



HISPANIC INFLUENCES  
ON THE WEST VISAYAN FOLK SONG TRADITION  
OF THE PHILIPPINES

Vol. I

by

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## VOLUME II

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## FIFTY SELECTED SONGS

## WITH MUSICAL AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

## SUMMARY

The four-century hispanization of the Philippines was only part of the overall drive for Spanish political and religious hegemony under the Hapsburg and Bourbon dynasties of Spain that brought together Western Europe, Latin America, and Southwestern United States under one flag. Though thwarted in their bid for England, Brazil, and the Far East by both the English and Portuguese forces respectively, the reigning sovereigns in Madrid were not deterred, however, from probing other isolated parts of the world such as the Philippines. Men, fired by ambition, power, religious zeal, and sheer adventure, came to the colony to establish Spanish sovereignty, a logical aftermath of which was the subsequent imposition of the Spanish way of life.

An obvious manifestation of this transplanted culture in the Philippines is in the realm of music, with the folk song tradition of the West Visayan region being one of the many types. Its basic framework is Western European with a definite Spanish touch in specific areas; a style which is indicative of the amalgamation of varied music cultures in Spain itself.

While it is impossible to pinpoint just which is German, Italian, French, English, or Flemish from these various traditions which the Spaniards had refashioned themselves long before these were introduced in the Philippines, a considerable portion of these that spawned the folk songs of West Visayas could be precisely labelled as Spanish.

This includes paraliturgical music that is performed during gaudy street processions, Marian songs and songs for other saints during patronal fiestas, melismatic passion chants done during Holy Week, and nativity songs which choirs and soloists re-enact from house to house during the Yule season. The dominance of the guitar in both solo and accompaniment roles; the repertoire of the *rondalla*, an ensemble of plectrum instruments; the use of folk songs and folk dances on the *zarzuela* stage; the perpetuation of the serenading tradition (*harana*); the obsessive employment of the rhythms of Spanish dances such as the *jota*, the *fandango* and the *bolero*; the heavy reliance on the verse structure of the Spanish *copla*; presence of Spanish loan terms; and consistent references to Catholic dogma and practice that is essential to Spanish Catholicism - all these could not have originated elsewhere but in Spain alone.

The concept of key and diatonic scales; use of isorhythm involving simple duple, triple, and quadruple metres; the employment of a harmonic vocabulary that relies solely on simple triadic progressions; the dominance of the sixteen-bar phrase structure in one-part, binary, and ternary musical forms, are vocal idioms which Spain and the rest of Western Europe share together. These were all disseminated en masse by the Spaniards to their respective colonies in the New World and in the Philippines where they were innovatively retouched by the natives to conform to their wishes and preferences.

In West Visayan folk song tradition this remodelling of an incoming European culture has led to the evolution of a vocal repertoire that manifests the following characteristics: soaring melodic lines that hardly go below an octave; a bias for the harmonic minor scale; a decided preference for plaintive tunes that are often associated with the death theme; the common use of the secondary dominant seventh chord in the second or fourth line of the quatrain; the habitual usage of the *danza* pattern based on the *habanera* and the *tango* dance; and the ultimate rejection of the compound metre. To add a touch of native colour to the style, varied national and regional customs, traditions, and facets of local history have been incorporated into the song texts that employ some Spanish words in their original or corrupted versions.

An exact opposite of this acculturated Hispanic folk song style is the indigenous vocal tradition of the pagan and Islamic Filipinos who constitute ten per cent of the national population. Their ethnic Southeast Asian songs have no place for Western harmonic practice; and their non-Western scales, rhythm patterns, and verse forms that are shared with neighbouring Asian nations, exhibit the freedom and spontaneity of their pre-Hispanic way of life which Spain had failed to uproot.