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## Stage managing *Bali Agung*: The possibility of hybridity in an intercultural production<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper explores notions of hybridity within an intercultural large-scale show in Bali, including levels of innovation, synthesized processes, scenery and safety considerations. As the original stage manager, I will discuss the mounting of the show from a technical production perspective, giving attention to the use and management of the stage space and its supporting environments. The focus is on hybridity in the context of the term ‘syncretic theatre’, which “integrates performance elements of different cultures into a form that aims to retain the cultural integrity of the specific materials used while forging new texts and theatre practices” (Lo & Gilbert, 2002, pp. 35-36). While the content and form of intercultural performance has been viewed through the lens of hybridity, the backstage management aspects have not been considered within this rubric to the same extent. This paper explores how innovation, negotiation and adaptation created a hybrid organisational entity during the production processes of *Bali Agung*, a Balinese legend performed by Indonesian artists on an ‘international’ style mega-stage.

**Keywords:** Stage management, Bali Theatre, intercultural production, backstage production processes, hybridity

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an expansion of an unpublished essay that was awarded the International Federation for Theatre Research’s 2013/14 New Scholars’ Prize.

### **Prelude**

***As the house lights dim, two women dressed in local batik sarongs and carrying small offerings of flowers and banana leaves with incense enter the eighty-metre wide space. We are reminded that we are in Bali, and an offering must be made to the gods to ensure taksu, success for today's show. The call of the conch shell signifies the beginning of the performance. A stage left curtain opens revealing a parade of umbul-umbul (Balinese flags or banners) carried by thirty-five villagers, some with offerings, interspersed between eight Sumatran elephants and their mahouts (drivers). Accompanied by a gamelan (percussion) ensemble, they snake their way through the audience and return to backstage via the stage right curtain, while the parade continues centre stage in the form of wayang kulit (shadow puppet) images projected on a white silk cloth. The parade finishes with the arrival of King Sri Jaya Pangus on the back of an elephant. Thus begins our journey to a Balinese village circa 1200AD.***

The elephants and *mahouts* are part of the Bali Safari and Marine Park in Gianyar. The 'villagers' are played by cast mainly hailing from Bona Village, on the eastern side of Bali, and the *wayang kulit* performance is expertly manipulated by a team of *dalang* (puppeteers) from the local community.

Bali Theatre (also known as *Bali Agung* Theatre) opened in 2010 in Gianyar, Bali, Indonesia. It was the first theatre of its kind on the island and the first mega-theatre in Indonesia. Coinciding with the theatre opening was the inaugural performance of the large-scale, intercultural production *Bali Agung*. This original show is set in Bali and presents a legend of Balinese goddesses. The production was created by an international team, led by Indonesian executive producers, an Australian creative director and designers, and a Balinese artistic director, it features a cast of more than 150 Balinese performers, plus 11 species of animals, and is currently supported by an Indonesian intra-cultural technical team of approximately 70. *Bali Agung* is now in its sixth year of performances and, as the original stage manager, I will discuss the mounting of the show from a technical production perspective, giving attention to the use and management of the stage space and its supporting environments.

This paper explores notions of Balinese theatre production, levels of innovation and synthesized processes, including scenery and safety considerations. Initiated by practice and part of a larger study, it weaves together an in-depth disciplinary knowledge developed over three decades of (western) professional theatre industry practice underpinned by anthropological, cultural and performance-related theory. I focus on hybridity in the context of the term 'syncretic theatre', which "integrates performance elements of different cultures into a form that aims to retain the cultural integrity of the specific materials used while forging new texts and theatre practices" (Lo & Gilbert, 2002, pp. 35-36). While the content and form of intercultural performance has been viewed through the lens of hybridity, backstage management aspects have not been considered within this rubric to the same extent.

Intercultural theatre has been a source of controversy over the years. Connotations attached to the term include those of cultural imperialism, colonization and appropriation, often resulting in inequalities in the balance of power between the different parties involved (Bharucha, 1993; Latrell, 2000; Pavis, 1996). However, there is another more utopian aspect to such theatre as well, where cultures work together "in search of a common humanity" (Knowles, 2010, p. 3). This case-study is specific in its scope and sits between these two positions in a place of negotiation and exchange, more in line with Julie Holledge and Jo Tompkins' definition of interculturalism wherein engagement marks "the meeting in the moment of two or more cultures" (2000, p.7). This definition is particularly useful in the circumstances of *Bali Agung* where several cultures intertwine to create a specific, original performance. The melding of production aspects and approaches will be detailed in this paper as I look at hybridity from a stage manager's perspective, applying the concept to theatrical production protocols by viewing the organisational styles and processes in a specific cultural context. In the case of *Bali Agung*, I argue that it is possible for innovation, negotiation and adaptation to create a hybrid organisational entity during the production processes of an intercultural show.

