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A single water puppet appears splashing in a spotlight near lily pads at a performance in Hanoi. Behind the puppet is the screen concealing the puppeteers. Above the puppet is the cloth-decorated platform where the musicians sit. Vietnam's unique water puppet tradition is said to date back approximately 1,000 years. Early northern Vietnamese farmers created these dramas using wooden puppets that they operated from poles moving unseen below the water surface in their wet-rice fields. The puppets carved from jackfruit wood, which were traditionally up to several feet tall, are fastened to bamboo poles manipulated by puppeteers standing in water behind a screen. The puppet performances, accompanied by musicians in colorful traditional-style clothes and hats, include two-hour comic dramas about farmers' lives and Vietnamese historical events.



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