

THE LEGITIMATE STAGE

SINO BA KAYO?—a Tagalog play in one act. Adapted by F. A. Rodrigo from the original of Julian C. Balmaceda, Metropolitan Theatre, Feb. 21, 1943.

HELP WANTED—a play in English in one act. By Domingo O. Nolasco. Metropolitan Theatre, Feb. 21, 1943.

THESE two days, according to the invidious and rather vulgar preface flashed on the screen before performance, were in answer to the demand of a public somewhat weary of musical stage-shows. The preface was certainly worded in the worst possible taste; whoever was responsible could simply say with more becoming intelligence and greater effectiveness—instead of pretending to explore a “new and unexplored field”—that “here are two attempts to give you something different; we hope you approve.”

In spite of the preface and in spite of “Help wanted” as curtain raiser, the public did approve—as no Manila audience had ever approved—the efforts of Dramatic Philippines to present something different in the way of the legitimate stage, in Balmaceda’s Tagalog play “Sino Ba Kayo?”. Here is an adult play (as far as local standards and achievements go) glorified by quite adequate performance, all the rough edges considering. It swept the audience (the biggest ever gathered in a Manila theatre—with all the seats paid for, I hope) off its feet, lifted it off its seat. These are definite, incontrovertible facts.

How did it happen? The play for all its deficiency in social significance and understanding is worthy of a veteran Tagalog writer: it has not only architecture but structure. It builds up towards a climax with cumulative interest and suspense. It speaks the language of today, along with its English and Spanish barbarisms. Built on an air-raid incident, it achieves contemporaneity fresh as your glass of carabao’s milk for breakfast. As a comedy of misunderstanding, it suggests a line of sophisticated dramatic tradition reminiscent of Shakespeare’s “Comedy of Errors”, and it is Filipino to the core withal, which is all to its credit. Finally, it has a good cast; and here we are happy to pause and express a desire to shake the hands of the director-actor and the rest of the performers—amateurs all with excellent professional prospects. They made us all feel that perhaps we could also act, without making us realize the gap that yawns between the balcony and the boards, the talent and competence that stand between. Mr. Pimentel Jr. should be a pleasant rediscovery to himself, and so should the rest of his fellow players, excepting Cora de Jesus and young Conchita Liboro whose effective first appearance here before a capacity crowd

out to get its money’s worth should be a delight and surprise to their families, enemies and friends. We bow to them all for making us feel that the distance between the present along with its hastily improvised musical shows and the remoter, more glorious era of the native zarzuelas and dramas has been definitely bridged, and we may now move confidently forward and speak as confidently of the Filipino theatre.

This fact, let us remind you, should be no excuse for speaking superciliously in invidious comparison of the musical shows today whose writers and directors badly need proper orientation social and technical to come to their own. The better musical shows of today have opened up vistas never seen before. They have been the first to wake up to the sun and its invitation to life and creativeness. The so-called legitimate stage, which Dramatic Philippines would revive and develop, is after all a mere trailer to the transitional New Regime pioneer who has cleared the path to more pretentious aspiration.

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“Help Wanted” is a sad hangover of pre-war “clever collegianism” which was anything but clever. It may have pleased the sophomores, before 1941. Its revival performance on February 21, 1943, was not without its service. It showed what a maturing audience should increasingly find unendurable. And it had the merit of being only One Act (which was trying enough), and gave La Theresa an excuse to return to an early campus dream and look for a better vehicle for her potentialities.

“Sino Ba Kayo?” deserves at least a 2-week run until all of Manila has seen it. Meanwhile, the players of “Help Wanted” should be scouting for an adult Tagalog play. It is idle to imagine that Filipino artists can talk and behave like authentic Anglo-Saxons. It isn’t done! Or may be later.

The following are brief reviews of current theatrical offerings as rated by Manuel E. Arguilla of the Department of Information:

***** Excellent. **** Very good. *** Good. ** Fair. *Poor, but with some minor characteristic of interest. The absence of asterisks may be taken to mean the absence of merit. The name of the theater and the opening and closing dates appear after the title.

**** SINO BA KAYO? (*Metropolitan*. Feb. 21, 24, 27-) Original play by Julian C. Balmaceda. Adapted by F. Rodrigo and directed by Narciso Pimentel, Jr. Good acting, sound direction and a fast-moving if somewhat over-complicated story com-

bine to make this farce-comedy, the first offering of the Dramatic Philippines, highly enjoyable from beginning to end.

