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Dramatic Publishing

Tales of Trickery

A Triad of
Comic
Indonesian Folk Tales

by
KIM ALAN WHEETLEY



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(TALES OF TRICKERY)

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NOTE

This play can be presented with the utmost simplicity using available music sources and props. It has proven very successful when done this way.

For background information and for advanced groups who wish to do a more elaborate production, a complete description of a traditional Topeng presentation is included in the Author's Production Notes at the back of the book.

TALES OF TRICKERY

This play requires a minimum of 9 people (3 men, 3 women, and 3 either male or female) plus an indefinite number of either men or women as desired, plus musicians.

CAST

PROCESSION and INVOCATION

The Company
The Permangku

THE WIDOW AND THE WEALTHY NEIGHBOR

The Dancer
The Female Storyteller
The Male Storyteller
Two Attendants
The Orchestra

THE MONKEY AND THE BARONG

The Storyteller
The Monkey
The Barong (two dancers)
Two Attendants
The Orchestra

THE BUFFALO AND THE BELL

Pandji, a simple-minded farmer (pand-ye)
Sukani, his domineering wife (soo-kan-e)
Klungkung, a notorious cheat (kloong-koong)
Kalebet, his clumsy confederate (ka-la-bat)
Kalabuat, their attractive companion (ka-la-boot)
Masak, the old vendor (ma-sak)
Dalang, the puppeteer (da-lang)
The Orchestra

BENEDICTION

The Company
The Permangku

PROCESSION AND INVOCATION

(The MUSICIANS take their places. Three gongs. Gamelan music.)

An Indonesian temple procession approaches. Two BEARERS lead the procession carrying pendjos, tall bamboo poles encased with long tapering banners which arch down to bell-tipped ends. Next comes a WATER CARRIER with a vessel of water, shaded by a fringed ceremonial umbrella carried by an ATTENDANT. The PERMANGKU, a white-clad temple priest follows, shaded by a second umbrella carried by another ATTENDANT. Next come WOMEN balancing ornate pyramids of fruit and flowers on their heads. Last come the PERFORMERS bearing puppets and baskets of masks.

(The WATER CARRIER, PERMANGKU, and UMBRELLA ATTENDANTS assume a central position, flanked by the PENDJO BEARERS.) (Gong.)

PERMANGKU.

Selamat Datang.

Welcome from us to you.

Welcome from the South Pacific,

From a realm of tall bamboo.

Our land is many islands,

Volcanic peaks in waters blue,

Crowned with rice paddy terraces

And lush forests damp with dew.

(The pendjos are crossed in front of the PERMANGKU who uses a flower to sprinkle them with water. (Windchimes.) The pendjos are then set into standards at either side of the multi-colored horizontally-striped curtain.)

These tall graceful pendjos

Announce our coming to the wind.

We sprinkle them with water

To purify the signs they send.

Come share in our festivities.
Your cares for a spell suspend.
Travel now through space and time,
As the past and the present blend.

(Gong.)

Savor exotic sounds and sights
From the land of the Indonesian.

(The WOMEN remove the pyramids of fruit and flowers from their heads and cross before the PERMANGKU who sprinkles the offerings with water. (Windchimes.) The offerings are then placed beside the pendjos.)

Pyramids of fruit and flowers,
Balanced with grace and ease,
Crafted in the dawn of day
As offerings meant to please.

(Gamelan music.)

Hear the harmonies of the gamelan
Floating on the gentle breeze.

(The PERFORMERS display their puppets and masks which the PERMANGKU blesses. Windchimes. The PERFORMERS then take their positions.)

Meet the actors with their masks
Who will portray both beast and man.
And observe the puppets soon to be
Animated by an “unseen” artisan.

As is the custom in the East,
Attendants will provide a prop or fan,
And storytellers will spin their tales
As they have since time began.

(Gong.)

Three tales from Indonesia.
Tales of tricks by friend and foe.
A monkey will play his mischief
On a burly beast from long ago.

(Bell.)

And then the tale of a magic bell,
A farmer, and his water buffalo.

(Bell.)

But first, "The Widow and The Neighbor,"
A story mixed with joy and with woe.

(Gongs.) (The PERMANGKU and WATER CARRIER withdraw.
The ATTENDANTS set the umbrellas in front of the pendjos
to shade the offerings. The central stage is now clear for the
first story.)

THE WIDOW AND THE WEALTHY NEIGHBOR

(Employing the traditional Topeng Pajegan style, one dancer will portray all three characters by changing masks. Storytellers will provide the narration and voices, and attendants will manipulate the props and puppets.

