

# A taste of the exotic arts from Indonesian dancers

By Mary Fraker  
Last Wednesday, the audience in York's Burton Auditorium was treated to a rare glimpse of two of

Sunda, Indonesia's unique art forms: *Penca* - a dance style derived from the art of self-defense, and *Topeng Babakan* - a narrative dance

accompanied by gamelan music.

A demonstration of *Penca* comprised the first half of the evening. The movements are derived partly from imitating animals - particularly the tiger and the monkey - and this influence was apparent as the dancers alternated between circular, calculated stalking and quick, erratic punches and grabs.

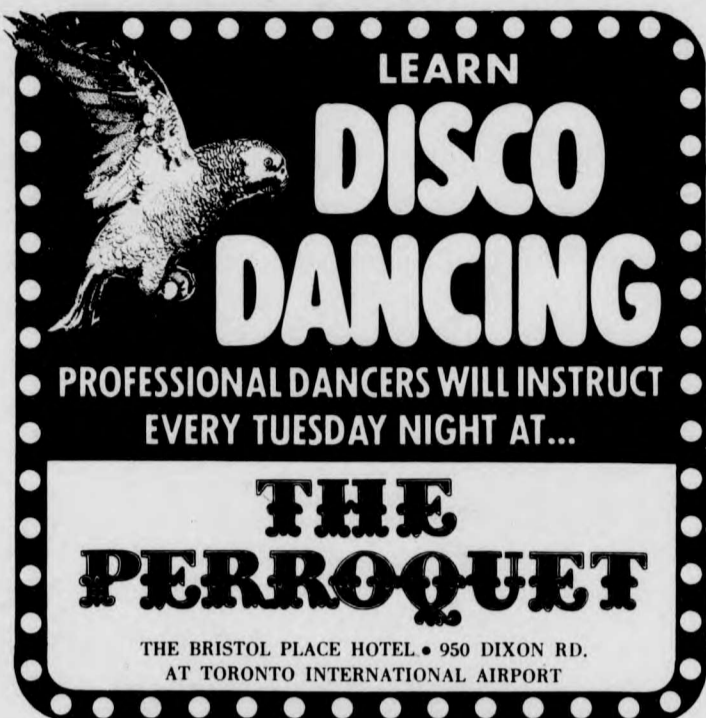
*Penca* is eclectic and idiosyncratic, and part of its effectiveness seems to lie in confusing one's opponent, but a practitioner of the art has a number of equally deadly means to choose from. Most of the exercises were performed as solos, but eyes were as full of lethal concentration as if they had been focused on flesh-and-blood adversaries, and it required little imagination to recognize potentially bone-breaking and viscera-tearing attacks. And - when they finally brought their weapons - swords, knives and blood-curdling three-pronged daggers - there could be no doubt about the deadly applications of their art.

It was a formidable team, and the tension created by their presence was lessened once by an air-borne backflip, and later by an almost burlesque confrontation in which two of the men went at each other with knives, swords, and finally a drum! The dancers accompanied each other throughout on a two-headed drum, a gong, and a pair of *tarompets*, nasal-sounding reed instruments with mouthpieces that give the musicians broad metal smiles as they play.

For each dance *Sujana* took a mask, holding it to get into the mood of the character and invoking the spirits' help, then put it on, becoming the character.


The stylized masks - some red, some white, all painted with bold

black features-helped to delineate the characters, but *Sujana's* subtle characterizations brought them to life. At the end of each dance it was astonishing to see the same human face emerge from behind such different masks.



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## Right Hand Left Hand

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All in all, this book is both an important historical document as well as a fascinating glimpse into a troubled but exciting epoch, and into the mind of a great woman communist.

This is perhaps the most interesting revelation of *RHLH* - a communist *ought* to be narrow-minded, scheming, dogmatic prude, n'est-ce pas? But this woman is the antithesis of these traits. Perhaps it isn't just Stalin who was guilty of rewriting history!

Unfortunately for Dee (and for many others) Stalin did exist. This is where *RHLH* is unavoidably weak as an historical document. That is, the broader political undercurrents which led eventually to Dee's disaffection with "the party", and its loss of "moral leadership", as claimed in the introduction.

It is interesting concerning this question that Dee ends her memoirs at the point where Churchill gave "his support to Stalin" (after Hitler had been given *carte blanche* by the Allies to rearm to destroy "world communism").

This indeed was "a moment of intense emotion" for Dee and her comrades, the culmination of years of struggle in support of this "world communism". She leaves her later political development however a tantalising mystery.

And yet, a most interesting clue surfaced just this summer in the form of an article Dee wrote for the *Globe* concerning the International Writers' Conference, held this year in Bulgaria.

Dee, Farley Mowat, and several other eminent *Canadian* writers (i.e., tinged with "proletarianitis") participated. Dee was greatly impressed with the economic and intellectual freedom of writers living in contemporary socialist countries, and said so. This, of course, raised the hackles of *Globe* readers for months after!

Nonetheless, Stalin is long dead and buried. To face the problems of the 1970s, perhaps we can pick up the struggle which Dee unfolds for us in her memoirs:

"To burst - Out of the earth again, another spring!"

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<b>FOLK AND BLUES</b> Amateur folk and blues musicians are invited to perform every Thursday night in the Café. 8:30 p.m.	<b>POETRY EVENING</b> Every Tuesday night in the Café. This week's guest reader is <b>Anita Latner</b> . 8:30 p.m.
<b>HARBOURFRONT ART GALLERY</b> Grant Assisted Art Part 4 opens in the Gallery on Friday, November 4. Paintings and works on paper by <b>Judith Allsopp, Ken Hopper, Richard Bonderenko and Elizabeth Leszczynski</b> .	<b>WEDNESDAY NIGHT AT THE MOVIES</b> Next Wednesday (Nov. 9) see two views of China: <b>Bethune</b> , depicting his work during the Communist revolution, and <b>The Other Half of the Sky: A China Memoir</b> , which documents the visit of eight American women to China. 7:30 p.m. in the Café.

Free admission (unless otherwise stated). Free parking. For more information on these and other programs during the week, call us at 364-5665.