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ST. SCHO'S SCHOOL OF MUSIC CELEBRATES 100 MELODIOUS YEARS

The music heard around the world

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE MUSIC THAT BEGAN WITH A young nun and a secondhand piano a century ago can now be heard practically around the world.

The violinist playing with the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra, the pianist teaching in a music school in Spain, the guitarist entertaining tourists on a Caribbean cruise or even the singer belting out a jazz number in a club in Thailand—they are among the products of the St. Scholastica's College School of Music that was founded 100 years ago.

"We have many graduates who are now in every part of the world. Some of them even leave before graduation because [lucrative jobs] await them," Sr. Mary Placid Abejo, OSB, dean of the SSC School of Music, told the INQUIRER in an interview.

The school, regarded as the center for excellence and pioneer of music education, has produced well known artists such as Rosalinda Orosa, Lucrecia Kasilag, Basilio Manalo and Lydia Larracas-Bunag.

The graduates produced by the school may be scattered worldwide, but the depth and tenor of their music can only be attributed to Sr. Bap-



A SERIES of concerts nationwide will be held to mark the school's centennial.

PHOTOS BY RODEL ROTONI

tista Battig OSB, who headed the School of Music for 34 years.

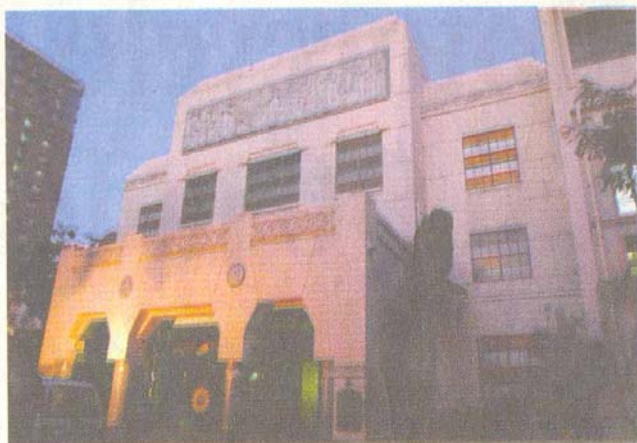
Sister Battig, a Benedictine nun from Germany, founded formal music education in the Philippines, formulating a standardized cur-

riculum and grading system for studying the piano which would later be adopted by other schools.

The first team of missionary Benedictine sisters arrived in Manila on Sept. 14, 1906 and

built a school on Calle Moriones, Tondo—then a shoreline dotted with bancas and nipa huts.

The school was a wooden little house with a garden and a long driveway wide enough for a car-



THE 100-YEAR-OLD School of Music: Teaching music with excellence and commitment.

riage.

With only a shoestring budget to run the school, the nuns wrote to their Motherhouse in Tutzing, Germany to ask if there was a piano teacher who could give lessons to Filipino children.

"Filipinos love music so much that they cannot live without it. Most of the children display an outstanding talent for this art as well as for dancing, an understanding far beyond their years and perfect natural grace," the nuns were quoted as saying.

And so Battig—a veritable concert pianist in Silesia, Germany and a student of the famous pedagogue Ludwig Deppe—arrived in Manila in October 1907 and immediately starting giving piano lessons.

Another German, Augustus Gnant, who had been helping out the sisters since their arrival, went around the streets of Tondo, ringing a bell to inform the neighborhood that a piano teacher was ready to give lessons at the sisters' convent.

When the school moved from

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Tondo to San Marcelino, and then to a snake-infested marshland in Singalong—where the school still stands—the nuns were again plagued by financial problems.

Battig responded by holding two fundraising concerts in 1910 and 1911 which drew in not only money, but also prospective students. It was said that her popularity was so great in those days that even residents in far-flung towns knew of her talent.

"Even my mother knew about her and because of that, she encouraged me to study piano instead of becoming an engineer," said Abejo, a native of Cagayan de Oro.

While heading the School of Music, Battig also established in 1923 the historical monument St. Cecilia's Hall, where music students could rehearse.

In the 1940s, the invasion of the Japanese Imperial Forces inflicted so much damage on the school: Its buildings, the chapel, the sisters' home and St. Cecilia's Hall were all destroyed.

Reconstruction of the music school began under the term of Sr. Gunfrida Schneyer, four years after Battig died. It took 10 years but the school gradually sprung to life again. St. Cecilia's Hall was rebuilt and composition recitals began under Lucio San Pedro,

who would later be named National Artist for Music.

When the school almost shut its doors in 1977 due to martial law, Abejo, who had become dean the previous year, gave way to the teaching of new disciplines to stretch the dwindling interest of students in music. The school started offering lessons in voice, winds and strings.

Seven years later, she established the Philippine Research and Developing Instrumental Soloists (Predis), virtually creating for the future a pool of musicians, including poor but talented children.

Abejo said Predis was aimed at "developing musicians for professional careers in orchestras and cultivating soloists and instructors in the use of orchestral instruments."

Now on its centennial year, the school will be witnessing a "tertulia" of all musicians who passed through its halls in a year-long extensive program to celebrate Battig's legacy. There will be a series of concerts to be held in various cities, provinces and even in train stations, as well as workshops and exhibits and the groundbreaking of Sr. Baptista Battig Hall.

"We cannot live without music. And here at St. Scho, we teach music with excellence and commitment," Abejo said.