(Drums and gamelan music.) The STORYTELLERS appear ceremoniously and kneel downstage. One holds a basket containing the three masks. The other STORYTELLER holds a tray containing a vessel of water, a flower, and a stick of burning incense. They are flanked by two ATTENDANTS who hold a staff and an umbrella.

The DANCER enters and approaches the unopened basket which is held aloft by the FIRST STORYTELLER.)

DANCER.

Sleeping in this bed of grass . . .
Honored spirits from the past.

Awaken from thy peaceful trance.
Awaken now and prepare to dance.

(The DANCER knocks (woodblock) on the basket three times, opens it, and, using a flower, sprinkles water (windchimes) onto the masks. The FIRST STORYTELLER places the basket on the ground and removes the first mask, holding it parallel to the ground facing skyward. Holding a burning stick of sandalwood incense up to the nostrils of the mask, the DANCER chants a magic mantra.)

Sa. Ba. Ta.

(The mask quivers (bells) and suddenly shoots upward facing the audience. (Gong.) The FIRST STORYTELLER carefully places the awakened mask in the basket lid so that it is visible to the audience, while the SECOND STORYTELLER removes the second mask and holds it facing skyward. The DANCER passes the incense across the mask's nostrils.)

I. Nang. Mang.

(The mask quivers (bells) and shoots upward facing the audience. (Gong.) As it is placed in the lid beside the first mask, the FIRST STORYTELLER removes the third mask, and the ritual is repeated.)

Sing. Wang. Ya.

(Bells.) (Gongs.) (The third mask is placed beside the others as the DANCER wais, or bows, to the audience.)

DANCER.

The name of our play is "The Widow and The Wealthy Neighbor," a favorite tale in Indonesia. (Gong.) There are three char-

acters . . . (As each character is introduced, the STORYTELLERS hand the appropriate mask to the DANCER who holds it before his face and assumes the character's stance.) . . . an old widow . . . (Autoharp.) (The DANCER leans on a staff supplied by the FIRST ATTENDANT.) . . . the widow's wealthy, but selfish, neighbor . . . (Drums.) (The SECOND ATTENDANT raises an umbrella above the Dancer's head.) . . . and the neighbor's timorous servant. (Woodblock.) (The masks are replaced in the basket.) And now, our play begins. (Gong.) (The PERFORMERS wai to each other. The DANCER and the ATTENDANTS carrying the props retire behind the curtain. The STORYTELLERS kneel DL and DR. (Flute music.)

FEMALE STORYTELLER.

At the edge of the forest stood a rickety old hut. This was the humble dwelling of a poor old widow.

(The curtain shakes gently. (Autoharp.) The curtain shakes again (autoharp) and the DANCER appears wearing the widow's mask, supported by a staff.) (Flute music continues.)

The widow's clothes were old and tattered, and she often went without food. Her neighbors were all quite wealthy, but they were too greedy and too selfish to help her.

"My problem is my age. When I was young, I was able to work and earn a little money, but now I am too old."

(The FIRST ATTENDANT precedes her, placing stylized "sticks" on the path (clave), which she collects.)

"Each day I wander through the forest, collecting sticks for firewood, which I trade in the village for a little rice."

(Flute music fades.)

One day during the height of the dry season, the old widow set out to search for twigs in the forest. She moved slowly as the blazing sun . . .

(Cymbal rolls.)

. . . beat down on her poor aching body. Stumbling along a dusty path, she came to a wide river.

(Slow gamelan music.) (ATTENDANTS unfurl two water cloths, giving them to the STORYTELLERS to control. The ATTENDANTS then kneel behind the cloths to manipulate the stylized fish puppets atop the waves.)

But the river was almost dry due to the heat . . .

(Cymbals.)

. . . and lack of rain. Moving closer, she noticed a school of fish wriggling in a shallow pool.

(Drum heartbeats.)

“What a stroke of good fortune. Just look at all these fish waiting to be picked up. Oh, at last I have something to eat.”

But as she reached out to pick up the first one, a great wave of sympathy . . .

(Windchimes.)

. . . swept over her, and tears filled her eyes.

“It’s true that my lot is hard, but it is nothing compared to the suffering of these poor helpless fish.”

As she pulled back her hand, a remarkable thing happened.

(Gongs.)

The largest of the fish rose up and called out in a man’s voice.

MALE STORYTELLER.

“Siwa! O mighty Siwa! We pray to you for rain. Send us rain or we will die!”

(Faster gamelan music.)

