

DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

Related Topic: Shadow Puppetry

The ancient art of shadow puppetry, in which shadow images of elaborately handcrafted puppets are projected onto a screen, is over one thousand years old. Thought to have originated in India and Egypt, shadow puppetry then traveled to Turkey, Greece, China, Thailand, Cambodia, and became a prominent part of the cultural traditions of **Indonesia**. Before the coming of television and movies, shadow puppetry was a popular form of entertainment and education. Puppeteers would travel from village to village to enthrall the residents with their shadow dramas. Shadow puppetry was a family enterprise, with fathers passing down the stories and handmade puppets to their sons.



ShadowLight Productions, (appearing in *People Like Me 2005*) was founded by one of the pioneers of **modern shadow puppetry**, Larry Reed. Often adapting traditional Indonesian shadow plays with innovative techniques, the company blends high drama, improvisation, and slapstick comedy. The stories and characters they create give people a chance to see themselves through the mirror of the mythic history; to view their current situation through a timeless perspective.

Indonesian Shadow Puppetry (*wayang kulit*)

Most Indonesian shadow plays are based on two epic stories from India. The Mahabharata and its sister work, the Ramayana, elegantly depict eastern philosophies which have inspired many cultures. The Balinese and Javanese have combined the Hindu stories with Buddhist and Muslim ideas and their own folklore.

Some favorite stories include Kala Rau - the eclipse of the moon, Calonarang - a call to witches, and Panji - Javanese folk tales.

The ***dalang***, puppeteer or shadowmaster asks the village about the local issues that they are facing and then chooses a story that illustrates solutions. The ***dalang*** tells the story, manipulates all the figures, interprets characters and voices for each, and produces sound effects punctuating speech and movement. The ***dalang*** also sings, cues the musical accompaniment, speaks several languages, and blesses the performance and surrounding area with mantras. ***Dalang*** usually make most of their own wayang kulit figures, eventually passing the craft to younger members of the family. Many ***dalang*** are also wood carvers, painters, dancers, musicians, and priests. They are an integral part of Indonesian society and merit the highest respect of the people.

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(Shadow Puppetry, continued)

Traditional shadow puppets are flat, usually made of leather, and perforated to create interesting shadow patterns. Split bamboo or cane sticks are attached vertically to the puppets for handling and manipulation. To create the shadows, they are lightly pressed on a translucent screen with a bright light behind them. A *gamelan orchestra* accompanies shadow plays. Gamelan players play gongs and xylophone type instruments, and respond to the spontaneous timing and direction of the *dalang*.

Shadow Puppetry Around the Globe

Traditional puppets from **India** include 5-foot Tamil figures of "Hanuman" (General) and "Sugriva" (The Monkey King). Although written records are scarce, it is clear that by the time of the composition of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, there was a form of theatrical performance, known as the "Chhaya Nataka".

The **Malaysian** shadow theater owes its origin to Java. However, it has also some similarities with Thailand. The shadow theater in Malaysia is divided into two forms the *wayang siam* and the *wayang djawa*.

The traditions of shadow puppetry of **Cambodia** and **Thailand** have very strong affinities. In Cambodia, it is called *nang sbek* and in Thailand, *nang yai*. Refugee camps along the Thai/Cambodian border became the artistic home for shadow puppetry when it was forced to near extinction by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970's.

Turkey was the home of a very distinct form of shadow theater believed to have come from Egypt and, perhaps, also Indonesia. The chief character of Turkish puppetry is Karagoz and the form is also known by this character. Whereas Asian shadow theater is often concerned with religious epics, Turkish shadow puppets come out of popular satirical theater.

The Turkish shadow theater was brought to **Greece** during the Ottoman Empire. Turkish influence on Greek puppetry is recognizable in both style and content. For example, both have the character Karagoz, called Karagiosis in Greek, as their chief protagonist.

China has a very rich tradition of shadow puppetry. There are several styles and schools both in Northeast and Northwest China.

Shadow puppets have been a popular theatrical form in **Egypt** since 1100 and are the origins of modern Aaagoz theater, or string puppet marionettes.