

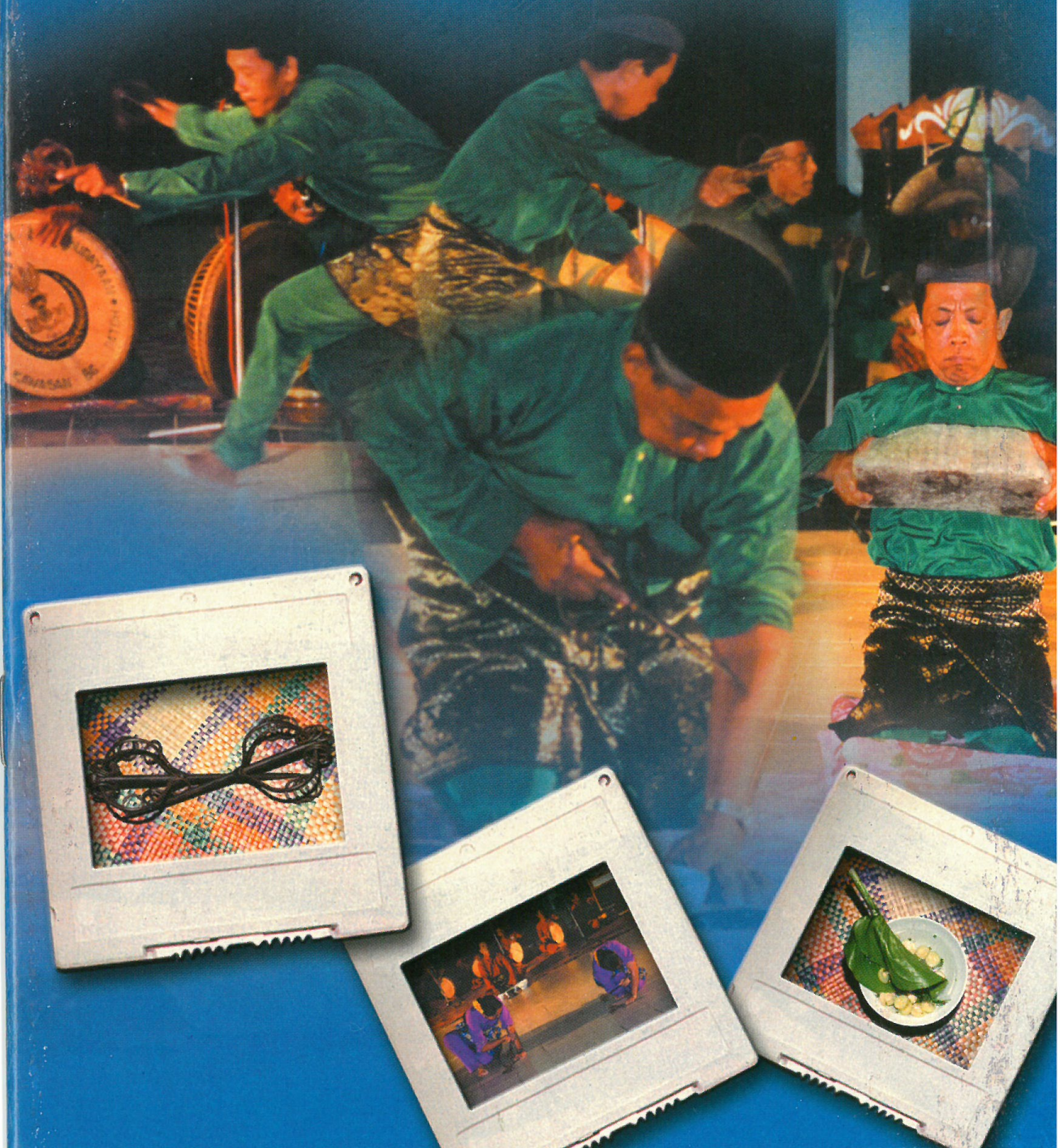
A Collection of Cultural Appreciation Series

1/2003



CULTURAL APPRECIATION SERIES 1/2003

Dabus





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INTRODUCTION

Widely regarded as a combination of dance, singing and the expression of courage using sharp weapons, *Dabus* is originally an art of self-defence. The traits of a warrior such as dexterity, skillfulness, speed and liveliness is important to the concept of *Dabus*.

