

Categories of Balinese Dance

At the heart of Balinese culture is Hinduism. This unique religion is the foundation of Bali's rich art forms and dance in Bali not only serves as an offering to the Gods but also as entertainment for human beings. In Bali, dances are divided into three categories based upon the religious significance of a particular dance and the place of its performance. The three categories of dance in Bali are:

Wali means “ritual” and refers to forms of music and dance that must be performed during religious ceremonies or festivals. These sacred dances are the oldest forms of dance in Bali. Usually, these dances are performed in the *jeroan*, the innermost, and holiest, courtyard of a Balinese temple. *Bebali* means “offering” and refers to ceremonial forms of music, dance and drama that are not necessarily a required part of a ritual but serve to accompany a ceremony. *Bebali* dances are held in the *jaba tengah*, the middle courtyard of a Balinese temple.

Balih-balihan means “performance” or “spectacle” and refers to secular dances that act as entertainment in Bali. Into this category fall all dances that are not *wali* or *bebali*. These dances are, however, often associated with religious ceremonies and can be performed in the *jaba*, the outer court of a temple.

Upon The Sacred Stage

Four Sacred dances are featured on this disc: Wali dances - *Sanghyang Jaran* and *Calon Arang*, and *Bebali* dances - *Gambuh* and *Topeng*. The *Topeng* may also be performed as a *Wali* dance if it is performed in the innermost court of the temple.

Sanghyang means ‘holy’ or ‘deity’. A divinely inspired dance, requiring the participant to enter into trance and perform physical challenges: walking and holding hot embers and, sometimes, impaling oneself with a magical *keris*. The performer is believed to be protected from injury by divine intervention.

Calon Arang is deeply concerned with the magical battle of light and dark. Black magic is deeply embedded in the Balinese socio-religious fabric to date and appeasement of the dark side of the divine panoply is not only a daily duty but is considered a wise precaution if one is not to fall prey to its powerfully destructive influence. This dance drama is a symbolic form of exorcism to keep the dark spirits aligned with *Rangda* at bay.

The Gambuh featured here is a collaboration of a Swiss and Balinese *Gambuh* troop. In modern Bali many of the more archaic dances have fallen prey to a malaise attributed to the business of cultural commodities and the changing tastes of a new electronic media driven Balinese society. Outside organizations have made strong attempts to preserve Balinese culture with heritage contributions and by the transplanting of traditions carried on by students from other cultures.

The Topeng is a mask dance drama and one of the most popular forms of dance in Bali. It is very common for the performer to craft one's own masks. Having to perform multiple characters is a physically rigorous study on the way to becoming a premiere *Topeng* artist upon the sacred stage.

Suggested Further Reading

There exists a vast range of literature concerning traditional Balinese arts and culture. Below are suggested books that will allow you to find out more information relating to Balinese dance and music:

Originally published in 1938, *Dance and Drama in Bali* by Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete (2002, Hong Kong and Singapore: Periplus Editions) contains a large selection of both pictures and stories relating to various forms of Balinese dance-drama.

A more recent book on Balinese dance is *The Sacred Dances of Bali* by Christian Racki (1998, Denpasar: CV. Buratwangi). This book contains colour photographs and provides the reader with short introductions to many Balinese dances.

To find out more about the music that accompanies many of the various forms of Balinese dance Michael Tenzer's *Balinese Music* (1998, Berkley: Periplus) provides an excellent introduction and is presented in an easy to understand manner.

For more in-depth information regarding Balinese dance I Made Bandem and Fredrik E. de Boer's *Balinese Dance in Transition: Kaja and Kelod*. (1981, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press) and Colin McPhee's "Dance in Bali." (1970, in *Traditional Balinese Culture* edited by Jane Belo, pp. 290-321. New York: Columbia University Press) provides a more technical and analytical approach.