime, the stage of the Principe Alfonso did not rest, coming again under the aegis of the Llanos drama company. Llanos later joined with Señor Preysler in partnership, and to attract the latter back to the stage, for he had proven to be a notable amateur in certain character roles.

Soon, the reinforcement of opera artists arrived, and we remember the contralto Ferrari, the tenor Sabatini, the baritone Péllico, and the bass Deserani. Among those who awaited them in Manila we recall the tireless soprano Bouché, the comedian Factori, the second tenor Errani, the bass singer Reina, three Italian dancers, and the orchestra conductor and celebrated violinist Stefani.

Their initial performance was held in April or May 1868, and Manila witnessed the most complete company for Italian opera, which introduced a completely classical repertoire of the masters, which was then in vogue.

The company returned to Italy at the end of its contract. Since Señor Stefani was quite satisfied by his first Philippine venture, he returned, forming a partnership with the Maestro Concertatore, Señor Zappa, for another opera company. He did not neglect to bring back the congenial Sabatini, so well-liked by the Manila public. Among the other members were Señora Leompetra, primadonna; Señora Palmana, lyric soprano; Señora Corsi, contralto; Grandi, baritone; Cesari, bass; and as comic actor, the already popular Fattori [sic].

The company concluded the season, but not with the expected success promised by the impresarios. However, even if there was no noticeable profit, all the expenses were met, and "the clothes were saved," that is, the cost of the wardrobe was redeemed, according to sources.

The drama season began again, and it was the Llanos-Preysler company that trod the stage of the Principe Alfonso after the Italian opera. The company made a lucky hit in bringing over from the Peninsula the two sisters, Carolina and Cecilia Campini, the former as dramatic actress, and the latter as comedienne. With them also came Señor Muñoz, lead actor and stage director, who turned out to be a noted actor; and another diligent young man, Señor Rodriguez.

This reinforcement of good actors was well-received by the public, and heartened the company, now that the Jimenezes had joined, and rendered it complete. Señor Llanos went to Spain to look for first-rate actors for the principal roles, since Señor Muñoz had then retired.

In the course of time, with the proper costumes, and enough experience, the impresarios, Stefani and Zappa, were encouraged to return to Manila, which had gotten used to, and had marked its season of, opera in the winter months, or from November to February. However, Señor Zappa having died en route to Manila, Stefani came alone with a well-organized company. He brought with him the highly esteemed soprano, Señora Bohema; Señora Belot as lyric soprano, and the tenors Nery and Bonachic. They

both distinguished themselves: Nery as *Polliutto*, which made one remember Tamberlik; and Bonachic in *La Favorita*. He possessed a privileged voice, which did not falter even after the final duet, which he sang with admirable power. Señora Bohema was compared by the critics of that period to Señora Borghimamo.

This company was so well-received and esteemed, and the theater so constantly well-attended through a whole long season, that the impresario and the artists were notably rewarded, and very much contented with their profits or livelihood.

Señor Stefani returned for the fourth time, having been titled the Conde de Michelena of the opera theater of Manila. He brought back the favorite artists, Señora Bohema, now wife of the impresario; and the tenor, Sabatini; and the no less appreciated coloratura, Señora Trafford; the baritone Domenico Oesary; the bass, another Cesary; and the comedian Bonafoux. This time, the fact that the company staged *Faust* in an extraordinary manner, along with other modern and spectacular productions, was not enough to achieve the same success and profit it had won the first two times.

The company lacked, above all, a certain official patronage or protection, which had been indirect but real with attendance by the authorities, who were now away on the campaign in Jolo.

With this failure, Señor Stefani never returned.

There was another interval of drama, with even the arrival of several French artists, the vanguard of a company of vaudeville or operetta, which had performed in Saigon. Hardly had they performed once or twice in the Principe Alfonso, when the fire which gutted our first theater broke out, one early morning in 1877. At that time, the principal Spanish actors and the rest of the French company were due to arrive.

This chronicle shows that in its seventeen years of existence, the theater curtains were hardly ever at rest. The theater was only closed perforce for several months, when the offices of the central government were housed in it after the earthquakes of 1863, since it was a secure edifice. This shows that it was earthquake-proof, but not fireproof, especially when the fires were started in the lights area where an inept stagehand was fixing the oil containers of the lamps.

XII. THE THEATER-CIRCUS OF BILIBID, OPERA SEASON (21 FEBRUARY 1893)

In the previous piece, and in the second article which was about the bullfights in the Philippines, we dealt with the bullring in Bilibid, which was converted into a theater, after the enthusiasm for the bullfight (which gave it being) had waned, and the bullring closed its doors.

This transformation was motivated by an enterprise formed to bring directly from Italy a good opera company headed by Assi-Panadés. At that time the Arroceros theater was under lease, and recourse had to be sought in this theater.

To cover the open bullring of the Bilibid plaza, a galvanized iron dome was installed, with a central column or upright support. On this were nailed enormous lamps as substitutes for the giant chandeliers that hung in the big theaters. In truth, the theater took on a somewhat bizarre appearance, but it was spacious, cool, and acceptable enough.

On the suspended lamps attached to the central column, wicks and gas deposits were later installed, and this was the first trial of this type of lighting done in the Philippines. As expected, it did not produce the best results, since coconut oil was used.

Let us mention several names of the members of this company, composed of two complete quartets. The management did not spare means nor expense for this venture, to enable Manila to see the best that could be presented in the art of music.

Señor Cassati, noted musical composer, came as director. He later left behind the remembrance of a brilliant *paso-doble* which is still being played by military bands. He was also an excellent violinist who showed his prowess with the bow in some concerts, and was a very able tenor, having played the role of Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*.

Señora Guerini, she with the powerful soprano voice, came as primadonna absoluta. A sister of Señor Cassati's came as contralto.

In the other quartet, the primadonna was Señora Doña Cecilia Coppa, who became so well-liked by Manila's elite society, and so well-remembered after her death.

The well-known artist Celestini came as tenor. His voice being already in decline, he reserved it to win public admiration in a romantic passage or in the most beautiful operatic aria. The enthu-

siastic audience forgave him his other deficiencies during the performance.

On the other hand, the other tenor, Forapan, had faculties in excess, but lacked the training that saved Celestini.

The lead baritone was another noted singer named Rossi, and the lead bass was the well-known Spaniard, Garcia, whose acting talent made up for the difficulties of his voice, which would have been powerful, had it not been somewhat tired and spent.

Don Santino Coppa came as concert master. He has stayed among us to propagate good musical instruction, and has been always ready to preside at musical programs in the dilettante society of Manila.

The company brought over as stage scenery painter the unforgettable Divela, who introduced painted backdrops with effects of perspective, the most exquisite ever seen here. Divela, together with Alberoni, left here outstanding disciples in the decorative art. We see evidence of this in the temples and public buildings and in the rooms of the wealthy Manila homes.

