

# Creating a Contemporary Dance Based on Traditional Techniques and Spirituality –

*Fusing Elements from Lanna (Thailand), Indonesia and Japan*

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## Abstract

The challenge of traditional dance to survive in a globalized world depends on the efforts of individual artists, groups and organizations based in local institutions, villages, and local festivals, and on popular entertainers. From a background as a Lanna (Northern Thailand) dancer, I studied how traditional dance is being transmitted and modernized in Japan and Indonesia. I introduce four artists from Japan and Indonesia with backgrounds in traditional dance who are trying to make their traditions contemporarily relevant. I describe some of the many forms that dance is taking in locations such as Mangkunegaran Palace in Surakarta, Indonesia and in so-called “Downtown Kabuki” in Osaka, Japan. Finally, I discuss my collaborations with artists in Japan and Indonesia in which we attempted to compare, contrast, or fuse our traditions. The long term aim of this work is to try to identify ways for traditional art forms to survive in an era of globalization.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Dance, Lanna, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Fusion, Traditional, Spirituality

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## Introduction

This paper discusses the challenges of traditional dance in three parts:

- Artists
- Village, Palace, Street, Festivals
- Workshops and Collaborations

### Artists

This section highlights two artists from Japan and two artists from Indonesia to show a range of challenges and responses to globalization. In Kyoto, Japan, Tatsushige Uda is a young traditional *Noh* theater actor, subject to the strictest rules and restrictions. Also in Kyoto, Heidi Durning, a half-Japanese, half-Swiss woman dancer, exemplifies the challenges faced by a person from a multi-ethnic background in a traditional society.

In Indonesia, Rianto and Mugiyono are performers based in the city of Surakarta (widely called Solo) who practice contemporary dance. Rianto is from a village in Banyumas (between West and Central Java), while Mugiyono comes from a *dalang* (shadow-puppeteer) family in Central Java.

### Village, Palace, Street and Festivals

This section explores the wide range of traditional dances being presented by groups and institutions. From Japan, I introduce Awa Odori, a popular street festival held in mid-August each year in the town of Tokushima on the southern island of Shikoku. The festival attracts hundreds of thousands of people every year. I also explore Hayachine Kagura, an ancient form of masked shrine dance, believed to be the ancestor of *Noh* drama, which is being quietly preserved by villagers in the town of Tohno in Japan's far north. Finally, I discuss traveling troupes of so-called "downtown Kabuki" which play in small theaters in the poorer districts of Osaka and Tokyo. In contrast to the very traditional "Grand Kabuki," these troupes introduce informal elements such as pop music, the wearing of blond wigs and other innovations.

In Indonesia, Mangkunegaran Palace in Solo transmits classical Javanese techniques and spiritual values through the teaching of gamelan music and dance in the palace's historic *pendopo* performance halls. Ceremonies at Samwan Tiga, a Hindu temple in Bali, are also highly traditional, but are preserved by villagers. As an example of an international arts event of the sort that are greatly influencing contemporary dance around the region, I introduce "In the Arts Island 2011," a dance and music festival held in July 2011 in Bali and East Java.

### Workshops, Classes and Collaborations

This section describes workshops in which I learned from Japanese and Indonesian artists, as well as those in which I taught *Lanna* dance. Three collaborations with local artists are discussed. In "Tatsushige to Ronnarong" (Jan 2011, Kyoto), *Noh* artist Tatsushige and I contrasted *Noh* drama with *Lanna* dance. In "Rianto to Ronnarong" (June 2011, Solo), Rianto and I conducted a similar event comparing *Banyumas* (Javanese dance) with *Lanna* dance. In a performance titled *Kembang*

Kapas (July 2011, Solo) Javanese singer Peni Candra Rini and I combined music and contemporary dance.

## Artists

### Tatsushige Udaka

Born in 1981, Tatsushige is the son of leading *Noh* actor Michishige Udaka of the Kongo School of *Noh* Theater in Kyoto. Kongo is one of five traditional schools descended from the actor Zeami of the 15th century. The Kongo School is led today by a hereditary *Iemoto* (grand master). At age 29, Tatsushige is a member of the young generation of *Noh* performers.