The term 'hybrid' encompasses a generalised mixing of different elements. Néstor Garcia-Canclini writes:

Hybridity, originally a biological term, has been used by authors in the social sciences, literary, artistic, and cultural studies to designate processes in which discrete social practices or structures, that existed in separate ways, combine to generate new structures, objects, and practices in which the preceding elements mix. (2001, p. 7095)

In the Bali Theatre case, May Joseph's 'new hybridity' involving modernity and transnational relations may be more pertinent to the Bali Theatre phenomenon. Joseph notes that:

By foregrounding modernization and development, the impact and growing complexity of the resultant new secular identities that are spawned by the globalizing tendencies through which they are mediated can now be read as new hybrid identities. (1999, p. 8)

In order to comprehend the modernisation of theatre style brought about by the construction of Bali Theatre, we must first begin by examining the characteristics of traditional Balinese performance spaces, then consider how new technology might impact on these previously held modes of performance presentation, and finally, show how diverse approaches evolved into hybrid protocols.

### **Balinese theatre**

I. Wayan Dibia and Rucina Ballinger provide the following description of Balinese performance spaces and protocols:

The traditional *kalangan* (performance space) can be a simple clearing in front of someone's home, a field in the village or a large permanent structure, open on three sides with an elevated stage. The audience sits on the floor or on chairs. The *kalangan* could be in the outer courtyard of a temple, with a *langse* (split curtain) at one end. This flanked on two sides by the *gamelan* players and the audience sitting wherever they can see. Generally there are not tickets, reserved seats or timetable. The performance begins when the performers have all gathered, been fed and are made up. (2004, p. 9)

This style of *kalangan* is common for Balinese performances, while rehearsals might be held at a *sanggar* (community performing artists' studio) or the *bale banjar* (community hall, see Figure 1). Other styles of venues include the less common small indoor stages such as that of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI, see Figure 2) or various outdoor amphitheatres. Most notable of this style is the Performing Arts Centre in Denpasar which has the capacity to seat several thousand audience members on raked bench seating (see Figure 3). This professional theatre is equipped with lighting and audio capabilities, *gamelan* side-stage platforms and limited backstage areas.



Figure 1: Example of community space that might be used for rehearsals or performances (*bale banjar*), 2012. Photograph: author



Figure 2: Example of an indoor stage at Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI), Denpasar, 2012. Photograph: author



Figure 3: Denpasar Performing Arts Centre stage, 2012. Photograph: author



Figure 4: Bali Agung technical rehearsal, Bali Theatre, 2010. Photograph: Richard Jeziorny

In 2010, the mega-theatre was the newest style of performance venue to enter into the Balinese landscape. Figure 4 illustrates a technical rehearsal onstage at Bali Theatre and gives evidence of the difference in style to previous Balinese venues. In addition to the performance area, the stage has enough enclosed backstage area to store the ten different settings used in the performance of *Bali Agung*, as well as 250 cast and crew and ten elephants. At the time of Bali Theatre's construction, the enclosed nature of the space was innovative for a professional performance venue. Since the opening of the theatre coincided with the first performance of *Bali Agung*, the production also informed the theatre's interior design. Housing an 80-metre wide stage, this venue boasts state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment, a custom-made counterweight fly system, a moat, and traps in the stage floor. The house is air-conditioned, with permanent seating designed for the comfort of up to 1,200 patrons. In contrast to the Balinese *kalangan* where the performance space might be set up in a number of orientations in relation to the audience, Bali Theatre is set up as a proscenium arch style theatre and is less flexible in structure. Similar to some *bale banjar* stages, the presentation is positioned for viewing from one viewing perspective known as the front. However, this space becomes a hybrid or stylised proscenium as the arch opening is only 35-metres wide on an 80-metre wide stage. Rather than completely framing the action of the production, the arch is seemingly freestanding. This configuration translates to performance areas set outside of the proscenium frame, another 20-metres in each lateral direction, stage left and stage right. It also incorporates a moat of approximately 60-metres in length, set directly in front of the stage, and a 'passerelle' that doubles as the audience entrance path as well as a path for performers (visible in the foreground of Figure 4).<sup>2</sup> This path connects the performers with the audience in the opening scene and includes ramps leading to the backstage areas at both ends of the stage. The following section considers how the transition to a highly technical theatre changes the approach to production procedures.