With these factors, this excellent company encountered no difficulty in presenting the more difficult operas on stage. Manila saw, for the first and last time, *Macbeth*, *Roberto*, and one other grand opera or so, which we do not recall. However, this was not enough to sustain the art and avoid the bankruptcy of such a well-capitalized enterprise.

It is also true that the audience had to divide itself among three musical groups, and the three all had the same disastrous end.

The French operetta company, whose vanguard of several singers we had already met in the Arroceros theater, had arrived with the whole troupe, and in a few days managed to arrange staging at the nearby Variedades theater, when the Arroceros had been razed by flames.

A school of singing called Capozzi in honor of the concert-master of the Stefani company, who remained in the country and acted as director, brought over several artists to form a select quartet. With the outstanding students of the school, they presented a few operas in the Binondo Theater.

We shall, however, speak of each of these companies in their proper places, and we shall end this chapter on the opera season of the Bilibid theater, with the dissolution and dispersal of the

Assi-Panadés company, the only opera group that performed in that theater.

XIII. THE CIRCUS-THEATER OF BILIBID, THEATER SEASON (28 FEBRUARY 1893)

We mentioned in the series of articles about the theater that when the Principe Alfonso of Arroceros burned down in 1877, actors were on their way to Manila. They had been recruited in Spain in order to complete the cast needed for high drama and comedy in the rich repertory of Castillian theater.

While the co-impresario, Don Rafael Llanos, went to the Peninsula to find this important part of the company, the other group in the Philippines, under the direction of Don Juan Barbero, who also became an impresario, went to Iloilo and other parts of the Visayas (the refuge and hope of decaying ventures), to await the arrival of the reinforcements requested.

The Arroceros theater was in this waiting stage when the fire occurred, with the French artists of the Deplace company making use of its stage.

After the necessary time had passed, the troupe in Iloilo returned to Manila, and met with the new arrivals from the Peninsula, but without a theater.

Fortunately for them, the opera company which occupied the Bilibid circus-theater stopped performing soon after. There the company had an impressive stage on which to present their initial production, the splendid drama *La Campana de Almudaina*, by Palao. In this the whole company took part:

- Don Antonio Garcia Ecija, stage director and lead actor;
- Doña Vicenta Ferrándiz, leading actress;
- Doña Carolina Campini, juvenile female lead;
- Doña Cecilia Campini, comic actress;
- Other actresses, Doña Amalia Fabre and Doña Remedios Offman;
- Don Rafael Llanos, lead actor;
- Don Juan Barbero, lead actor and comic director;
- Don Ricardo Ferrandiz, juvenile male lead;
- Don Melchor Ramiro, comic old man;
- Don Carlos Rodriguez, juvenile male lead; and other supporting actors.

With such a brilliant group, there was no difficulty at all in casting, and within the Bilibid proscenium were seen the dramas of Echegaray, who was then in vogue, and the comedies of Ayala, who had barely premiered in Madrid his latest production, entitled *Consuelo*. Not neglected were renowned works by other authors, like *El Nudo Gordiano*, by Sellés; *El Drama Nuevo*, by Tamayo; and adaptations and translations difficult to present like *Sullivan*, the best remembrance left to us by the great Romea. All these works attested to the craft of Director Garcia Ecija, worthy disciple of Don Jose Valero.

This company lasted for about two years, and with it began and ended the only theater season in the Bilibid theater. It was the last drama group of authentic actors which the capital of Manila has had.

XIV THE KIOSKO DE VARIEDADES, FRENCH OPERETTA (14 MARCH 1893)

Long ago, in the days of a well-meaning general concerned about the homesickness of the European troops, a large kiosk or bandstand, octagonal in shape, was erected in the Arroceros site, at the side of the thoroughfare which started at the statue of Queen Isabel II, and ended in the Puente Colgante. It was meant as a salon for public dances. For this a military band performed to attract the strollers in an area where the coaches of the rich did not bother, nor powder with dust, those on foot, or the general masses.

The construction of the kiosk was undertaken by the military, and we do not know if the public dances were also in their charge. The venture proved a failure, since no more than the first dance was held. This was because of the efforts of a certain agent of female dancers for hire, who brought a few of these to the inauguration of this little center of Terpsichore.

Such were the liberties of Mars, seeking relief for nostalgia in this locale, that these hired dancers did not appear again, and there was no other agent able to bring another *babae* to the incomparable kiosk.

There was enthroned the nostalgia of silence, until the fire which gutted the Teatro del Principe Alfonso, a few paces away, made

possible the conversion of the kiosk, whether by witchery or by the *fiat* of a man of spirit, into a delightful summer theater.

This man of spirit was no other than the same Monsieur Deplace, producer, director, and actor of the French operetta company which came from Saigon, augmented by the artists who had performed in vaudeville theaters in France.

It would be good to speak of the history and genius of Monsieur Deplace, who introduced here the special architecture of colonial theaters. He was a capable financier who was able to raise the capital in fifteen days; a consummate artist who with his company (in which stood out the beautiful Mme. Sison, the haughty Mme. Dorani, whose wardrobe was reputed to be worth 30,000 *duros*, the noted singer Mlle. Ragani, the most gracious Mr. Perrier, and others whom we cannot remember) properly introduced us to the works *La Grande Duchesse*, *Barbe Bleu*, *Le Petit Faust*, *La Vie Parisienne*, and many other productions of light French operetta.

Of the history of Deplace, all that was known was that he had been an illustrious officer of the French army, and upon changing career from the military to that of wandering artist in the seaways of America, Asia and Oceania, he also changed his distinguished name to that which he brought with him to Manila.

This company left, the first and last of its kind which has come to the Philippines, and we shall here close the first epoch of the dance kiosk which was converted into the Teatro de Variedades.

XV. KIOSCO DE VARIEDADES, SEASONS OF ZARZUELA AND ITALIAN OPERA (7 APRIL 1893)

The procession of civil servants who have passed through the Philippines from *La gloriosa*, thanks to the predicaments of politics and successive changes of government, brought to these shores the poet Dario Céspedes, author of *El toque de animas* and other well-known productions of the second period of the Spanish zarzuela.

This enthusiastic son of Apollo, a true fan of the zarzuela, with a powerful voice which amazed and seduced his audience, read poetry and presented dramatic scenes. In the streets and houses where it was possible, he praised the attributes of the grand

zarzuela,⁴ citing the need to implant it in Manila, and the substantial profit a company would earn in bringing over the first group.

Céspedes soon came to be echoed by other voices, and when he returned to the Peninsula, following the waves of the procession, and on some kind of retirement, he took with him sufficient funds to contract and launch a creditable and large zarzuela company.