*Noh* is a form of masked theater that originated in shrine dances. Abstract, slow, and highly controlled down to very small details, it includes three elements: *mai* (dance), *hayashi* (drums and flute), and *utai* (chanting). I studied *mai* and *utai* with Tatsushige and learned to perform the dance section (*shimai*) of the play *Yuki* (Snow).

Tatsushige was first placed on a stage (where he says he promptly fell asleep) at the age of three. Today he is a professional actor, comfortable with the *Noh* tradition and ready to step forward into the world of globalization. He is an expert on wearing the kimono, the *hakama* (Japanese traditional pants) and the *obi* (sash) when he performs *Noh*, but he wears jeans and t-shirts otherwise. He engages with artists from many countries and has taught *Noh* workshops in France, the United States and Korea. With his open personality, he attends dance shows of all varieties, including Western and contemporary performances. He hopes to reach out to people in society and to provide easy access to the very specialized world of *Noh*.

However, as an actor of the Kongo School, Tatsushige needs to follow the guidelines of the *Iemoto*. The strict rules of *Iemoto* mean that *Noh* Theater has been passed on, almost unchanged, for centuries, making it one of the world's oldest forms of continually performed drama. On the other hand, this strength also means that it is difficult to break away from the rules.

Among Tatsushige's attempts to do this are collaborations with his wife, the contemporary dancer Haruna Udaka, and with artists from Slovenia in a performance piece called *Nohsono*. Tatsushige has said, "I want to go back to the origins of *Noh* (simple stage, lighting from the woods). It feels contemporary looked at from today." For Tatsushige, the road to globalization lies not in trying to bring in new forms, but in going deeper into the old forms and finding contemporary value in them.

### Heidi S. Durning

Choreographer and dancer Heidi was born in 1957 of a Swiss father and Japanese mother. Based in Kyoto, she studied *Nihon Buyo* (traditional Japanese dance) in the leading Fujima School, where she received the professional stage name "Fujima Kanso-o." She also earned a master of fine arts from the University of Michigan.

*Nihon Buyo* dates back to Kabuki performances along the Kamo River in Kyoto in the early 1600s. More realistic and expressive than *Noh*, it developed within Kabuki Theater during the Edo period (1600-1868). It later multiplied into many styles, including geisha dance. *Nihon Buyo* features make-up rather than masks, elaborate stages and costumes, and flowing and dramatic gestures and rhythms.

In her contemporary choreography, Heidi mixes *Nihon Buyo* with contemporary dance. While freer than *Noh* Theater, *Nihon Buyo* is still quite strict, so when Heidi performs anything that is not traditional she uses her own name “Heidi S. Durning.” When she performs or teaches *Nihon Buyo* she uses her certified Fujima school name.

“Being half Swiss and Japanese, sometimes it seems I get away with being creative in this way, but I guess if I did something very embarrassing the school would not like it. I have not had too much trouble creating new things. I guess I am also sort of known as a fusion dancer within that world... I feel I have been lucky to travel through these worlds. Sometimes I feel like a foreigner in the traditional Japanese world... It would be nice to be more universally accepted in those ways sometimes.”

Heidi calls her work Fusion Dance. Heidi’s “fusion” is part of the centuries-long process of traditional dance adapting to outside influences. Being half Swiss and half Japanese has advantages and disadvantages. Most Japanese *Nihon Buyo* dancers are still focused on working within the *iemoto* system and are not ready to venture into contemporary forms. That gives Heidi certain possibilities and openings. On the other hand, many Japanese people feel that she is not a “true Japanese” and so it can be difficult for her to work in the traditional formats, at the deeper levels.

### Rianto

Born in 1981 in a village near Banyumas, a small city between central and west Java, Rianto began traditional Javanese dancing in high school and graduated with a degree in dance from the Institut Seni Indonesia at Surakarta (STSI) in 2004. From 2005 he also trained in Javanese court dance at Mangkunegaran Palace. Married to a Japanese dancer, he is the founder and director of the Dewandaru Dance Company in Tokyo. Rianto spends part of each year in Japan, and the rest in Indonesia and conducting performances in other countries.

