



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WOMEN AND ISLAMIC CULTURES

Women and Traditional Dance Forms in Southeast Asia

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- ❖ The Rodat dance is thought to have been introduced to Malaysia by Arab merchants as a form of dhikr, or praise of God and the Prophet Muhammad. Initially, it was only performed by men at religious occasions. After WWII, it became normal for women to perform. The dance came to be presented at secular ceremonies, like the harvest festival as well.¹
- ❖ The Sultanate of Kelantan's traditional form of dance-drama is known as the Mak yong, which combines singing, acting, gestures, instrumental music, and elaborate costumes. Traditionally, the entire cast is composed of women, with only the clowns being portrayed by men. As an art form, it was under the direct patronage of the Sultan until the 1920s. It is performed for both entertainment and healing.²
- ❖ The Inang dance form is typical of the Sultanate of Malacca. It is thought to have been invented by Sultan Mahmud Shah in the early 1500s. Today it is a form of social dance, performed with one male and one female dancer.³
- ❖ The joget, another partner dance, is thought to have been introduced by Portuguese colonists.⁴
- ❖ The Zapin is another dance that was brought to Southeast Asia by Arab traders. It is performed in Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore. It may be performed by both men and women, though female dancers are typical in female-only gatherings. The Zapin is almost exclusively performed in religious occasions. Each region has a slight variation on the dance form.⁵
- ❖ The Asyik dance was developed in the Sultan's court in Kelantan in 1644, when the Queen's bird escaped, and the women of the court came together to provide her with a form of entertainment. The name of the dance comes from the Arabic word ashiq, meaning "lover," and it is thought that that is the name of the bird that was lost. The dance is exclusively performed by women.⁶

¹ (March 6, 2015) http://www.dancemalaysia.com/Dance/Traditional/Folk_Dance/Rodat/rodat.htm

² (March 6, 2015) http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/23apa_uk.htm

³ (March 6, 2015) <http://malaysianfolkmusic.weebly.com/music-for-dance.html>

⁴ (March 6, 2015) <http://malaysianfolkmusic.weebly.com/music-for-dance.html>

⁵ (March 6, 2015) http://www.dancemalaysia.com/Dance/Traditional/Folk_Dance/Zapin/zapin.htm

⁶ (March 6, 2015) http://www.dancemalaysia.com/Dance/Traditional/Court_Dance/Asyik/asyik.htm