First performed about 300 years ago in the state of Perak *Dabus* has been able to withstand the test of time and is still being enjoyed and performed by lovers of traditional Malay art forms. According to research, groups in *Lumut*, *Pasir Panjang Laut*, *Setiawan* and *Teluk Intan* in the state of Perak still actively perform *Dabus*.

Although not categorised as one of the more popular traditional dances in Malay society, *Dabus* is considered as one of the main traditional dances in the state of Perak.

IDENTITI

Each dancer in *Dabus* uses a type of 'weapon' called *anak dabus*. The use of this weapon in the dance, provides the essence without which, *Dabus* will lose its identity. Dancers would use these weapons to poke themselves. A faithful performance of *Dabus* usually incorporates the use of other sharp weapons by the dancers to increase the impact of the performance. The use of a variety of sharp weapons in *Dabus* is to highlight the aggressive nature of the dance.

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HAMDOLOK





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INTRODUCTION

One of Malay cultural heritage that is still relatively unknown in this country is 'masadeka' or better known as *Hamdolok*. This folk-dance performance of artistic and cultural value is a fusion of Middle Eastern and Malay vernacular environment cultures. Therefore, one glance would see a performance and costumes which are based on the cultures of the Arabs (Middle Eastern).

Because the dance is known to the people, in general the cast who make up the *Hamdolok* dance consist of local characters, particularly from a certain district in Batu Pahat, Johor.

These dance groups' performances are generally only limited to certain occasions, such as certain ceremonies, gatherings, carnivals, cultural shows and at private functions.

When performed, *Hamdolok* contains elements of singing, dancing, and musical performance. The group is made up of between fifteen to twenty performers, each having their own roles, depending on the character, the costume worn and the musical instrument being played.

At the said ceremonies, the dance functions as entertainment to add to the gaiety of the occasions, besides introducing and upholding its cultural values to prevent it from fading away from the knowledge of the people.



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Mekmulung



The background of the page is a monochromatic, sepia-toned illustration depicting a theatrical performance. In the foreground, several figures are visible: a man in a white dhoti and shawl is seated on the left, looking towards the right. Another man in a white dhoti is standing in the center, facing away from the viewer. To the right, a woman in a sari is partially visible. The background shows more figures, some standing and some seated, in a dimly lit setting that suggests a stage or a traditional performance space. The entire illustration is rendered in shades of brown and orange, matching the book's cover color.

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INTRODUCTION

Mek Mulung is a mixture of art that is combined into one performance. It includes acting, singing, dancing and of course, music! Even though the show may appear simplistic it is nonetheless unique and has a high aesthetic value.

ORIGIN

It was claimed that *Mek Mulung* originated from Ligor, in Siam and was later introduced to Kedah during the Kedah-Siam confrontation. It was first performed in Kg. Perit, in the territorial division of Kurung Itam, Kuala Nerang. Later, it reached Kampung Belukar Mulung, Kampung Paya Keladi and finally Kampung Wang Tepus.