Rianto believes that what we now see as “traditional dance” was the “contemporary dance” of its time. He develops his work by taking the techniques, choreography and ideas from traditional dance to create his own new work.

In Rianto’s vision, the difference today between traditional and contemporary dance is that while traditional dance evolved over the years, contemporary dance is more focused on “concept.” It takes ideas from the lives of people and the artists themselves to create something new. Rianto’s motto is “new creation, new idea.”

Rianto works with artists from different countries, for example, Pappatarahumara (a contemporary dance company in Tokyo), Noh actors, and Sen Hea Ha from Korea. He also takes dancers from Indonesia to perform in dance festivals around the world.

Rianto's challenge is that not many people know about contemporary dance in Indonesia. However, awareness is growing as a result of dance festivals such as the Indonesian Dance Festival in Jakarta, the Solo International Performing Arts event and the Lenyog Art Festival in Kalimantan.

### **Mugiyono Kasido**

Mugiyono, the most senior artist mentioned here, was born in 1967. Known as one of Indonesia's leading contemporary performers, he comes from a family of *dalang* (shadow puppet masters) in Central Java. He started dancing at the age of eight, and continued to study classical Javanese dance, graduating in 1993 from the Institut Seni Indonesia at Surakarta (STSI). Mugiyono highly values the masters he has studied under, such as R. Ng. Rono Suropto from the Mangkunegaran Palace, Suprpto Suryodarmo, and Sardono W. Kusumo. Starting in 1992, while still studying at STSI, Mugiyono began choreographing contemporary pieces. He wanted to do something new.

In addition to dance, he teaches and conducts workshops. However, he points out, "Anywhere in the world, it is hard to live as a dancer." In Solo it is acceptable to perform both traditional and contemporary dance, and Solo society is supportive. But there is not much support from the government.

"The concept of my contemporary work is 'nowadays'," says Mugiyono. In his vision, he tries to make the traditional and contemporary elements in his dance enhance and support each other. He tries to transmit old forms in a modern way. For example, in his performances, he uses old dance techniques and stories, but wears ordinary clothes and presents the stories in a contemporary way.

### **Village, Palace, Street and Festivals**

#### **Awa Odori**

*Awa Odori* is a type of dance performed in mid-August in Tokushima city in Japan's southern island Shikoku. Everywhere in Japan in mid-July or mid-August, people gather to dance in honor of the ancestors for *Obon* (Festival of the Dead). In most *Obon* festivals, people dance calmly in unison in a circle, with musicians seated in a tower in the center. However, in Tokushima, people dance in small separate groups that parade through the streets, accompanied by musicians playing *kane* (gongs), *taiko* (drums), *fue* (flutes) and *shamisen* (guitar). At times the dance can be very frenzied and acrobatic. Dancers and musicians, including women, men and children, make fun with spectators and invite them to join the dancing. The men, wearing *happi* (short tunics) and white shorts, dance more energetically than the women who are dressed in *yukata* (cotton summer kimonos) and straw hats. The women look like delicate white egrets stepping through a pond.

*Awa Odori* is very popular and draws hundreds of thousands of people from around Japan. Some participants practice all year just to dance in the event. Some groups are very traditional, wearing typical *yukata*; others adopt a more “pop” style, with costumes decorated with metallic silk-screen designs, and using poses from rock or rap bands. Some groups dance for show in front of an audience seated on viewing bleachers; others just dance for pleasure, wandering around at random in the back streets. The event provides traditional, informal fun for everyone, adults and children.

An important contribution to the success of *Awa Odori* is good management by the city authorities. For example the authorities invite dancers to come from all over Japan, provide bleachers for the audience to watch the parades, and close off large parts of the city to traffic so that groups can dance freely.

### Tohno

Tohno city is located in Iwate prefecture in northeastern Japan. Northern Japan is known as the country’s rice bowl, and is also known for its severe winters. Tohno became famous in Japan after ethnologist Kunio Yanagida published his book *Tohno Monogatari* (Tales of Tohno) in 1910, introducing the region’s colorful folk tales and ghost stories.