### **Scene One**

***A white silk curtain masks the stage as a new wayung kulit shadow puppet scene begins. A series of shadow animals emerge from the traditional kayonan (tree of life) heralding a***

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<sup>2</sup>The stage term 'passerelle' refers to a semicircular bridge, catwalk or gangplank extending from the stage, generally surrounding an orchestra or orchestra pit. In the *Bali Agung* example, the bridge encompasses the moat and a small section of audience seating (approximately 150 seats) rather than an orchestra.



***'new day' before an instant change of lighting signals the release of the silk cloth on which the puppets are projected. The Kabuki-style cloth disappears magically into the centre stage floor as a blue cloth rises, spreading across the stage like a pool of water.<sup>3</sup> Rattan life-size animal puppets make their way to the water.***

Subsequent to the show's prelude, the action moves from the passarelle to the stage, where a 20-metre-wide silk cloth masks performers and scenery. When lit from behind, the cloth transforms to a large-scale *wayang kulit* cloth, providing *dalangs* with an opportunity to use their traditional skills on an enormous 'screen' with the assistance of a 5000-watt electric light. When the kabuki-style cloth is released from above, fluttering to the stage floor and disappearing into a trap door, the audience is transported from the *wayang kulit* scene to the next fictional space. This illustrates how backstage organisation, design and technology can be used to effectively accomplish a transitional scene change in the context of a performance.

### **Scene Two**

***As the shadows fade, the percussive gamelan gives way to a more stylised soundscape as the village is skillfully constructed one element at a time. Trees, huts, carts, a rice paddy and groups of villagers create the scene of a Balinese village complete with a cow, roosters, ducks and goats.***

***Made, the master dalang of the village, and his son Wayan arrive amidst a full stage-freeze of dozens of cast.<sup>4</sup> This is where the narrative begins. The two characters make their way to the front of the stage and set up their wayang kulit screen, blancon (lantern) and puppets on a circular platform over the moat. Made begins to tell his son the story of a King through shadow puppetry. Once this convention is set, the stage once again comes to life.***

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<sup>3</sup> A kabuki-style drop is a special effect allowing for a swift or sudden reveal of hidden elements onstage. The drop is generally made of a light-weight cloth to enable it to fall swiftly to the stage floor when it is released from its fly-line, or pipe. The mechanism for the release varies.

<sup>4</sup> The Balinese name Made is pronounced ma:dei.

## **Levels of innovation**

In traditional *wayang kulit*, the lantern or oil lamp (*blancon*) houses an actual flame, but in *Bali Agung* the *blancon* is rigged with electric light, instituted for practicality and safety reasons. Flame is preferred in *wayang kulit* performances as the shadows produced by the variations in light are thought to embody the spirit of the character or of a god. The intermittent spurts of the flame actually make it seem that the shadows are breathing (Jensen & Suryani, 1992).

On a stage management level, where occupational health and safety (OH&S) is a priority, electric light is less dangerous and logistically more straightforward than a flame. Using an electric lamp facilitates transitions from one scene to another without requiring the *dalang* to light, extinguish and relight the *blancon* wick. It also affords the lighting designer the ability to adjust the intensity of the lantern within a scene. As the performance is understood *not* to be a ritual, but a staged representation, this modified *blancon* seems to be accepted as part of theatrical conventions.

The circular platform, used by Made in the scene above, is also an introduced style of scenery commonly known as a 'revolve', operated in this instance by a technician sitting on the stage behind the platform and manually pushing the platform in a horizontal circular motion. With the *wayang kulit* screen dissecting the platform and the *blancon* hung downstage (on the audience side, see Figure 4) of the screen, we are able to see Made as he prepares for his puppet show and also observe Made's discussion with his son Wayan in preparation for the story. Made brings life to the characters of the legend through the *wayang kulit* puppets. The platform then revolves so that the characters and lantern are behind the screen. For the next sequences of the show, the audience can watch portions of the shadow puppetry on the revolve *wayang kulit* screen, as well as the live performance on the main stage. The turntable remains in this position until the end of the story when it revolves back to allow the audience to see Made and Wayan pack up the *wayang kulit* puppets and return to the main stage.