Señora Soler came as first soprano, Señora Fo de Aragon as second, Señora Perez as contralto; and some chorists of the fair sex, among whom was one of the other of doubtful reputation. Among them, too, was the bass Vendrell, who also acted as stage director; Mora, the first tenor; Carbonell, baritone; Chaves, tenor and comic; and Del Rio, orchestra conductor.

With the above additional actors for the secondary roles, and choruses of both sexes recruited from performers already in the country, all the zarzuelas of the old and new repertoires were presented. The company's initial presentation was the gem of our lyric theater, *Jugar con fuego*.

The premiere nights and gala performances were well-attended. *El Barberillo de Lavapiés* was the zarzuela which proved the most profitable for the company, since it drew such large audiences. Applause and praises were showered on the artists . . . until the usual feelings of tedium, weariness and theater anemia set in.

The women were no longer attractive, as they had passed from Aprils to Augusts, and needed to be replaced by actresses in their springtime. The antics of Chaves, once so acclaimed, seemed intolerable abuses. Disagreements between management and administration became critical till the company dissolved and the enterprise failed (contrary to Dario Cespedes' prophecy), in the last days of April or the early days of May 1880.

* * * * *

A few months later, the earthquakes of 1880 of sad memory occurred, and the Variedades served as the offices of the Japi-

4. The full-length zarzuela is often referred to as the *zarzuela grande*, and had from three to five acts. The short, or one-act zarzuela was called *el genero chico*. — Eds.

tania General, while the building for the staff headquarters was under construction on Aguadas street.

In the early part of the latter months of 1881, a large opera company arrived in Manila to perform at the Variedades. This company was brought over by friends and enthusiasts of bel canto, and was under the direction of the ill-starred maestro, Don Laureano Carreras. A series of calamities befell the company. Before its premiere presentation, it lost one of its sopranos and the lead tenor. In such a situation, the management, as a last resort, enlisted the help of an intelligent amateur to substitute for the tenor. This person, who still lives among us, knew the dangers and difficulties of taking over an artist's role, yet risked everything to accommodate his friends and save them from the disaster in which bad luck had placed them. The opening night of the opera arrived, and with it the public presentation of the unexpected artist in the difficult role of Genaro in *Lucrecia Borja*. His performance was successful, and the company was not badly received. Thus it continued until new reinforcements requested arrived from Italy. With these artists came the excellent maestro Goré, a fine professor of piano and director of note. Of the other artists as a group, after the reconstitution of the company, we shall only mention that there were some failures, the most notorious of which was the interpretation of *Faust*, which drew whistles of disapproval on the evening of 20 October 1882. This presaged the dissolution the following morning of the Teatro Kiosco de Variedades, when a horrible typhoon hit the city and the kiosk fell like a house of cards, its materials scattered through the air and spread all over the Arroceros area.

XVI. THE FILIPINO (7 SEPTEMBER 1893)

In this weekly publication, we have been publishing a series of articles with the present heading [*Los Teatros de Manila*], until Chapter XV, which dealt with the Kiosco de Variedades in its second period; with music companies. We began with the theater of nipa in Arroceros, which is the first theater in living memory that can be called a theater for European presentations in the Philippines.

We suspended the publication of these inquiring articles, which cost us a good deal of investigative work, as we heard murmurs

that these were boring and tedious. Furthermore, we were nearing the modern period, in which these [the theaters treated in the articles] were coming to be known as pseudo-theaters.

Recently, however, with the inauguration of the Teatro Zorrilla, and with having to deal with this real theater, we have thought it opportune to resume our forgotten articles, since only a chapter on the Teatro Filipino remains, with which to take leave or send into retirement this veteran with many chronic complaints, who has been gainfully replaced.

The corner of Crespo street had become the regular site of the *carrillos* which were mounted in makeshift stalls, in vacant lots, transferring from the left sidewalk to the right, and from there to the end of the street—the transverse street of San Roque.

The young lads of the *carrillos* had grown into men, and were under the masterful direction of the veteran actor Don Alejandro Cubero, with the exemplary artistry of Doña Elisea Raguer at the head of the company.

With these elements brought together, it was not possible to continue in the makeshift stalls of San Roque street. Recognizing the importance of site, the stall was converted into a small theater. The proprietors were Cubero, and the enthusiast Don Jose Primo de Rivera. The ownership was later to pass on to other owners and co-owners who need not be named.

In this site, the well-consolidated Filipino company named Fernandez, after the star and leading artist who gave it character [Praxedes "Yeyeng" Fernandez], would produce for some time a large repertory of modern zarzuelas under the direction of Cubero. This new company has been in Iloilo for some time, reaping applause and congenial feelings, and will soon return to reanimate the dark and dusty stage of San Roque. In this theater the large peninsular company of Navarro de Peralta, which had been brought over by Mme. Raguer to introduce the grand zarzuela, staged their productions. Eventually, there was need to expand and redecorate better the modest Teatro Filipino. The company which came to be known as the Compañía de Zarzuela Española, reorganized by the same Raguer with free-lance professional artists and amateurs, performed here until the construction of the Teatro Zorrilla. Teatro Filipino became the setting of all the concerts, magic shows and small theatrical presentations which

passed through Manila and had no need for large halls. For a large audience, the Teatro de Tondo was preferred, and for this reason, opera companies have gone there, and benefit shows and spectacles requiring large-capacity halls were shown there.

Today, ancient and abandoned, the Teatro Filipino is a nest of termites and rats which will eventually destroy it, unless a pickaxe comes to restore or wreck it, to allow a phoenix-theater to rise from the ashes, and rival the pride of Calle Iris [the Zorilla].

We shall not conclude without mentioning another small suburban theater which, because of its distance and size, does not merit a separate chapter, but does deserve credit and remembering. It gave delight to the people of San Nicolas, and to those who had been attracted by the humor of the carrillos. This little theater was called the Principe, and now it is almost always closed. It was constructed by the veteran Barbero, who could readily organize an improvised company sufficient for the occasion.

Here we end our account of the old theaters, after having mentioned those that no longer exist.

Los teatros de Manila

VII

LOS PEQUEÑOS TEATROS

ESPUÉS de haber descrito el de Binondo, ya no pueden ser más que pequeños todos los que quedaron ó siguieron á éste, en los primeros años de su completa ruina.

Hemos venido hablando del pseudo coliseo de Tondo, desde nuestro 1.º artículo sobre *El Teatro Tagalog*, construido con materiales ligeros en el mismo sitio en que está el desvenecado que subiste ahora, para dar á los habitantes del Norte de Manila, como el de Quiapo daba á los de la región del Sur, esta clase de espectáculos, por lo cual tuvieron el sobre nombre de *Tagalogs*, que conservó el de Tondo, hasta que lo transformaron en edificio de madera con techo de hierro, para otras más serias representaciones.

