

# The Dancers and Musicians of the Burmese National Theater

The University of Hawaii College of Continuing Education and Community Service and  
The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts in cooperation with the University of Hawaii  
at Hilo Continuing Education and Community Service and The University Theatre

Hilo College Auditorium  
November 13, 1975  
7:00 p.m.

Kennedy Theatre  
November 15, 16, 1975  
8:00 p.m.

The Lyceum Series 1975-76 presents

# The Dancers and Musicians of the Burmese National Theater

Directed by U THAN MYINT

**Dancers:**

Daw Nu Nu Khin	U Myint Swe
Daw Khin Than Htay	U Soe Nyein
Daw Mary	U Sein Win
	U Tin Tun

**Musicians:**

U Sein Chit Tee, Leader of the Orchestra (*Patt Waing*, drum circle)  
U Soe Tint (*Kyi Waing*, brass gong circle)  
U Shwe Tun (*Maung Hsaing*, brass gong square)  
U Mya Gyi (*Nhai*, flute)  
U Than Tun (small cymbals and clapper)  
U Than Aung (big cymbals and big drum)  
U Kyi (bass drums)

The United States tour of The Dancers and Musicians of the Burmese National Theater is sponsored by the Performing Arts Program of the Asia Society under a grant from Lila Acheson Wallace.

## PROGRAM

### **BURMESE DANCE TECHNIQUE**

These basic movements and patterns, taught to Burmese dancers before they even begin to learn dances, take four years to master. About twenty-five exercises are learned each year. Since there are different movements for men and women, there are as many as two hundred variations. Beginning with bending exercises to the accompaniment of rhythmic drumming, the movements become increasingly intricate. Each pattern is an eight-count phrase separated by two- or four-count transitions. These exercises never shown in public before will be performed by the entire dance ensemble.

### **THE DANCE OF THE NAT VOTARESS**

At the beginning of the program, it is traditional to appeal to the *nats* (spirits) to ensure a successful performance. The ritual music accompanying this dance has been preserved exactly as it was originally played for fear of offending the spirits if changes were made.

Daw Khin Than Htay or Daw Mary

### **THE PRINCE RETURNS FROM TAXILA**

One of the main scenes in Burmese drama is the return of the prince from the ancient university of Taxila bringing his bride with him. Since the only means of travel in olden times was on foot, the journey was rough and tiring. The bride feels the strain of travel. To soothe her, the prince tries to divert her attention to the beauty of the scenery. Finally, he offers to carry her.

U Myint Swe and Daw Nu Nu Khin

### **ZAWGYI DANCE**

The *zawgyi*, a sorcerer, possesses such superhuman powers as flying, passing through earth and water, and the ability to bring to life the tree-born fruit maidens.

U Soe Nyein

*Intermission*



## **Tales from the Ramayana:**

### **DASAGIRI AND THE INVITATION TO PARASURAMA**

While meditating high on a mountain top, Parasurama receives King Janaka's invitation to participate in a bow contest. The prize to the winner is Princess Sita's hand in marriage. The invitation is accompanied by a portrait of Sita. Since Parasurama is "practicing austerities," he tosses away the invitation which floats down the mountainside to fall into the lap of Dasagiri, the demon king. Dasagiri falls in love with the princess depicted in the portrait and decides to accept the invitation brought to him on the wind. This scene from the *Ramayana* is unique and originally Burmese.

U Sein Win and U Tin Tun

### **THE BOW CONTEST**

To win the contest, the bow must be lifted from the ground and strung. Dasagiri, the strongest of all the competitors, can only lift the divine bow, yet he demands the winner's prize. Prince Rama and his younger brother, Lakhana, come to the rescue of Princess Sita. To Dasagiri's surprise, Lakhana not only lifts the bow, he also strings it. But then he puts it down and urges Rama to lift and string it. Rama easily accomplishes this feat. The object of this scene is to portray love of justice and active resistance against injustice.

U Sein Win, U Myint Swe, U Tin Tun, U Soe Nyein, Daw Nu Nu Khin

### **RAMA AND THE ENCHANTED DEER**

Dasagiri sends an enchanted deer to Rama and Sita's palace. Sita insists on having the beautiful deer and refuses to listen to Rama's warnings that the deer is a demon in disguise. Because of his love for Sita, Rama goes after the deer, deep into the forest, leaving Sita unprotected. This scene shows human weakness in the face of temptation.