In addition to the puppetry work, the one-hour production introduces different cultural and ritual dances, edited to fit into this specific theatrical space and timeframe. These sequences include a Balinese welcome dance, and a stylised Chinese dance as the first Chinese junk arrives carrying the captain's daughter Kang Ching Wie, with whom the King promptly falls in love. The action segues into a wedding, complete with variations of the renowned dances *Legong*, *Topeng* and *Barong*. These dances are

often performed in both ritual and tourist shows.<sup>5</sup>

Musical accompaniment is not a new concept in Balinese theatre. The percussive *gamelan* is so ingrained in performance that different rhythms in the music actually cue performers' entrances. The understanding of this cuing mechanism is acquired at a young age. Due to the unusually wide nature of this mega-theatre's stage, negotiation and explanation was required to convince artists, such as the dancers, to enter on cue several phrases prior to their customary musical cues. Entrances required early anticipation to ensure that the dancers travelled the extra distance and were onstage in their proscribed positions when the gamelan segued into their specific music. Cuing the dancers' entrances became a duty of the stage manager, thus eliminating unnecessary pauses between sections and scenes, and ensuring the smooth flow of the performance.

### **Finale**

***We journey from the village to a fantasy forest by way of a choreographed voyage and shipwreck. After the Goddess of Lake Batur discovers King Sri Jaya Pangus on the shores an affair ensues which produces an heir to the throne.***

***Through the magic of performance, puppetry, choreography, lighting, moving scenery, special effects and music, we accompany the Queen on her own voyage to the forest, the discovery of the King, Prince and Goddess and battle of the guards and giant puppet monsters. The King and Queen are turned into stone statues by the Goddess, and then brought to life again in the form of the Barong Landung (large puppets), to protect the Balinese people.***

The show transports us through ten lavish settings. Every scene projects a cultural aspect and/or a spectacular visual effect. The executive producer charged the company with creating a Balinese story, one that is true to its cultural aesthetics and concurrently introduces new staging to support the story and make the show spectacular in world-class terms. The 'mega-theatre', one might argue, is of western

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<sup>5</sup> These specific dances have been modified for the production. Rituals, ceremonies and customary permissions were attended to throughout the production process in accordance with local cultural advisors and are the subject of a paper currently in development.

design, but it is an international image that the company aims to achieve (H. Manansang, personal communication, September 8, 2011).<sup>6</sup>

In this circumstance, where Indonesian producers *invited* 'western' creative staff to participate, the resulting synthesized approach to staging couches the production in the realms of a constructive syncretic theatre due to its strong commitment to retain cultural content, infused and supported by the incorporation of other 'foreign' effects. In this way, Christopher Balmes's concept of *equilibrium* describes the actualised fusion, where "traditional form absorbs the foreign elements to such an extent that formal innovation becomes the dominant characteristic" (1999, p. 19). This idea poses the possibility that, in this instance, syncretic theatre may not be an example of colonisation or homogenisation, but rather an incorporation of diverse skills and facilities in an exchange that supports an indigenous cultural text, supported on the whole by an Indonesian cast and crew, and innovative in its presentation.

### **Synthesized processes**

Levels of innovation in the production created hybrid processes to ensure the smooth running of the performance. The most notable change to the usual Balinese ceremonies and celebrations from my point of view was the introduction of the role of the stage manager. In simplest terms, the stage manager is responsible for the flow of a performance. *Bali Agung* required a minimum of eight stage managers to ensure a smooth, safe-running performance. Without experienced local theatre workers, the stage management team was necessarily trained on the job as we progressed through the production process of rehearsals, technical rehearsals on stage, and stage performances in the ongoing run of the show. The style of stage management taught was derived from western theatrical practice, in response to anticipated rehearsal protocols, new technology and safety considerations. However, it became evident during rehearsals that other factors would impact on the process.<sup>7</sup> Lines became blurred in the creation of processes required to run this highly technical show as hybrid management strategies emerged incorporating many aspects of production, from casting to safety management. Training dozens of inexperienced locals to safely use the introduced technology brought its own variations to the process.

