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KHMER FOLK DANCE



SAM-ANG SAM
CHAN MOLY SAM

Khmer Folk Dance
Sam Sam-Ang // Chan Moly Sam

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CHAN MOLY SAM

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Music Department
Wesleyan University
Middletown, CT 06457
USA

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To Mr. Thun Hak Hang, Mr. Phon Chheng,
and our teachers and friends at the
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PREFACE

The following work is based on a series of collected data from a very few and descriptive sources. Some are even controversial as in some cases sources of information on one dance have many different variations, which can be attributed to the evolutions and changes prevalent in the oral folk tradition. The greater part of the data presented in this book is drawn from our own experiences and memories gained from longtime involvement in the domain of this art.

The present Khmer folk dance repertoire, which is by far the largest ever, has sprung up comparatively recently, within the last two decades or so, as a result of the *Conservatoire National des Spectacles* (National Conservatory of Performing Arts) and the *Université des Beaux Arts* (University of Fine Arts). The majority of attributes, thoughts, and folk dance lives discussed in the book are presented within this parameter. We intend to provide readers with neither a total analysis nor exhaustive information. Rather, we try to highlight the dance itself as well as its origin and history in respect to its practice and development.

The current repertoire is drawn up to the early 1970's, the majority of which are the recent creations of the National Conservatory of Performing Arts and the University of Fine Arts. The descriptions contained here are more elaborate than those in previous publications on Khmer folk dance. We also include lyrics and transcriptions of musical pieces used in each dance, hoping to help readers, particularly dancers and musicians, to be able to reconstruct those dances that have not been realized outside of Cambodia. However, we also leave out some transcriptions of songs. The *chhayam* [chay"ām], for example, has a recitative style and simply dwells on a single pitch which constitutes the melodic line. The variations of this piece depend on the individual performer and therefore are too numerous to list. The *peacock of Pailin dance*, too, has been performed with many variations. The *sacrifice of buffalo dance* is accompanied by thirteen gongs; each punctuates the melody and contributes a single pitch, creating a line which could be interpreted differently by different listeners.

All of the lyrics and transcriptions that appear in this book are our interpretations of the original performances by the ensembles of University of Fine Arts, the tapes of which are in our collections.

