

Yanni Amouris

Yanni Amouris, tenor, is a native of Athens, Greece and is making his debut with GSL as Mordechai. He is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, where he performed the roles of Paolino in Cimarosa's "Il Matrimonio Segreto" and the Banjo Player in William Mayer's "Death in the family". Yanni recently sang with the Gregg Smith Singers in the Berkshire Opera production of Bellini's "I Capuletti e i Montecchi".

Phyllis Clark

Phyllis Clark has performed recitals featuring works by composers Robert Dennis, Roger Verdesi, Martha Alter, Louise Talma, Wendy Griffiths and Music Under Construction. She is collaborator in EQUAL VOICES, an a cappella sextet performing a wide range of vocal repertoire. A former member of the Western Wind Vocal Ensemble, she premiered many of their commissioned works. She is the Artistic Director of Women Singing, a chamber choir, and teaches at St. David's School and the Dalcroze School.

Lisa Karrer

Lisa Karrer tours internationally as a composer, vocalist and performance artist, collaborating, recording and performing with many artists and ensembles. Last year Lisa produced "Pick of the Litter", the new CD released by Music For Homemade Instruments; and in the fall will release a recording of "The Birth Of George," a chamber opera co-composed by herself and her partner David Simons. Lisa is currently composing an opera based on the writings of South African novelist Olive Schreiner.

Jody Kruskal

Jody Kruskal is a composer, performer, recording artist, educator and inventor of new musical instruments. He performs with and composes for a number of musical ensembles including the contra dance bands Grand Picnic and Jaybird, and is a member of Music For Homemade Instruments as well as Gamelan Son of Lion. He also is founder, director and builder for the Public Works Orchestra performing dance and theater commissions for Elise Long's Spoke The Hub, Ralph Lee's Metawee River Company and Shakespeare On The Sound, Rowatan CT.

Cliff Townsend

In addition to being a versatile singer with a large vocal range, is a composer, arranger, actor and orchestral musician. He produced his own solo album, *Out Here On My Own*, and someday hopes to conduct the premiere of his symphony. Cliff appears with *The Flirtations* in the movie *Philadelphia*.

Gamelan Son of Lion

is a new music repertory ensemble and composers' collective based in downtown New York City, specializing in contemporary pieces written for the instruments of the Javanese gamelan percussion orchestra. The ensemble was co-founded by Ms. Benary, Daniel Goode and Philip Corner and has been performing and presenting new music in the greater New York area since 1976, and has premiered over a hundred new compositions by American and international composers in various contemporary styles. The ensemble has toured in Indonesia, Canada and New Zealand. For recordings and upcoming events of **Gamelan Son of Lion**, visit our website: <http://www.gamelan.org/sonoflion>



and **Gamelan Son of Lion**
present

Wayang Esther: A Javanese Purimspliel

Feb. 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 2001

Music & Libretto

Barbara Benary

Dhalang / puppeteers

Barbara Pollitt and
Joko Susilo

Assistant puppeteers

Terra Vandergaw
Jody Kruskal
Beverly Fox

Co-directed by Barbara Benary and Barbara Pollitt

Vocal ensemble:

Phyllis Clark, soprano
Yanni Amouris, tenor
Jody Kruskal, baritone
Cliff Townsend, bass-baritone
Lisa Karrer, mezzo

Esther
Mordechai
King Ahasuerus; First Conspirator
Haman; Second Conspirator
Vashti; Zareth

Gamelan ensemble:

Barbara Benary, Mark Steven Brooks, David Demnitz, Lisa Karrer,
Laura Liben, David Simons with Peter Zummo (trombone) and
Jon Gibson (soprano sax)

PART I:

The Marriage of Esther and The Camel Catcher

PART II:

Haman's Evil Deed and The Purim War

The puppets used in this production are traditional wayang kulit characters. The majority were made by Ledjar Subroto of Jogjakarta, Indonesia. Others are from the collections of Ms. Benary, Joko Susilo and Jody Diamond. Additional puppets special to the play were constructed by Joko Susilo and by Beverly Fox, who also made the "wayang beber" storytelling scrolls. The puppet stage marquee by artist Tjokorda Gde Arsa Artha represents Boma, a Balinese guardian spirit.

Special thanks to Daniel Goode and Ann Snitow for use of their home as rehearsal base, to Jody Diamond for the loan of puppets and arranging of Joko's tour, and to our donors Dorothy Silverstein, Blanche Benary Gross, David P. McAllester, Susana Torre and Geoffrey Fox and Peter E. Demnitz



This production is made possible in part by funding from
the New York State Council On the Arts, a state agency

Wayang kulit

is the name of the indigenous shadow puppet theatre of Java and Bali. It has served the purpose of public entertainment for people of all ages throughout many centuries before the advent of television and cinema. Performances are held to celebrate many occasions such as weddings, circumcisions and births. Traditionally they take place outdoors or in the entryway to a house or ceremonial building, by torch light at night. Stories unfold slowly, beginning around 9pm and lasting until sunrise.

