

5<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Dear Chair of LUTSF

Enclosed is my report on the results of my project to learn Javanese dance last summer.

Following the guidelines on reporting, I am writing a covering letter to you and enclosing a CD with five photographs of my performance of one of the dances in the Royal Festival Hall ballroom. This is the first tangible outcome of the project. Unfortunately I did not record myself performing, but only my teacher, because I was learning from the tape, as I explain in the report. If you wish a copy of the tape, I shall be happy to send it.

Project title: Learning classical Central Javanese women's dance  
Dates: 28<sup>th</sup> June to 21<sup>st</sup> August 2004  
Place: Yogyakarta, Central Java  
Timescale: 53 days intensive dance training. The time taken was approximately as follows. (Evidently I was still refining the earlier dances while learning the later ones.)

Tari Gambyong Paréanom	10 days
Tari Golèk Sukaretna	14 days
Tari Srikandi Larasati	29 days

The project went very much as I had planned, except I was advised to change details of the dances that I should learn. However when I talked to the South Bank Gamelan Players, they were happier with final choice, as the dances that I learned were precisely those that they wished to include in their future repertoire here in London.

During of my stay in Yogyakarta I also went to the Prambanan complex to watch the Ramayana Ballet (Surakarta-style), and to the royal Mangkunegaran palace in Yogyakarta to see their version of the Ramayana Ballet (Yogyakarta-style). It was very interesting to see the difference between the two different styles. The Prambanan performance is set on a massive stage and is designed to be spectacular. However several of the main dancers are exceptionally talented and can project their presence even on such a large stage. The Mangkunegaran performance, by contrast, was much smaller and intimate. Many of the dancers however were still students and, while they were technically proficient, their performances mostly lacked expression. So the Prambanan Ramayana was undoubtedly the high point of the trip. Unfortunately because of other commitments, I was unable to spend time talking to the

dancers afterwards, which would have been very valuable. I hope to do so on a future trip.

I am not sure that I have much advice for future Awardees. What I did find extremely valuable though was learning from an experienced dancer about the philosophy and attitude of the dancer towards the dance. I do not know if that is relevant to people working elsewhere though.

My way of sharing information about the project will be mainly through performance in the first instance. As I indicate in the report, I have danced, or shall be dancing, two of the roles in the next few months, and also dancing Sinta at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, for which my training as Srikandi will be invaluable. In due course, I hope to be able to give workshops on Javanese dance, for which the experience gained through the project will also be very useful.

With best wishes,  
Yours sincerely,

Ni Madé Pujawati

## **Report:**

### **Learning classical Central Javanese women's dance**

#### Summary

In July and August 2004 I spent eight weeks in Central Java extending my repertoire of different classical dances for women by learning certain important genres of classical dance. As so often in Indonesia, the study did not work out quite as planned, because my female teacher in Java recommended rather different dances to develop the vital female qualities of dance from what my male Javanese teacher in London had suggested! As my aim had been to refine my dance technique by working intensively with female dancers, obviously I went along with the advice, not least as I was able to work with a senior dance teacher at the Indonesian Institute of Arts in Yogyakarta, who is well known for her skill in teaching the subtleties of female dance. I was also able to learn certain key dances, which are basic for obtaining a command of the repertoire. It was very fortunate that, with the LUTSF Scholarship I was able to study these dances, as on my return I have already been asked to dance two of the pieces, and possibly the third.

The dances

The original plan had been for me to spend eight weeks in Yogyakarta and Surakarta in Central Java. These are the two great rival court complexes, which are the centres of excellence in the performance of classical Javanese dance.

The dances I had been advised to learn were:

- *Tari Bondan* – A short solo dance narrating a young mother nursing, amusing and playing with her child.
- *Tari Énggar-Énggar* the female part in a duet where a princess falls in love with a labourer (who is a royal prince in disguise).
- *Tari Gambyong Mudotomo* – A solo piece about a young girl adorning herself and showing off her beauty.

On arrival in Java, I discussed my proposal with several dancers, who recommended slightly different dances to achieve the flexibility and variety considered appropriate for a dancer wishing to command the feminine repertoire. One of these dancers, Ibu Indah Nuraini, a specialist in the Solo-style of female dancing and a senior teacher at Indonesia's foremost college of dance, the Institute of Arts, Yogyakarta, offered to instruct me herself. It was far too good an opportunity to miss, as she is a highly experienced and recognized as a leading teacher.