Middletown, June 19, 1986

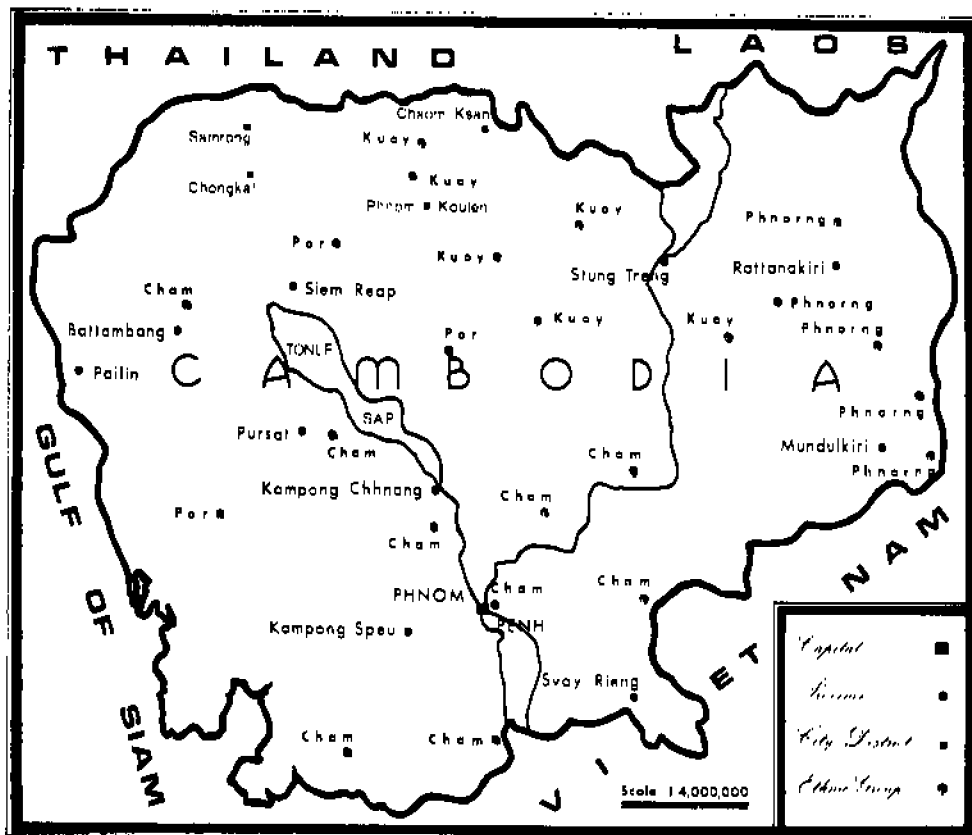
Sam-Ang Sam
Chan Moly Sam

Graduates of the *Faculté des Arts Chorégraphiques*
Université des Beaux Arts

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Map: Kaiti Ang Kim

INTRODUCTION

Folk dance plays an essential part in social life. It serves not only as a recreational and entertaining resource, but also as a psychological dynamic of the many-fold sides of life. It reflects custom, tradition, and culture, and undergoes metamorphoses as the social life does. Folk dance is therefore a fundamental device to help us understand society, because folk dance is the reflection of its living significance. It is a realistic art which is performed in a familiar setting.

Among the tribal groups, dancing is a serious activity and cannot be dispensed with. Be it at a birth, during a marriage, at a death, during planting and harvesting, during hunting, at war, or at a feast, a dance is needed. The dance becomes a sacrificial rite, a prayer, and a prophetic vision. It summons and dispels the forces of nature as well as healing the sick. It assumes luck in a chase and victory in battle. It blesses the fields and the entire tribe.

Animism is an elemental part of the way of life of most rural Khmer. Almost every Khmer peasant's activity takes place in social context. Fears of catastrophe develop into certain art forms associated with music, dance, drama, and folk trance. These art forms serve to increase the communal sense of security. They give emotional release. They satisfy the desire to communicate ancestors and other spirits. They provide spiritual satisfaction. They bring good luck and prevent disaster.

Khmer traditional society epitomizes the indispensable concurrence of man, nature, and god. Khmer folk dance exemplifies this concept through its themes, which are accented on the one hand by religion and belief and on the other by the natural world in which the Khmer live.

Khmer folk dance is solely of peasant origin and use, and is considered to be a part of the peasants' lives. It is in rural Cambodia where folk dance has taken and has retained its deepest root. People dance around the village green or upon a rough stage built under spreading trees or leaves and shielded by a gracious shade which lends the setting and the site a beauty all of its own. In the villages there grows a spirit of intimate understanding and candor amongst performers and spectators.

Khmer folk dance has a great advantage over other art forms in that it originated in the village. It is performed by and for the people of the village. The adults and children all come to understand and appreciate every nuance of this highly spirited dance form that follows popular themes with lively movements and gestures that stimulate perfect sympathy and pride.

All over Cambodia after the harvest is over, it is time for music, song, and dance. There are attractive dances in many regions of the country where men, women, boys, and girls gather in the village for an evening and dance for sheer joy. The dance motifs are usually based on local legends and the

life of the people. Dancers dance with easy, improvised and composed movements and gestures that are designed to invite humor and laughter.

This community dance is part of the people's social life and, therefore, is important for the sociological and group systems. As one of the creative expressions of the people, dance is closely tied to the land and with living in diverse regions of different environments and backgrounds. Dance still bears an indestructible link to tradition and trends of thought.

Nature is always the strongest inspiration of all dances, coupled with customs, traditions, and beliefs, all of which have much in common. Dance is not merely an optional luxury; it is a way of life. Music, song, poetry, and dance are all integral parts of Khmer life. The subject of Khmer folk dance is comprehensive and full of variety, indicating how important a role dance plays in the social, religious, and sociological life of the people.