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'western' is used in a general sense, indicating that which originates through a European lineage, for the purpose of theatrical comparisons. A lower-case 'w' is engaged for the purpose of not emphasizing or seeming to show preference to any particular culture.

<sup>7</sup> See also Studham (2015), *Stage management: A question of approach in intercultural theatre*, which makes an in-depth examination of these factors.

As the Balinese artists came to terms with the structured and lengthy procedures for rehearsals and performance, the western contingency struggled with differing perceptions concerning the nature of time and its formal management. Compromises and cultural understandings intertwined with the vision of how an outcome, the final production, could be achieved and this situation inevitably determined our methodology as we progressed.

Cast attendance at rehearsals was respondent to community and temple commitments and a distinct approach to daily life. Culturally important events, not always planned, must be prioritised in a society where community members are interdependent in the duties required to maintain harmony and balance between the seen and the unseen worlds.<sup>8</sup> Responsibilities to family, community (*banjar*) and religion all played a part in developing a system which was ultimately devised to ensure there was always enough cast and technical staff to perform the show, while also allowing a degree of flexibility for community commitments. Artistic staff created an arrangement involving a large number of understudy or 'swing' cast who were trained to step into specific roles at short notice.

The initial contingent of 120 *dalang*, dancers and performers were drawn from one Balinese community. However, further considerations needed attention in response to the challenges brought on by fluctuating attendance. The replacement process became complicated when it was understood that some of the 'swings' were from the same *banjar* as the original cast. This presented a problem when temple ceremonies specific to their *banjar* occurred and neither cast could attend. The solution to this dilemma came by way of extending the invitation of performing in the show to villages outside the immediate community, thus ensuring there would be enough cast members to perform any given show (currently running six times per week). For myself, the new understanding of *banjar* commitments added to a growing awareness of cultural considerations involving how I related to the community with which I worked. This, in turn, expanded my perceptions of protocols not generally catered for in western theatre and inspired processes of alternative approaches to knowledge exchange within specific cultural contexts.

### **Props and innovation**

Notions of hybridity and innovation are applicable to some aspects of the handling and operation of the properties (props) used in *Bali Agung*, which in this production are similar to artifacts that would be used in cultural performances. With many of the

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion on this topic, see Eiseman (1989).

company and crew being experienced artisans, such as mask carvers and puppet makers, there were few issues that could not be attended to. Variation was found in the organization of presets, the notation and placement of each individual prop and scenic element used in the performance (including any moves or resets throughout the show) and daily maintenance procedures. Simply using lists, charts and maps or diagrams to check prop placement seemed to be a change to the normal routine for the newly initiated stage staff.

Within the stage management team, further forethought was required regarding implications for props pertaining to the casting and replacement procedures. In this production, certain props and small pieces of scenery are moved, or manoeuvred, by specific individuals within the cast. With the ongoing role of swings extending into cast and crew positions, a chart of set pieces, scenes and responsibilities that would be either taken over by another company member or cut altogether depending on the circumstance and performers in attendance, needed to be put in place. The configuration varied daily. The replacement plans are put in operation by the stage management team in the last minutes before the show starts, as the official sign-on time for the cast is only understood as a general guide.<sup>9</sup> Some of the final decisions on replacement cast lists must be made before the house opens (twenty minutes prior to show time) in case there is a 'knock-on' effect with regards to prop setting. The following is an example of how casting and attendance might affect the flow of a performance.

Initially there were two performers trained to manoeuvre the canoe from stage right to stage left across the moat without capsizing. However, if both canoe rowers are absent, the stage management team must change the preset position of the prop because the canoe must be at the stage left end of the moat as the ducks swim across to stage right. If this manoeuvre is not achieved, access to the duck exit ramp will be blocked. While the two-dozen ducks could happily remain in the moat, they might distract the audience and cast and complicate the flow of subsequent scenes. Additionally, at approximately 40 minutes into the show, special water effects programmed through the lighting desk burst from the moat. Unless there is sufficient time to reprogram the effects during the show, an emergency show stop would be required to move the boat and safely remove the ducks from the water. With twelve scenes, ten different settings, and more than 200 cast and crew, the stage management and production teams had to be innovative with hypothetical situations to develop back-up plans.