* **HELP WANTED**, a farce written in English by Domingo Nolasco and directed by Jean Edades, served as an indifferent curtain raiser.

*** **KAPIT-BAHAY** (*Avenue. Feb. 9-* .) Musical drama, written and directed by Lamberto Avellana. The romantic and comic strains are very shrewdly subordinated to the sentimental theme of the son-mother relationship between Leopoldo Salcedo (who fails to make the most of his role) and Rosa Aguirre (who turns in a surprisingly appealing performance). The set is the most realistic we have yet seen on the current Manila stage.

*** **MARRIAGE PROPOSAL** (*Metropolitan. Feb. 28-* .) Play by Anton Chekov. Produced by Dramatic Philippines and directed by Alberto Cacnio. This old farce-comedy standby somehow didn't click so well with the big crowd that went to see it on its first day at the Metropolitan, largely because the acting lacked flair, gusto; the pace was slow and often heavy. Mila Nieva-Zamora has an unusually expressive body which should be quite effective in roles other than comedy.

** **MUSICAL INTERLUDE** (*Times. Feb. 26-* .) Directed by Enrique H. Davila, featuring Ernesto Vallejo. Instrumental and vocal music for the discriminating.

** **DESERT SONG** (*Capitol. Feb. 19-* .) Written and directed by Fernando Poe. This is billed as an operetta: the songs are mostly old American song hits; the dialogue in Tagalog. Somehow the mixture doesn't quite jell.

** **LUPA!** (*State. Feb. 23-* .) Written and directed by Joe Climaco. This show is supposed to glorify love of the soil, but the hero's main pre-occupation is how to bring about his marriage despite the villainous machinations of his younger brother who has turned into a blackguard as a result of his stay in the City. An interesting, if unoriginal, trick of having a man come up from the audience to the stage to tell the story of his life is used to start off the show.

** **SINO ANG MAY SALA?** (*Life Feb. 25-* .) Written by Pedrito Reyes and directed by Dr. Gregorio Fernandez. A musical drama built around the idea of the sins of the fathers being visited upon their children, but the script writer has made his characters

to speak and to act so unnaturally that it is impossible to take them seriously.

** **BASAGULO SA KASKO** (*Lyric. Feb. 25-* .) Story by Casto J. Rivera; direction by Carlos Vander Tolosa. This is the third show currently running that makes use of the City slums as setting for people to commit murder (in more ways than one), make love, quarrel at the top of their voices, and generally disport themselves in a manner unlike anything ever seen or heard this side of the Pasig.

* **DR. ARBULARIO** (*Dalisay. Feb. 20-* .) Written and directed by Paquito del Rosario. Scenes of heaven and the South Seas are thrown in together to afford Georgette opportunities for displaying her shapely limbs.

ANG SULTANA (*Strand. Feb. 25-* .) Written and directed by Lou Salvador. A costume show centering about the choosing of a husband for the Sultan's daughter.

MINSAN LAMANG (*Palace. Feb. 25-* .) Another Lou Salvador show where plain vodavil numbers are clumsily strung together on a sketchy story that were better left out.

** **AMIHAN** (*Capitol. March 4-* .) An Associated Artists production directed by Fernando Poe. There are two or three scenes in this generally pleasant show where one can almost smell the clean, fresh breath of the *amihan*—east wind—blowing in from across wide fields where the ricestalk bends low with the ripe grain.

** **TULOY PO KAYO** (*Dalisay. March 1-* .) Written and directed by Lorenzo P. Tuells. A neat, well-done show that has the added merit of being short.

CLOSED

** **BUHAY ALAMANG** (*Life Feb. 11-24*).

* **IN OLD VIENNA** (*Lyric. Feb. 1-24*).

* **PIRATES OF TZIGANE** (*State. Feb. 9-22*).

** **DESERT SONG** (*Capitol. Feb. 19-March 3*).

** **LUPA!** (*State. Feb. 23-27*).

* **DR. ARBULARIO** (*Dalisay. Feb. 20-28*).

MINSAN LAMANG (*Palace. Feb. 25-March 3*).

LOOKING FORWARD

BAGONG LIWAYWAY—*Avenue*.

SI, SI, SEÑORITA (*Life*).

MERRY WIDOW (*Lyric*).

THE MISSING SCORPION (*State*).