Throughout the years, people's opinions towards dance have oscillated between favor and disfavor. Finally, dance ends up as an art that has become confined to a particular group of people who pass it on to posterity as an hereditary art. After dance has become traditional, indeed, after it has begun the process of its nation-wide decline into the background of cultural importance, most of the old art forms are forgotten, except for the few families who preserve them.

There are various types of folk dance to satisfy the social need for the security of happiness and welfare, dances which are normally related to belief, tradition, and recreation. The first type is necessary when religious ceremonies are organized. The second is needed for traditional festivities. The last is closely tied to the people and is used to enhance recreational gatherings. Thus, Khmer folk dance can be categorized into three types of art: religious, traditional, and popular.

The religious art form of dance emerges from the customs and beliefs that give value to miracles, nature, the soul, witchcraft, and animism. This form of dance is represented by the *peacock of Pursat dance* and the *sacrifice of buffalo dance*.

The traditional art form of dance emerges from traditions practiced by peasants and farmers as well as by city dwellers. This kind of art is usually performed during traditional ceremonies and is represented by the *trod dance*.

The popular art form of dance is connected with recreation and is sometimes called "peasant's art" or "people's art." After the harvest, peasants get together to perform their village dances, which express their spontaneous joyfulness after the completion of their hard work, as exemplified by the *krab dance* and the *pestle dance*.

Any existing life has been born, now transforms, and will die. Under these transient circumstances, we cannot ignore the social phenomena to which the phenomena of dance are inextricably attached. A performance is regulated by its usage and is tied to a ritual or a specific occasion.

Only within the last decade or so, during which the political situation in Cambodia has been unstable, has folk dance been seen as one of the most

effective means of transmitting the country's political ideology. The universal characteristics of dance can be appreciated by people of all social levels and ages. Because dance is a folk art reflecting its society's everyday life, as a medium, it is easy to understand. Moreover, its form is open to suit any theme-political, educational, or recreational.

Indigenous folk perceive the aesthetics of their dance quite differently than those in academia. A good dance in the people's eyes is tied more to the right context, because it serves its original purposes, the ritual, the proper occasion, the correct time, and the methods of performance.

Khmer folk dance has been systematized into a unique form of its own featuring distinctive movements and gestures. Though the general patterns of a dance often prevail, its details vary greatly from place to place and from year to year. The University of Fine Arts' dances, for example, have much more variety in rhythms, steps, movements and gestures than are generally supposed.

While the court dance is subject to a definite order, a strict form, and a prescribed language of movements and gestures, folk dance is spontaneous, and is created for emotional expressions. As reflected through music and song, folk dance embodies the significance of nature and traditional occupations.

Folk dance of Cambodia has never been the subject of an in-depth study beyond a few printed books and some local research materials compiled by the *Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes* of the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh. Although folk dances and folk practices are kept alive in diverse regions of Cambodia, they are shared and appreciated only by people of those regions.

Unlike other art forms whose troupes were hired to perform across the country during national and traditional ceremonies and festivals, the folklore troupe could not create a repertoire long enough to provide entertainment for one evening. Therefore, it stayed in its original locality. Moreover, a folklore troupe was not intentionally formed for touring or making a living, but merely for casual entertainment and for serving religious and traditional purposes when they were necessary. By and large, each region had only one dance peculiar to its tradition.

Khmer folk dance is a group activity in which there is neither hero nor protagonist. "Grouping" is very significant in the Khmer traditional society. People live their lives as a unit--be it a community unit, kinship unit, or family unit. This "unit" or "grouping" is reflected in the Khmer social life. The Khmer live in extended families in which everyone, young and old, shares chores around the house according to his or her role, duty, and obligation. People live together in houses as individual rooms are not built within a house. Instead, everyone owns part of the house, and together the family forms a big unit. Groups work together to build houses, to plant and to harvest as well as to perform folk dance. Working as a group is thought to be a conventional necessity, and almost all types of dances in Cambodia invariably respect this tradition. It is "we" and not "I" that dominate the show.

