

overall effect of the scene to the foreign visitor is at once grotesque and unforgettable.

After All Saints' Day, the Christmas activities gather great momentum. Announcements about carol singing and lantern contests begin to appear in newspapers and public bulletin boards and the preparations for the Yuletide season now go on without interruption. By December first, multi-colored Christmas lanterns are seen on every window and even in cars, buses, and jeepneys.

Lantern-making is an art borrowed by the Filipinos from the Japanese and Chinese. Taking out the Buddhist overtones to the lantern rituals, the Filipinos have made it a beautiful Christmas activity that begins around the end of October, when people start making lanterns, and climaxes on Christmas eve, when the lantern parades are held, along with contests for the best and most creative lanterns.

The lanterns are usually made of Japanese rice paper on a thin bamboo frame, and are supposed to represent the five-pointed Star of Bethlehem. It is the most popular emblem of the Filipino Christmas.

The grandest lantern parade of all is held in the town of San Fernando, fifteen minutes' drive from Clark Air Base, in Angeles City. Thousands of tourists jam this prosperous provincial capital on Christmas Eve, for this lantern affair is so spectacular it dwarfs all other lantern celebrations.

The wood-and-paper lanterns, in various shapes and colors, ranging from Oriental and Malayan styles to the psychedelic in design, are huge, measuring anywhere from 15 feet to 40 feet in diameter. They are mounted on large trucks and are lighted by complicated electronic systems, powered by an electric generator.

Every barrio (village) in San Fernando is expected to enter a lantern in the contest, and embarrassingly poor is the village that cannot join it. The barrio folks, old and young alike, become involved for weeks in the making of hundreds of parts that make up the lantern. The manipulation of the intricate lighting system is



*Young carollers, with merricacs and bamboo rattlers, start going around by December 1st.*

so difficult and requires such expertness that many young men spend numerous days and nights training for the complex operation.

In recent years, the Department of Tourism has made it possible to bring this colossal lantern festival to Manila for those who cannot go to San Fernando, which is about 50 miles away. This is usually held at the Rizal Park in Manila sometime before the end of the year.

Just before dawn of December sixteenth, just as the first cockcrows are heard throughout the Philippine archipelago, the bells in all Catholic churches peal exultantly, signalling the "official" start of Christmastime. A wave of jubilation sweeps across the villages. Brass bands play Spanish *paso-dobles*, Philippine airs, and Sousa as they march gaily all

over town. Small bamboo cannons are fired by children in the streets. And skyrockets burst in the cool December skies. In many towns around Manila, groups of boys and girls, with guitars and tambourines, go from house to house, rousing the people with their songs and getting a few centavos in return.

All this happy noise is intended to wake the people up so they can attend the *Misa de Gallo* (Cock's Mass), where ancient carols are sung and gospels on the Nativity are read with much fervor. The church is brightly lighted and one cannot help but be affected by the holiday mood everywhere.

After Mass, the young men and women of the villages congregate in the makeshift foodshops put up around the church, for an early morning snack of