

# The Julian Yorong Rondalla Group



## DA CAPO - THE JULIAN YORONG RONDALLA GROUP

During Hawai'i's centennial commemoration of Filipino migration in 2006, The Julian Yorong Rondalla Group often performed at official functions with their eclectic mix of kundiman, folk, jazz standards, and contemporary Filipino and Hawaiian music. While these performances usually functioned as "atmosphere" or background music to formal openings, dedications, and receptions taking place in the foreground, a closer look at this rich and varied repertoire reveals a genealogy of the musicians and their continued musical and personal growth.

The Group did not play rondalla music until very recently. Each musician, individually and in various ensembles, has performed for over fifty years the musical styles dictated by fashion and economic necessity – mostly jazz and Hawaiian music. Yet, their recent turn to this particular form of Filipino music was not a novel experience, for each musician was raised on Filipino plantation camps and grew up familiar to the sounds of music from the homeland. Learning and performing something 'new' has really been – 'da capo' – a return to their beginnings.

It is, thus, with distinct pride, admiration and respect that these accomplished musicians now take a front stage as the Filipino Community Center of Waipahu and the Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i present The Julian Yorong Rondalla Group.

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|--|------|---|------|
| 1> Samboanga March                       | 4:13 | 8> I Fell In Love With Honolulu - D. N. McKay | 4:44 |
| 2> Leron Leron Sinta/Planting Rice       | 3:46 | 9> Waikiki Chickadee - M. Paoa                | 4:46 |
| 3> Lahat Ng Araw - M. Velarde, Jr.       | 3:27 | 10> Imagination - J. Van Heusen               | 3:41 |
| 4> Maligayang Araw                       | 3:40 | 11> Look For The Silver Lining - J. Kern      | 4:36 |
| 5> No Dua-Duaem Pay                      | 5:49 | 12> Maalaala Mo Kaya? - C. De Guzman          | 5:04 |
| 6> Under The Double Eagle - J. F. Wagner | 3:04 | 13> Dahil Sa Iyo - M. Velarde, Jr.            | 5:47 |
| 7> I Am Hawaii - E. Bernstein            | 4:17 | 14> Mabuhay March                             | 2:48 |



The Julian Yorong Rondalla Group, from left:  
 Joe Engbino (guitar, bass); Julian Yorong (mandolin, ukulele, vibraphone, bass); Sonny Popa (bass, trombone); Roland Aton (guitar, bass, vocals)  
 Recorded on November 18, 2008, at the Filipino Community Center, Waipahu, Hawaii

## THE MUSICIANS

Anacleto “Sonny” Popa (b. 1934) was born in Kolo, Kaua‘i. Relocating to Oahu in 1935, he paid \$15 for this first trombone to play in his elementary school band. Graduating from Waipahu High School, Sonny formed his own four-piece band and, later, joined Julian for the next five decades. When not playing music, Sonny worked at the Navy Exchange, U.S. Navy and, finally, the USPS.

Joe Engbino (b. 1939) was born in Maui, moved to Lāna‘i, then to O‘ahu in 1947. In his youth Joe was surrounded by Filipino music, his father played the bango and his mother and sisters sang. He fondly remembers Christmas caroling throughout the camps. Raised mostly in Kalihi, Joe graduated from Farrington High School. After a stint in the U.S. Air Force, Joe began playing jazz/Hawaiian music around town, notably with the group, Noeau. At different points in his life, Joe worked with National Air Guard, Pan Am Airlines, Hawaiian Air and Hickam Air Base.

Roland “Lando” Aton (b. 1939) was born in Ho‘olehua, Moloka‘i, where his father worked after coming from Cebu in 1916. In 1944 his family moved to O‘ahu (Kunia camp). Lando’s exposure to Filipino music started early as a child singing at prayers, although he gave up music during high school to concentrate on athletics. While attending Chaminade College, Lando hooked up with a rock-and-roll band called, The Drifters, performing

on Tom Moffat’s “Show of Stars” as opening act to notables such as Tommy Sands, Fabian, and The Platters. Lando later learned four-part harmony with Sam Kapu at the Queen’s Surf, one of Don Ho’s productions.

Group leader, Julian Yorong (b. 1936), is the only member to grew up with rondalla music. His father, Jose, won a Filipino rondalla contest in the 1940s with the Aiea Rizal Band. The tour that followed the contest influenced Julian to take up music. He signed up for clarinet in elementary school and at ‘Aiea High School represented the school in the all-rural district band. Maintaining a Pearl Harbor shipyard day-job, Julian played in numerous venues with many talented local musicians including Berne Hal-Mann, Herb “Ohta-san” Ohta, and Wally and the Whalers. Eventually, he joined Roland and Wally at the Flamingo Chuckwagon.

## THE SONGS

Group members remember Florentino Padilla “Frank” Mamalias as the former member who laid the foundations for the Group’s rondalla performances. A master not only of rondalla but of Filipino martial arts, Maestro Frank Mamalias passed away in 2006.

The two marches which begin and end this CD, “Samboanga March” and “Mabuhay March,” are rondalla arrangements inspired by Frank Mamalias. The Filipino medley, “Leron Leron Sinta/Planting Rice,” is the

group's own arrangement of two popular Filipino songs.

The three vocals sung by Roland highlights his past: his mother sang "Lahat Ng Araw" and "Maalaala Mo Kaya" in his youth, while "Waikiki Chickadee" is a old Steven Kaowili beach boy tune picked up while playing the Elks Club. Similarly, Joe Engbino remembers hearing "Maligayang Araw" on the radio each morning, smelling the arresting aroma of eggs and spam being prepared by his mother, who did laundry and made lunch for six camp workers. "No Dua-Duaem Pay," a popular Ilokano folk song, recalls a more relaxed, rural lifestyle.

"Under The Double Eagle" is a favorite of bands and guitarists. Even Julian's father played "Under The Double Eagle" in winning its rondalla contest. Sonny remembers young musicians using this piece to challenge each other.

On the ukelele Julian derives inspiration in "I Am Hawaii" from the style of Dennis Regor, whereas Roland puts his own stamp on "I Fell in Love With Honolulu." Jazz selections include "Imagination," a standard popularized in the 1940s, and "Look For The Silver Lining," a song of hope during the depression years.

Finally, in spite of its extreme popularity, "Dahil Sa Iyo" still evokes the longing and nostalgia that makes it a beautiful and memorable song.



#### PRODUCTION NOTES

Recorded, mastered and produced by Clement Bautista.

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