

THE RONDALLA

The Philippine rondalla is truly a big step in the understanding of our culture and musical heritage. Not only has it established and developed our traditions of the past but of the everyday experience of folk and artistic creation. The rondalla is an important organization both on account of its effect upon the players themselves and on account of its relation to the other departments of the school and the community. A player may not only receive a fine musical education but learn teamwork of the most exacting description and get a good lesson in public spirit by assisting at many school functions. It also encourages instrumental playing not only as a cultural experience but also as a means of realization and release from the tensions of everyday living.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

There are several versions of the origin of the rondalla. The guitar brought into the Philippines by the Spaniards may be said to have inspired the development of the rondalla in the country. Filipino ingenuity produced several other instruments modeled after it--and these new instruments joined the guitar in the group that was to develop into the rondalla. Besides the native talent that produced the instruments, there was the Filipino's natural inclination toward music, which the Spanish friars encouraged by giving free instruction in music and recruiting the musically-talented for training in the playing of various musical instruments. Many musicians later flocked voluntarily to the convents to study not only the playing of musical instruments but the theory of music as well.

Originally, the term *rondalla* applies to a group of young people making their evening rounds to play and sing before people's houses. A certain song or popular tune known with this title bore some semblance to the "Jota Aragonesa" a Spanish dance from Aragon. Although the origin of the rondalla is in Spain, the development in the Philippines can be considered an original creation. The string group has been identified with different terms such as "comparsa", "murga", "estudiantina", or "tuna". *Murga* was a name given to a small group of street musicians especially in Madrid, who play for gratuity. *Comparsa* signified a retinue of personages represented on the stage. *Estudiantina* was a party composed of persons masked and disguised as students, moors, soldiers, etc. Musically, the *estudiantina* was made up of mandolins, violins, guitars, flute, basses, tambourines, castanets and triangles.

The terms "comparsa" and "rondalla" seemed popular in the higher strata of musical society. They had the same connotation, although in the Philippines the term "comparsa" was popularly applied to the group only during the Spanish regime and up to the early years of American domination, when rondallas took over.

It can be observed that notes played by these instruments are done in tremolo motion to produce their full value. They are played by a plectrum or pick which gives a vibrating movement in a down and up stroke of the right hand.

5. *Guitar* — like the horn in the band, the guitar plays the harmony part. It provides a permanent rhythm for the group and it also plays the arpeggio and chord accompaniments.
6. *Contrabass* — provides a fundamental group tone and it gives solidness in rhythm, strength in upholding the harmonic mass and bigness in sustaining rich tonal effects.

It will be noted that the percussion section is optional for the reason that traditionally the rondalla does not need the drums, the cymbals and the snare drum for they produce greater volume thereby saturating the sweet tinkling sounds. However, some innovations were made in the course of time with the inclusion of percussive instruments.

TUNING AND TECHNICAL REGULARITIES

1. *Bandurria* — has 6 pairs of strings tuned in fourths. The strings are tuned from the 1st highest tone G (sol); the second string D (re); the third string A (la); the fourth string E (mi); the fifth string B (ti); and the sixth string F# (fa#).

G, D, and A = three strings each
 E and B = two strings each
 F# = one string

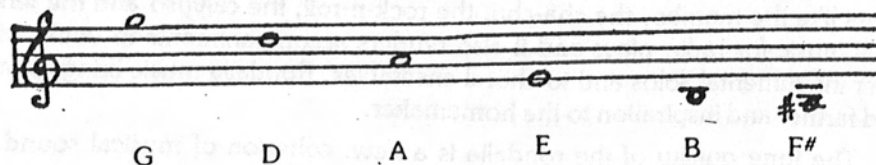
This doubling or tripling of strings is made to obtain a better sound and to strengthen the tone.

2. *Laud and Octavina* — are tuned in the same manner as the bandurria, but the tones of the former one is pitched an octave lower than the latter (bandurria). The difference in the tone color is due to the difference in the shape of these instruments.

Octavina — has the form of a small guitar with a round hole in the middle.

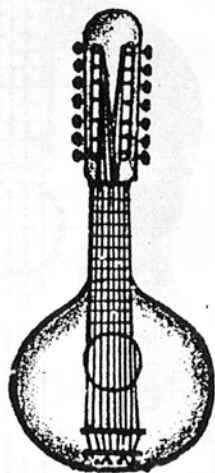
Laud — shaped like a bandurria but with longer neck and with two F-holes instead of the usual round hole.

Tuning of bandurria, laud and octavina:

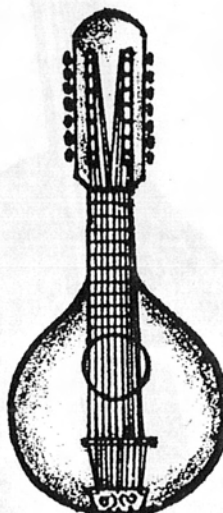


that the instruments in the group are all played with the *plecimum*, making for a certain uniformity in the manner of playing. The *rondalla* is also versatile. It can tackle all types of music, from simple folk songs to classical overtures and operatic selections. It is not surprising that it has become an essential part of social gatherings. It is also the most practical music group for out-of-town engagements, for the instruments are portable. If the *rondalla* is popular, it is because it is easy and simple to organize, the instruments are comparatively inexpensive. Indeed, the *rondalla* has become an institution. It is a distinct contribution to the musical culture of the nation.

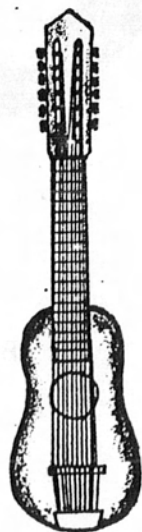
Rondalla Instruments



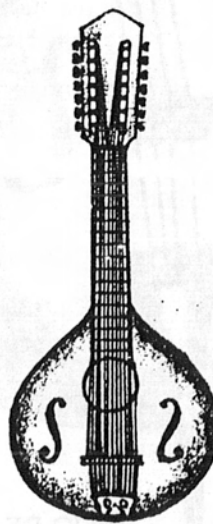
PICCOLO



BANDURRIA



OCTAVINA



LAUD