The region preserves several very old forms of folk dance. One is *Shishi-Odori*, a very energetic jumping dance. It’s a kind of “lion dance” using huge masks that are part-deer, part-lion, and that feature enormous manes made from shaved wood bark.

Another is *Hayachine Kagura*, an ancient masked dance performed at Hayachine Shinto Shrine in the mountains. *Kagura* is a type of dance performed at Shinto shrines. Experts think that *Hayachine Kagura* shows the original form of *Noh* Theater, before it reached the capital of Kyoto and was refined after the 14th century. It has been preserved for centuries by villagers who have their own groups of performers and even a local hereditary iemoto, Mr. Suzuki.

*Shishi-Odori* is still going strong, with groups of young farmers training and dancing at festivals. But the village of Hayachine is aging, and Mr. Suzuki has no heir. The tradition, which has lasted for so long, is in some danger. It was moving to watch Mr. Suzuki, who is very old and had recently had a stroke, put on the mask and dance for us. We could see a world of ancient art that might not survive the modern age.

### Downtown Kabuki

In centuries past there were many traveling Kabuki troupes in Tokyo and in the provinces, but in the early 20th century they were combined into the “Grand Kabuki” based in Tokyo. Grand Kabuki is performed by famous artists in big theaters. The level of art is very high, with large orchestras of traditional instruments, painted stages, brocade costumes, and beautifully made wigs and makeup. The manner of speaking is very stylized, as are many of the movements.



In fact, some of the small *Kabuki* troupes didn't disappear but went "underground" into small theaters in the old downtowns of poorer neighborhoods in Osaka and Tokyo. One of these theaters is the Naniwa Club in the Shinsekai area of Osaka. I went to see a troupe called Hisho.

Unlike at the Grand *Kabuki*, where people sit very quietly and clap politely at the end, the audience for Hisho was lively, eating and drinking, shouting their appreciation, and even tacking wads of ¥10,000 notes onto their favorite actor's kimonos. The Hisho troupe is basically one family, with set pieces performed by the grandfather, grandmother, aunt, father, and even young children. They wore blond wigs, had costumes made of day-glo synthetics, and danced to pop music while lit by strobe lights. It was *Kabuki* adapted to international pop culture.

At the time of its beginnings in the early 1600s, *Kabuki* was the art of the people; the pop culture of its day. Nowadays people think of it as "traditional art," but in Osaka one could see how it grew out of pop culture.

### **Mangkunegaran Palace**

The royal courts of Java preserve a rich tradition of dance, *gamelan* music, costume, textiles, ritual, and philosophical teaching. Their dance is similar to Japanese *Noh* Theater in that the pace is slow and stately, the mood contemplative and abstract. The courts themselves, led by hereditary Sultans, and prizing small but important differences between each other, are similar to Japan's *iemoto* (hereditary schools headed by grand masters).

Of these, Mangkunegaran Palace, a princely house in Solo dating from 1756, is one of the leading centers of traditional performance in Indonesia. Its *pendopo* (open-sided performance hall) is one of the oldest and largest in the country, and its ruling family places much emphasis on preserving old forms of dance and music, and teaching them to Indonesians and foreign students.

I studied in Solo from August 2006 until July 2008, and again from February to July 2011 on the API fellowship, and during those years spent much time viewing performances and studying at Mangkunegaran Palace.

Mangkunegaran's emphasis on tradition is actually an advantage in a globalized age. People around the world want to see the highest and best example of old art forms, and so they are drawn to Mangkunegaran because of its quality. It is proof that something that seems very traditional and local can have an international appeal.

However, it doesn't happen just by accident. Mangkunegaran Palace works hard on outreach to Indonesians and foreigners, including providing public performances on Wednesdays and by organizing the palace-sponsored Mangkunegaran Performing Arts festival.

Mangkunegaran's successful combination seems to be: Within the institution, or internally, it maintains a pride in tradition and an emphasis on high standards.

Externally, it is open to outsiders, eager to teach people from many backgrounds, and willing to experiment.

### **Samwan Tiga Hindu Temple**

*Samwan Tiga* is an ancient Hindu temple in the village of Bedulu, near Ubud in central Bali. Now a lesser-known local site, in the 10th century it was the state temple of the main kingdom of Bali.

