

RONDALLAS

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from *Filipino music: indigenous [sic], folk, modern* (1976)

For historical reasons, the rondalla takes precedence in a discussion of Philippine instrumental organizations. This string band originated in Spain, but its development in the Philippines exhibits the characteristic Filipino adaptation process. Two different terms identify this ensemble, namely, *rondalla* and *comparsa*. Other terms used somewhat indifferently prior to the band's 20th century development are: *murga*, *tuna*, and *estudiantina*. The first of these, *murga*, came to designate a group of wandering minstrels similar to the Visayan *Kumbanchero*. The other two, *tuna*, and *estudiantina* belong to bands which were popular among college young men, according to Dr. Antonio J. Molina, who gives a lively description of them in his U.S.T. Journal of Medicine article titled "Life, Music and Physicians." A standard instrumentation for the Spanish *estudiantina* follows: mandolina, violins, guitars, flutes, cellos, basses, tambourines, castanets, and triangles—a strikingly different group from the Filipino *rondalla*. Prof. Molina (1967:9) quotes a Spanish musical dictionary written by a Spanish musician who says of the *rondalla* or *comparsa* that it is derived from the Spanish original, but is not Spanish. He mentions "Bajo de uñas" (bass played by the "natives" and "Guitarion Filipino" Filipino guitar with five strings). The instruments, he declares, are different and also their combination [sic]. Our authority (Molina 1967) gives as the Filipino *rondalla* make-up the following plucked string instruments: *bandurria*, *laud*, *octavina*, *guitar*, and *bajo de uñas*; and then he adds that Juan Silos, Jr. of contemporary *rondalla* fame adds "...*mandola* to enrich the lower registers of the group." It is observed that other common

additions in current practice include bass drum, snare drum, cymbal, triangle, tambourines, xylophone or marimba, and tympani. Prof. Molina singles out a concert presented at Manila's Philippine American Life Auditorium on July 24, 1965. The music was composed and conducted by Jerry Dadap and the program included "Balliton No. 1" for *rondalla*, "Choral Cycle No. 1" for chorus and *rondalla*, and "Choral Symphonic Ode" for *rondalla*, Chorus and orchestra. Of this music, Prof. Molina remarks that it "...gave distinct symphonic personality to *rondalla*..."

Rondalla, like the zarzuela, currently enjoys revived emphasis and seems to be exceeding the height of its former heyday which came between 1905 and 1915. Numerous public and private schools of the Philippines maintain regular *rondalla* groups, and the teacher training institutions include *rondalla* playing in the standard curriculum. In addition, civic, business and social groups compete in *rondalla* competitions which are held annually. The Batangas *Rondalla* Festival is one. Late in the 1960's it numbered one thousand players in the competing *rondallas* and an audience of eight thousand. Here are some other examples of *rondalla* enthusiasm in the Greater Manila area:

Taliba *Rondalla* Contest Festival
Rondalla Filharmonica Juvenil
Centro Escolar University *Rondalla*
Yellow Taxi *Rondalla*

For those interested in learning or reviewing *rondalla* technique we can cite two references: Bacatan, Jose T.: *Rondalla Handbook*, Manlapas Publishing Company, Quezon City, 1970, and Patricio, M.C.: *Development of Rondalla*. U.P. College of Music Library, 1959 (unpublished article).

Pfeiffer, William R. 1976. *Filipino music: indigenous [sic], folk, modern*. Dumaguete City, Philippines: Silliman Music Foundation.