

# Zarzuela - Musical Theatre

**WIDELY PRACTICED IN THE PHILIPPINES IN URBAN AREAS.** *This is now rarely performed in modern times having been relegated to semi-obscurity except as a cultural piece showcase.*



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Scene from the Cultural Center of the Philippines Tanghalang Pilipino production of "Dalagang Bukid".

THIS IS A SPANISH lyric-dramatic genre that alternates between spoken and sung scenes. Introduced in the Philippines in the 19th century (1878), it places great importance on music. Initially, *zarzuelas* were presented by professionals from Spain. Later, locals took over as when Ateneo de Manila presented the zarzuela, *Junto del Pasig*, written in verse by Jose Rizal, with music by Blas Echevoyen (1880). Later, native languages began to be used. After the Spanish rule, the Americans took over and gave rise to a

new theatre form, incorporating the humor from the *moro-moro* and the abandon of the Spanish zarzuela.

The early Filipino zarzuela had moro-moro themes with encounters between Filipinos and Spaniards, or Filipinos and Americans with the Filipinos coming out on top. If the moro-moro was aimed at conversion, the zarzuela was a propaganda against foreign rule – hence the development of the form in native dialects. Literary and dramatic values were hardly present in the early forms and were more of propaganda to stimulate nationalism. This resulted to the arrests of librettists and theatre owners due to the revolutionary overtones.

The zarzuela evolved into a kind of comedy of manners: elaborate theatrical and musical displays became popular, leading to the demand for composers, conductors, singers and members of orchestras.

After 1920, with the advent of cinema, the form began to be relegated to the provinces. There are attempts at revival in Manila (e.g. *Walang Sugat*), and it remains the Philippine version of the Italian Opera, Japan's Kabuki and other similar forms.