

**Asia Society**  
Presents

# **Javanese Wayang Kulit, Shadow-Puppet Theater of Indonesia**

Accompanied by full Javanese gamelan orchestra

Performed by Ki Purbo Asmoro and members of Mayangkara  
Featuring Gamelan Kusuma Laras directed by I.M. Harjito



**Friday, March 16, 2012, 8:00 P.M.**  
**Welcoming music starts at 7:40**

**Asia Society**  
**725 Park Avenue at 70<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**New York City**

This program is 3 hours with no Intermission. Guests are welcome to walk on stage (20 at a time) to view the shadow-side of the screen, and to enjoy food and beverages (beginning at 9 PM) upstairs in the Garden Court Café, provided by Asia Society and the Indonesian Consul General.



**Asia**  
Society®

**Wayang Kulit Performance,  
Featuring Ki Purbo Asmoro and Mayangkara**

**Déwa Ruci: Bima's Spiritual Enlightenment**

**Gamelan Kusuma Laras:**

I.M. Harjito, *Artistic Director*  
Anne Stebinger, *Co-Director*

Glenn Baun-Cueto  
Wayne Forrest (guest artist)  
Stuart Frankel  
Barry Frier  
Joseph Getter (guest artist)  
David Haiman  
Seán Hanson  
Denni Harjito  
Uci Haryono  
Rex Isenberg  
Ronald Kienhuis  
Robin Kimball  
Lutfi Kurniawan  
Bleakley McDowell  
Puspitaningsih Moeis  
Debie Morris  
Emily Jane O'Dell  
Dan Owen  
Eva Peck  
Mark Reilly  
Jason Robira  
Leslie Rudden  
Dave Ruder  
Jenny Sakirman  
Carla Scheele  
Amy Scott  
Don Shewey  
Elly Siswanto  
Tatung Suharjono  
Sri Suharti  
Bambang Sunarno  
Safiah Satiman Taylor  
Carole Weber  
Dylan Widjiono  
Antonius Wiriadjaja  
Sri Zainuddin

**Mayangkara:**

Wakidi Dwidjomartono, *musical director*

Yayuk Sri Rahayu  
Gatot Saminto  
Timbul Saminto  
Minarto  
Sapto  
Kasino  
Subandi  
Wiji Santoso

### **Tonight's Story: Déwa Ruci (Bima's Spiritual Enlightenment)**

This episode focuses on Bima, the second of the five Pandhawa brothers. Bima is disturbed by a number of recent events in his family and has decided that he needs to strengthen his spiritual side and take some time to be introspective about his life. He goes to his teacher, Durna, and asks for guidance as to how to go about this. Durna tells him to search for “*kayu gung susuhing angin*” in the forest, which Bima interprets as a kind of special and magical wood (as *kayu* can mean wood). As Bima tears apart the forest, he finds that it is not in fact a piece of wood he should be looking for. Later, his teacher sends him to the depths of the ocean to find “the essence of the purest water”. Once again, Bima takes on the challenge, but finds something very different from what he is expecting.

This story is thought to have been inspired by a poem, *Nawaruci*, by Empu Siwamurti, written in Old Javanese in the 1600's, which was then translated into modern classical Middle Javanese poetry by Yasadipura I of the Mangkunegaran Palace around 1794. After the Javanese classical translation, it was also adapted by a number of leading Islamic teachers in the late 1800's, and for a period was even thought of as an Islamic-based, Sufi sect mystical teaching through wayang. It appears in dhalang study books at least as early as the mid-1800's.

### **Background on the Epic**

The *Mahabharata* concerns a family feud between a set of cousins—the Pandhawa (a family of five brothers) and the Kurawa (a family of ninety-nine boys and one girl). The Pandhawa and Kurawa, whose fathers were brothers, vie for control of the vast, prosperous, and powerful Astina Kingdom. The Pandhawa have official rights to the kingship of Astina, as their father was the former king and named them successors. However the Kurawa also claim rights to the kingdom, since their father was the oldest son in the family and was passed over as king simply due to his blindness. Moreover, the Kurawa had temporary control over the kingdom in between the Pandhawa's father's death and the Pandhawa's coming of age, and thus were always reluctant to relinquish power. While the Pandhawa are inspired to lead Astina in order to guide the world toward greater peace and prosperity, the Kurawa see gaining control of Astina as a way to ensure personal power and wealth.

Besides the basic plot line, the Javanese-version of the *Mahabharata* deals with everything from births of the main characters to their coming of age rituals, marriages, and pivotal life struggles. The Pandhawa-Kurawa feud eventually erupts into unresolvable differences, despite numerous attempts at reconciliation. The *Mahabharata* ends with the colossal Baratayuda War, in which almost every member of both families is killed.

