

SACRED & SECRET

Genre: Creative Feature Documentary
Travel & Adventure – Religion & Spirituality

Length: 86 minutes

Short synopsis: A Film about the cycle of the Bali's secret spiritual life and the Balinese Hinduism.
The Balinese belief in reincarnation and in unseen forces beyond the material world.

Countries of origin: Malaysia & Switzerland

Production status & delivery: completed, autumn 2010

Shooting format: HDCAM / RED Cam

Available versions: HDCAM SR, HDCAM, Digital Surround

Language: English (Bahasa Indonesia, Balinese, English, German)

Director: Basil Gelpke

Director of Photography: Julian Shori

Camera: Eric Oh, Victor Wai Tuck

Editor: Jakob Nägeli

Sound design: Brian Burman

Music: IWayan Yudane, Brian Burman, Juergen Eppinger and Balinese indigenous music.

Executive Producer: Julian Shori

Producer: Valerie Lew

Co-Producer: Basil Gelpke

Written by Gill Marais, Basil Gelpke

Production companies:

GS Productions
Suite E-13-14, Plaza Mont' Kiara
2 Jalan Kiara, Mont' Kiara
50480 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia
Company website: www.gsproductions.com.my

Lava Productions AG
Basil Gelpke
Attenhoferstrasse 34
8032 Zürich
Company website: www.lavatv.com

The film website: www.balithefilm.com

A film picturing an incredibly beautiful and exotic culture that incorporates more than meets the eye

In this time of turmoil with financial wealth being destroyed at an unprecedented pace, it pays to look at the tiny island of Bali where, for centuries, the people have lived a meaningful life beyond the material.

For the Balinese there are more important things than the accumulation of material wealth in one lifespan: They think it is better to lead their lives well and so acquire what they call Karma Pala. Good Karma Pala ensures them rebirth into a new and potentially higher level of existence.

“None of us are new souls, we are all old souls”, says Tjokorda Raka Kerthyasa, a Balinese prince who is the main character in the new feature length documentary on the spiritual life of Bali called **“SACRED & SECRET”**. For the Balinese, reincarnation is not a mere belief but a fact of human existence. The film sheds light on the celestial wheel of existence, and bears witness to the biggest royal cremation in the last three decades when the energy, mysticism and creativity of Hindu Bali comes together in spectacular mass ceremonies.

Bali may never again see a cremation as huge as this one. The Balinese, however conservative and faithful in their beliefs, are not afraid of change: as Tjokorda Raka Kerthyasa says in a typical Balinese way, “Cultures come and go. It’s just a matter of time. Don’t be afraid of change. There is nothing absolute.”

It is as though some great protection has been given to this small island fortifying its religion that has survived amidst the Islamic Indonesian archipelago, the world’s largest Muslim nation.

The New York Times Correspondent who witnessed the event was overwhelmed by what he saw:

‘Tuesday was a day of raucous energy as thousands of volunteer porters in purple shirts carried the giant emblems of the ceremony like armies of ants bearing impossibly large objects’.

‘Strange as it seems, it is in their cremation ceremonies that the Balinese have their greatest fun’, wrote Miguel Covarrubias in his classic work, “Island of Bali,” published in 1937. ‘... an occasion for gaiety and not for mourning, since it represents the accomplishment of their most sacred duty to liberate the souls of the dead’.

However, “SACRED & SECRET” goes beyond being an outside observer of the events. The crew got unprecedented access and insight into some of the occult ceremonies, guarded since the medieval times when the Majapahit Kingdom, based in Java, ruled over most of S E Asia. Tjokorda Raka Kerthyasa traces his ancestry to the Majapahit rulers when they established their court, culture and sacred writings during the 15th century in Bali. Bali Hinduism is alive and well in its unique form found only on this island.

“SACRED & SECRET” looks at how the beliefs and occult ceremonies of these long bygone times have survived so well. The film lets its viewers witness some of the most mysterious rituals still to be found on this extraordinary island with one foot in the traditions of the past, the other firmly striding into the future. Unlike other emerging nations, consumerism has not killed Bali’s spiritual values.

Once a year in a little hamlet in a hidden remote part of the volcanic island villages fall into trance and start to fight armed with traditional knives. It defies logic to see how they all escape the night’s ordeal exhausted but unharmed after cleansing their village of demonic influences. Just as astounding, and never permitted to be filmed before, we show temple scenes of pre-menstrual girls suddenly possessed by protective spirits while performing an elaborate sacred dance. The Balinese view such phenomena as perfectly normal, because for them, another reality lies behind the tangible outer world they call the Sekala. It’s the invisible inner world of the Niskala, the abode of powers far greater than those in our every day reality. Here reside deities and demons influencing and controlling the world as we experience it. For the Balinese, the streams of colourful rituals are about striking equilibrium between these two realities.

The film not only lets its viewers immerse themselves into an exotic island life, and the people’s fascinating rites of passage, but in going from an outer to an inner life, it provides a timely reminder that there are things more important than the material world suggests.