CHAPTER ONE

UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS

During the late 1950's and early 1960's, an interest in folk art sprang up among a group of teachers who decided to create the National Conservatory of Performing Arts and the University of Fine Arts, to which the majority of folk dances that we see today owe their origin. When these establishments came into existence, their members were assigned to search for dances in various regions of Cambodia. Movements, gestures, and choreographies were learned directly from indigenous as well as photographed dancers. Music, songs, and narrations were learned and taped for further study.

After materials were collected and brought back, the Conservatory and the University had to take a big step in deciding what to do next--whether to follow and preserve the dance tradition by presenting a carbon copy of the original, or by modifying the dances to suit a stage presentation or a concert hall.

Putting this organization of materials to work was the most difficult task. The Conservatory and the University had to confront numerous problems, especially those pertaining to the responsibility of how "folklore" relates to the world. In spite of what the consequences might have been, the Conservatory and the University decided to take off in the direction needed to modify some of the original elements in order to come up with an acceptable adaptation for stage presentation.

Reproducing movements and gestures that have been handed down from father to son for generations, as well as capturing the profound sentiments attached to rituals and ceremonies that the indigenous folks have witnessed all their lives was frustrating. Yet, so that folk dance could be adapted for the stage, some aspects of the original dance needed to be modified. Poor movements, improper postures, and choreographies--as seen through academic eyes--needed alterations and improvements. Long, repetitious, and unnecessary phrases needed elimination or shortening. With great care and awareness, the Conservatory and the University were able to preserve the original form, theme, idea, music, and song.

Some people would prefer the original form, but the Conservatory and the University took a different stance: 1) to collect and document all folk materials; 2) to build up and to expand the folk repertoire; 3) to spread the folk arts to the people throughout the country by having troupes perform at those places where the dances were originated; 4) to increase the people's awareness of their folk arts; 5) to introduce to the academic circle the peasants' arts of didactic impulse; 6) to take folk traditions to international stages; and 7) to bring these traditions up to the universal standard for study purposes. The 1969 Festival and Conference on Asian Music and Drama in Malaysia and Singapore and the 1971 First Third World Theatre Festival and Conference in the Philippines were two perfect examples that allowed the above statement to materialize.

After a few years of intensive research, study, and practice, the Conservatory and the University were able to send their folklore troupes representing Cambodia to participate in world festivals and conferences. The troupes returned with feelings of great success and pride for their folk arts and their jobs well done.

In the academic institution called the University of Fine Arts, dancing flowers again. However, dancing is regarded as a passion and not a pastime. Training is long and arduous. The talented ones are spotted early and put through a degree program. It is seen, then, that here the casual practice of peasants is conducted intensively at a professional level, and a career in folk dance is accepted as a professional trade.

New folk dance pieces were created only after the establishment of the Conservatory and the University. This dance genre was then brought to urban audiences for the first time. As a result of long and intensive study and practice, the Conservatory and the University were able to make up a folk repertoire long enough for one evening's entertainment.

The old dances have evolved through stages, from the most indigenous form to stage adaptation, and from the exotic or rural area to the university circle. Some dances have been modified many times before arriving at their present form, and there is still room for more modification.

This century marks a period of a highly developed civilization in which theatre, music, dance, architecture, painting, and poetry form part of the daily life of people of every class and occupation. Thus, there is a great impetus given to the dance.

Dances that depict centuries of the Khmer's struggle and other folklore have been studied and performed as a refined art. People find dances interesting primarily because of their good presentation, decor, pleasing musical accompaniment, and the new original work. Today, with the availability of concert halls in many leading cities across the country, people have a chance to witness highly artistic performances where the dance begins to flow uninterruptedly once again into the circles from whence it had been so long denied a place.

Nowadays royal members and ladies of culture dance. Dancers are very well-educated and take to the art with serious purposes. Besides dancing, they learn the theory and philosophy of the arts, knowledge which brings the dance to its peak in both performance and artistry. This study of dance is not only of academic interest, but also can have a very practical application in raising the credibility of dancers and artists and stimulating them to do more.