Allí se fué progresando gradualmente, y cambiaron las decoraciones de montes artificiales ó artificiales, por los bastidores y telones del teatro europeo, y de los dramas, puramente tagalogs, pasaron á las representaciones bilingües, esto es, salpicadas con intermedios de piezas ó retazos de zarzuela castellanas que para eso había entre la *troupe* tagala artistas especiales, que eran oriundos de aquellas compañías hispano filipinas de Arcecos y del comienzo del teatro de Binondo.

En el teatro de Tondo se acogieron los disidentes de Escosura como el antiguo director Basora y el reputado actor Gabán Alvaro Corazo que formaron compañía con otros improvisados actores, la cual duró poco tiempo en la heligerancia, por causa de su debilidad misma.

También fueron allí en sus separatas la parte rebeldi de la Compañía Arca, cuando esta se dividió en dos fracciones, quedando la mitad ortodoxa en las dichas salones del Casino. Hasta que una y otra se fueron desviando por un tiempo á separaciones. La historia de siempre y la hispano filipina.

En aquella época en el teatro de Tondo el teatro de rebeldía de los artistas fue el teatro de la Compañía

de rebeldía que en Manila más es, el coliseo de entonces, así como ahora, los artistas suecitos ó de paso que venían á dar espectáculos de otros géneros.

Allí vimos un falsificado turco, que se llamó *Ali ben-Sualle*, que vino á exhibir dos instrumentos músicos, que decía ser de su invención, llamados el *turcofon* y el *turcofonini*, y que no eran otros que los ahora generalizados saxofon y saxofonini, que vemos en todas las bandas de música. Y á dirigir grandes conciertos mónicos, con cuatro numerosas bandas de Regimientos, como nunca se habían visto en Manila.

Aquel charlatán francés, que no dejaba de ser un excelente músico, aprovechó la reciente invención de los instrumentos de Sax y la turcoomanía que produjo la guerra de Oriente para venir por estas lejanas tierras de Oceanía, que apartadas del mundo europeo, sin canal de Suez y sin cables telegráficos, creveron cándidamente en el gran músico Turco y en su *turcofon* y *turcofonini*.

También apareció por aquella época en el teatro de Tondo, el primer prestidigitador teatral que vino á Manila, con muchos y misteriosos aparatos, y que enloqueció á este pueblo de las *salamanca*s. Llamábase Mr. Debar y no sólo ganó en las funciones teatrales y de salón, sino en la venta de administraciones y enseñanza del *arte mágico*, que se ha ido vinculando en los aficionados, hasta llegar al Páon de nuestros días. Después han venido otros *magos mágicos*, hasta el del *gabinete negro* y el de las *transformaciones*, pero nadie quitará á Mr. Debar haber sido el primer prestidigitador *verdadero* que ha pisado Filipinas.

Acompañaron al teatro de Tondo, el teatrillo de Sibacoy ó de Appiani, que ya hemos mencionado, y el que se construyó en Gunao (Quiapo), sobre el terreno del antiguo teatro tagalog, para la compañía *bilingüe* que emigró de Tondo.

Estos dos teatrillos eran como ahora el *Príncipe*, pero hechos tan ligeramente, que acabaron por desmoronamiento con poca existencia.

Hubo compañías para todos, divididas y subdivididas, con personal móvil ó trasladable, según ha seguido la costumbre.

Y con esto, hemos descrito los teatros que siguieron á la ruina del teatro de Binondo.

VIII

EL PRIMER CASINO ESPAÑOL



EMPEZAMOS al comenzar estos artículos, que no habrían dejado de haber en el antiguo Manila los teatros de sociedad ó compañías de aficionados, antes de que existiera el primer coliseo de Arroceros ó sea el primer teatro castellano, que ostentó, aunque *d' tabla y nipa*, la ciudad de Legaspi: suposición que luego hemos encontrado confirmada en la obra del antiguo cronista P. Delgado, el cual dice que los artistas de entonces "hacían bien sus papeles."

Pero dejando de divagar por tiempos en que han quedado borrados los accidentes y costumbres de la vida social manileña, por falta de prensa periódica y de cronistas de salones, que hubieran dejado escrita, aunque en papel de China, la vida de su tiempo, para que nos sirviera de curiosidad, estudio y comparación en estos días de progreso y refinamientos; dejamos estos que ahora son puntos históricos para esa nueva ciencia del *Folk-lore*, pues apenas dicen que hubo distracciones dramáticas los primeros historiadores.

Empezemos, pues, por donde llega nuestra memoria, bien por lo que hemos oído contar á los viejos *camagones*, bien por lo que recordamos vagamente que vimos cuando niños.

Destácase en el primer período histórico que alcanzan estos apuntes, una sociedad que se llamó *Casino Español*, la cual inauguró sus funciones dramático-literarias en un caserón de la calle de Anda esquina á la de Cabildo, palacio que fué de la antigua familia de los Casales y que desde que la ocupó aquella Sociedad, se llama hasta ahora del *Casino*, como ya hemos dicho en el artículo V, al haberla transformado en teatro la com-

pañía Lopez Ariza.

Diéronse brillantes veladas por el Casino Español, en el cual figuraba lo más culto y distinguido de la sociedad de Manila, veladas muy concurridas en que se daban alternativamente bailes y *saraos*, funciones dramáticas y tés literarios, sostenidos por una pleyade de poetas líricos y festivos, que entonces

pululaban por Manila, en los tiempos de moda de los *Zorrillas* y los *Villergas*.

Grandes vuelos tomó el Casino Español, y ya le era poco y estrecho el palacio de Casal encerrado en los muros de Manila. Preciso fué llevarlo á casa más suntuosa y más céntrica en el barrio del Comercio; y se adquirió, en caro arrendamiento, la que ahora está dividida en dos grandes fincas, reedificadas recientemente despues de un incendio, en la calle del Rosario esquina á la de la Sacristía frente á la iglesia de Binondo.

Amueblóse el Casino en su nueva casa con inusitado lujo: cortinas imperiales, alfombras persianas y arañas palaciegas dieron tono altamente aristocrático á salones y gabinetes, y desde entonces los bailes y reuniones fueron necesariamente de rigurosa etiqueta, y esto mismo fué una de las causas eficientes para que muriera aquella que fué amenísima Sociedad, mientras sostuvo la modestia y la confianza que informaron sus primeros estatutos. Olvidó este medio ambiente de Filipinas, para pretender traer aquí el de las capitales europeas, y se asfixió entre sedas y terciopelos, al relegar las vaporosas *beatillas* (muselinas) y los económicos *jusis*.

