

THE RECORDING INDUSTRY

# The return of the native

A rather tame description fits Philippine tin pan alley: the fragile discs that rasped in RCA victrolas in the early 1900's have spun out for the coming of the long playing albums with perfectly controlled sounds; the teeny-boppers that swooned for the combs have grown to a generation of slight screaming listeners. Singers have changed from the suave, svelte balladeers to the grating, long-haired bearded soul heroes but who are today well-dressed and clean shaven. Top tunes have switched from ballads to jazz, to rock, to pop, to blues, to soul and are still transforming. Something new is trending into Philippine tin pan alley—local music is clearly floating in the air.

There is an expected boom in local compositions. Album releases of the young superstars are now mostly Filipino songs. And while only 30 percent was left for local ditties in the past with the bigger percentage for foreign songs, Tagalog songs have increased to 50 percent of the total compositions recorded. The record industry looks forward to success.

Success in tin pan alley is measured by sales. In the Philippines, a record can sell as many as 50,000 copies. Some records have been sold more than that number. But these are sporadic and not enough to boost the industry, which is still caught in a complicated network that has hampered its growth. It is still battling for recognition. It still suffers from wrong ex-

fers and licenses. Some companies could hardly resist the temptation to lower prices because of the lack of ground rates. And, says one industry source, "since the Philippines is not covered by the Universal Copyright Convention which automatically copyrights a composition coming from abroad, there is no restriction on the part of a local producer to copy and release his version of records released by the licensee."

A major problem faced by all recording companies lies in what is termed in record circles as "piracy." The piracy menace was at its height two years ago. It got to a point where three big recording companies were prompted to voice out their protest in the form of newspaper advertisements. As explained by Luis M. Trinidad, overall coordinating officer of

the discs are naturally cheaper. There were long-playing albums that sold at P8 wholesale and P10 retail which pushed into pathetic corners the legitimately manufactured ones selling at P12 and P15 wholesale; P15 and P18 retail.

Pirated records first appeared in the country in 1960 during the hottest selling years of Elvis Presley, Harry Belafonte, Neil Sedaka, The Trio Los Fanchos, Doris Day, Paul Anka and Tony Bennett. A foreign national, the record manufacturer held responsible for the crime, was later convicted and deported.

A flood of pirated records swept the country anew in 1962 when discs manufactured in Taiwan seeped in. The prices became even more ludicrous. They went down to as low as P5 to P7 for long-playing albums. Although these were confiscated and the agents arrested, pirated records were not to completely vanish from record bars. Up to 1971 when the top tunes were of Tom Jones, Engelbert Humperdinck, the Begees, several popular favorites were in the market for the pirates: Mantovani, Ray Conniff, Sergio Mendez, Andy Williams, The Cascades, the Beatles, the Lettermen and the soundtrack from the movie, "Love Story." Recently, they have dwindled to almost zero.

An even more serious problem which the record industry was confronted with until some months ago was the "payola." This practice had something to do with the exposure of a particular song. A producer would pay a disc jockey some amount for a record to be given more spinning time than the rest. The tune usually catches the attention of the public. This illegal practice is responsible for the dubious popularity of mediocre compositions and talents. Genuine composers and good artists who had nobody to plug for them were thus brushed off; or else they shied away because of frustration. Several record companies have been trying their best to counteract "payola." Aside from making their own promotions, they are organizing more and more tours to provide greater exposure for their recording stars.

Although most of the problems discussed have been resolved with the advent of Proclamation 1081, the growth of the record industry still ultimately lies on the support of the public. As it is directing present efforts to the general move towards evolving a truly Filipino music, art and culture, the signs clearly point to an imminent boom. A significant factor, too, is the increased exposure given to locally composed songs.

The record companies look forward to a revival of those days at the turn of the century when the "piece de resistance" of most singing stars in the country were Filipino songs.