Once a year, people from around 12 villages in the vicinity gather for a huge festival. Groups parade from all directions to the temple. Lines of women carry tall offerings of fruit and flowers on their heads, bands of musicians play cymbals and drums, and men carry palanquins with the images of various deities, including Hindu gods such as Shiva and Brahma, Buddhist deities and local spirits. Among the latter are the *barong* (guardian spirits), which can be in the shapes of lions, dragons, or even people, such as the black images of a 10th century Balinese king and his Chinese wife, revered as lords of black magic.

Men dressed in white run in circles through the temple complex, whipping each other with sacred leaves, as elderly women follow them while dancing a very archaic style of Balinese dance. Everywhere there are elaborate flower arrangements and fruit offerings. The thousands of participants are dressed in their best sarongs made from Balinese and Javanese textiles.

Bali is unusual in Indonesia because it resisted the Islamic wave in the 15th century and continues to this day to be a Hindu island. In the 20th century it used tourism to support and internationalize its arts, so that today Balinese dance is perhaps the best-known Indonesian dance worldwide. However, the festival at *Samwan Tiga* is interesting because it is based entirely on religious faith, and not on tourism (most tourists don't even know about it). Importantly, it shows that maintaining a culture is not so difficult; you don't need support from the government or help from outside organizations. Simple faith can preserve cultural traditions. This can be done without modification to fit into modern society or globalization.

### **"In The Arts Island 2011"**

Regional arts festivals are a powerful engine for the globalization of performing arts in Asia. Unlike many other dance events, they are not "tourist shows" with locals dressed up in picturesque costumes dancing traditional showpieces. They focus on creative artists, and try to facilitate cultural exchange between different countries. Arts festivals are venues for premieres of cutting-edge work by creative artists. At arts festivals many students get their first taste of the outside world. Some festivals tour regional towns and villages, so that even villagers are exposed. Meanwhile, the festivals provide visiting artists with a chance to learn about local traditions.

One of the smaller, but most exciting, Indonesian arts festivals is "In The Arts Island 2011," founded by director Agung Gunawan from Yogyakarta. I joined this festival in July 2011 in its second year. The concept is to foster cooperation be-



tween contemporary dance artists from overseas and artists and artistic traditions of local areas in Indonesia. The festival moves around, presenting the same work in different places.

In 2011 the festival started in Bali and moved to four locations in East Java between 12-20 July. Participant artists came from Australia (Yumi Umiumare, Tony Yap, Ida Lawrence); Malaysia (Kuan Nam); Thailand (Ronnarong Khampha), and Indonesia (Agung Gunawan, Iwan Darmawan, Memet Chairul Slamet, Gita Purnama Kinanthi, I Nyoman Sura, Bagus Budiindarto and Agus Riyanto).

One interesting event was held on 19 July at Punden Mbah Agung/Pujon Malang in East Java. The festival started with the parade of the *bantengan* dance (bull trance dance) in which everyone, including many dance troupes, paraded from village to village from noon until midnight, ending at the tomb of the founder of the first village. Then the action shifted to contemporary work from Thailand, Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia, finishing with improvised dance by local artists, villagers and overseas artists. The event continued on into the night with the bull trance dance.

“In The Arts Island 2011” is a good example of a linking between contemporary artists from overseas and traditions of a particular area in Indonesia. Ranging from village to international – and back again – it was a truly globalized event.

### Workshops, Classes, and Collaborations

#### Workshops and Classes

I stayed for six months each in Japan and in Indonesia to become familiar with the traditional values and techniques of dance and other traditional arts in both countries. In Japan, I studied Noh Theater with Tatsushige Udaka of the Kongo School, and *Nihon Buyo* with Senrei Nishikawa of the Nishikawa School. In Indonesia, I attended dance practice at the Mangkunegaran Palace in Solo, and studied Balinese dance with Kadek Dewi Aryani at her studio in Ubud, Bali.

I also conducted workshops to introduce *Lanna* dance to local students. I taught a series of classes in *Lanna* dance at Kyoto Seika University, concluding with a performance in which students danced in costume before an audience. I also taught *Lanna* dance to students at the Institut Seni Indonesia ISI Surakarta in Solo.

