

# 'Wayang Gokil' preserves cultural heritage in hip, fun way



courtesy Pedi Suryadinata

Puppet master Bapak Sriyono makes vigorous displays of his skills in *Wayang Gokil*, which held a one-night performance on Jan. 10.

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Simply from the title of the shadow puppetry show, *Wayang Gokil*, potential viewers could probably imagine the hilarity in store. *Gokil*, originally from the word *gila*, is a popular Indonesian slang – or *bahasa gaul* – meaning “crazy”.

Whatever viewers may have conjured in their minds may not have been too far from what was actually presented in the *Wayang Gokil* performance on Jan. 10 at the Wayang Museum, West Jakarta.

Amused faces flooded the small performance hall as the audience watched the 30-minute show.

Inspired and organized by a group of advertising professionals from J. Walter Thompson together with museum staff, *Wayang Gokil* is a unique way of preserving Indonesia's precious cultural heritage by “representing” aspects known and familiar in a fresh, creative way as has not been attempted before.

Based on the classic epic of *Ramayana*, the story was presented in a modern and humorous way by top Indonesian artists.

Club 80 vocalist Lembu Jati paired up perfectly with Lux star Dian Sastro as Rama and Sinta, while two famous presenters Farhan and Indra Bekti took the

roles of Rahwana and the narrator.

The four delivered a striking collaboration with the *dalang* (puppet master), Bapak Sriyono, with his magic hands and exuberant energy and passion in breathing life and soul into his puppets.

A truly entertaining puppet show that took a departure from the typical *wayang* performance, the dialogue in *Wayang Gokil* was rich with popular contemporary expressions, idioms or funky slang with which most people – especially the younger generation – can relate.

Meanwhile, Indra Bekti's story-telling, in his naturally comical and lively manner, spiced up the already funny script.

The entire madness was perfected by well-chosen songs to dramatize certain actions, creating roars of laughter and applause from the audience.

The musical accompaniment comprised familiar tunes from past and present, like heavy metal band Europe's *Final Countdown* or pop trio The Police's *Every Breath You Take*, and even The Beatles' *Help*, which accompanied a scene where Sinta is kidnapped and cries out for help.

And many couldn't help but burst into laughter when Sinta and Rama are finally reunited, happily ever after, accompanied by *Together Forever* by Rick Astley.

The musical compilation, voice-overs of the artists and the mixing was pro-

duced by J. Walter Thompson and Cut2Cut Audio Productions. It was indeed a production that was worth every one of its seconds, considering the crowd's enthusiastic response.

As executive creative director Juhi Kalia of J. Walter Thompson said, “We hope to get the younger generation to realize that *wayang* can be crazy, entertaining and cool. It's actually a beautiful culture that we shouldn't let die.”

The same hope occupies the mind of Bapak Sriyono, the senior puppet master behind the screen of *Wayang Gokil*: “This is the first out-of-the-box *wayang* (I've done) and I'm actually touched that there are people who care and want to preserve this culture.”

“I truly support this (effort), and I'm up to this kind of event in the future,” he added.

In an era when modernity itself is a culture, and reinvention an art form, J. Walter Thompson has chosen to experiment with precisely these concepts toward treasuring and preserving cultural heritage.

The resulting production has shown that traditional art and entertainment can endure the onslaught of their modern electronic cousins simply by embracing the language, idioms, music and popular icons of contemporary culture in creating an irresistible draw for young and old alike.