

S.S
A1
1993

The Larry Reed Shadow Play Theater Company

will present

Selected Scenes from the Mahabharata

using traditional Balinese leather shadow puppets

or wayang kulit

and accompanied by Balinese gamelan music

DON'T MISS IT!

Tuesday, April 20, 1993

Macky Hall Lawn
[Nahl Hall in the event of rain]

8 PM
[Bring a jacket or wrap and a friend]



WAYANG KULIT

Various forms of wayang kulit (shadow theater) are known throughout Asia from Turkey to the Philippines, although its origins are generally thought to be traceable to India where it is but occasionally performed today. Its popularity in Indonesia (primarily Bali and Java), however, is well known, being the focal point of local religious and social occasions as well as a highly popularized tourist attraction.

The Balinese form of wayang kulit emerged at the end of the 15th century when the Javanese Hindu Mahapahit empire collapsed, and the new Muslim rulers rejected Hinduism in favor of Islam; the Hindu religious and artistic traditions were carried to the safety of Bali with fleeing Javanese royalty and intelligentsia and were gradually subsumed into Bali's indigenous culture in which both animism and ancestor worship play a significant role. This hybrid artistic expression is strongly preserved in the Balinese version of wayang kulit, the most important form of puppetry on the island today.

The dalang or master puppeteer is a highly trained individual, being qualified as a puppet maker, a musician, a dancer, a singer, an actor, a director, a shaman and a priest. His thorough knowledge of four distinct languages [ancient Kawi or Old Javanese; and high, middle and low Balinese], as well as of numerous stories, including those from the classic Indian epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Additionally, his familiarity with the Laws of the Wayang as well as various sacred chants and spells which are characteristically woven into the plays themselves are but a further reflection of the philosophical and religious aspect of his training. He is generally attended by two apprentices who offer him assistance, four instrumentalists who play the gender or metal-keyed xylophone, all of whom he directs with the sound of a hammer which he typically clutches with the toes of his right foot. The numerous voices that he is able to assume, from low and coarse to high and delicate, are what animate the performance. To each character presented from the idealized heroes and heroines to the comic panasars who function as translators, the dalang assigns a particular voice pattern and tone that mirrors his/her visual appearance and embodies his/her personality. The ability of the dalang to improvise during a performance, periodically providing comic relief to the serious unfolding of a traditional legend reflects his sensitivity to his audience, his complete and total identification with his leather puppets and the yet living oral character of the Balinese version of wayang kulit.

Shadow theater is performed for both its entertainment value as well as its moral instruction. Balinese societal ideals are expressed by the Hindu allegorical figures of Rama and Sita in the Ramayana or by Arjuna, Yudhisthira and Krishna in the Mahabharata; or by the famed Indonesian warrior Pandji. All serve to sustain belief in traditional values and ethical codes which are cleverly intertwined with folk wisdom and oftentimes obscene humor, a clear reflection of the popular nature of this form of Balinese theater.

Although wayang kulit is performed both day and night, night performances alone offer the dramatic impact of the actual shadows of the leather puppets projected against the muslin screen (klir) and torch light. While day performances are generally shorter storytelling sessions, night performances of shadow theater are characteristically more dramatic and often continue until dawn.