



Khon Chansina, front, Chy Lina, center, and Nget Rady during a rehearsal of the dance "Dream."

Siv Channa

A Question of Dance

New forum allows performers to explore the technical and philosophical aspects of their art

By MICHELLE VACHON • THE CAMBODIA DAILY

In 1947, a group of actors in New York City set up a workshop so that professional actors, directors and writers would be able to discuss theater among themselves, explore new avenues and keep developing their trade. Called the Actors Studio, this workshop attracted legendary performers over the years including James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino and Angelina Jolie.

Amrita Performing Arts—the organization that has helped Cambodia's dancers develop their own, unique form of contemporary dance over the past 10 years—has come up with a similar concept for dancers in Phnom Penh.

The "Contemporary Dance Platform" will consist of a forum discussion held every four months during which choreographers, dancers and others involved in dance will have the opportunity to discuss concepts and techniques.

"When the artists work together

through their creative process, something amazing happens," said Kang Rithisal, executive director of Amrita. "And it is important...to nurture them, to help them move forward so that they don't stagnate."

The first Dance Platform is taking place this weekend with a program including discussions but also a performance for the general public Saturday night featuring the country's star contemporary dancers and ending with a discussion with the audience.

Dancer Nam Narim is staging "Dream," a work for one female and five male dancers she has choreographed and will present to electronic music.

Chumvan Sodhachiv, known as Belle, will present "Bach Cello Suites," which she created for four women dancers, to Western classical music.

And Canadian choreographer and composer Peter Chin is presenting for the first time in Phnom Penh his work for one Cambodian

dancer, "Ferocious Compassion," which was performed in Kuala Lumpur last July and will be staged in Tapei in a few weeks. Mr. Chin has been coming to Cambodia every year for more than a decade to work with Cambodian dancers.

On Sunday morning at 10 a.m., Cambodia's dance community is invited to join in for an open discussion on the development of contemporary dance in the country. Speakers include Mr. Chin; German choreographer Arco Renz who created the award-winning work "Crack" for Cambodian dancers; and Phon Sopheap, a Cambodian classically-trained dancer who has assisted foreign choreographers developing works with Cambodian dancers.

The afternoon program reserved for Amrita dancers is to be a discussion of Ms. Narim and Ms. Sodhachiv's dances with the guest choreographers along with Indonesian dance critic Sal Murgiyanto, whose visit was organized by the

Indonesian Embassy, and Proeung Chhieng, a star classical dancer of the 1960s who is now in charge of performing arts at the Ministry of Culture.

This impressive lineup was selected with great care, Mr. Rithisal explained, saying that panel members had to have a deep understanding of Cambodian dancers and dance tradition.

"It's about helping dancers grow their own way as Cambodian choreographers because they are living in a social, economic and political context, and it must be tailored to reflect their own reality," he said.

What is at stake in the development of contemporary dance is much more than producing a few works: It is serving as a mirror of Cambodia at this particular time.

"Contemporary dance is a reflection, a reaction, and a dialogue with the times of today and with the problems that exist, and with the phenomenon, the tension, the beauty and the life that surround

the artist," Mr. Renz said. "So I think Cambodian contemporary dance should be specific in relation to what is happening in Cambodia, what is happening today but also with Cambodian tradition."

Two years ago, when Australian choreographer Paea Leach was invited by Amrita to hold a workshop for Cambodian dancers and suggested building a dance around daily life in Phnom Penh, Ms. Sodhachiv said she did not understand the idea.

But she does now. "What I've been learning is that contemporary dance connects with our daily life."

"I use this experience [performing overseas or working with foreign choreographers] to develop myself and also to go back to my own story. I mean my own story with Khmer classical dance and also with my own life."

Contemporary dance is much more than movements, Ms. Narim noted. "It's not about, like, your face. It's not just dance, it's ideas;

We dance from inside, not outside."

As for style, Mr. Sopheap said, "Cambodian contemporary dance means that we stand on our basis of classical dance and then develop contemporary works, somehow trying to find our style."

Over the years, Amrita has brought in foreign choreographers to help its group of Cambodian dancers, who were all trained as Khmer classical dancers, to create its own contemporary dance style. "At first, we were really confused," thinking that since contemporary dance was coming from Western countries, this meant imitating Western styles, Mr. Sopheap said. But dancers soon grasped that, if there was to be Cambodian contemporary dance, it would have to be inspired by Khmer classical dance tradition, he said.