The Conservatory and the University preserve and develop traditional art forms. As a result, they are able to present scintillating cultural performances, perhaps not as traditional as the purists would like to have it, but certainly interesting enough to evoke responses from the people of the cultures they present. Moreover, these establishments, namely the Conservatory and the University, have inspired interests in the traditional cultures through the popularity of their offerings. They have been able to have indigenous music accepted as normal radio and television materials.

rather than as an irrelevant oddity in an increasingly Westernized world. As a result of this task, folk dance is now epitomized as being equally important as other art forms. The Conservatory and the University have done much to remove the idea that there is something derogatory and rather low class about dancing. We are glad to look forward to an even greater revival of this wonderful art than we have already seen.

FOLK DANCE PRESERVATION

The act of preservation of Khmer folk dance must be accredited to Mr. Phon Chheng, the Director of the National Conservatory of Performing Arts, and the Folklore section of the University of Fine Arts in Phnom-Penh, Cambodia, and his team of *Moniteurs* and *Monitrices* of the same institutions, who started the movement.

The invasion of Western civilization into Cambodia has made the Khmer feel that their culture is inferior to that of the Western world. This inferiority complex endangered the survival of Khmer folk dance. Luckily a folk dance preservation movement was started, a movement that stressed the importance of traditional art. During the time when we were at the Conservatory and the University, Mr. Phon Chheng constantly reminded us that "traditional is not backward, and modern is not advanced," which allowed us to look back and respect our own traditional art over the intruding Western art.

Once the Khmer agreed upon and valued the movement, they worked day and night to promote their traditional art forms, namely folk dance, mask dance, shadow play, *yike* [yīke],¹ *bassac* [pāsāk],² and so on, to increase quality of the traditional values. For example, they worked to correct the improper wording in the songs and narrations to suit the educational standards of the country. They have improved music, song, movement, gesture, costume, decor, lighting, and sound systems. They have elevated the aesthetic of the art to a high standard. They have certainly succeeded in bringing people's attention and appreciation back to their own traditional art. Moreover, during the late 1960's and the early 1970's, the Conservatory and the University sent teachers to schools and universities to teach folk dances to students. At the same time many tours were organized to bring the traditional art to people of every class, occupation, and region across the country. The movement has sustained the life of our traditional art through the present day.

¹A theatrical form of Muslim origin in which elements of drama, acting, dancing, and singing are incorporated.

²A theatrical form of Chinese opera influence.

FOLK DANCE FORMATION

Before the establishment of the National Conservatory of Performing Arts and the University of Fine Arts, troupes of folk dancers were organized rather casually on an amateur level. They performed on an occasional basis, serving spiritual, traditional, and recreational purposes devoid of solid systematic organization. In the 1950's and 1960's, following the formation of the aforementioned institutions, folk organization was systematized in Cambodia for the first time. The University offered folk dance in its curriculum as a professional trade.

It was during this time that a number of new dance pieces were created, making the folk repertoire long enough to be an evening's entertainment. Many country wide tours were organized. The University sent folklore troupes to participate in world festivals and overseas conferences.

Students who had just finished elementary school were recruited to be trained as performers in the first cycle of a four-year program leading to the *Diplôme des Arts Chorégraphiques* degree. Graduates with this degree could then take an examination and, if they passed, would then become a *Moniteur des Arts*. They could also extend their study to the second cycle of a three year program that leads to the *Baccalauréat des Arts Chorégraphiques* degree. Graduates with this degree could then take an examination and, if they passed, would then become a *Professeur des Arts*.

In 1973 the University of Fine Arts recruited six- and seven year old students to be trained in the folk discipline. The Khmer have been the unfortunate victims of the holocaust and genocide by the Communist regime in Cambodia. This inhumane regime has claimed millions of Khmer lives, including the lives of artists, musicians and dancers. Today, many of the young students who have endured the hardship, starvation, diseases, and slaughtering by the Communist regime, have managed to restore themselves, come back together, and continue to practice the dance. They are both the preservers and the carriers of the future of Khmer arts.