The three dances she thought that I should learn were:

1. *Tari Golèk Sukaretna*: The dance, lasting about twenty minutes, epitomizes sheer femininity, in the refined female style in which Solo specializes and is performed by young girls. *Golèk* is the name for a wooden doll. However the relationship with the dance itself is complex as *Golèk* also refers to dances often performed after a shadow play performance. The Javanese word *golèk* means 'to seek for'. So, one interpretation of the significance of the dance is that it invites the audience to seek for the symbolic meaning of the story.
2. *Tari Gambyong Paréanom*: This is a flexible dance, as it can be performed as a solo piece, or by a number of dancers. It lasts for about fifteen minutes and depicts a young woman (older than the young girl in *Golèk*), who has reached the age that she is conscious of her looks and enjoys making herself up in front of the mirror, in adorning herself and showing off her beauty, liveness and grace. *Gambyong* was originally a village dance, performed at celebrations and ceremonies like circumcisions and marriages. Its sensual overtones were evident in the fact that it was often used at all-night drinking parties, where men would join and flirt with the dancer on the dance floor. However, when *Gambyong* was adopted by the Central Javanese palaces, it was transformed and refined to fit the palace aesthetics and etiquette. It is

often performed to greet guests at the opening of an auspicious ceremony or performance.

3. *Tari Srikandi Larasati* (aka *Retno Tinanding*): This dance is a duet, of which I learned the part of Srikandi. The dance tells the story of the hero of the Mahabharata, Arjuna, who falls in love with and wishes to marry a beautiful young woman, Larasati, who spurns his advances however. Instead Larasati issues a challenge to all other women. She will only submit to a woman who can defeat her in combat. Arjuna therefore decides to ask his wife, the famous warrior, Srikandi, to take on Larasati. she will submit. Srikandi eventually betters Larasati and then delivers her to her husband, Arjuna, to take Larasati as his wife. The dance sets an interesting challenge for a female dancer. It is how to portray a strong (and complex) female character as the height of feminine refinement without losing the sense of strength and purpose. The dance takes about fifteen minutes.

As this description shows, the three pieces require the dancer to master different aspects of the female role in Central Javanese court dance. The first instantiates the innocence of a young girl, the second a young woman's maturing self-awareness, the third the strength of a self-confident mature woman.

#### Comments

The opportunity of working with Ibu Indah Nuraini was very interesting. As with most classical Javanese and Balinese teachers, she works primarily by demonstrating and by the pupil following the teacher. This method is time-consuming and, as I had to learn three major dances in a very short time, I video-taped my teacher, so that I could practise for 4-5 hours a day when she was not there. Without this it would have been difficult to complete the entire programme that I had set myself.

What was particularly exciting was Ibu Indah's explanation of *rasa*. *Rasa*, which is usually translated as 'feeling', derives ultimately from Indian aesthetics. However in Java it takes a singular turn, because *rasa* becomes a special kind of internal state in which you fit yourself to the dance. This may involve meditation, fasting and other techniques to aid concentration. As discussion of *rasa* is largely absent in Balinese dance teaching, I am still learning quite how to approach it. As an introduction I was taught that there are eight roles that you have to do as a Javanese dancer:

1. *Pacak* – You have to learn to make the movements fit the character.
2. *Pancat* – You have to make the movements correspond to what is laid down

3. *Ulat* – You have to feel the dance and imbue it with expression so that the audience knows what you are embodying from the feeling.
4. *Lulut* – You have to learn to move without thinking about it.
5. *Luwes* – You have to practise until your body becomes fluid and the movements become completely natural.
6. *Wilet* – Each dancer must learn to appropriate the dance in their own special way to make it unique to her or himself.
7. *Iromo* – You have to learn to fit the movement with the rhythm of the music, but such that the movements do not necessarily fall exactly on the beats.
8. *Gending* – The dancer must learn not just to feel the music, but to bring your movements to life through the music and bring the music to life.