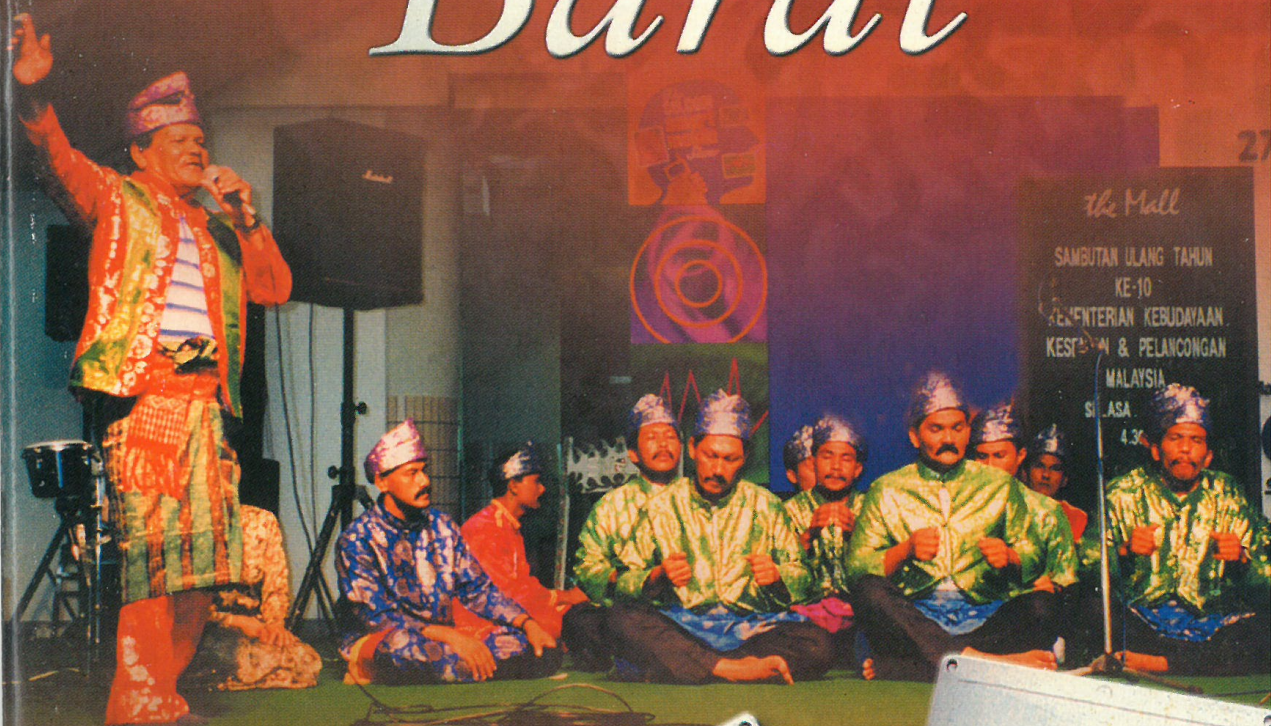
It is known today that *Mek Mulung* originated from Kampung Wang Tepus, Jitra, Kedah Darul Aman. *Mek Mulung* stems from the root word '*Mek*' which means young lady, and '*Mulung*' the name of a jungle where the art began.

According to the legend, a king called *Raja Ligor* was bestowed with a daughter. Heeding advice from his *Tok Nujum* (mystic advisor/fortune teller) His Majesty disposed of the princess. Tok Nujum prophesized that she would bring bad luck to the King and country. The princess was sent to the heart of the Mulung jungle accompanied by her loyal *inang* (ladies-in-waiting) who went at their own will.



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Dikir Barat



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INTRODUCTION

Dikir Barat is a style of “call and response singing” performing art that is very popular among the Malay people in Kelantan and Patani. Unlike any other traditional performing arts, it is more popular among the commoners than the royalties. It is performed by farmers during the harvest season and occasionally at weddings and festive events. A *Dikir Barat* competition is also frequently organised by local youth associations, government agencies and local authorities as ways to collect fund.

Dikir Barat is relatively new compared to other traditional theaters. However, the development of *Dikir Barat* is unique as it has evolved numerous times. The speciality of *Dikir Barat* is the energy it projects which revives the audience through its musical form. It centres on a match of wit between two teams. Each team weaves a continuous stream of impromptu, rhythmic verses, ridiculing and pinning down the arguments of the opposing side. The main characters in this performance are the *juara* and the *tukang karut*. The former being the ‘head’ of the group usually sings a long song comprising a chorus and several verses. The *tukang karut*, or the lyricist on the other hand, sings songs in short bursts. He is usually the wittier of the two and does most of the ridiculing. The rest of the group is made up of chorus singers and percussionists who play the instruments.