Esto contribuyó poderosamente á la desaparición del Casino, cuya vida consistía en ser el único punto de reunión aristocrática, como aquí decimos, pues es cosa de estos tiempos las altas *soirees* y los *asaltos* de buen tono en los hoteles de los Señores que se *quedan en casa*; y contribuyó para acabar al fin con aquella sociedad, la atracción del teatro, que hicieron asidua costumbre social las buenas compañías peninsulares, de que hemos hablado en los capítulos anteriores.

Pero las dichas compañías tambien tuvieron su fin y vino la decadencia del teatro y el enfriamiento del público, y volvió á sentirse la necesidad

de las sociedades recreativas; y éstas que siguieron al Casino, serán objeto de otro capítulo, como el paréntesis á la segunda época que tuvieron los teatros de Manila ó como el gérmen que se desarrolló para la existencia de ella.

IX

SOCIEDADES DRAMÁTICAS Y LÍRICAS ANTES DEL TEATRO DEL PRINCIPE ALFONSO

MUCHAS ó debilitadas cayeron las últimas compañías dramáticas, de que hemos hecho mérito, hasta el extremo de que quedó como Director absoluto D. Juan Carballo, de popular memoria como desventurado cómico, por más que haya podido ser apreciable como artista y organizador de otros espectáculos, bien gímásticos y acrobáticos, bien mágicos ó de prestidigitación; que para todo esto servía el buen D. Juan, llamado por antonomasia *El Romeo Filipino*. Pero con tan mala suerte, que tuvo que ir á probar fortuna hasta el interior de China, donde todavía recuerdan á aquel valiente *salamanquero*.

En aquella atonía del teatro, fueron formándose sociedades dramáticas de aficionados, y se empezó por una titulada *La España*, de elementos peninsulares de gran valía.

No se creó esta sociedad recreativa para casino fijo, y por no tener, digámoslo así, domicilio social, como sucede ahora con el Jockey-Club y la Sociedad Musical de Sta. Cecilia, duró muy largo tiempo, hasta que se disolvió por la marcha á España ó á provincias de los más distinguidos aficionados, que se hicieron necesarios é indispensables en el ajustado cuadro, de aquella que surgió como improvisada compañía.

Actuaba *La España* en los pequeños coliseos que hemos mencionado de Sibacón y Quiapo, y dió á conocer el teatro moderno, en lo que ahora llamamos el drama de sociedad y la alta comedia.

Y levantaron de tal modo aquellos buenos aficionados el entusiasmo público, que sin dificultad ninguna se formó una asociación de vecinos pudientes, para construir un teatro de más capacidad, mejores condiciones y digno

de la culta sociedad de Manila.

Reuniéronse unos sesenta mil pesos de capital social; el Ayuntamiento cedió el terreno de Arroceros, donde estuvo aquel primer teatro de materiales ligeros que hemos descrito, no hubo impedimento alguno por la zona polémica; pusieronse al frente de la obra dos expertos ingenieros militares; y se levantó el *Teatro del Príncipe Alfonso*, en 1860.

Hemos dado á conocer la sociedad dramática que fué el principal estímulo para que se llevara á efecto la construcción de un buen teatro, sin que dejaran de contribuir á este pensamiento otras apreciables sociedades, que sostuvieron en aquel paréntesis de falta de compañías artísticas, la afición á espectáculos y el deseo de ver levantado un digno coliseo de la capital de Filipinas.

Pues nació también en la casa de un vecino de la calle de la Barraca una modesta sociedad lírico-dramática, que fué tomando cuerpo, hasta que tuvo que constituirse en verdadero casino, con el nombre de *La Alianza*, é instalarse en casi propia en Ja Isla del Romero, que es donde está ahora la Redacción de *El Eco de Filipinas*.

En el teatrillo de esta sociedad se dieron funciones dramáticas y líricas, así como conciertos vocales é instrumentales.

Pero los jóvenes estudiantes que la fundaron, tuvieron que ceder la dirección á las personas respetables que habían venido á ella, y murió por exceso de formalidad, al desaparecer la confianza.

También como ésta, se formó otra sociedad recreativa, llamada *La Confianza*, que tuvo su principio en una reunión de jóvenes aficionados á la música, quienes empezaron por formar una orquestita y después una pequeña sección dramática, y siguiendo por el camino de la otra, se constituyó en Casino y se instaló, con todo el aparato y las dependencias de un gran círculo de recreo, en la soberbia casa de la plaza de Santa Cruz, ahora de Goiti, donde están la botica de Schuster, la Sastrería de Meyer y el martillo de Abraham, que en

tonces era una sola casa con treinta á cuatro calles, en el sitio que está llamado, como el más apropósito, á que se construya allí el muy futuro *Teatro Real de Manila*.

Arreglóse el escenario en la larga *caída* de esta casa y allí se oyeron zarzuelas y conciertos; pero empezaron los grandes bailes, y cayó la sociedad de *La Confianza*, como cayó el primer Casino Español, al entrar en la vida aristocrática.

Epoca fué aquella de diversiones y estímulos artísticos, en la que además de estas sociedades, había otras para bailes y giras, como una que duró mucho tiempo en el pintoresco barrio de Sampaloc, antes que se hiciera el *boulevard*, y que mucho deben recordarla los gallos morrocotudos, que polleaban entonces, en los salones que podían llamarse del Manila-alegre, como el título de un célebre periódico, que fué el padre de todos los semanarios festivos ó humorísticos que hoy día se publican.

Pero ya tenemos levantado el teatro del *Príncipe Alfonso* y á él dedicaremos el siguiente capítulo.

X

TEATRO DEL PRÍNCIPE ALFONSO

(1.ª época)



¡JIMOS en el anterior artículo, que se había construido este teatro, con capital formado por acciones, sobre terreno que cedió el Ayuntamiento, en el sitio de Arroceros.

Resultó bonito, amplio, fresco y propio en todos conceptos para las necesidades

de esta población.

Inauguróse en el referido año de 1860, por la compañía de aficionados titulada *La España*, disponiéndose una función combinada con el violinista Robios, que dejó nombre en Manila, por ser el mejor concertista que hasta entonces aquí se había visto. Para aprovechar el paso de este artista que viajaba por Oriente, dando conciertos, se hizo esta inauguración algo precipitadamente, cuando todavía no estaba concluido de pintar el telar necesario para un teatro.

Siguió la Compañía *La España* dando

funciones en el nuevo teatro de Arroceros, sin que nadie pudiera disputárselo, por el derecho moral que tenía al coliseo, habiendo sido el gérmen de su edificación, y para sostener la emulación al gusto y la afición dramática que ella había levantado; hasta que tuvo que disolverse por desmembramiento de sus sócios actores, que, como Militares y Empleados, tuvieron que ir destinados á otros puntos, y entonces pasó á ocupar este teatro la primera compañía lírica que había venido á Filipinas.