Through workshops and classes such as these I had a chance to learn the dance techniques of Japan and Indonesia, and to pass on some of my traditional knowledge to students in both countries.

#### Collaborations

##### a. “Tatsushige to Ronnarong” (22 January 2011)

From August 2010 to January 2011, Tatsushige Udaka and I embarked on six months of study of Noh. Beginning with *aisatsu* (greetings), we worked on how to wear the kimono and *hakama* (lower garment), the forms of Noh dance, such as *kamae* (basic stance) and *ashi-hakobi* (moving the feet), culminating in the study of

two *shimai* (the dance part of *Noh* Theater) from the plays *Oimatsu* (Ancient Pine) and *Yuki* (Snow).

In *Yuki*, the *kata* (forms) used in the dance are very simple, which makes it suitable for *Noh* beginners. At the same time, the theme (the spirit of snow) makes it a demanding dance, since the actor must express a heart as pure as the spirit of white snow.

Once, in a practice session, I remarked that I finally felt freedom within the totally prescribed forms of *Noh* dance. Tatsushige responded by explaining the concept of “*shu ha ri*.” This was a moment of discovery for the two of us.

*Shu* means “obey;” *ha* means “break;” *ri* means “depart.” First you learn how to obey the rules, but there comes a point where you start to break them, and finally you depart from the rules altogether in order to reach a new level. It describes the process of development as an artist.

Tatsushige says, “*Shu ha ri* is a daily theme for me personally. After you pass through the *ri* of *shu ha ri*, you arrive back to *shu* again... Always changing, it’s a painful and difficult process, but I feel it points to something very deep, essential to art.”

Tatsushige’s *shu, ha, ri* is also a metaphor for the globalization of traditional dance. *Shu* is the traditional forms as they’ve been handed down, *ha* and *ri* are when you break through to contemporary forms. And then you go back to *shu* to get inspiration from the traditional once more.

On the night of 22 January 2011, we held a joint event in the main hall of the historic Honen-In Temple in Kyoto. First we demonstrated the similarities and differences between *Noh* and *Lanna*; and then we showed the audience something of *Noh* training. At the end, I performed the *shimai* (dance part) of *Yuki* four times: once properly, as taught; the second time, “breaking” by adding some *Lanna* feeling; the third time “departing” by making it mostly *Lanna* with some *Noh* feeling. And then a fourth time, I performed in complete *Noh* costume with a mask in front of the Buddha; back to *shu*, the original form again. It was a merging of two traditions that is only possible in our globalized world. But it wasn’t just “mix and match.” While sharing, we each preserved the essential core of our own traditions.

**b. “Rianto to Ronnarong,” 30 June 2011**

The aim of this performance was similar to that of “Tatsushige to Ronnarong.” This time it was collaboration between me and Rianto, the Javanese dancer from Banyumas, who I have known and worked with since 2006.

In this event, performed at the Tidak Sekedar Tari Program at TBS (Cultural Center of Central Java), Solo, we developed the *shu ha ri* concept in a different way. We began on opposite parts of the stage dancing in our traditional styles (*shu* – “obey”). When we became close to each other, we explained to the audience our styles and

how we use them to create contemporary dance (*ha* – “break”). We then danced together in contemporary style (*ri* – “depart”). At the end, we crossed to the opposite side of the stage to where we started, and danced our traditional styles again (back to *shu* again). The challenge was for us to show contemporary dance together and in the process to return to the origin of dance that transcends both genres.

An important part of the event was talking with the audience at the end of the program. In the strongly artistic society of Solo, criticism from the audience is useful for artists in order to develop their work. When the experience and knowledge of the individual artists are different, this can make for a conflict of ideas, but it is also a starting point of conversation and discussion.

Many audience members said that it was interesting to see the differences and similarities between Javanese and *Lanna* culture, and how we developed traditional forms into contemporary dance. However, some people said it didn’t feel so much like a dance “performance” as a “workshop” on stage.

