

As I See It
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Muscovado: Rondalla Festival sweetener

The International Rondalla Festival to be hosted by Silay City on November 3-11, 2018 shall feature concerts, outreach performance, international conference and workshop, exhibition on heritage, and a deeper understanding and appreciation of a shared musical heritage.

‘Cuerdas Sang Paghiliusa’ is fulfilling its goal to promote global peace and unity. The Committee on Exhibition has organized a group of teachers endorsed by Dr. Roselyn J. Palcat, schools division superintendent, to make a thorough research on Silay cultural heritage... history, economy, legend, music, food, and vision for the future.

Silay has been tagged by the late Dr. Doreen Gamboa Fernandez as ‘Banwa sang Dulce’. The city is famous for its hometown delicacies. Most of the toothsome delights are sugar based. In the recent past, the Negros Cultural Foundation, Inc. had been sponsoring ‘Adobo Festival’ side lighted by a cooking competition using muscovado sugar produced by Hawaiian Philippine Company. This will be featured again during the International Rondalla Festival.

A group of researchers is making focus on ‘the molinos’ (traditional sugar mills) and the production of muscovado. The researcher will picture out in the exhibit the role of the ‘muscovado’. The source of ‘muscovado’ is sugarcane. It is harvested from the field by the ‘tapaseros’ (cane cutters) and brought to the mill (molino) by using ‘caro’ (cart) or ‘carosa’ (sledge) pulled by a carabao.

The traditional mill (molino de sangre), according to the researchers, made use of the wooden rollers driven by the carabao in crushing the cane. Muscovado production is being supervised by a ‘Maestro’, a skilled person in the boiling process. From the crusher, the juice is stored in a tank where solid impurities are removed.

The juice with scum is heated in the first cauldron (‘kawa’), later to be transferred to the second ‘kawa’ for juice liming then to the third ‘kawa’ for juice concentration, and after that to the fourth ‘kawa’ for juice concentration still. While in that process, the impurities (‘sapwa’) floating on top are manually removed. The first three ‘kawas’ are intended for clarification and the fourth ‘kawa’ is for evaporation.

The fifth 'kawa' (the last) is for the proper cooking of the juice concentration. When properly cooked, the 'Maestro' will order that the concentrated syrup should be poured in a steel mixing tray where it will cool out and 'be shocked' into muscovado sugar. The lumps will be manually pulverized using the spades. The fine sugar would now be ready for packing.

In the 60's, the producers would pack muscovado sugar in 'may-ong' (sack made of buri palm). Buri palm would give muscovado sugar an enchanting smell that would attract buyers. The producers would always see to it that muscovado is not 'dulit' (undercooked or overcooked). A 'dulit' muscovado would either be wet or hard (with foul odor similar to that of a charcoal).

Enjoy muscovado (the healthy sugar) in your coffee and in your delicacies. Know more about muscovado at the International Rondalla Festival Exhibit at Silay Puericulture Center.