

# REVIEW

## Javanese Wayang Kulit at U.C. Berkeley

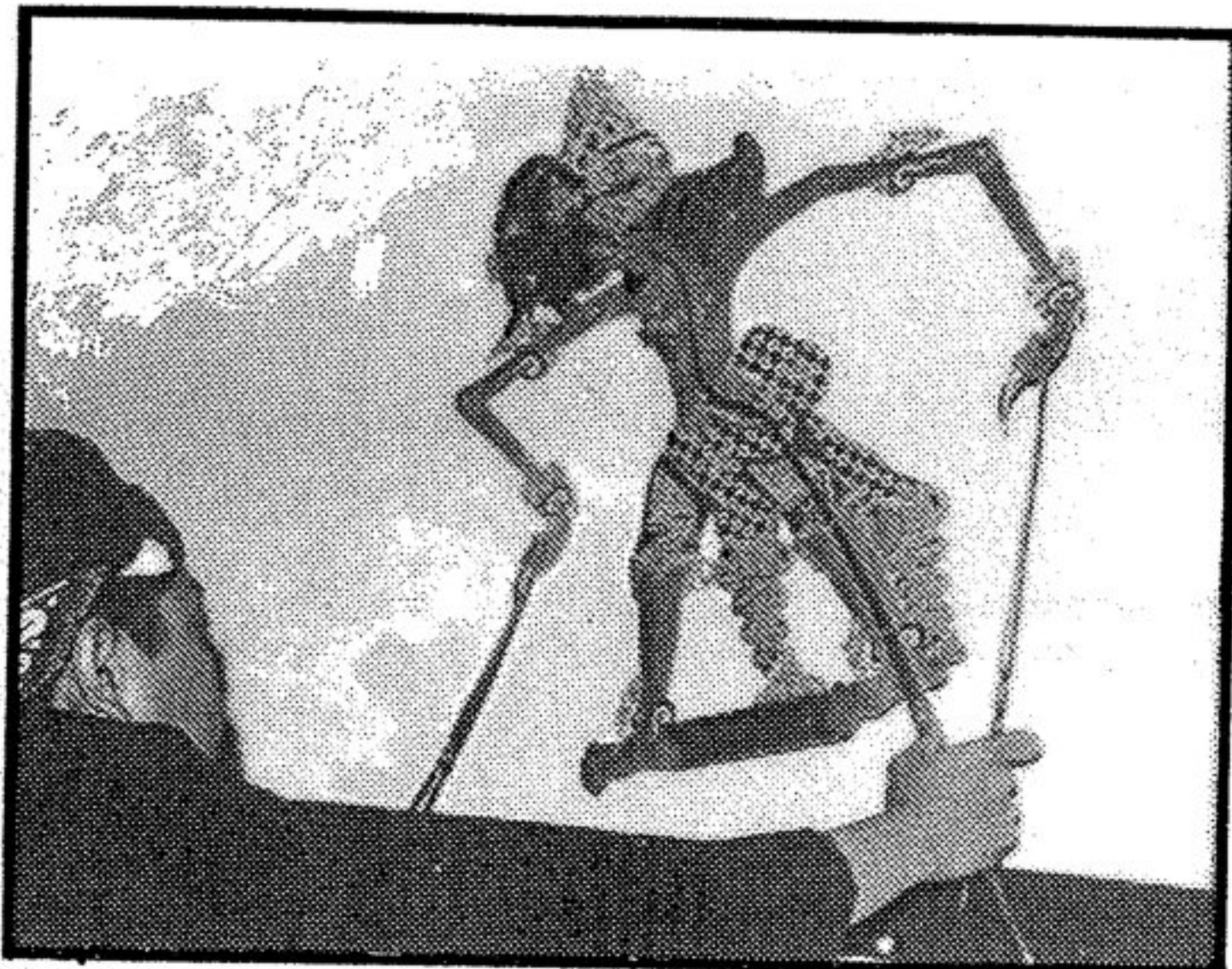
by Ernest Rideout

The San Francisco Bay Area is fortunate in having a relatively high number of gamelan within its environs and there are many opportunities for experiencing the music of this ensemble. There are frequent performances by American as well as Indonesian gamelan, with programs ranging from classic pieces to new works in traditional or American styles. It is also possible to participate in a gamelan by availing oneself of the superb instruction offered at the numerous gamelan in local colleges, universities, and independent organizations.

There are, however, genres of gamelan music which, for reasons of logistics and difficulty, are performed only rarely. One of these is the wayang kulit, or shadow-puppet theater. The demands made on a gamelan in the course of producing a wayang are considerable. The length of a wayang requires great stamina and facility with the enormous number of compositions required for a performance. The bulk of the responsibility for a successful performance by a relatively inexperienced gamelan rests on the director, who must use what little rehearsal time is available to give the necessary basic instruction as well as direct the ensemble towards the larger goal of a polished performance.

Even without an appreciation of the difficulties involved, the performance of Lakon Dewa Ruci by Gamelan Khai Udan Mas at U.C. Berkeley on April 7, 1984, would have been a very special event for anyone having the good fortune to be present. Under the direction of K.R.T. Wasitopuro and Jody Diamond, the gamelan demonstrated its solid foundation in basic ensemble playing as well as its ability to be flexible in accompanying the play. The entire group sounded confident, and the various soloists gave beautiful performances.

The overall success of the show, of course, depended greatly on the dalang (puppeteer). Soeprapto, an anchorman with the Voice of America Radio in



Soeprapto with Bratasena, who undergoes the transformation to Bima in Lakon Dewa Ruci.



Dalang Soeprapto

Washington, D.C., gave a skillful and entertaining performance in that capacity. He performed nearly the entire show in English rather than Javanese for the benefit of the predominantly American audience. In addition to fasting, Soeprapto prepared himself for the performance by researching the lives of the members of the gamelan, the student body at U.C. Berkeley and the community of the Bay Area. As a result, his performance was full of amusing inside jokes and references to people and events familiar to the majority of the audience. The first section, patet nem, was performed in a traditional manner, but the remaining two, patet sanga and manyuro, were shortened considerably, even to the point of rushing the line of the story. Even so, Soeprapto conveyed the highly spiritual message of this particular lakon clearly.

The wayang took place in Hertz Hall on the U.C. Berkeley campus, and the audience was allowed to come and go and wander about as they would in Java. There were also seats available behind the screen with the gamelan. Javanese food was served outside the hall during the performance, which contributed greatly to the relaxed atmosphere. There was still a large portion of the near-capacity crowd remaining as the show came to a close sometime after midnight.

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