'Senlima': Finding a World with No Boundaries

By A. Kurniawan Ulung

Entertainment: The old man sits beside his sister, who tries to entertain him after he loses his pet parrot.

Two contemporary puppet theater groups from Indonesia and Germany are helping theatergoers to imagine life in a world with no boundaries through collaborative puppet drama Senlima.

Yogyakarta-based Papermoon Puppet Theater director Maria Tri Sulistyani and Berlin-based theater group Retrofuturisten's director Roscha A. Saidow staged Senlima at the Salihara Theater in Pasar Minggu, South Jakarta, recently.

In Senlima, six puppeteers act as gods and goddesses who leave their world to find other worlds.

"In Senlima, we, as the gods and goddesses, interact with humans played by the audience members," said Papermoon puppeteer Pambo Priyojati.

The show begins with a goddess who accidentally enters the human world. She brings a white box that she believes contains treasure.

In the human world, she is shocked. She keeps hugging the box in a bid to prevent humans from grabbing it out of her hands.

"She panics because it is the first time she is outside of her world," said Pambo, who joined Papermoon early this year.

Soon afterward, the other three gods and two goddesses appear and find her. They scold her because she left them without permission. Their anger recedes when they see the box she is holding.

"They ask her about the content of the box, but she does not know what it is," said Pambo.

The goddess then tries to give the box to her five friends, but they refuse it because they are afraid of it.

The six gods and goddesses then decide to return to their world and leave the box in the human world. However, when they put it on the floor, they hear the sound of a bird inside.

The sound makes the six more curious about the box because the bird repeats every word they say.

elderly man lives with his sister and takes care of a parrot in a cage.

The six then release the parrot from the cage and box.

"The elderly man feels lonely and is sad because the bird was his best friend. They [the six] then cry and blame themselves for their actions," said Pambo.

To visualize the sadness, the six puppeteers of Papermoon and Retrofuturisten used puppets representing the old man, his sister, the parrot and its cage. In this part, they did not speak.

Bringing the empty cage, the old man tries to find his parrot, but he fails. His sister then comes and tries to entertain him.

The old man and his sister then sit together and talk, something they had not done for a very long time. The sister then takes a family photo album to recall their past memories.

Meanwhile, the parrot flies away and experiences new things that it never had inside the box.

At the Salihara Theater, the six puppeteers, who were clad in gray shirts, yellow bowties and black pants and skirts, received applause from an audience of 195 people after performing the one-hour show on a 108-square-meter stage under a single floodlight.

The animation and video art linked to the storyline also wowed the spectators.

Maria said the interaction between the gods, goddesses and humans would make the audience feel a boundary that divided their worlds.

Another boundary was the sides of the box, inside which the old man and his sister were trapped and had to live a monotonous life.

"The bird is also trapped and it is forced to live not only in the box but also in the cage," said Maria, who founded Papermoon in 2006 with her husband, artist Iwan Effendi.

Maria said that humans created limits and borders. She and Saidow began their partnership while communicating from their respective countries.

When Maria tried to reach Saidow in Germany and vice versa, she also met with some challenges, such as the complicated process of getting a visa, which she saw as another border.

Such experiences drove Maria and Saidow to imagine a world with no boundaries and inspired them to create Senlima, which literally means "without limits". It came from Esperanto, which Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof developed in the late 1870s and early 1880s to be an artificial international auxiliary language.

Maria could meet with Saidow because they were facilitated by German cultural center the Goethe Institute in Jakarta, which was celebrating a three-month German Season.

The economic and sociocultural event was organized by the institute, the German Embassy in Jakarta and the German-Indonesian Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Ekonid).

"We have been preparing this show since last November," said Saidow, who founded Retrofuturisten in 2011 while studying at Berlin's Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Art.

She said that the theme of borders related to human beings.

With Maria, she discussed it and they looked at the concept with cultural, religious and philosophical perspectives.

Saidow said that working with Papermoon was enjoyable and she expected that the cooperation would continue in the future.

Through Senlima, Saidow hoped that the audience would be fully aware of the arrogance of people who made boundaries that had impacts on the lives of other people as well as to make them more careful in taking steps and making decisions.

"We hope that people will be more tolerant and open-minded after watching Senlima," she said.