

VALLEY ARTISTS INC IS A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY THEATRE GROUP in the Wollombi Valley. We produce quality theatre and offer training in performance and production to the community, especially its youth. We produce three stage plays a year, and run workshops in acting, voice, *commedia dell'arte*, street theatre, sound, lighting, make-up and stage management. We also give scholarships to NIDA for further study.

Valley Artists is a non-profit organisation surviving solely on the generosity of local sponsorship, ticket sales and enthusiastic members. This year we have had the added benefit of a Regional Arts Fund grant towards our experiment in Community Theatre.

The Arthurian Randai Project presents an episode from the legends of King Arthur in the style of randai, a dynamic circular martial folk opera. Originating in the matrilineal society of West Sumatra, randai combines the indigenous martial arts with song, storytelling, poetry and explosive rhythmic effects, to tell epic tales, histories and romances. In the 1930s the first randai troupes unified a colonised people just as the tales of the round table celebrate Arthur's unification of the Britons.

The Arthurian Randai Project is a year long process of community workshops with randai specialist Indija Mahjoeddin, current Artist-in-Residence with Valley Artists. Since February 2003 a mix of young people, local artists and community enthusiasts have converged to develop skills in all facets of randai from which we are building our major production opening on 3rd December. Sessions with Indija and guest tutors have included pencak silat martial arts, sword combat, pants-slapping and weapon-whacking percussion, poetic declamation, *commedia dell'arte*, voice coaching, plate dancing, rhythmic dialogue and narrative songs.

We had planned a performance of work in progress from the Randai Project at the the 2003 Wollombi Festival but that event was cancelled due to insurance costs. We have instead decided to go ahead with a performance during intermission of The Wollombi Short Film Festival on **28 September**.

What audiences will see at the Festival is part way along our journey. It represents a hybrid of elements from both West Sumatra and the Celtic Dark Ages of Britain to evolve a unique hybrid performance style with our own cultural signature. The performance will be followed by workshops in Martial Percussion, Circus Skills, Sword Combat, Celtic songs & Madrigals; Randai and Plate dance with visiting artists Mike Burns and Company, John Campbell and Rendra Freestone and Company.

What is Randai like?

Folk gather around a circular performance space and the randai minstrels herald the performance to come. Enter a column of

warriors sometimes clapping and stamping in rhythmic patterns, other times moving in unison in an eloquent dance of combat motifs. After a dramatic display of their martial prowess, and an opening hymn (see below), they form a circle and the story proper begins. In alternating episodes, either singers carry the plot forward accompanied by the chorus of warrior dancers, or the whole company, in seated formation, encloses actors who enter the sacred circle to declaim the poetic dialogue of their characters.

The whole drama unfolds according to the patterns of martial tournament. Each verse of each song bursts from its wistful mood into rounds of wild shouts and rhythms before settling back into the gentler spirals of nature.

Randai is a feast and a celebration, an entertainment, a display of virtuosity, prowess and style, an art event for all ages, all stations and a common creed. ■

A West Sumatran King Arthur



... in Wollombi

Opening Hymn

*All gathered, living and ghosts of old
To remember a story that has been told
We ask your blessings a thousand fold
To forgive the knot if it will not hold.*



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This Project was made possible by the Regional Arts Fund, a Commonwealth Government initiative supporting the arts in regional and remote Australia.



September

27 September

 **GULGONG** Music, Wine and Food Night. Poet's Corner Wines present *The 20th Century: A Musical Journey*, featuring talented singers musicians and a two course meal with wine. Tickets \$55. Tel 02 6374 2344 or 1800 816 304

27 September

 Opera in **MURRUNDI**. Magnificent duets and arias. Proceeds to the RSL Hall upgrade in preparation for the 2004 Norvill Art Prize. Tel 02 6546 6620

27 September

 Plan and Program Events, Creative Volunteering — No Limits! training module. Covers key elements of planning and programming arts and cultural events. Only \$25. Held at Snowy Monaro Business Enterprise Centre, **COOMA**. To register contact RANSW Tel 02 9247 8577

27-27 September

 Wollombi Folk Festival. Blues, Comedy, Street Theatre, Light, Kids Festival, Corroroboree, Funk, Dance, Workshops, Film, Theatre, Fire, Healing, Food, Markets and Camping - all in **WOLLOMBI**. Website www.wollombifestival.org.au