Juara in Dikir Barat

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BORIA





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INTRODUCTION

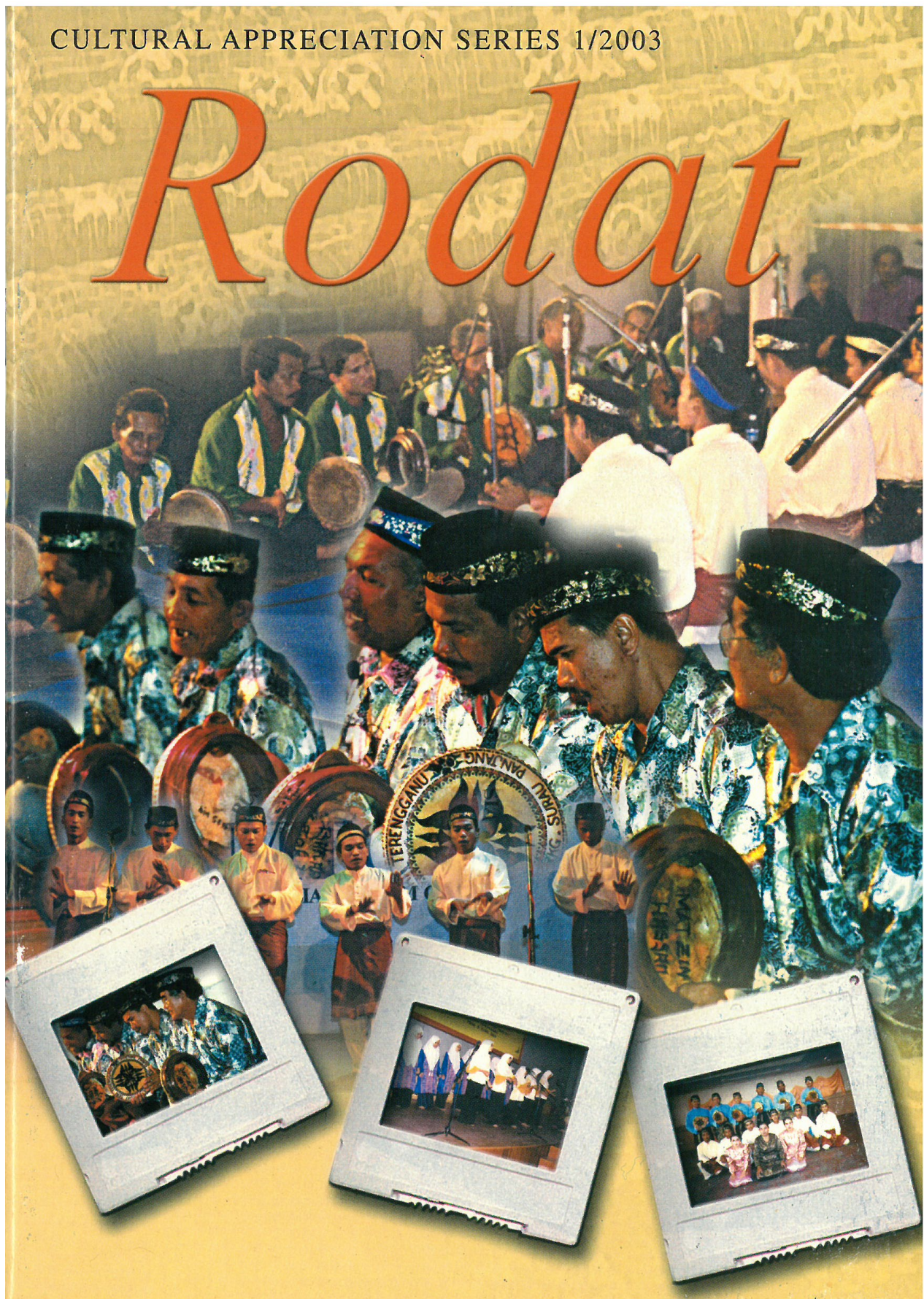
Boria is a type of theater performance that is very popular in the north of Malaysia, particularly in Pulau Pinang. The performance is divided into two segments, comic sketches followed by singing and chorus dancing. Both segments are interdependent in determining the success of the performance. Originally, the artists were all men. Even the character of a woman was played by a man dressed up in woman attire. The acting is filled with sight gags and fictitious comical drama to spice up the performance.