Era una compañía de ópera francesa, dirigida por Mr. Mogard, empresario y 2.º tenor de la misma, siendo la primadonna absoluta la señora de éste, de muy simpática figura y de muy flexible garganta para las más difíciles *fioritures*, que aquí no se conocían y que enloquecieron al público que oyó á Mad. Mogard aquellos gorgoros de canario. Ella era el alma de la compañía desempeñando magistralmente el papel de Norma, como soprano absoluta, y el de Lucia, como tiple ligera; cuyo recuerdo del aria de la locura, no ha podido ser comparado más que con el que cantó muchos años después la Sra. Pierreti.

Empezó á actuar esta Compañía en el pequeño teatro de Quiapo, hasta que la Sociedad *La España* le dejó libre el coliseo de Arroceros, y entonces tuvo, en más propio lugar y más lucido escenario, sus verdaderos triunfos.

Disgustos que surgieron entre el público y la compañía, por exigencias de aquel y genialidades del Director de ésta, obligaron á la marcha de toda la *troupe*, que había hecho su agosto en gran escala.

Ocupó inmediatamente el teatro del *Príncipe Alfonso* una nueva compañía dramática, que se formó con los elementos desperdigados de las anteriores y algunos nuevos, que dieron bastante *juogo escénico*, con la escuela moderna que sembró aquí la brillante sociedad de *La España*. Entre aquellos sobresalieron D. Tomás Escudero, como actor de carácter, y don Angel Rivera, como actor cómico.

Retirado Escudero por aguda enfermedad que le llevó el sepulcro, se disolvió la Compañía de que formaba parte, y seguidamente se constituyó otra de aficionados entre peninsulares é in-

sulares, destacándose entre ellos la señora doña Amalia Fabre, los Sres. Beltran y Delgado y el actor cómico don Manuel Ortiz, siendo empresario de dicha compañía el Sr. D. José Gómez de la Serna.

También ésta tuvo vida efímera, para dar paso á la tercera compañía *mixta*, dirigida por el hoy veterano y aplaudido actor cómico D. Juan Barbero, siendo empresario don José Dayot.

Esta concluyó asimismo al poco tiempo de actuar, y Barbero, con parte de su compañía, pasó á engrosar la cuarta ídem que formó D. Rafael Llanos, siendo éste director y primer galán, como alumno de declamación premiado en el Conservatorio de Madrid.

En estas dos últimas compañías actuó todavía Angel Rivera.

Y cerramos este capítulo, para abrir la segunda época del teatro del *Principe Alfonso*, con la primera compañía de ópera italiana que vino á Filipinas.

XI /

EL DEL PRINCIPE ALFONSO

(2.ª época)

MIENTRAS se sucedían rápidamente las compañías dramáticas que actuaron en este teatro y que hemos hecho relación de ellas en el artículo anterior dedicado á su primera época, vino por aquí un concertista de oboe llamado Pompey, que vió la posibilidad de traer y el buen resultado que daría por estas tierras el espectáculo de la ópera italiana.

Y efectivamente, sin anuncio prévio y cuando menos se esperaba, apareció el tal Pompey con una *troupe* de artistas líricos y formó empresa con los que aparecían dueños del teatro, los hermanos D. Eduardo y D. Diego Jimenez, que también fueron propietarios de los los periódicos *El Porvenir Filipino*, *Diario de Filipinas* y semanario ilustrado *El Oriente*, fundadores de *La Occanta Española*, y después Directores-propietarios del *Boletín de Cebú* y *Porvenir de Bisayas*, respectivamente.

Buen éxito debió tener el *debut* ó los comienzos de esta primera compañía de ópera italiana, en un país tan

aficionado á música y sobre todo al bell-canto; pero habiendo fallecido al llegar á Manila el baritono Colombo y siendo por demás incompleta aquella compañía, con elementos desiguales y mal avenidos, y con poca base de solidaria empresa, pronto entró en estado de disolución, y unos se fueron y otros se quedaron, para esperar un buen refuerzo que se encargó de Italia de todas las partes que faltaban para un buen cuadro de *primo cartello*.

No descansó entretanto el escenario del *Principe Alfonso*, volviendo á apoderarse de él la Compañía dramática de Llanos, quien se unió al Sr. Preysler para constituir empresa y para traer á tablas á éste que, en ciertos papeles de caracter, era notable aficionado.

Pero pronto llegó el refuerzo de los artistas de ópera y recordamos á la contralto Ferrari, al tenor Sabatini, al baritono Péllico y al bajo Deserani, y entre los que esperaban en Manila á la incansable tiple Bouche, caricato Factori, segundo tenor Errani, bajo cantante Kalna, tres bailarinas italianas y el Director de orquesta y celebre violinista Stefani.

Debutaron en Abril-Mayo de 1868, y vió Manila la Compañía más completa de ópera italiana, que dió á conocer todo el repertorio clásico, que todavía está en boga, de los buenos Maestros.

Concluida su temporada de contrata, volvió esta Compañía á Italia; y como el Sr. Stefani quedó muy satisfecho de su primera campaña en Filipinas, volvió, formando empresa con el maestro concertatore, Sr. Zappa, con otra compañía de ópera, sin dejar de traer al simpático Sabatini, tan querido del público de Manila: venían de prima-donna la Sra. Leompetra, tiple ligera la Palma, bajo Césari y caricato el ya conocido Factori.

Concluyó esta compañía su temporada; pero no con la suerte que debieron prometerse los empresarios. Más si no hubo producto efectivo, se cubrieron todos los gastos y se *sacó la ropa*; esto es, se sacó el valor del vestuario, según aquellos dijeron.

Volvió á entrar la temporada dra-

mática, y fué la Compañía Llanos-Preyler la que pisó, después de la ópera italiana, el escenario del Príncipe Alfonso. Tuvieron el buen acierto de traer de la Península las dos hermanas Carolina y Cecilia Campini, la primera para dama seria y la segunda para graciosa, y también vinieron con éstas el Sr. Muñoz, primer galán y director de escena, el que resultó notable actor, Sr. Ramiro, y otro aprovechado jóven, el Sr. Rodríguez.

Este refuerzo de buenos artistas fué entusiasmando al público y bien comprendió la empresa, á la que se unieron los hermanos Jimenez, que debía completar la compañía, y fué el Sr. Llanos á buscar á España actores de primer orden, para el desempeño de las partes principales, pues ya el Sr. Muñoz se había retirado.