Which does not mean to be cut off from other dance movements, Mr. Sopheap said. "We have to know the world: We are the world, we are the same.... And at the same

time, we try to find our new style, our Khmer contemporary world."

"Contemporary dance is different in each country but contemporary dance is also a transnational, transcultural phenomenon. It's not something happening isolated in one place," Mr. Renz agreed. "For Cambodia...it's not a question of thinking 'we are Cambodian, we have to think Cambodian and close ourselves up'...which I think nobody is doing."

"So it's a mix of being true to where you come from and being open to what is happening around you today where you live, which is Cambodia, and internationally," Mr. Renz added.

When Amrita decided to focus on Cambodian contemporary dance a decade ago, some Khmer classical dance masters were concerned that contemporary dance would destroy Khmer classical dance, said Mr. Chhieng.

"I tried to explain that...it was not there to modify or replace classical

dance," he said. As theater forms such as Bassac theater or yike never put Khmer classical dance in jeopardy, Cambodian contemporary dance would simply be a new form of dance. "Little by little I was able to make teachers understand," he said.

But contemporary dancers must first master their own Khmer classical forms. "I always tell students, 'You must know yours well, and afterwards you can learn from others,'" he said.

The three dances of approximately 17 minutes each are presented Saturday at 7 p.m. at the theater of the Department of Performing Arts, which is located behind the Spark Club and accessible through Street 173 off Mao Tse Tung Boulevard.

The Sunday discussion starting at 10 a.m. is held at the Center for Circus and Performing Arts located across the street from the National Assembly building next to the Peace Book Center.



Siv Channa
Chy Lina, front, and Nget Rady rehearse a scene of the dance "Dream" by Cambodian choreographer and dancer Nam Narim.

WEEKEND



Bernard Touillon

People walk by an art installation in MAXXI: National Museum of the 21st Century Arts in Rome—a building designed by Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid that took home the 2010 Stirling Prize.

A Genocide Museum Re-imagined

Zaha Hadid to design Cambodia's repository for Khmer Rouge information

By DENE-HERN CHEN • THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The fluidity of the structures designed by renowned Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid bring to mind the gentle waves of a river—her skyscrapers are never angular and block-like, her museums mimic the sprawling infinity of the ocean.

Now, Ms. Hadid—a two-time winner of the Royal Institute of British Architects Stirling Prize, one of architecture's highest accolades—will be bringing her vision to Cambodia. Her firm, Zaha Hadid Architects, has agreed to design the long-awaited new institute for the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)—the country's largest repository of information relating to the Khmer Rouge regime.

The Sleuk Rith Institute, whose name refers to dried leaves historically used by religious leaders as writing paper, plans to be the leading center for genocide studies in Asia. DC-Cam will also use the institute—to be located next to the Boeng Trabek high school on

Monivong Boulevard—as its home base to store, analyze and preserve information relating to the regime.

Ms. Hadid said that Youk Chhang, director of DC-Cam, inspired her to take up this project, which has gone through several design iterations, with the final plans to be released in December.

"He has a very particular vision for this building which greatly inspires us: that beauty and optimism can heal and reconnect a country," Ms. Hadid said by email. "We share [these] principles and we believed this is an opportunity for something very special and unique for the people of Cambodia."

Ms. Hadid said that her firm is currently doing extensive research to incorporate "the richness of the Angkor architecture," and once Mr. Chhang is satisfied with the designs, they will move ahead with the construction—of which she declined to provide an exact timeline.

"[T]aking on such an important project is a great responsibility.

Youk Chhang's work is critical in documenting the event, but the work also aids the healing process by moving forward with education, understanding and inspiration," said Ms. Hadid, who refers to all of her past designs as her children.

"We are privileged to be trusted with such an important task."

The institute was Mr. Chhang's vision. He was evacuated from Phnom Penh to his grandparents' home Takeo province in 1975, before being moved to Banteay

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Vanthan Poedara

Youk Chhang sits in front of his grandparents' house in Takeo province in 2004.



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Performers explore the technical and philosophical aspects of their art

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PARALLEL WORLDS

The 38th parallel, separating north and south, is Korea's most important dividing line

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TWO SIDES TO LOU REED

His tough, streetwise image was matched by songs of real tenderness and fragility

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Top: Siv Channa
Center: Reuters
Bottom: Creative Commons



Reuters

Architect Zaha Hadid