

George Lucas ENDORSE

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Origins of Malaysian *wayang kulit*

IN Malaysia, shadow puppet plays are also known as *wayang kulit*. In Bahasa Malaysia, *wayang* means shadow or imagination, while *kulit* means skin and refers to the leather that puppets are made from. Stories presented are usually on mythical and morality tales. There is an educational moral to the plays which usually portray a battle between good and evil. Malay shadow plays are sometimes considered one of the earliest examples of animation. The *wayang kulit* in Kelantan is influenced and similar to Thai shadow puppets, while the *wayang kulit* in southern Malaysia, especially in Johor is influenced by Javanese.

The puppets are made primarily of leather and manipulated with sticks or buffalo horn handles. Shadows are cast using an oil lamp or, in modern times, a halogen light, onto a cotton cloth background. They are often associated with *gamelan* music.

Peperangan Bintang character designer, the ingenious Tintoy Chuo, has always been a fan of the motion picture *Star Wars*. He believes in the formula of combining passion and talent into work. When that happens, work becomes play.

"This is our tenth performance and all of them were free even though we've put in so much of effort, commitment and time into it. I know it's for the better, it's a responsibility," said Tintoy.

"I chose to do *Star Wars Episode IV, A New Hope*, because we want what we are doing to give a new hope for *wayang kulit*," Tintoy said.

He cleverly combined the characters from *Star Wars* with sprinkles of traditional touch with inspiring surroundings.

"It is a traditional way to tell a story but we mixed it with something that the youths will like and connect," said Tintoy.

The lead character in the American epic space opera franchise, Luke Skywalker, was created by infusing him with *wayang kulit* character Sri Rama from the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. The animated robot in *Star Wars*, R2-D2, was inspired by the dome of the Sultan Abdul Samad building along Dataran Merdeka and was called Ah Tuh in *Peperangan Bintang*.

"I wanted to do it the real way, with moveable puppets, a *Tok Dalang* performing, proper lightings and musicians consisting of eight to 10 members," said Tintoy, who had the audience lapping up the passion shown for the arts.

"We had doubts when we started. We were worried that people might throw

rocks or eggs at us but thank god the response was positive. The feedback we received is what is giving us energy to carry on because we spent so much money to do the shows. But we kept the faith and believed in our concept and ourselves," said Tintoy.

Appreciating the support from *Star Wars* fans, Tintoy said the movement would not have been possible without *Tok Dalang* Muhammad Dain Othman or Pak Dain from Kelantan.

The retired 62-year-old master puppeteer has been accredited as *Tok Dalang* since 1980, and had witnessed the fall of the art.

He said there are hardly any accredited *Tok Dalang* around to continue the hierarchy of authentic Kelantanese *wayang kulit*.

Being the thirteenth in line and the one and only left, he believes there is still hope for *wayang kulit*.

"I appreciate what Tintoy is doing. He may not have the idea to do the real performance but he did a lot of research so I showed him the methods to do a proper shadow play. I was happy to help," Pak Dain said.

Peperangan Bintang may have brought *Star Wars* fanatics out to witness a different side to the epic movie series and with excellent timing because *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is coming out next year.

An 88-second trailer is said to debut in cinemas today causing die hard fans to buy movie (any movie) tickets solely for the trailer.

The force is truly with them.



Pak Dain dazzling the crowd at Central Market. — Pictures by Nazerul Ramli