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<sup>9</sup> The cast's official sign-on time (also known as sign-in) to prepare for *Bali Agung* is set at one hour prior to the commencement of the show. However, as is accepted culturally, some cast will arrive minutes before the show commences, already with full make-up on.

### **Scenery and safety considerations**

The style of scenery also impacted on process, method and contingency plans. Moving scenery, in this case both horizontally and vertically, which transitions the action from scene to scene without disrupting the flow of a performance, was a new departure for a Balinese performance. While it may have been technically possible to move scenery in Balinese theatre scene transitions prior to *Bali Agung*, it was not part of the usual process. Flying scenery, moving large scenery pieces, revolves and trap doors (with a drop of up to three-metres that could open in the floor during the performance), are all innovations that have added to the theatricality of a performance in supporting the story. With the introduction of these new staging methods came a forced awareness of safety issues and risk management. The basic understanding of safety considerations on the stage needed to be addressed with the *Bali Agung* company as it was the first time they had dealt with any of these components. If we were employing equipment that involved inherent dangers, it was the theatre management's responsibility to ensure that all employees of the theatre understood how to safely handle such equipment. Introductions to safety issues required constant repetition, as we never had a full complement of cast together at any one time during the rehearsal process.

The challenge was to achieve a shared understanding of safety management and to implement appropriate OH&S conditions. Initially, there seemed to be a resistance to, or dismissal of, the concept of safety management. Counterbalancing this was a reported frustration from the Indonesian team as to why these rules were necessary.

What was observed in the rehearsal process of *Bali Agung* seemed to be a lack of understanding of why the safety equipment was important. Steel toe shoes were provided to stage staff, and hardhats were also provided if there was work overhead. Yet, rarely was a hardhat seen when staff were working onstage. Safety footwear was only perceived as a 'costume', with thongs being the preferred footwear.

A discussion with an international oil consultant on safety management in the southeast Asian region raised the question: if the body is a fit tool, does adding safety gear to it then make a 'well-tuned machine' unsafe in unfamiliar shields? Would an employee who spends most days wearing open footwear and no shirt, be unsafe working in safety gear such as closed, heavy, steel-capped shoes and a high visibility vest? OH&S Research conducted in 1995 in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia noted that, for varying reasons, Indonesians do not adhere to guidelines. Although safety equipment may be provided on site, it is often not used by the workforce (Hutchings, 1996).

It took more time than anticipated to train staff to follow specific procedures and use the safety gear provided. OH&S regulations, largely seen as a western construct, may only be adopted by locals once there is a better understanding of *possible* injuries. The new procedures were eventually embraced, or perhaps *tolerated*, for the

benefit of the show and in order to use the new technology.

Interspersed with this imposition of the unfamiliar were negotiated procedural adjustments to accommodate backstage cultural requirements such as the *taksu* temple. Observing backstage areas from a risk management perspective, one of the zones that I suggest requires a high level of vigilance is the fly rail. This area and its equipment is set on one side of the stage in theatres which utilise a counterweight or winch fly system that generally runs the depth of the stage. The fly system is operated by a team of trained technicians. It is not unusual, due to safety regulations, for a line to be drawn on the floor that only trained fly-staff may cross. The integration of the backstage shrine forced a compromise to protocols in this safety area.

The small temple was positioned by the temple priest stage right, at the fly rail, between active fly-lines. This, he inferred, was the most auspicious position in the theatre for pre-show prayer obligations due to its proximity to Mount Agung (*Ganung Agung*), the highest and most sacred active volcano on the island, and the place where the gods reside. It is at this temple that the cast and crew pray and give offerings. There is quite often incense burning at the temple. In a western theatre, these practices might be considered unacceptable for several reasons, including the locality in relation to the fly equipment, and burning incense, which poses a fire hazard. However, the decision to situate the temple was not a discussion or negotiation determined by the theatre. Protocols to accommodate both the gods and safety regulations were enacted with a flexibility that may not have been tolerated in a counterpart western theatre. Bali Theatre staff have been trained in fire-safety management and first aid and the cast have been inducted in safety procedures.

Working with 11 species of animals, from elephants to ducks, introduced other safety considerations, ranging from onstage and offstage lighting to emergency exits, 'animal comfort areas' and hygiene. While interesting in itself, particularly the management of safari animals, there is not scope to adequately cover this topic in this paper. Suffice to say that measures were put in place to counteract or ameliorate any foreseeable incident which may have occurred to endanger the animals and the people in the vicinity.