The comedy sketch in Boria

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Roddat



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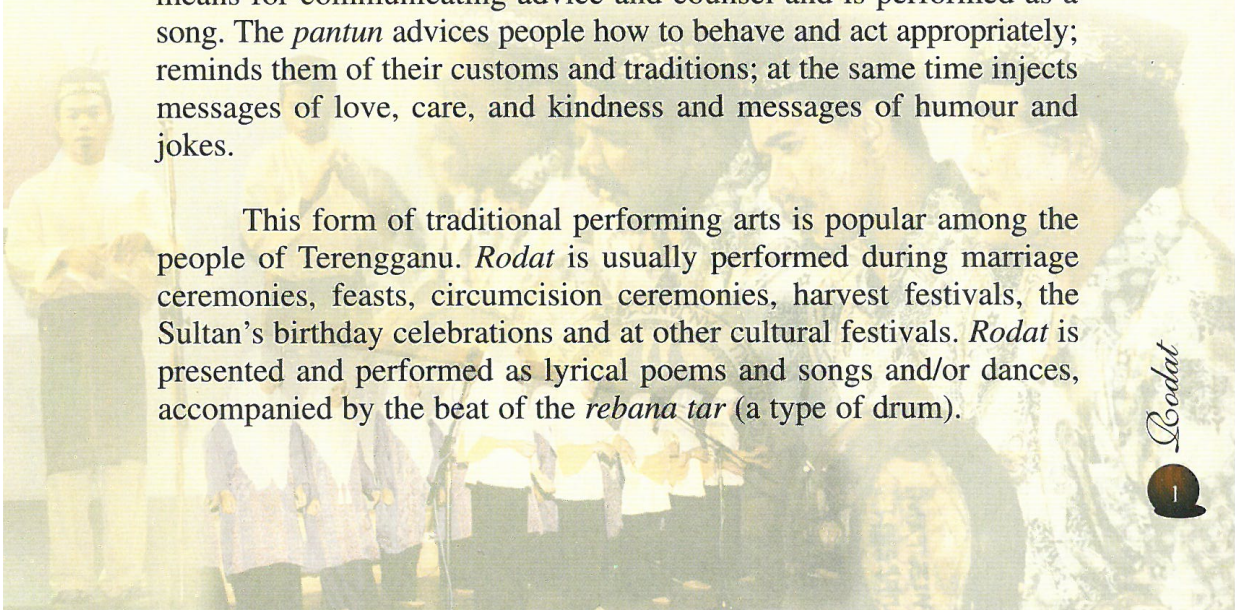


INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country that has been endowed with a rich background in cultural heritage. This is especially evident in traditional Malay performing arts. Through the years and with the tide of modernization, some traditional performing art forms have not been sustained. Nonetheless, there are still many different traditional Malay performing art forms that have endured and are still very much alive in Malay society. Each state in Malaysia has its own cultural arts identity. Each state works hard at maintaining, preserving, and enhancing this rich cultural identity. For instance, in the state of Kedah, one can be transported back in time when one listens to the sounds of the *Ghazal Parti* that is still being performed today. In Penang, you can tap your feet to the energizing beat of the *boria*; in Selangor, one will be mesmerized by the piercing musical notes of the *Keroncong* whereas in Malacca, one may listen and be enthralled by the *Dondang Sayang*. The state of Johore is renowned for the nimble and graceful *kuda kepang* while Kelantan is synonymous with the reverberating *Dikir Barat* and classic *Wayang Kulit*. Finally, the state of Terengganu is unique because of the *Rodat*, an art form that is both graceful and melodious.