Transcurrido el tiempo preciso, ya con vestuario propio, y con bastante experiencia, animáronse aquellos empresarios Stéfani y Zappa á volver á Manila, capital que ya se había acostumbrado y que tenía marcada su temporada de ópera, por los meses de invierno ó de Nortes, de Noviembre á Febrero, pero habiendo muerto en el camino el Sr. Zappa, llegó solo Stéfani con una bien formada compañía trájose la que fué muy apreciada tiple Sra. Bohema y á la Belot como tiple ligera, y los tenores Nery y Bonachic, que dieron á conocer, Nery el *Polutto*, haciendo recordar á Tamberlik, y el joven Bonachic, *La Favorita*, con una garganta privilegiada, sin debilitarse hasta el día final que cantó con admirable fuerza. A la Bohema se le comparó por los críticos de aquella época, con la Boughimamo.

Fué tan bien recibida y apreciada esta Compañía, y nunca se vió el teatro más persistentemente concurrido, en toda una larga temporada, que fué notablemente pingüe al empresario y á los artistas, todos los cuales salieron muy contentos de sus beneficios ó *seratas*.

Volvió por cuarta vez el Sr. Stéfani que se había hecho el Conde de Michelena del teatro de la ópera de Manila, y trajo los artistas queridos señora Bohema, ya esposa del empres-

ario, y al tenor Sabatini, con los no menos apreciables Sra. Trafford, tiple ligera, Domenico Césary, baritono, otro Césary, bajo, y Bonaloux, caricato; y no bastó que pusieran el *Fausto*, de una manera sorprendente y otras óperas modernas y de espectáculo, para que aquella compañía tuviese el éxito y el provecho de las dos primeras.

Faltóles sobre todo, cierta protección oficial, bien que indirecta, con la asistencia al teatro de las primeras autoridades, por motivo de la campaña de Joló.

Y con este fracaso, dejó de venir para siempre el Sr. Stéfani.

Hubo otro intermedio de drama, hasta que vinieron unos artistas franceses, como vanguardia de una compañía de *vaudeville* ú *opérela*, que actuaba en Saigón, y apenas dieron una ó dos funciones en el Principe Alfonso, ocurrió el incendio que acabó con nuestro primer teatro en una madrugada de 1877, cuando estaban para llegar los primeros actores españoles y el resto de la compañía francesa.

Por este relato se vé, que casi no descansó el telón de este coliseo en los 17 años de su existencia; y sólo estuvo en clausura necesaria por algunos meses cuando se alojaron en él las oficinas del Gobierno general, como edificio seguro, después de los terremotos de 1863; lo cual indica que estuvo á prueba de temblores, pero no de incendios, y mucho más cuando estos empiezan por el cuarto de las luces, donde un torpe criado arreglaba los depósitos de las lámparas de petróleo.

XII

EL CIRCO-TEATRO DE BILIBID

(Temporada lírica)

En el número anterior, y en el artículo II sobre *Las corridas de toros en Filipinas*, tratamos del circo taurino de Bilibid, que se convirtió en teatro, por tener ya cerradas sus puertas, al apagarse el entusiasmo torero que le dio

el ser.

Dió motivo á esta transformación

una empresa que se formó para traer directamente de Italia una buena compañía de ópera, la cual empresa se dominaba de Assi-Panadés, teniendo que buscar este recurso de teatro, porque el de Arroceros ya estaba arrendado.

Púsose un gran paraguas de hierro galvanizado al ruedo descubierta de la plaza de Bilibid, con un pié derecho ó columna central, donde se clavaron grandes candelabros en reemplazo de la araña monstruo que tenían colgada los grandes teatros; y en verdad que resultó un coliseo un poco estrambótico, pero ámplio, fresco y bastante aceptable.

A estos albornotantes de la columna central se pusieron después mecheros de gas, y fué el primer ensayo de este alplabido que se ha hecho en Filipinas, y recordo que no tuvo el mejor resultado, por haber estado alimentado de la gasolina con combustible de mala calidad.

Almuerzo en un par de cambres de esta plaza, y al momento, los señores Assi y Panadés, cuya empresa no perdieron tiempo en irse a buscar para que fuera Manila la primera ciudad que presentara un teatro de ópera.

Vinieron como Director el Sr. Cassati, notable compositor, músico que dejó aquí el recuerdo de un brillante pasadoble que todavía se toca por las bandas militares, excelente violinista, que ganó el mérito de su arco en algunos conciertos, y muy aceptable cantante; tal vez no fue su voz de tenor en el papel de Aza en el *Barbudo di Sicilia*, pero en su función absoluta como la de un tenor de primera voz de su tiempo, fué bastante buena para el tiempo.

Como primer cuarteto, era la prima de Cassati, el Sr. D. S. Coppo, tan queda de la culta sociedad italiana, y tan recordada, después de su fallecimiento.

Vino como tenor el respetado artista Celestini, que ya en el ensayo de su voz, se reservaba para cantar en una romanza ó en el pasaje más bello de la ópera, la admiración del público, que entusiasmado le perdonaba todas las deficiencias de la noche.

En cambio, el otro tenor Forpan tenía exceso de facultades, pero

tanto de ellas, que se salvó a Celestini.

El 1.ºer Barítono era un respetado cantante llamado Rossi, y el 1.ºer Bajo conocido español García, que salvó con el arte escénico los escollos de su voz, que habría sido potente, pero que aquí vino algo cansada.

Vino como maestro *concertatore*, el que ha quedado entre nosotros para difundir la buena enseñanza musical y ser elemento dispuesto para toda función lírica en la sociedad *dilettante* de Manila, D. Santino Coppa.

Y trajo esta compañía como pintor escenógrafo al inolvidable Divela, que dió á conocer los más preciosos telones que se habían visto, en efectos de perspectiva. Divela, unido á Alberoni, dejaron aquí, en aventajados discípulos, el arte del decorado, que vemos en los templos y edificios públicos y en las habitaciones de las casas ricas de Manila.

Con estos elementos, no encuentro aquella excelente compañía, dificultad alguna en poner en escena las óperas más difíciles, y vió Manila por primera vez, para no volver á verlo ya, *Machel, Roberto* y alguna otra gran ópera más, que no recordamos. Pero no fué esto bastante para sostener el espectáculo y evitar que diera en quiebra una bien capitalizada empresa.

Verdad es también, que tuvo el público que repartirse entre tres espectáculos líricos, y que los tres tuvieron el mismo fin desastroso.

La compañía de opereta francesa, cuya avanzada de algunos cantantes ya dimos á conocer en el teatro de Arroceros, había llegado con toda la *troupe*. É improvisaron en pocos días el teatro de Variedades, cerca del anterior, cuando éste fué arrasado por las llamas.

Una escuela de canto llamada *Capozzi*, por ser este maestro *concertatore* de la Compañía Stéfani que quedó en el país, el que la dirigía, trajo algunos artistas, hasta formar un escogido cuarteto, que con los aventajados discípulos de la Escuela, pusieron algunas óperas, en el teatro de Tondo.

