

Living shadows

One of the oldest forms of theatrical storytelling gets a modern twist — and a uniquely local flair with Masakini's 'Wayang: Malaysia Kita'.

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been," she said. Along the way, the couple — and the audience — get to see fireflies, visit the stalagmites and stalactites in Gua Tempurung and take in the panoramic view of Kuala Lumpur at Bukit Belacan. *Malaysia Kita* also pokes fun at contemporary pickles such as traffic jams and *mat rempit* (illegal motorcycle racers).

For the first time ever in Masakini's *wayang* productions, there will be no words on screen or dialogue — an impressive feat seeing that the actors and dancers as well as the audience have to rely on the cues of folk and Kristang music to indicate the towns.

"You are going to see dancers who will announce which state they are in through the music and the dance," said Sabera.

For example, viewers will know they are in Kelantan when performers sing the *Wau Bulan*.

But perhaps the most important aspect that will make or break the entire presentation is none other than body language.

With rehearsals starting in January, the team has had three months to practise the performance, learn to work as a team to project images with

Sixteen performers from acting and dance backgrounds have been rehearsing since January. — Pictures by

DE-LIGHT-FUL SHADES OF MALAYSIA

By Melanie Chail • melanie@malaymail.com.my



“The actors have been working hard, rehearsing up to four hours a day, with lots of stretching and strengthening exercises to keep up with dancers who have been trained to be flexible.” — Sabera

IN approximately an hour, a team of 16 actors and dancers from the Dua Space Dance Theatre takes viewers through iconic and unknown spots in every Malaysian state. Whether it's watching tapirs and wild boars at Pahang's national park or strolling through Taiping's war memorial, *Malaysia Kita* aims to make everyone who watches it feel refreshed when they leave the theatre.

The fourth *wayang* series of the Masakini Theatre Company has always presented Malaysian-centric shadow theatre and this time around, Sabera has decided to go with a present day setting. The story centres on a couple who embark on road and rail trips. An argument erupts halfway through, leaving the girl in Kuantan while her other half goes off to



Muzakkir Szali

The performers are required to possess excellent flexibility and focus to create and hold a pose.

Perlis. Eventually, they meet on board a ferry, patch up and head to Langkawi. Unlike most *wayang* productions that seek comfort from the nostalgic route, Sabera's latest project serves as a reminder to celebrate the present. "There is so much negativity nowadays so we decided we will have a shadow theatre that will take you to places you have never

razor sharp precision and possess the mental strength to hold on to a pose.

Sabera said the actors have been working hard, rehearsing up to four hours a day, with lots of stretching and strengthening exercises to keep up with dancers who have been trained to be flexible.

"Most of them have lost a lot of weight," she quipped. At a recent rehearsal session, *Malay Mail* was invited to go behind the scenes to understand and learn the complex art form.

To say the least, what went on behind the screen was an entirely different universe. Strips of tape were stuck on the floor to serve as cues. An attempt to create the silhouette of a fish took more than 20 minutes to perfect. It was almost like learning a new language.

Given its Malaysian route (and roots), one could say shadow theatre is the new dialect of *wayang kulit* that should not be kept in the dark.

Wayang: Malaysia Kita will be staged at Auditorium Bandaraya, Kuala Lumpur from Wednesday to Sunday at 8.30pm followed by Seremban at JKKK Auditorium D'Surya on April 8 and 9.

Tickets are priced at RM23, RM53 and RM83 and can be purchased at www.masakinitheatre.com.my.