FEMALE STORYTELLER.

The frightened widow sprang back in alarm and hastened up the bank. As the fish continued to pray, black clouds began to gather in the sky, and a howling wind sprang up.

(Lightning and storm sounds.)

Suddenly a downpour of rain soaked the dry earth. The river began to flow again . . .

(The STORYTELLERS ripple the water cloths.)

. . . and the fish swam happily away.

(The ATTENDANTS exit, with the fish puppets, as the STORYTELLERS withdraw the water cloths. Music fades.)

“I have seen a miracle! The fish called out to Siwa for aid, and they were saved. If Siwa helped them, would he also help me? I’ll ask, but not for rain. I’ll ask for money.”

And so she began calling to Siwa as she hurried home.

(Gongs.)

“Siwa! O mighty Siwa! I pray to you for money. Send me money or I will die!”

(The WIDOW exits through the curtains.)

She repeated her cry again and again, louder and louder.

“Siwa! O mighty Siwa! Send me money or I will die!”

(The Widow’s pleas and the gongs continue subdued.)

MALE STORYTELLER.

Her shouting made a terrible noise, disturbing her nearest neighbor . . .

(The curtain shakes violently.) (Drum.)

. . . the wealthiest man in the village.

(The curtain shakes even more violently (drum) and the DANCER appears wearing the Neighbor's mask. The SECOND ATTENDANT manipulates an umbrella which "comes to life" as a companion of the NEIGHBOR; a visualization of his ego.)

The more she shouted, the angrier he became. At last he could bear no more and he marched over to her hut.

(Drum.)

"Stop that noise, you silly old woman! You're driving me crazy!"

(Umbrella twirls.) (Ratchet.)

"Siwa will never answer your prayer. You're wasting your time, and giving me a headache!"

(Umbrella pulsates.) (Drum.)

"If you want money so badly, go into the forest and gather some sticks. You'll never get money by shouting for it."

FEMALE STORYTELLER.

But the old woman kept on praying.

"Siwa! O mighty Siwa! Send me money or I will die!"

(The Widow's pleas and the gongs crescendo, then continue subdued.)

MALE STORYTELLER.

Shaking his fist at her, the wealthy neighbor stalked home.

(Drum.) (Umbrella remains at the curtain, shaking in anger. The NEIGHBOR gestures for it to accompany him. It does and they cross downstage to a pool of light.)

He tried to sleep, but the noise from next door pounded in his head . . .

(Umbrella pulsates.) (Drum.)

. . . and his temper got shorter and shorter.

(Ratchet.) (Umbrella closes about his head like an earmuff.)

The next morning he could bear it no longer!

(Cymbals.) (Umbrella rockets upward, returning to plot with the NEIGHBOR.)

And he determined . . .

(Gongs and prayers cease.)

. . . to silence her!

(Gongs and prayers resume.)

With his head ringing with sound, he grabbed a large sack and began to fill it with all sorts of rubble . . .

(The FIRST ATTENDANT manipulates the sack and rubble.)
(Percussion noises.)

. . . with broken bricks, and old tiles, and shattered glass. Tying it with a rope, he hoisted the sack onto his shoulder and staggered off to the old woman's hut.

(The NEIGHBOR climbs onto the First Attendant's shoulders and they edge along the front of the curtain as the umbrella tries to keep its balance.)

Climbing up on the roof, the neighbor carefully inched his way over to a large hole. Looking down, he saw the widow directly below. As her prayers rose upward, the neighbor deliberately dropped the sack of rubble right on top of her.

(The sack is tossed over the curtain. (Slide whistle and crash.)
The prayers cease. The umbrella twirls.)

“That’ll stop your noise, old woman! Your prayers have been answered . . . with rubble!”

Shaking with laughter, the neighbor lost his balance . . .

(Ratchet.)

“Ohhh . . . Oooooohhhh! . . .”

. . . and fell off the roof.

(Slide whistle.)

“Aaaggghhh!”

(The NEIGHBOR and ATTENDANTS disappear behind the curtain.) (Crash.)

FEMALE STORYTELLER.

Dazed by the blow, the old widow lay on the floor gazing at the huge sack beside her. Suddenly realizing that her pleas had been answered, she struggled to her feet and hurried outside.

(The DANCER wearing the widow’s mask enters through the curtain. (Autoharp.) The FIRST ATTENDANT carries the sack.)

“O merciful Siwa! Thank you for your marvelous gift! This is certainly more than I ever expected.”

Trembling with joy, the old widow untied the rope and peered into the sack. It was completely full of coins!