PROFESSIONALISM

Artistic activities are closely tied to the socio-economic factors of a society. No art is promoted unless there is economic self-sufficiency. In a traditional agrarian society such as that of Cambodia, most peasants harvest once a year, producing just enough to support their family, with perhaps a small amount of surplus that is preserved for the next year's crops without an idea of stockpiling grain. Many of the Khmer peasants borrow funding for their initial crops from landowners or businessmen to whom they end up paying a great amount of interest, usually paid at the site during the harvest.

During the dry season after the harvest, Khmer peasants may conduct other trades or merely relax and celebrate. During this time one can observe many ceremonies and festivals. Some peasants practice their art specialty. Some join festivals and perform in them. As a result, one will notice many artistic activities.

Because these artistic trades are seen merely as a form of entertainment and recreation, and can only be engaged in at certain times of the year, very few take them seriously and perfect their skills to become professional. Professionalism in this sense must be acknowledged by the society in which an artistic specialty is required. Although ceremonies and festivals are organized year round, an artist can scarcely make a living by performing, since scheduled performances are rare. Therefore he must carry out a non-performing job in order to make ends meet.

As in other traditional countries of the world, the everyday life of Khmer agrarian society is collective: planting, harvesting, and building houses are all group activities. The same collective principle is applied to the organization of communal interests such as repairing irrigation canals, building roads and schools, and observing ceremonies and festivals. Weddings and funerals, though only concerning a few families, are also amplified by a collective celebration and ritual. Likewise, Khmer music and dance are fundamentally collective. Moreover, Khmer musicians and dancers play and perform for the love of their own art. They do not think of performing for a living; rather, they do so for self-enjoyment and satisfaction. For that reason, they get together to play and dance, in the evening after working in the field.

Unlike artists in a developed country where means of transportation allow musicians and dancers to travel and be constantly on the move, Khmer artists almost always stay in their place of origin. Khmer artists are unlike artists in a modern and developed country whose performances are constantly in demand, where competition and promotion are encouraged, and where money is transacted for any sort of performance. These criteria challenge people to strive for individuality, high specialization, rich repertoire, and a professional status. Instead, Khmer artistry stresses collectivity, community ideals, social concerns, and a dependable mutual aid system. They have low

levels of specialization and a limited repertoire. Competition and promotion are neglected. Since there is only an occasional demand for performances, dancers hardly perform at all in public and get paid little or nothing. In such a society, "professionalism" is almost non-existent.

The status of musicians and dancers has never been regarded with high esteem. Women, especially, are rarely accepted as artists, because arts such as music and dance often have negative connotations and therefore are not considered to be serious. In a traditional society such as Cambodia, the acceptance of a career in art is very difficult. To make matters worse, the profession could hardly support a family.

The University of Fine Arts makes an exception to the above. Young musicians and dancers are recruited and encouraged to choose their own careers. The University offers courses in the history and philosophy of art and literature in theory and practice, enabling artists to achieve high levels of performance and artistry. Through the availability of radio, television, and concert halls, artists are exposed to the public. Gradually, the trade becomes more acceptable.

As the result of state-supported, full time intensive study, practice, and performance, the professionalism and technical perfection at the official, professional, and educational institutions are now taken for granted as role models. The casual activities of the peasants who earn their living by tilling the soil and practicing and performing on an occasional basis when needed stand in sharp contrast to the new professionalism.

Recently, musicians and dancers have been accepted by society and now occupy a position of high dignity. People have begun to see music and dancing as both accomplishments and cultural assets. Consequently, the Khmer study music and dance seriously, making them honored arts and elevating them to a position of esteem.

CHANGES IN KHMER FOLK DANCE

As happens in all countries and among all peoples, the vicissitudes and prosperity of life deeply affect art at all times. It has been the same in Cambodia. Changes of thought, outlook, culture, circumstances and attitudes have all left their indelible marks on the position of dance in Khmer society.