Puppets are made from buffalo hide parchment, ornately carved and painted in a unique form of stylized art. They represent ancestors and supernaturals, and are not meant to be realistic. Shadow plays are taken from folklore or from the ancient epics of India, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Contemporary events and characters are often worked into the retelling. Clown characters appear to explain the obscure doings of the highborn kings and gods, and to provide local humor. The dhalang or puppeteer may use the stage as a forum for interposing moral or sometimes even political messages. Wayang remains a beloved living art in both Java and Bali. New stories are constantly being improvised using the traditional forms and characters.

About this megillah:

The reciting of the megillah or scroll of the Book of Esther is an annual event in Jewish culture at the time of the festival of Purim. It is an occasion for merriment and drunkenness, and for costume parties reminiscent of Halloween. The holiday celebrates an historical victory of the Jews over a genocidal villain who plotted their extermination during the time of the ancient Persian empire. It is about victory of good over evil, which is also very much a theme of traditional wayang kulit theatre. Yet the wayang theatre also struck me as a very good medium for this story because it recognizes the complexities and ambiguities of human nature. And the victory in the Purim story is one I find indeed ambiguous.

Historically there is little direct connection between bible stories and Javanese arts. The wayang theatre centers on the Hindu epics Mahabharata and Ramayana with other indigenous tales. The bible enters only when a rare play might use an old testament story by way of Islam, or when stories of the life of Christ, called *wayang wahyu* are performed at Christmas and Easter. But in general, little is known of Judaism in that part of the world.

This then is a meeting of cultures of a personal nature, come together because I have spent many years involved with Javanese arts, and am also Jewish. My immediate inspiration was a reading of the Purim Megillah which I attended some years ago at the height of the Bosnian war. The troublesome end of the Esther story, generally de-emphasized in children's versions, stood out in light of current events and raised many questions which I feel should not be ignored by any adult in this post-Hitler era. Were these Judean exiles of the Persian empire the same as us, Jews of today? Would we handle contemporary problems as they handled theirs? What can or should we do when faced with the threat of mindless violence and genocide? Who is an innocent, and must children suffer for the deeds of their fathers? And must we carry old wars forever in our hearts?

We can never know if there is any truth in my hypothesis that perhaps at the end of the Purim war Mordechai took a more Machiavellian stand or Esther a modern humanitarian one. I have taken the liberty of casting them in these roles to raise the dialog, to air the questions that must be resolved if the endless feuds of the world - Bosnian-Serbian, Israeli-Palestinian and everywhere else - are ever to be ended.

The Cast

Barbara Benary

Ms. Benary is a co-founder and Artistic Director of Gamelan Son of Lion. She holds a doctorate in ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University where she specialized in musics of Indonesia and India. Subsequently she has pursued a career that combines performing and composing with her knowledge of world musics and their instruments. In addition to her activities as a "downtown" chamber music composer, she has written theatre and dance scores for many New York area companies, including LaMama ETC and NY Shakespeare Festival. In 1994 she collaborated with Barbara Pollitt to produce "Karna: A Shadow Puppet Opera." Barbara has been a puppet enthusiast since third grade, an interest which revived when her graduate work brought her in contact with the wayang kulit tradition. Among her theatrical mentors and inspirations she counts John Braswell and Wilford Leach, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Punch and Judy.

Barbara Pollitt

Puppeteer, maskmaker and performer, Ms. Pollitt most recently directed and designed the highly acclaimed Haydn opera "Philemon and Baucis" for the Orchestra of St. Luke's at the Kaufman Theater in New York. She also designed puppets for Theaterworks' "Lion King of Mali" which is touring nationally. Ms. Pollitt's mask and puppet work was seen on Broadway in George C. Wolfe's "Tempest" (American Theater Wing nominations for mask design) and for Mr. Wolfe's "Jelly's Last Jam." Her design work has been exhibited at Lincoln Center and at other venues in New York. She can be seen performing in Mabou Mines' newest work "Ecco Porco" at PS122 this March. Her puppets currently appear in Rudi Stern's "Theatre of Light" at the CSV Cultural Center through March.

Joko Susilo

Guest artist Joko Susilo is an eighth-generation dhalang (master puppeteer), an experienced performer who blends comedy, drama and philosophy with virtuoso puppetry. He holds a doctorate in Ethnomusicology from university of Otago, and is lecturer at the Department of Puppetry of STSI, the prestigious arts university in Solo (Surakarta), Indonesia. A resident of New Zealand, he is currently on tour in the United States, sponsored by the Bildner Endowment and the Music Department of Dartmouth University. He will next appear with the Schubert Club Gamelan in Saint Paul.

Terra Vandergaw

is an actor, director and Assistant Professor of Theatre at Ramapo College of New Jersey. She has performed at many theatres in New York and regionally including The Public, Lincoln Center, the Guthrie, and on tour with The Acting Company. She received an M.F.A. in acting from N.Y.U. and is certified as a Kripalu yoga instructor.

Beverly Fox

attends Bennington College where she studies creative writing, theater and art.