### Conclusions

Learning Javanese dance is a very good experience for me. I was trained in classical Balinese dance. Although the two islands are adjacent and have influenced one another throughout history, in many ways Javanese dance is the exact opposite of Balinese dance. Balinese dance is highly technical, precise and energetic; movements always have to fit the music exactly. Javanese female dance, by contrast, is much slower, fits the music in complex ways and demands individual interpretation of a different order. I still find the switch very difficult and challenging, as I have to rethink and embody everything quite differently. I need to focus, take the dance more seriously than I do Balinese (to which I am accustomed) and I have to practise regularly to avoid losing the sense. However I have found that learning Javanese dance has enabled me to interpret my original Balinese dance training anew.

To internalize the feeling and the expression of the dance are very difficult. Javanese dance is so different from Balinese dance. Both you have to dance 'from the inside', but in contrasting ways. In Balinese dance the challenge is show the expression through the face and to animate the dance that way. But Surakarta-style classical Javanese dance is much more settled. The face and its expression should be still, indeed impassive. You have to express the dance through conveying the feeling to the audience. My teacher, Ibu Indah Nuraini, told me that the goal is to concentrate on the feeling (*rasa*) of the dance and to instantiate this feeling, so that it is accessible to the audience. I hope that my account of this significant difference in how dance is imagined in two regions of Indonesia may be of interest to other dancers in enabling them to think about how you convey expression and feeling.

To learn the choreography and the technique is not that difficult in itself. If I learned from watching a video of my teacher, I can grasp the basic technique from two or three lessons and much practice. What is difficult is to get the

feeling of the dance and to refine the basic movements, which takes far longer. I found that I needed to practise alone every day for hours.

#### Future performances and plans

Having learned some of the basic female classical Javanese dances, I came love them. I hope to be able to go regularly to Java to expand my repertoire and, more demanding, to learn to concentrate feeling and refine the movements.

I have already had a chance to perform one of the dances. On 3<sup>rd</sup>. October 2004 I was invited to perform *Gambyong Pareanom* on the ballroom floor of the Royal Festival Hall as the opening dance of the South Bank Javanese Gamelan's concert as part of the *Listen Up! Festival of Orchestras 2004*. I attach a CD with five photographs of my performing *Gambyong Pareanom*.

I also have an invitation to perform the *Tari Srikandi Larasati* in York in May 2005. Finally I have been asked to dance the lead female role of Sinta in the Javanese Ramayana at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 8<sup>th</sup>. June 2005.

Finally I have been invited to choreograph a new dance for the visit of the London-based Gamelan Gong Kebyar, Lila Cita, to the annual Bali Arts' Festival in June 2006. The piece will attempt to combine elements of classical Balinese and Javanese dance around a story from classical Greek mythology. I shall probably use either the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, or the Abduction of Helen of Troy.

Ni Madé Pujawati,  
London, November 2004

#### [Photos and dance description](#)

### ***Tari Gambyong Paréanom***

*Gambyong Paréanom* is a classical Central Javanese female dance, usually performed to greet guests at the opening of an auspicious ceremony or performance.

It may be performed as a solo piece, or by a number of dancers, and lasts for about fifteen minutes. It depicts a young woman (older than the young girl in *Golèk*), who

has reached the age that she is conscious of her looks and enjoys making herself up in front of the mirror, in adorning herself and showing off her beauty, liveness and grace.

*Gambyong* was originally a genre of village dances, performed at celebrations and ceremonies like circumcisions and marriages. Its sensual overtones are still evident when it is performed at all-night dancing and drinking parties, where professional female dancers (who may also sometimes be prostitutes) are paid to dance with local men. However, when *Gambyong* was adopted by the Central Javanese palaces of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, it was transformed and refined to fit the palace aesthetics and etiquette.

The photographs are of a performance of the Surakarta-style *Gambyong Pareanom* on the ballroom floor of the Royal Festival Hall on 3<sup>rd</sup>. October 2004 as the opening dance of the South Bank Javanese Gamelan's concert as part of the *Listen Up! Festival of Orchestras 2004*. This *Gambyong Pareanom* was performed by two Indonesian dancers, Ni Madé Pujawati and Yayuk. The photographs show Ni Madé Pujawati in various poses and movements.