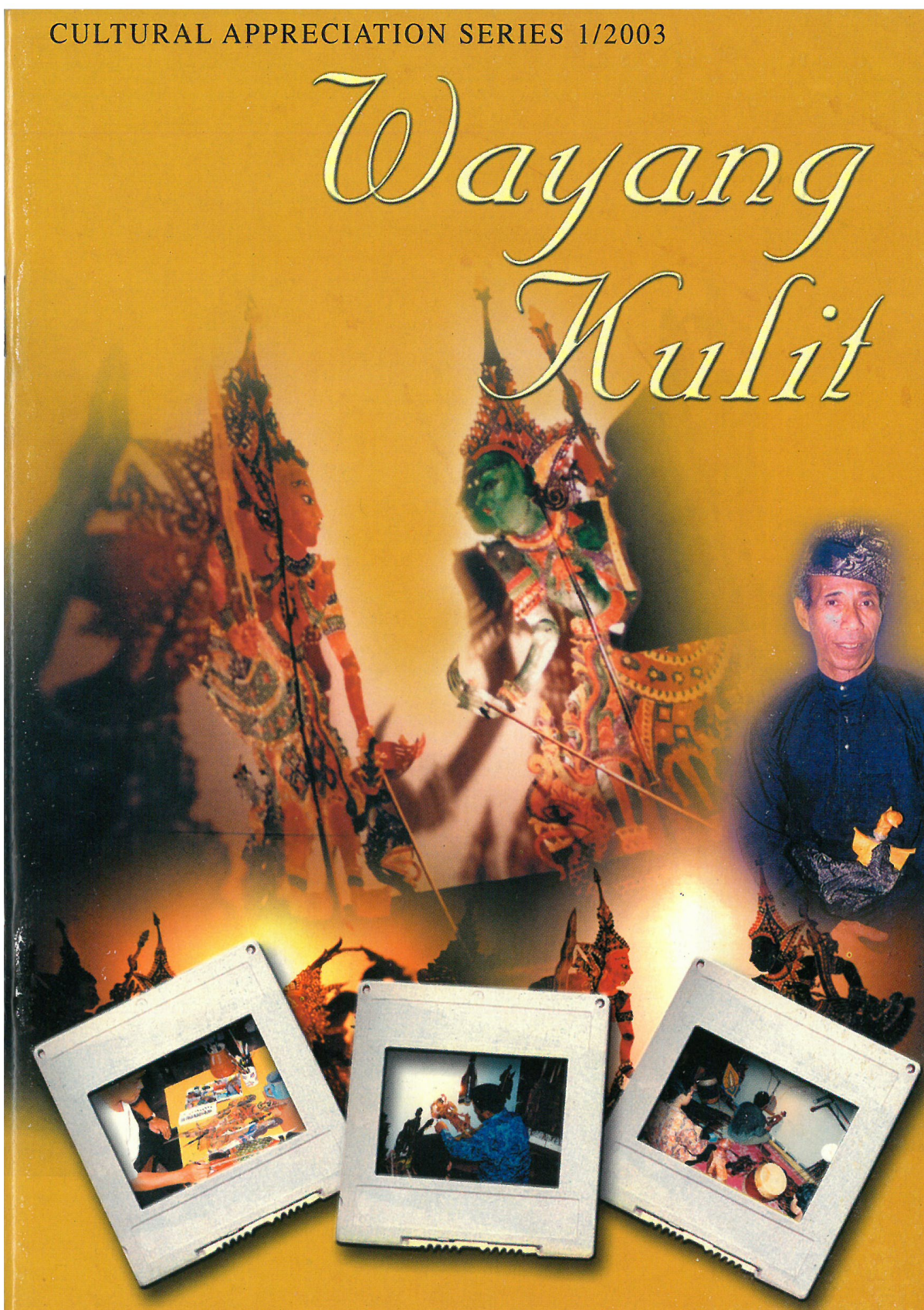
Rodat is a form of traditional entertainment that also plays a social function in the lives of the community. The *pantun* or rhythmic poem that is sung in a *Rodat* performance can be a significant influence for the community. In this context, the *pantun* or poem is a means for communicating advice and counsel and is performed as a song. The *pantun* advises people how to behave and act appropriately; reminds them of their customs and traditions; at the same time injects messages of love, care, and kindness and messages of humour and jokes.

This form of traditional performing arts is popular among the people of Terengganu. *Rodat* is usually performed during marriage ceremonies, feasts, circumcision ceremonies, harvest festivals, the Sultan's birthday celebrations and at other cultural festivals. *Rodat* is presented and performed as lyrical poems and songs and/or dances, accompanied by the beat of the *rebana tar* (a type of drum).



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Wayang Kulit



A background illustration depicting a Wayang Kulit performance. In the center, a shadow puppeteer (dalang) is seated, manipulating a large, ornate shadow puppet. To the right, another shadow puppet is visible, and to the left, a person is seen from the back, looking towards the performance. The scene is set against a warm, yellowish-gold background with faint silhouettes of trees and structures.

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INTRODUCTION

Wayang Kulit is a form of traditional theatre which uses the principle of light and shadow. The shadows from the leather puppets take on the role of various mythological and imaginary characters that are created by the “*Tok Dalang*” or the puppeteer of the theater. A *Wayang Kulit* performance is usually accompanied by the beatings of a drum or gamelan and string instruments (violin/rebab) or wind instruments (traditional flute).

THE ROLE OF WAYANG KULIT IN THE SOCIO CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SOCIETY

There are numerous forms and types of *Wayang Kulit* in Asia. This is especially true in the South East Asian region. Each type has its own peculiar form and character which differs from either one area to the next, or according to the different groups of people who reside there. Today in Peninsular Malaysia alone, there are four types of *Wayang Kulit* and each one reflects the different influences of culture and society surrounding it. The four types of *Wayang Kulit* in Peninsular Malaysia are:

- i) *Wayang Kelantan* (performed using Malay with a Kelantanese dialect)
- ii) *Wayang Melayu* (performed using Malay with a Javanese influence)
- iii) *Wayang Purwo* (performed using Javanese interspersed with local Malay)
- iv) *Wayang Gedek* (usually performed using Thai language and local Malay dialect)

The first two types of *Wayang Kulit* can be found in Kelantan and states on the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The third *Wayang Kulit* can be found in the southern part of the Peninsular namely in Johor and the last type in Kedah, Perlis and other states in the north of Peninsular Malaysia.