The old ways of practicing old dances had been neglected and changed since the dancers who practiced them were not professionals and lacked the knowledge and understanding necessary for preserving the old traditions. When the institutional artists of the National Conservatory of Performing Arts and the University of Fine Arts conducted researches and collected and studied folk materials, many aspects of the dance as seen through academic eyes, had to be altered, cut, added, or modified. Improper postures, movements, and gestures were corrected. The old themes were changed to suit either the purely artistic or the didactic and political contexts that were necessary at the time. This issue can be controversial and debatable, and we do not intend to discuss it here. Rather, we would like to present the steps that have been taken by the Conservatory and the University, leaving the issue open for readers to rationalize.

Khmer folk dance seems to be able to survive only by adapting itself to the social and political situation of the country. It is therefore changed and differentiated in times of peace and in times of war. In times of peace, folk dance is seen as a form of entertainment to which its form and theme totally conform. Aside from entertaining, folk dance is used effectively as a means of reenforcing people's beliefs. As social life changes out of political necessity, folk dance also does. In times of war, the traditional forms of folk dance are directed to serve solely the political ideology of the country's rulers. At this point, folk dance is no longer seen as merely entertaining but also political. Consequently, the form of folk dance might be changed. The costumes, for instance, might be adapted to suit the current events and plots called for by politics. Music can be freshly composed. Lyrics can be rewritten to embody new ideas with obvious political overtones. Rhythms and movements are created anew. All of the above are practical because folk dance is a very popular form which suits the diversity of any kind of crowd, be it made up of young or old, peasants or high ranking officials, laymen or intellectuals. Moreover, it is open to welcome any theme and thus can be used to effectively implant new ideology.

"Change" is an unstoppable phenomenon. Since it affects every aspect of life, one must learn how to accept it as a positive ongoing process. In dance even the fortunate folk dance enthusiasts sometimes bring back

differing choreographies or music from the same country. A dance taught by one teacher may be presented differently by another. Khmer folk dance has undergone some changes through the years. Dances have gone from dancer to dancer, teacher to dancer, books to dancers and teachers, and have been altered in the process.

Folk dance is fast disappearing from rural regions mainly because of the increasing impact of urban modes of living on the rural life of villages. The fast growth of industrial development and new means of entertainment such as radio, movies, and television are also making considerable changes in the styles of folk dancing.

In remote, isolated areas folk dance was previously associated with different animistic rituals as well as with various traditional and social festivals. As long as rural society remains cut off from the rest of the world, rural folk dance retains its old characteristics. Variations, if any, take place within the narrow framework of their special and spiritual context.

As civilization develops, folk dance becomes more sophisticated. Simple folk dance changes accordingly, becoming more social in character. As travel increases, there is a resultant intermingling of dance forms that were formerly kept in their original forms by geographic isolation.

Another change that is perhaps dangerous, and which unfortunately is seen only through academic and professional eyes, is the degradation of the quality of folk dance that results from poor knowledge, lack of understanding, and low levels of specialization. For instance, the indigenous dancers and dancers of the University of Fine Arts perform a much more complicated version of folk dance than the version performed by non-professionals today. This simplification is a result of, on the one hand, a lack of knowledge and understanding of the dance, and on the other, that those steps, movements and gestures are too difficult for them to learn.

CHAPTER TWO

MOVEMENT AND GESTURE

Khmer folk dance is pure dance, made up of movements and gestures found in the "mother of postures" or *kbach chha banchoh* [kp̄ac chā p̄āncuh].³ as well as those movements and gestures in the programatic dance, including the transitional ones, that do not convey any meaning. Its movements and gestures do not conform to a *khvat* [khnāt]: a dance measurement to which the closing, opening, height, or size of a posture conforms--as do those of court dance. Dancers have more freedom to interpret the movements and gestures of Khmer folk dance since these are less sophisticated than those of the court dance.⁴ Moreover, Khmer folk dance also includes elements of improvisation in certain situations.