The critics were probably right because contemporary experiments like ours are in a sense “workshops.” Artists are feeling their way, experimenting as they go. In this case, it was a combination of three cultures: a Japanese concept, *Lanna* dance, and Javanese dance.

### c. *Kembang Kapas*

I first met singer Peni Candra Rini at the APPEX (Asian Pacific Performing Exchange) program held in Bali in February 2010. Born in 1983 in Tulungagung in East Java, Peni is a composer and well-known *sindhen* (a female singer who sings with a *gamelan*). Peni has received awards for her work and participates in many festivals, collaborating with different artists from all over the world.

In February 2011 I had a conversation with Peni in which we said that we would like to create a collaboration piece featuring music and dance. We started to work on this project, with each of us working from our own traditional base. The performance was held at the Theater Kecil ISI Surakarta in Solo on 11 July 2011. The title *Kembang Kapas* meant “cotton flowers,” which are the flowers of life. It was inspired by a poem “*Kembang Kapas*” by Garin Nugroho, an Indonesian artist and movie director. Peni wrote and sang the music, which was traditional Javanese-modern fusion; I did the choreography, which was *Lanna*-contemporary fusion.

Peni said, “We’re all of the new generation that can enjoy Facebook and use Skype to talk with friends in other countries. But we are also very lucky that we know about traditional arts. I am a *sindhen* singer; I was famous for my voice and almost became a pop singer and a star in Jakarta. But I decided to be a teacher to teach students how to sing traditional music. It makes only small money, but I’m so happy that I can help to pass on our traditional music and at the same time I can work on creating new music based on that tradition I have within me. Amen!”

## Conclusion

In the 21st century, Asian dance traditions are at a turning point. Some traditions will probably be lost, such as the knowledge of the old *Hayachine Kagura* dancer Mr. Suzuki in the town of Tohno. But in the same area, the *Shishi-Odori* dance is healthy, and continues with the young generation. The key to survival is the ability to make dance attractive to, and taught to, young people, and not only the property of the old.

In Bali, the strong Hindu beliefs of the people ensure traditions are passed from generation to generation in local ceremonies such as the festival at Samwan Tiga temple.

In Osaka, “Downtown Kabuki” connects with audiences by bringing in “pop” elements. In Tokushima, good city management of the *Awa Odori* Festival helps to make the event fun and popular.

The “In The Arts Island 2011” festival in Bali and East Java has succeeded because of the open-mindedness of the local artists and audiences, including villagers. Performing arts in Mangkunegaran Palace thrive because the palace has pride in its tradition, promotes the arts, and teaches to local and international students.

For some artists the challenges are more difficult than for others. *Noh* Theater has elements that make it feel very modern and abstract, so it should be easy to use it in contemporary work. However, a young actor like Tatsushige Udaka under the control of the *Iemoto* system must be very careful. He cannot do anything too adventurous, too suddenly.

Other artists, such as half-Japanese, half-Swiss Heidi Durning in Kyoto, are relatively free to do what they want, but they find it difficult to be entirely accepted in local society.

Peni, Rianto, and Mugiyono represent different aspects of Indonesia’s very active performance world. Peni uses avant-garde composing and singing; Rianto travels between Japan and Solo; Mugiyono performs in arts festivals worldwide. All three are succeeding in bringing their traditional arts into the modern world and appealing to new audiences.

These are all examples of what I saw during my one year of research: how performers and institutions manage to continue traditional dance in interesting ways in order to survive in a borderless modern world.

For myself, I took up the challenge of fusion and modernization through collaborative performances with *Noh* actor Tatsushige in “Tatsushige to Ronnarong,” with Javanese dancer Rianto in “Rianto to Ronnarong,” and with Javanese singer and composer Peni Candra Rini in “Kembang Kapas.”

The benefit was not only in the performances that we created, but in the time we spent working together, exchanging our cultures through dance. Through these connections we are building a network in the Asian dance world, and we will continue this in our own countries through performances, by giving dance workshops, and by giving presentations around Asia and beyond.

This kind of collaboration is not a new thing. But in a time of globalization when traditional arts are under threat, it is important to show how we can develop traditional arts, and bring them alive in the contemporary world.

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