## About Javanese Wayang Kulit

Wayang kulit has been a thriving, highly complex yet constantly developing art form on Java for over 900 years. In these traditionally all-night shadow dramas, a single puppeteer (the *dhalang*) casts shadows from a seated position behind a screen, weaving episodes adapted from the Indian epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The *wayang* movements and story moods are accompanied by a 15-20 piece *gamelan* (an orchestra of mostly bronze percussion instruments but also vocalists, a string instrument known as the *rebab*, and a flute known as a *suling*), which responds spontaneously to musical cues from the *dhalang*. A *dhalang* must not only relate the story with literary and poetic grace, but is also expected to be a philosopher, current events commentator, comedian, talented singer, effective conductor of the *gamelan*, and virtuosic manipulator of *wayang*. *Wayang kulit* has undergone a number of innovations in the past fifty years, with Purbo Asmoro at the forefront of developments in the past fifteen years. It is still extremely popular in Central Java and has managed to hold its own with competing forms of entertainment such as television, film, Western pop music, video games, and the internet.

## How the Wayang Are Made

The puppets (which are known as *wayang* just as the art form as a whole is known as *wayang*), are made from raw water buffalo hide which has been dried in the sun and stretched over a frame for months until it becomes quite thin and somewhat translucent. After the *wayang* form is cut out, artisans carve elaborate patterns and designs with a whole range of chisels and knives, so as to create an intricate shadow effect. Usually a separate set of artisans then handpaint the *wayang*, after which a water buffalo horn is cut, chiseled and shaped to create the *wayang*'s the supporting stick and arm attachment sticks. After a month or two of hand-made craftsmanship, the *wayang* is ready for use by a *dhalang*.

## Character Traits

The nature of each individual character can somewhat be judged by their physical features. Eyes the size of a grain of rice, feet close together, black faces, and angular noses are signs of the refined characters. Eyes the size of a cherry, feet far apart, red faces, thick red lips, fangs, and bulbous noses are signs of the more rough and aggressive characters. The main character tonight, Bima, is somewhat of a combination. He has rough qualities, but is a strong-willed, honest, straight-forward, loyal prince with intense resolve. He also has the unusual quality that he cannot speak high Javanese, and speaks a rough, low level language even to kings and gods.

## The Kayon

Aside from a few weapons, there is only one prop in wayang and that is the *kayon* (the large, leaf-shaped wayang). This is used to begin and end the performance and is also used to separate scenes or signal a flashback, dream, or vision. It can symbolize water, a mountain, an entire forest, or general emotional energy.

## Cast and Crew

**Purbo Asmoro** is considered to be at the forefront of the modern, classical interpretive treatment in wayang, commonly referred to as *garapan*. Born in East Java in 1961, he is able to officially trace his lineage back to at least six generations of practicing *dhalang*, though he is the first in his family to be formally educated. He holds a Master's Degree in Performance Art from Universitas Gadjah Mada, one of the most prestigious universities in Indonesia. Currently a professor at the Institute of Indonesian Arts in Solo, Purbo Asmoro divides his time between teaching and an active performing career. He has both a dedicated, academic following and a broad-based, enthusiastic community of fans across Java. He has conducted highly successful international tours of the USA, the UK, Japan, Bolivia, Singapore, Austria, Thailand, India, and Greece. In 2007, the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, purchased a complete set of Purbo Asmoro's wayang. The set was made into an elaborate educational exhibit, on display from March 2009-March 2010. In March 2009, he performed a series of wayang in Paris and Normandy, at the Maisons des Cultures du Monde. In August 2009, Purbo Asmoro traveled to Santa Fe to perform at the museum, and also made a stop in Houston, Texas at Rice University's Sheppard School of Music. Current trends in wayang kulit often range from the extreme avant-garde to tableaux of light entertainment. Purbo Asmoro, however, is steadfast in his adherence to wayang as philosophy, oral literature, and food for thought, presented in a dramatic and entertaining style, respecting both tradition and innovation.

**Kathryn (Kitsie) Emerson** has been researching gamelan and wayang in Solo, Central Java, since 1991 and is currently a teacher at Jakarta International School. She has studied the styles of many *dhalang* but for the past seven years has been working intensely with Purbo Asmoro, researching his work, studying his style, and translating for his performances. She is his official overseas performance translator and has toured with him to Singapore, New York, Chicago, Seattle, Washington, DC, Santa Fe, Houston, Kalamazoo College, Wesleyan University, London, Paris, and dozens of venues in Jakarta for Western audiences. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Cornell University, she also holds also a Master's Degree in Music from Queens College in New York City.

