



Suzan Piper of Sydney and her husband, Muhammad Djohansyah, better known as Sawung Jabo, have been together for 25 years. The couple relocated from Indonesia to Sydney at the end of 1992 with their two children, Johan and Shanti, now aged 23 and 18 years.

Piper, whose family moved to Australia from England when she was still a teenager, is an accredited translator and interpreter of Bahasa Indonesia, and she manages Wot's many activities, both in Australia and Indonesia. She also works as an academic of Indonesian Studies and runs their busy household. Piper describes herself professionally as an "Indonesianist of 30-plus years' experience of Indonesia".

Jabo, on the other hand, is an actor, choreographer, director, singer, composer and arranger. Piper laughingly calls him "my husband the rock star". Yes, he's "the" Jabo of Swami, Sirkus Barock, Dalbo, Kantata, GengGong -- the man who co-wrote the award-winning song Bongkar and many others, including Hio, Dalbo, Cinta and Lingkaran Aku Cinta Padamu, while collaborating with Iwan Fals. They earned a place in history when their music served as anthems of change during the period of growing unrest leading up to the massive political changes of 1998. Although the family home is in Sydney, Jabo is located in both Indonesia and Australia, always busy with his continuing role in Indonesia's contemporary artistic and creative life. Therefore, the cultural bridge between the two countries plays a major part in Wot's activities and in the life of this unique household.

Piper and Jabo aim to use their "bridge" for endeavors in the arts, education, business and cultural exchange, and to creatively build bilateral understanding. Jabo explained: "A lot of people have tried to create bridges, in their own ways. In both countries, ordinary people are busy and do not have time to spend on learning about other cultures, and therefore they are easily blinded by the mass media, and too quick to react." "Wot Cross-Cultural Synergy could perhaps be called just one pillar on the big bridge of mutual relationship between two countries. There is government, and there is the mass media and other smaller groups, but Sue and I are from the arts field, and we feel that the arts offer the most direct contact -- culture to culture, person to person. A high standard of art and culture is the vehicle which we use to introduce ourselves to Australians.

"People can feel it, not just read from the newspaper. Experience is the most important thing. If any pocket money comes from it, that's OK, but my priority is always culture, and the mutual relationship. Not money, not profit." said Jabo.

Wot has produced many successful artistic events in Indonesia and Australia since 1995, including theatrical performance tours, concert tours and a film festival featuring the neighbor country's films. Sometimes, Wot acts as a Sydney-based tour producer of Indonesian performers, such as Emha Ainun Nadjib and his group Kyai Kanjeng, and the Panji Kirana East Javanese dance and percussion group. For concert or theater performers in either country, Wot acts as both artistic director and producer, and shows often feature traditional Indonesian performing arts rarely seen in Australia. Wot also organized a 2002 tour of Indonesia by the acappella group, From the Vacant Lot, from Sydney, while Jabo's Sydney-based band GengGong have also toured in Indonesia several times.

Wot's most recent project, in September-October 2005, was a four-city tour in eastern Australia by Indonesia's iconic poet and playwright W.S. Rendra, along with his wife and fellow theater worker Ken Zuraida, with Jabo providing musical accompaniment to their readings of Rendra's poetry.

This project, too, involves bridges and connections. These four have a long-standing friendship and professional association: Jabo has been a member of Rendra's Bengkel Theatre since 1977, where he still conducts workshops and is also musical director, while Piper joined Bengkel around 1973. She performed in two plays and also wrote a thesis on Rendra's plays.

"It is of particular importance to Wot to present Rendra in Australia. He is a highly respected poet, dramatist and profound thinker, who has much to say as a cultural and social commentator, and can help spearhead better understanding between our neighboring countries," noted Piper.

Piper and Jabo want the activities of their organization to add to the depth of understanding between the cultures, and they aim to show to Australians the depth of meaning, cultural richness and complexity of Indonesian society. These are cultural aspects to which it is difficult to gain access while on a short holiday in the vast and varied archipelago, with its many different ethnic groups.

"W.S. Rendra and Sawung Jabo have such stature that this enables them to have the platform and opportunity to speak out on cultural and social issues, and people will listen," said Piper, speaking recently in Brisbane, Queensland, where Rendra delivered his final poetry reading in Australia and a seminar. Rendra, Jabo and Ken still had one event remaining in their schedule before returning to Indonesia -- a drama workshop in Sydney on Oct. 22. The tour also involved several public forums in which Rendra shared his thoughts on intercultural perceptions, Indonesia's future and the issues of cultural pluralism and peace in the region we share.

Wot Cross-Cultural Synergy plan to continue their artistic work in supporting and strengthening the bridge between Indonesia and Australia. "The door of possibility must always be open for people to get together and learn. We must explore every

possibility. We must believe in the possibility. Every small step is valuable", said Jabo.

SUZAN PIPER cultural interpreter

I've had the good fortune to live my life in three countries: England, Australia and Indonesia. I studied French and German at school in England before emigrating to Australia with my family as a teenager in 1967. Since I was then living on the doorstep of Asia I decided as a student at Sydney University in the early 70's to study Indonesian. It was quite a popular subject at the time with many Australians passing through Indonesia (and many staying) on the trail through Asia on their way to Europe.