### **Hybridity in process**

*Bali Agung* performers were skilled in the art of stage make-up and wardrobe. They developed their own routines for setting out their many costume changes with the aid of simple equipment such as numbered baskets and shelving for the accessories. Wardrobe staff were given guidance and advice from an Australian professional wardrobe supervisor to streamline their procedures, alongside the designer who also advised in the dressing of the characters.

Basic lighting and audio had already been incorporated in Balinese performances; however, moving lights and dedicated follow spots involved new technology and



methods that required the training of staff. The programming of the computerised lighting control desk is a specialist skill that required not only an experienced technician to program, but also a full schedule of training to enable the handover of responsibilities to local staff. Likewise, the use of audio time-code (a computer generated time-synchronization system which can be digitally displayed) as a cue triggering mechanism between audio and lighting desks is quite advanced technology. For the Bali Theatre staff, the use of this system required understanding and maintenance of the technology, as well as daily pre-show tests and a back-up system.

Hybridity emerged, if not in performance style, then certainly in the procedures used to run and maintain this production. Adaptations to procedures were necessary to ensure a smooth running show and an ongoing high level of performance, as well as to accommodate cultural needs and understandings. Variations on procedures involved how and when cast arrived at the venue, how we communicated with each other, how the cast is cued, how we dressed, the location from which the stage manager calls the show, the handling of emergency situations and show stops—strategies of which the crew must be aware to ensure a safe show—how everyone deals with risk management, and how, where and when to work, eat and pray. Through the entire production process an amalgamation occurred, one that I would place within Mikhail Bakhtin's 'organic' or unconscious variation of hybridity, which incorporated an unplanned mixing of distinct voices (1981).<sup>10</sup> As the senior stage manager, I did not enter into this project with a specific intent of creating hybrid stage management processes. These developed over the course of the production. Given that the Indonesian producers invited an international team to devise this show, thus initiating collaboration in both creativity and production processes, I would place this hybridity in line with Jennifer Natalya Fink's articulation:

This task, then, may be not to celebrate hybridity as such, but rather to tease out the precise contours, lost languages, buried histories from which hybridity emerges ... The hybrid truth of cultural experience may lie not in the comfortable middle ground between two cultural experiences, but in the irreconcilable distance between. (Joseph and Fink, 1999, p. 250)

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<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin divides hybridity into two categories: organic or unconscious, and strategic or intentional (1981).

*Bali Agung* provided a unique catalyst for examining stage management in intercultural contexts. I was not initially employed as a teacher of stage managers; however, my role became hybrid as I engaged with the training of new staff. Through a kind of two-way learning and teaching process, I became more aware of my own assumptions in interpreting theatre-making processes across cultures.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the journey of this research-in-action reinforced the premise that practice and theory are inseparable and must co-exist to be meaningful to the discipline.

I entered into this contract with personal and professional assumptions. On my arrival in Bali, I assumed there would be stage managers to take over once the show was up and running. I assumed that stage managers existed and that the concept translated across cultures. When it became evident this was not the case, we proceeded to hire staff to train. The idea was to transfer knowledge and procedures to produce a smooth running show, but it was not going to be as straightforward as envisaged. Adjustments to my processes were necessary taking into consideration cultural understandings, many of which have been noted above. We, as a team, were compelled to create hybrid processes through an organic methodology. This operational management was not achieved through the conscious intent of synthesizing styles and production techniques, but emerged because it seemed the only logical way forward in the effort to attain a common goal: the smooth running performance that is *Bali Agung*.

There are many definitions and connotations that go along with theories of hybridity. The aim of this case study is not to demonstrate how synthesized procedures intentionally create hybridity. Bali Theatre's aim was to create a spectacular theatre show telling a Balinese story, supported by newly introduced methods of technology and in a unique theatrical environment in Bali. The resulting fusion of production approaches has created neither a completely Balinese nor a wholly western style of presentation, but a synthesis of the two. The host culture informed the methods and modified the introduced techniques to create strategies unique to this venue that support and showcase a Balinese cultural story.

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<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth examination of the training process of the *Bali Agung* stage management team, see Studham (2015) *Stage management: A question of approach in intercultural theatre*.

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