U Sein Win, U Myint Swe, U Tin Tun, U Soe Nyein, Daw Nu Nu Khin

### **SITA'S REJECTION OF DASAGIRI'S COURTSHIP**

The demoness attending the captured Sita tells of Dasagiri's flying chariot and enormous wealth, trying to persuade her to submit to Dasagiri. She also tries to entertain her. Dasagiri appears and woos Sita who uses her scarf as a defense against him. She successfully resists all his advances. The object of this scene is to demonstrate the value of resistance to temptation.

U Tin Tun and Daw Nu Nu Khin



**More than a thousand years ago**, during the T'ang dynasty in China, a troupe of Burmese dancers and musicians visited the imperial court of Ch'ang-an, the then cultural capital of the world, and entertained the emperor, "singing songs containing Sanskrit words" and performing "spelling dances, lining up in a pattern." Watching them, the poet Po Chu-i wrote:

At one blow from the copper gong,  
their painted limbs leap,  
Pearl streams glitter as they twist,  
as though stars are shaken from the sky . . .

It was a new, strange sort of dance and music even for that sophisticated audience. And it is equally new and wonderful to American audiences since no performing art has ever come to the United States from Burma before.

**From 800 A.D. until the nineteenth century**, the tradition of including a *pwe* (a "show") with song, dance, music, and drama at the beginning and the conclusion of all important events was gladly adhered to. Incidents of the *Ramayana* began to be performed in the eighteenth century. Of all the many scenes that elaborate this Hindu epic in various Southeast Asian nations, only in Burma are the soft and romantic episodes emphasized over the war-like sequences.

**The cultural independence of the Burmese is reflected in even more ways.** Nowhere in the world is there an orchestra like the *saing* in which the melody is carried by the drums. The twenty-one drums of the *Patt Waing*, are tuned by the drummer, the conductor of the orchestra, by making a little circle of tuning paste in the center of each drumhead — a paste made of soft-boiled buffalo rice mixed with ash of five different kinds of wood. Nowhere in the world is there quite the same admixture of animistic *nat*-worship with the powerful, all-per-vading Buddhism of the country. Nowhere do the dancers manipulate white tubular trains sewn to the hems of their long skirts, snaking and billowing to the movement of their feet while performing steps with names like "puppet moves quickly," "seagull flies with spread wings," or "peacock tail hand behind." The tradition is centuries old and yet Burmese dance techniques are strikingly like contemporary Western approaches to dance.

This third program in the 1975-76 Lyceum Series is given in honor of **Jeffrey Fleece**, the founder of the Lyceum, who retired from the University of Hawaii in September, 1975, after twenty years of service. Dr. Fleece instigated the idea of making the knowledge and talent on the University of Hawaii campus available to the rest of the State. The early years consisted of free lectures on Hawaii, Maui, and Kauai by members of the University faculty on topics from Shakespeare to sharks. The highlight of this period was the neighbor island tour of Amahl and the Night Visitors, a production done by the Central Union Church.

In 1965 the Lyceum Program was formally established and soon thereafter began to offer programs from the mainland. In 1966 the Program began to collaborate closely with The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, which gave the first of an annual series of grants. With the continuing support of the University of Hawaii, including the Community Colleges and the Department of Music and Drama on the Moana Campus, the Lyceum Program has presented such distinguished productions as The Awaji Puppet Theatre of Japan; the Royal Shakespeare Company; the Nikolais Dance Theatre; San Francisco Ballet; and others as part of an endeavor to offer the finest performing arts of Asia and the Western World as well as the popular arts of the past and present to communities throughout the State.

**Acknowledgements:**

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Kennedy Theatre—Takeo Miji, Mark Boyd; House Manager: Aletha Worrall;  
Box Office: Karen Brilliance, David Furumoto, Lester Mau, Elsie Yamakawa

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University Relations—Gay Burk, Michael Tamaru

Brigham Young University-Hawaii—Allan Oleole

Norman Geschwind

Prof. D. H. Roop

Harriet Johnson

Maung Maung Kyi and Sybil Kyi

**Coming Events**

**Mary Anthony Dance Company:**

November 18 ..... Brigham Young University—HI Auditorium

November 20 ..... Leeward Community College Theatre

November 22 ..... Kauai War Memorial Conventional Hall

November 25 ..... Baldwin High School Auditorium (Maui)

November 28 ..... Hilo College Auditorium

**McLain Family Band:**

January 23, 24 ..... Place to be announced

**NOTICE:** Smoking is not allowed in the auditorium nor may photographs or recordings be made during performance.