

## FROM THE EDITORS

The papers brought together for this issue of the *Malaysian Journal of Performing and Visual Arts* (MJPVA) range from several disciplines as follows: Ikebana or Japanese flower arrangement, music education and composition, as well as Aesthetics of the Kelantan Malay shadow play.

The first paper deals with the important question of regionalism in cultural and artistic phenomena with special reference to music composition. Following a definition of regionalism, it raises the question whether, with global travel and communication becoming so easy in the past century or so, regionalism still exists. The author believes that there, in fact, persists a misconception that regionalism has declined with globalisation. In the author's view regional identity has, on the contrary, strengthened due to enhanced regional pride. The author then goes on to the "constructive and valuable" importance of regional pride in contemporary classical music compositions through *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, a Malaysian composition for solo piano. This piece, according to the author, includes active references to gamelan musical nuances juxtaposed with Western compositional styles. The piece thus demonstrates that two contrasting regional musical influences "collide and collaborate" into a single work of art. The paper concludes with an analysis of how the author's own composition corresponds with and supports such a broader artistic phenomenon.

The second paper examines the implementation of School-based Assessment (SBA) in a selected Malaysian lower secondary school focusing on the study of music. SBA, better known in Bahasa Melayu as *Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah* (PBS), was introduced in 2011 in primary schools and 2012 in secondary schools as an alternative to the exam-oriented learning generally practiced in public schools. The authors examine the teaching methods following one author's immersion into the system, as well as observations of, and interviews with, various stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, officers of Examination Syndicate, officers of Education Department in the state and district, parents, and students. This study aims to draw insights into the implementation of SBA, highlighting the different opinions and issues arising in SBA's implementation in the music subject.

The *ikebana* paper, written by an established practitioner of the art of Japanese flower arrangement, provides a rare historical perspective into the practice, with particular reference to the *tatehana*, style, involving standing branches or flowers stems. Based on the author's own field observation and documentation, the paper provides insight into the art of *ikebana* and rites connected with the veneration of the mountain deity. These in turn gave rise to the practice of placing a branch cut from the top of a large tree in a flower pot to decorate the *tokonoma* (wall niche) in a Japanese house. The author traces the development of the ancient belief in trees and the formalisation of such a belief in the *tatehana* style from the Muromachi (1338-1573) period, to the present through several stages including *rikka* (standing branch or flower style), which came into being during the early Edo period in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the *seika* or *shoka* style a century later in the same period.

The tree- or mountain- shaped figure known as *gunungan* or *kayon* in the Indonesian shadow play and as *pohon beringin* in the Malaysian shadow play of Kelantan State is the subject of the third paper. By far the most important figure in a complete set of several dozen puppets in the classical Javanese *wayang kulit purwa* and the Malay *wayang kulit* Kelantan, the Malaysian *pohon beringin* is examined in the next paper. Among theories advanced to explain the origins and development of these two as well as other forms of Southeast Asian shadow play, perhaps the most convincing indicates the likely origins of the Indonesian-Malay *wayang Kulit* within Java and a dispersal thence into the other Indonesian islands as well as into northern parts of the Malay peninsula. One vital indication, among many, of such connections including rituals, functions of the shadow play as well aesthetics, is the use of the *kayon* or *pohon beringin* figure, which is unique to Indonesian and Malay *wayang kulit* styles. All the same, external elements or influences have served to shape the traditional arts forms of the Indonesian-Malay world (Nusantara). These have come from a variety of sources including Hinduism, Buddhism as well as Islam, all transplanted upon an indigenous animistic base.

The first part of the *wayang kulit* paper traces the origins, meaning and significance of the mountain and tree figure in general in several of the cultures that diversely influenced Javanese and Malay cultural manifestations, and the *kayon* and *pohon beringin* figures in particular. Such a figure belongs uniquely to these two forms of puppetry although, in Indonesia, the use of the *kayon* has spread into newer forms of puppetry, into human theatre and also into general use. The second part of the paper presents a detailed visual analysis of examples of two types of *pohon beringin* encountered in *wayang kulit* Kelantan, the first purely arboreal and the second containing living creatures. The analysis is based upon puppets in the collection of well-known Kelantan puppeteers as well as the co-author of the paper. It establishes possible connections with visual imagery as well as designs in other traditional art forms, such as batik, rooted in a common heritage of motifs and symbols within the Nusantara region. While interesting in itself as an introductory study to the subject of *wayang kulit* Kelantan design, this paper certainly indicates potential research that may take into consideration not just the *pohon beringin* but also other figures used the Kelantan shadow play.

The papers in this edition of MJPVA have expanded the range of subjects compared to previous issues. Particularly significant is the inclusion of Nakayama's paper on the historical development of ikebana, the first on an East Asian art form. While refreshing in themselves, these papers indicate the potential for the journal to bring into its fold new disciplines and fresh approaches to the performing and visual arts.