

*The Wesleyan Gamelan Ensemble presents*

## WAYANG KULIT

Javanese shadow-play with flat leather puppets

Story: *Wahyu Cakraningratn*

(The divine blessing of Kingship)

Saturday, May 8, 1999

8:00PM, World Music Hall

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Pre-Performance discussion on wayang by

Prof. Marc Perlman of Brown University and Dr. Susan Walton of University  
of Michigan Ann Arbor

Thursday, May 6, 1999

4:00PM, World Music Hall

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### WAYANG

The Javanese wayang kulit or wayang purwa is one of the great dramatic forms of the East. Above and beyond its value as a wonderful entertainment, it is important to the Javanese as a ceremony: It provides a means of contact with ancestral spirits and establishes an atmosphere of serenity and balance; it is a means of educating the young in the wisdom of the culture; and it employs, as a frame of reference, philosophical and mystical ideas relating to the esoteric self-discipline known as semadi.

No one understand all the facets of a wayang performance -- even the dhalang (puppeteer) may not completely understand the obscure imagery of some of the beautiful songs he sings. One is not expected to pay constant attention throughout the nightlong course of the play, and may wander away for some tea or food. Children, who form a large part of the audience in Java, often fall asleep during the longer and more philosophical dialogues and wake up when the clowns appear.

In general, a play falls into three main divisions defined by the planting of the

kayon or gunungan (tree or mountain) in the center of the stage, thus marking the line between the forces to the dhalang's right, usually positive, and the forces of left, usually negative. (The Javanese are, of course, too subtle to imagine that human nature is all bad or all good -- even the great heroes have certain weaknesses, and some of the villains have a great nobility.) The division of the wayang play into three sections is paralleled in the accompanying music by its corresponding division into three pathet (modes).

The dhalang is in a complete charge of the performance. Before it begins, he meditates; during the performance he manipulates the puppets, delivers all the dialogue in many voices, describes the scene, comments on the meaning -- often drawing on events of the day -- and signals the orchestra what and when to play. He must know the stories and characters of more than two hundred puppets. A good dhalang may be able to perform as many as two hundred lakon (wayang episodes). In Java, he is often revered for his deep understanding of life and his role as a teacher and spiritual guide. Through him, one is initiated into the "secrets of earthly existence" and educated in the philosophical and mystical composition of life: the nature of order in the world, of cosmic justice, and of the laws of the universe.

## **GAMELAN**

A gamelan (orchestra), using various combination of instruments, is traditionally and essentially accompaniment to puppet shows, dances, feasts, and ceremonies in Java. Most of the instruments are bronze: tuned gongs, suspended vertically or horizontally; and instruments with tuned keys, suspended over tubular resonators or a resonant cavity in the base of the instrument. Other instruments include a two-stringed fiddle, xylophones, flutes, and drums. A full Javanese gamelan comprises two sets of instruments, one in each of two tuning systems: sléndro, with five tones per octave, and pélog, with seven. The three pathet used in the course of the wayang all have their distinct manifestations in both tuning systems. In the overall sound of the gamelan, no instrument predominates: each has an important function that relates to the whole. As for the music, rather than harmony and development in the Western sense, the primary organizing feature is vocally-inspired modal

polyphony of a highly melodic character. Gendhing (composition) are quite formal, for all their quality of ethereal improvisation. Every gamelan piece is cast in one of a small number of forms defined by the mutually subdividing cycles of certain of the gongs, most prominently, the gong ageng (great gong). The cyclic organization allows great flexibility in the creation of pieces of differing character; even within a piece, subtle (or dramatic) shifts in feeling occur as cycles slow down or speed up.

***WAHYU CAKRANINGRAT***  
**THE DIVINE BLESSING OF KINGSHIP**  
(From the Mahabhrata)

**Synopsis of the story**

**PATHET NEM (ACT ONE)**

**JEJER (the first scene): The court of Hastinā**

Duryudānā--Eldest of the hundred Kurāwā; king of Hastinā

Durnā--Spiritual adviser to the Kurāwā

Sangkuni--Prime minister of Hastina

Lesmānā Mondrākumārā--son of king Duryudānā

King Duryudānā informs his entourage that Wahyu Cakraningrat, or the divine blessing of kingship, is soon to descend to earth to be bestowed on the most worthy. The king summons his son, Lesmānā, and commands him to strive for the Wahyu by going on a spiritual retreat in the Krendhāyānā forest.

**BEDHOLAN: Departure of the court**

**KEDHATONAN: The inner palace of the court**

The queen Banowati, the princess Lesmånåwati and ladies-in waiting greet the king

**PASEBAN NJAWI: The outer hall of the court**

Sangkuni, Dursåsånå, Durmågati, Citrakså, Citraksi, Aswåtåmå, Kartåmarmå--Kuråwå brothers/army leaders

Prime minister Sangkuni orders the Kuråwå brothers to accompany Lesmånå on his mission to the Kredhåyånå forest and to protect him. The Kuråwå brothers, some on horseback and some on foot, depart for the forest with Lesmånå and priest Durna with their footsoldiers. The footsoldiers encounter fallen trees, boulders, and other obstacles along the way.

**ADEGAN (Scene): The Forest of Kredhåyånå**

The army of the kingdom of Dwåråwati, under the leader of Setyaki, is guarding prince Sombå on his quest for spiritual cleansing to prepare himself to receive the Wahyu.

Lesmånå and the Kuråwå brothers finally arrived at the Kredhåyånå forest. There they encounter Setyaki and his army. A fight ensues and the Kuråwå clan is defeated.

## **PATHET SÅNGÅ (ACT TWO)**

**ADEGAN: In the forest**

Abimanyu--son of Arjunå

Semar, a clownish but respected companion of Abimanyu

Garèng, Pétruk, and Bagong, clownish companions of Abimanyu and Semar's sons.

In preparing himself to receive the Wahyu, Abimanyu is clearing his mind by taking a journey in an unknown forest, admiring its great beauty. Semar and his three sons amuse themselves with jokes and songs and general buffoonery.

### **ADEGAN: Perang Kembang (Flower Battle)**

In passing through dense forest, Abimanyu encounters demon soldiers, who try to expel him from the forest. Abimanyu kills Gendir Penjalin, the Cakil (a giant with two movable arms and a protruding fang) and the other demon. (This scene is called "Flower Battle." It is a showcase for the puppeteer's skill in manipulating the puppets, and is almost obligatory in any wayang performance.)

## **PATHET MANYURÅ (ACT THREE)**

### **ADEGAN: In the Krendhåyånå Forest**

The essence of the Wahyu, taking the form of the god Wulandremå, enters Lesmånå. In the meantime, the disguised receptacle of the Wahyu, taking the form of a beautiful woman, Wulandremi, who attempts to seduce him. Ignoring Durnå's advice, Lesmånå succumbs to Wulandremi's seductive temptations. Wulandremå leaves wife. Abimanyu's father (Arjunå) and uncle (Bimå) arrive in the scene and are delighted to learn that Abimanyu has received the Wahyu, since this means that Abimanyu's descendants will be future kings. Upon hearing that Abimanyu has received the Wahyu, the Kuråwå approach the prince, intending to remove the Wahyu from Abimanyu by physical force. Arjunå and Bimå repulse them and Bimå performs a victory dance.

### **TANCEP KAYON**

**THE END**