

## **“The Watchers by the Well”**

by Tim Jones (storyteller) and Segara Madu (Balinese *gendér wayang* group)

**1<sup>st</sup> November 2014, 7pm, Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS, University of London, FREE**

Following on from the group’s exploration of Balinese legend in “The Birth of Kala”, Segara Madu blends Balinese instruments with violin and electronics in this retelling of “The Watchers by the Well”, a folk-tale from the English-Welsh borders.

This story appears as “The Hare and the Harburer (version 2)” in a collection by the Somerset folklorist Ruth L. Tongue (Tongue 1970: 110–16) and is reproduced verbatim in Katherine Brigg’s *A dictionary of British folk-tales in the English language* (1970: 554–60), but with the title “The Watchers by the Well”.<sup>1</sup> It is said to have been collected from a Hampshire New Forest gypsy in the 1920s, but to originate in the Welsh Borders. It may be an amalgam of various sources. The atmosphere of the story is somewhat unsettling, as if we are on an unknown path, unsure whether we are in a real or imagined past, present or even future.

### **Ruth L. Tongue:**

Ruth Tongue (1898-1981) has been described as “a problematic figure” for folktale collection (Simpson and Roud 2000: 363). Mystical and eccentric, she was often dismissed by more academic collectors: “she was, after all, a storyteller by nature, and she could never stop herself from improving a good tale” (Rhodes 2009: 3). One might, however, argue this makes her more rather than less in tune with the character of her sources. In the spirit of Ruth Tongue, then, Segara Madu presents this retelling, whose borderline existence is reflected in the uncertain provenance of its musical language, the problematic nature of certain elements in the tale, and the questionable reliability of its narrative.

### **Gendér wayang:**

*Gendér wayang* is the name given to a small quartet (or sometimes duo) of bronze metallophones, used in Bali to accompany the shadow play (*wayang kulit*), a sacred drama based on stories from ancient Indian epics. It also serves as a ritual ensemble playing for life-cycle ceremonies, temple festivals, purification rituals and cremations as part of Bali’s rich Hindu heritage. The playing technique in this miniature gamelan ensemble is very demanding, as players must damp the ringing notes with their wrists while executing high-speed figuration that interlocks between the instruments. Bamboo resonating tubes beneath the keys give the sound a unique resonance.

### **The programme (no interval):**

1) Three Balinese *gendér wayang* pieces taught by I Wayan Locéng in Sukawati village in south Bali:

“**Suléndra**” – an introductory piece

“**Partha Wijaya**” – for fast action in the shadow play

“**Kayonan**” – for the dance of the tree of life at the start of a shadow play

2) “**The Watchers by the Well**” (music by Nick Gray): a story with music. The opening tune is loosely based on “Worcester City” or “Oxford City” (traditional English; a version can be found in Vaughan Williams and Lloyd 1959: 83). It also includes an excerpt from “The Prayer of

---

<sup>1</sup> A harburer is someone who looks after the deer of a forest.

Protection” (traditional English, transcribed in Tongue 1967: 99). Final song: “The Watchers by the Well” by Nick Gray.

3) “**Sekar Sungsang**” A Balinese *gendér wayang* piece taught by I Nyoman Gunawan and I Wayan Mudita in Tenganan village, east Bali. A simpler, less ornate style than that of Sukawati.

**The group:**

**Segara Madu** is a *gendér wayang* group based at SOAS, directed and taught by Nick Gray. The performers are: Paula Friar, Rachel Hewitt and Nick Gray.

Storyteller **Tim Jones** is a singer, performer and workshop facilitator. He has pioneered a method of voice teaching, **The Nature of Sound** that draws on both his long study of South Indian music and bhakti (devotion) spiritual traditions with K.R. Sivasankara Pannikar, and of **Amerta Movement** with Suprpto Suryodarmo from Java. Tim is also a qualified craniosacral therapist.

**Nick Gray** composes and lectures on music at SOAS. He studied *gendér wayang* for several years with I Wayan Locéng in Sukawati, a village in south Bali famed for its shadow puppetry and the complexity of its *gendér* style. In this performance he also plays violin and synthesiser.

**Bibliography:**

Katherine Briggs (1970) *A dictionary of British folk-tales in the English language, incorporating the F. J. Norton collection: [in 4vols]. Part A, Folk narratives*, vol 1: 554–60. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

M. B. Rhodes (2009) *Songs and stories of Ruth Tongue, self styled folklorist from Somerset*. Crowcombe, Somerset: Halsway Manor Society.

Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, eds. (2000) *A dictionary of English folklore*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ruth L. Tongue (1970) *Forgotten folk-tales of the English counties*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ruth L. Tongue (1967) *The Chime Child or Somerset singers: being an account of some of them and their songs collected over sixty years*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ralph Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd, eds. (1959) *The Penguin book of English folk songs*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

**For Segara Madu’s “The Birth of Kala”, visit <http://music.sas.ac.uk/node/160>**

**Thanks to:** SOAS Faculty of Arts & Humanities for funding, Paula and Rachel for the spinning light, The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at Cecil Sharp House, Halsway Manor at Crowcombe, Somerset, and Jeremy Glasgow of the SOAS audio-visual technicians team. Dedicated to the late I Wayan Locéng and Ruth L. Tongue.