Pero de cada una de estas otras compañías hablaremos en su lugar respectivo, y terminaremos este capítulo de la temporada lírica del teatro de

la Empresa por los llenos que obtuvo todo era aplaudir y alabar á los artistas, hasta que pronto fué entrando el cansancio y el hastío y la aneimia teatral de todos tiempos.

Ya no gustaban las damas, porque ya habían pasado de los Abriles á los Agostos y debían reemplazarse con artistas primaverales; las gracias de Chavés que tanto se celebraron, eran abusos insufribles, y siguieron á las críticas los disgustos de la Empresa contra los administradores y se disolvió la compañía y tronó la Empresa, contra la profecía de Dario Céspedes, en los últimos días del mes de Abril ó principios de Mayo del año 80.

No quedó aquí ninguno de aquellos artistas, desapareciendo por completo de la escena, la gran zarzuela.

A los pocos meses, vinieron los terremotos del 80, (de triste recordación,) y entonces sirvió "Variedades" para que lo ocupasen las oficinas de la Capitanía General, mientras se levantaba el pabellón del Estado Mayor en la calzada de las Aguadas.

En los primeros últimos meses del año 81 llegó á Manila, para actuar en Variedades, una numerosa compañía de ópera, traída por una sociedad de amigos aficionados al *bel canto*, bajo la dirección artística del malogrado maestro D. Laureano Carreras. Una serie de calamidades sufrió aquella compañía, perdiendo antes del debut á una de las tiples y al primer tenor. En tal situación, acudió la Empresa, como único salvador de aquel conflicto, á un inteligente aficionado, que todavía vive entre nosotros, el cual conociendo los escollos y dificultades consiguientes para un aficionado que tiene que sustituir á un artista, todo lo arrojó para complacer á sus amigos y salvarles del naufragio en que les había colocado la mala suerte. Llegó pues el momento del estreno de la Compañía de ópera y con él el acontecimiento de la presentación al público del improvisado artista, en el difícil papel de Genaro en "Lucrecia Borjia," habiendo salido airoso de su parte, y la compañía no fué mal recibida, y así continuó

hasta que llegaron los nuevos refuerzos de artistas pedidos á Italia, con los cuales llegó á Manila el excelente maestro Goré, buen profesor de piano y director de mérito. De los demás artistas, en el conjunto, después de reconstituida la compañía, solo diremos que hubo algunos fiascos, siendo el más ruidoso el que obtuvo la interpretación del "Fausto" que fué silbado en la noche del 20 de Octubre de 1882, como presagio de que á la mañana siguiente se disolvería el Teatro Kiosko de Variedades, por el horroroso huracan ocurrido aquella día esparciéndose por los aires y en el campo de Arroceros los materiales de aquel edificio, como vuela deshecho un castillo de naipes.

XVI

EL FILIPINO



EMANAMOS publicando en este semanario una serie de artículos con el epígrafe del presente, hasta llegar al XV, que trataba de *El Kiosko de Variedades* en su segunda época, de compañías líricas, habiendo comenzado por el de nipa de Arroceros, que es el primer coliseo de que se tiene memoria con respecto á teatros ó espectáculos europeos en Filipinas.

Suspendimos la publicación de aquellos curiosos artículos, que nos costaron muchos trabajos de investigaciones, por que nos había llegado el susurro de que se iban haciendo pesados y más al aproximarse á la época moderna en que ya eran conocidos nuestros pseudo-coliscos.

Más ahora, con el acontecimiento de haberse inaugurado el teatro Zorrilla y tener que tratar de este verdadero coliseo, hemos creído oportuno reanudar nuestros olvidados artículos, ya que sólo faltaba el del teatro Filipino, siquiera para despedir del servicio ó dar el retiro á este veterano lleno de alifafes, que ha sido tan ventajosamente reemplazado.

Ya venía siendo el rincón de la calle de Crespo sitio habitual de *carrillos* que se armaban dentro de algún baracón, en solares deshabitados, pa-

sando de la acera izquierda á la de la derecha, y de ésta al fondo, en la calle transversal de San Roque.

Ya los niños de los carrillos se habían hecho hombres y estaban bajo la maestra dirección del veterano actor D. Alejandro Cubero, con el modelo artístico de D.a Elisea Raguer al frente de la Compañía.

Ya con estos elementos reunidos, no era posible continuar en el barracón de la calle de San Roque; y reconociendo la importancia del sitio, transformaron el camarín en un pequeño teatro, del que fueron propietarios el mismo Cubero y el entusiasta D. José Primo de Rivera, para pasar después á otros dueños y conductos, que ya no es del caso nombrarlos.

Allí es donde se fué haciendo, por mucho tiempo bajo la inteligente dirección de Cubero y con numeroso repertorio de zarzuelitas modernas, esa bien consolidada compañía filipina, llamada de la Fernandez, por la *estrella* artística que le dá carácter, la cual compañía está hace algún tiempo en Hoilo cosechando aplausos, simpatías y mexicanos, y tal vez vuelva á reanimar el oscuro y empolvado escenario de la calle de San Roque; allí acudió la compañía peninsular de Navarro de Peralta, que trajo de Barcelona la misma Sra. Raguer, con numeroso personal, para dar á conocer la gran zarzuela, y entonces hubo necesidad de dar más amplitud y mejor decorado al modesto teatro Filipino; allí ha seguido actuando, hasta la as-

rición del teatro Zorrilla, la Compañía de Zarzuela Española, reunida por la misma Raguer con elementos sueltos de artistas y aficionados; y allí se han exhibido todos los concertistas, prestidigitadores y los pequeños espectáculos, que de paso han venido á Manila y que no han necesitado grandes coliseos; pues como de capacidad, siempre fué preferido el teatro de Tondo, y por eso han ido allá todas las compañías de ópera, y allá se han dado los espectáculos de beneficencia ó los que requerían mayor entrada.

Ahora, viejo, vetusto y abandonado es el Filipino de anay y de ratas, que acabarán de destruirlo, si antes no viene la piqueta restauradora á echarlo por tierra, para levantar el teatro *Fénix* que renacerá de sus cenizas, para hacer sombra ventajosa al soberbio de la calle del Iris.

No terminaremos sin mencionar si quiera otro teatrillo de barrio, que por lo lejano y lo pequeño no merece capítulo aparte, pero sí un estimable recuerdo, por que no ha dejado de hacer las delicias de aquel público de los muelles de San Nicolás y de los que en són de broma carrillesca allí acudían. Llámase este teatrillo, el del *Príncipe*, y ahora y casi siempre se halla en clausura. Hizolo el veterano Barbero, que pudo reunir una compañía improvisada, y que fué bastante para el caso.

Y aquí hemos dado fin con los teatros viejos, después de haber mencionado los que ya no existen.