Recording was introduced in the Philippines in 1913. The first manufacturer of Philippine records was Ibeck and Co. with offices at Plaza Sta. Cruz. The pioneer recording stars were Atang de la Rama, Vicente Ocampo, Pilar del Castillo, Jovita Fuentes, Diana Toy, Eny Gonzales, Socorro Vasquez, Rosa Jose. They were the most popular artists during that time. They were singing kundimans and balltaws. The foreign top tunes were of Eddie Cantor, Enrico Caruso, Harry Richman, Al Jolson and Russ Columbo. The discs which came out in singles, were brittle and broke easily.

A host of Filipino distributors known as licensees followed the initiative of Ibeck and Co. They reproduced "from master stamps or mother plates from the US and paid royalties to RCA distributor in the Philippines like Filipino Record Corporation and Columbia (now CBS)."

Record manufacturing in those early days, according to Trinidad was difficult and time consuming. There were no tapes yet, and the recordings were done at the broadcast stations. These were made directly from master disks and cut on the spot. It took as many as five times before a perfect one would come out. From the master disks was produced a master stamper.

Today, record making is very much simplified. Electronic gadgets have made the process less complicated and very much cheaper. The use of tapes has eased most of the technical problems. In the Philippines, a new manufacturing company is even moving away from tapes. Cinema Audio, Inc., managed by a former movie star, Jose Mari Gonzales, has its studios replete with sophisticated control and sound systems. The records thus produced can compete with foreign made discs, according to Jose Mari.

The record industry in the Philippines may be said to have reached a peak between 1957 and 1965—the years of rock and roll and the Beat.

Added to the first companies that started in the earlier period, 1913, like Mareco, Bataan (now defunct) and Nico, were new ones: Vicor, Dyna, Alpha, Mico, Filipinas, Zodiac, D'Swan, Jonal, Wheelers, Grandeur.

Jukeboxes arrived with crowns for jukebox kings. The increased popularity of television in the early 1960's saw the emergence of the Elvis Presleys of the Philippines, the Johnny Mathises, the Perry Como, the Platters, the Dave Clarks, the Nat King Cole. Later, the multiplying number of TV programs helped spawn a new breed of recording artists—the young superstars. Meanwhile, earlier recording stars, became regular guests and contributed to the revival of old ballads and new local compositions: Merce Molina, Carmen Patena, Sylvia la Torre, Helen Gamboa, Carmen Soriano, some of them having their own programs. Pilita Corrales and a few others gained foreign acclaim. More stars were giving concerts and touring Asia and other parts of the world.

Songs composed and sang by Filipinos are now recorded abroad. The first was "A Million Thanks to You" sang by Pilita Corrales, followed by "Dahil sa Iyo." At the recently concluded 2nd Tokyo Music Festival, "My Daughter," a song composed by George Canseco, was rated one of the semi-finalists, chosen from several hundred songs from all over the world.

All over the country today, there is a revival of native songs. A pioneer in this field is Mareco. Other companies have followed suit. Vicor Music Corporation has launched its Plaka Filipino records and has been reported to be gaining favorable acceptance by the public. Alpha Recording System's best sellers include Tagalog songs of Nora Aunor, Ric Manrique and Victor Wood. A unique album release done by a blind pianist Ato, is another all-Filipino new favorite.

By these indications, the recording industry in the Philippines can really look forward to brighter days. ALEGRIA A. ALBANO



Carmelita Alburo: a talent for singing.

postures of right music. One basic problem that poses a barrier to the progress of the recording industry is the nature of record producers in the country. According to somebody quite familiar with the workings of the industry, there are two types. One is the foreign licensee releasing foreign labels and at the same time producing original compositions. The other is the producer releasing original compositions and versions of records brought out to market by the foreign licensees. The arrangement inevitably results in stiff competition. In fact, four years ago, a "record war broke out" between deal-

one recording company—Mareco—the pirate has a simple modus operandi: "He takes a wait-and-see-what's-selling stance then picks up the popular hit. He buys an LP from a record dealer and dubs this on disk (master). From the master, the pirate proceeds to have a stamper made, either from abroad or locally. With the stamper, he can press as many records as there is demand for them." The targets for piracy are usually the best selling albums, not necessarily the new hits because the former do not need any promotion.

Because everything used in the manufacture of pirated records is fake,