**I.M Harjito**, artistic director of Gamelan Kusuma Laras, is one of the finest Javanese musicians of his generation. He is a graduate of Indonesia's state conservatory for the traditional performing arts, where he worked closely with one of the major figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century Javanese music, R. T. Martodipura. Harjito has directed gamelan ensembles in Indonesia, the United States, Canada, and Australia. He is also a composer of traditional and innovative works for gamelan and other instruments. For the past 22 years, he has been a faculty member at Wesleyan University. He also directs the Javanese gamelan ensemble at Brown University and is a featured guest at concerts of the Boston Village Gamelan. Although is a master of all the Javanese gamelan instruments, he is most famous for his superb *rebab* and *gender* playing.

**Gamelan Kusuma Laras** formed 27 years ago at the Indonesian Consulate with instruments built especially for the Indonesia Pavilion at the World's Fair of 1964-65 in Flushing, NY, Gamelan Kusuma Laras has enthralled audiences around the Northeast, other regions of the United States, and in Indonesia with its authentic performances of music and dance from the classical repertoire of the courts of Central Java. The ensemble has been a treasure of the New York City cultural scene since its first performance in 1983 in a Tribeca loft. Since then, the ensemble has been presented at a wide variety of venues, including the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum, Symphony Space, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Bard College, Vassar College, Wesleyan University, Princeton University, Hartwick College, Bank Street College of Education, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Texas A&M University, Cooper Hewitt Museum, Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors Festival, and the Jogjakarta International Gamelan Festival.

## **Acknowledgments and Thanks on behalf of Gamelan Kusuma Laras**

Gamelan Kusuma Laras would like to thank **Dan Owen, Safiah Satiman, Bambang Sunarno, Don Shewey, Antonius Wiriadjaya, Kathryn Emerson, Stuart Frankel, Anne Stebinger** and **Sri Zainuddin** for their help in organizing this performance.

Our deep appreciation and thanks also to:

**Mr. Ghafur Akbar Dharmaputra**, Consul General, Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia.

**His Excellency Mr. Desra Percaya**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative-Designate, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations

**Mr. Fuad Adriansyah**, Consul, Culture and Information Section, Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia

**Ms. Rina Fitriyah**, Assistant Consul, Culture and Information Section, Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia

**Rachel Cooper, Rachel Rosado** and Asia Society

Gamelan Kusuma Laras gratefully acknowledges the support of the **New York State Council on the Arts, Paguyuban Cakra, Inc.**, the **Consulate of the Republic of Indonesia**, and the **Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations**.

## **About Asia Society**

The Asia Society is an international organization dedicated to strengthening relationships and deepening understanding among the peoples of Asia and the United States. Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, the Society reaches audiences around the world through its headquarters in New York and regional centers in Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, DC, Hong Kong, Manila, Melbourne and Shanghai. A nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization, the Society provides a forum for building awareness of the more than thirty countries broadly defined as the Asia-Pacific region - the area from Japan to Iran, and from Central Asia to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Through art exhibitions and performances, films, lectures, seminars and conferences, publications and assistance to the media, and materials and programs for students and teachers, the Asia Society presents the uniqueness and diversity of Asia. For more information, please visit [www.asiasociety.org/ny](http://www.asiasociety.org/ny)

## **Asia Society Staff**

**Rachel Cooper**, Director, Cultural Programs and Performing Arts  
**Rachel Rosado**, Program Assistant, Cultural Programs  
**Hesh Sarmalkar**, Director, Events and Visitor Services  
**Elaine Merguerian**, Associate Director, Communications  
**Eric DeArmon**, A/V Manager  
**Jeff Tompkins**, Senior Producer, Asia Society Online

## **Asia Society Audio/Visual Crew**

**Kia Rogers**, Lighting Technician  
**Oscar de la Fe Colon**, Lighting Technician  
**Max DeArmon**, Audio Technician  
**Brian Petway**, Audio Technician

*Co-sponsored with the Consulate General of Indonesia, New York; Cakra, Inc.; and Gamelan Kusuma Laras*

This program is made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. This program is part of Asia Society's ongoing initiative *Creative Voices of Muslim Asia*, supported by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. For more information, please visit [www.asiasociety.org/creativevoices](http://www.asiasociety.org/creativevoices)

Major support for performances at the Asia Society is provided by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Helen and Will Little Endowment for Performing Arts.