Even if some of their beliefs are beyond our understanding, it has guided them through centuries of geological and political upheaval, and of late the bombs of fanaticism. The vigour of their practices has forged an extraordinary sense of identity. They have an effervescent joie de vivre. They know who they are.

They are the Balinese.

Producers' Note

"Sacred & Secret" has been inspired by Gill Marais' seminal book "Bali – Sacred & Secret", on the spiritual life and rituals of Bali.

Director and co-producer Basil Gelpke, a veteran of South East Asia, and Malaysian Producer Julian Shori have joined forces for the first feature-length documentary on Bali shot in HDCAM. With a crew of twelve persons they have shot for 11 months during two shooting periods. The editing took place in parallel and is currently proceeding. The delivery is planned for Autumn 2010.

The uniqueness of the film is given by the privileged access to particular rituals and to the royal family in Ubud. The crew of "SACRED & SECRET" were the only people to film the four-month preparation and all the procedures surrounding the death of Agung Suyasa, the deceased head of the royal family of Ubud.

The director was coincidentally in Bali when Agung Suyasa died.

The film has a very high production values, as it has been shot with four HDCAM cameras. The high quality images have been emphasized by steadicam, aerial, travelling and crane shots.

Biographies & Filmographies

Executive Producer: Julian Shori

Julian Shori, a veteran of more than 25 years in the broadcasting, film and video industry, is director and founder of GS Productions in Kuala Lumpur. From modest beginnings GS has grown to become a pioneer in the use of latest technology for film and television production. GS Productions is the first Malaysian company to provide HD production and postproduction facilities to local and international clients.

As a cameraman Julian Shori shot news, news features and documentaries for foreign TV stations like NHK, ABC (Au), ABC (US), CNBC (US), Discovery Asia, Discovery (Canada) and many others. GS also organizes and provides satellite up-link services to foreign TV crews in Malaysia. Before founding GS Productions Julian Shori was a freelance director, cinematographer, director of photography and TV journalist. He was involved in several documentaries, TV commercials and news programs for local TVs as well as corporations. He spent many years at the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development training producers, cameramen, soundmen, lighting-men and editors and taught them how to produce TV documentaries, TV dramas, talk shows and all kinds of TV programs.

Producer: Valerie Lew

Valerie Lew is general manager and founding member of GS Productions. She has been involved in the production of several documentaries like “Mitsubishi Electric TVC” for CNN, “Digital Asia”, “Steam” and other documentaries for NZZ in Switzerland, “On the Run” for Discovery Channel Canada and many others.

Lately produced GS Productions three successful documentaries: “Thaipusam”, “Subak – The Three Causes of Happiness” and “Fight Masters: Silat” commenced by National Geographic channel. The film “Thaipusam” has been invited at the Moon Dance Film Festival. It reveals the story behind the Hindu festival through the experiences of Guna, an Indian Hindu, residing in Kuala Lumpur and Dr. Carl Vadivella Belle, a Caucasian Australian Hindu. “Subak – The Three Causes of Happiness” was commissioned by three broadcasting: NHK Japan, Caldecott Singapore and KBS Korea. It tells the story of the irrigation system in Bali: This age-old water irrigation system has proven over the centuries to be near perfect. The system is based on the principle of harmony. Without consulting the locals, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank introduced a new water distribution system and pesticides to Bali. The project almost destroyed Bali’s farming system. Since then, there has been a concerted effort to revive and fully reinstate the system.

Director & Co-producer: Basil Gelpke

Film producer and director Basil Gelpke is the founder of Lava Productions AG. With over 25 years in the business, he has been producing and directing many one-offs documentaries and reality TV programs.

His documentary “The Artificial Paradise” about the history of LSD and its Swiss inventor, Albert Hofmann, 1992 got nominated for Germany’s prestigious Grimme awards. As director for the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ), the TV department of Switzerland’s oldest and most respected newspaper, he compiled dozens of TV documentaries (www.nzzformat.ch) for the German speaking TV market.

Basil Gelpke also has a track record in producing reality TV programs. For Lava Productions and its clients he in 1999 and 2000 was the Executive Producer of the legendary “Survive” TV series in Switzerland (“Expedition Robinson”) and in Germany (“Inselduell”). The three series he was responsible for attracted record-breaking nation wide ratings. With Lava Productions AG Basil was also the Executive Producer of TV entertainment programmes such as „Klassenfesten“ and various others.

Basil Gelpke has won a series of awards for his documentary filmmaking such as the 2007 Sol d’Or of Barcelona, the Film Prize 2006 by the City of Zurich, the 2007 Best Doc Award of the Palm Beach Film Festival amongst many others.

His documentary „A Crude Awakening – The Oil Crash“ (www.oilcrashmovie.com) was the only film shortlisted twice with the 2007 Grierson Awards – Britain’s foremost Documentary Awards and got invited to more than 60 film festivals, including A-list festivals such as Edinburgh, Melbourne, Warsaw, AFI Los Angeles, SXSW, HotDocs. Screened on the Sundance Channel, it sold to more than 20 territories. Whilst Cinetic Media provided distribution advisory services, Telepool Munich is now in charge of world sales.

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