The whole context of the dance solely reflects the peasants' life, making this art form successful when presented to the peasants. Because folk dance reflects social life, it is easy to understand.

Movements and gestures in Khmer folk dance do not convey the meanings that are seen in court dance. Each dance phrase is important and constitutes one theme in which many meaningless movements and gestures are realized. For example, the *gum-lac pounding dance* is divided into three sections: the search for the gum lac in a sampan, the pounding of the gum-lac, and the joy after the completion of the task. Each section of the dance denotes only one theme within which there are many changes of movement and gesture. The texts that the choir sings do not dictate movements and gestures to follow blow by blow as practiced in court dance, but instead tell of the dance as a whole.⁵

There is no role and movement study as such in Khmer folk dance. Folk dancers simply learn how to dance. The folk movements and gestures are touched with a sense of humor.

The rhythm of the drum is the important factor to which steps and movements must conform, and its beat is faster than that of the court dance. Therefore, folk dance is perceived as being exciting and enjoyable for its activity and interaction among dancers.

Because folk dance has no rule as to how a movement or gesture should be executed, it differs and varies from place to place, and from year to year. But underneath the variations in the dance there lies a fundamental uniformity which is not difficult to detect.

³Dance alphabet serves as basic exercises for the dance.

⁴See *Khmer Court Dance*, by Chan Moly Sam, 1987.

⁵See *Khmer Court Dance* by Chan Moly Sam, 1987.

Folk dance probably gets more involved with its audience than any other Khmer art. At times dancers interact with the audience as exemplified by the *krab dance*. Audiences attend folk dances to watch movements, gestures, and humorous expressions. People watch and participate in folk dance for entertainment and excitement rather than to hear a story.

COSTUME

Because the excitement of folk dance depends mainly on interaction, interpretation, expression, movement, and gesture, costume, especially that of indigenous dancers, has usually been neglected. The indigenous troupes were not uniform in the type or color of dress they wore to dance. Usually, with some minor exceptions, they danced in their work clothes. Modern dancers tend to dress more uniformly.

Many new dances have been created from the observation of peasants' lives and natures. New, more uniform costumes inspired by peasants' real lives are adapted for stage performance according to logical roles and themes. For example, in the *trod dance*, *peacock of Pursat dance*, *wild ox dance*, *pestle dance*, et al., peasants wear *sampot chung kben* [sambát cân kpin⁶] or pants when dancing. The highlanders who inhabit the northeastern plateau in the provinces of Mondulkiri and Rattanakiri wear G-strings when performing the *good crops dance* and the *sacrifice of buffalo dance*.

When those dances were brought to the University of Fine Arts, the original costumes used by those indigenous dancers in the *good crops dance* and the *sacrifice of buffalo dance* were closely conserved. The costumes of other dances such as the *trod dance*, *peacock of Pursat dance*, *wild ox dance*, and so on, were changed and modified to suit the theme and context of each dance. The new costume for the *peacock of Pursat dance*, for example, is entirely green. Dancers also wear peacock tail headgear. In the *wild ox dance*, headgear of wild ox horns are worn. Dancers who perform the role of wild oxen wear maroon dresses. The dancer who portrays the tiger wears a brown outfit, while the one who plays the bee wears a green outfit with yellow stripes.

⁶A piece of cloth approximately three meters long which is wrapped around the waist, with one end rolled, placed in between the legs, and tucked at the waist, then finally fastened with a belt.

CHAPTER THREE

MUSIC

The so-called "folk music" is used to accompany folk dance. We do not intend to discuss folk music as such. Rather, we would like to pursue the phenomenon of folk music as the accompaniment to the dance. Having played and observed the folk dance movement in Cambodia and now in America for more than ten years, we could say that accompanied pieces are drawn from a very old repertoire, as found in the *peacock of Pursat dance* and the *wild ox dance*. Others are drawn from the wedding repertoire as heard in the *gum-lac pounding dance* and the *coconut shell dance*. The newly created dances that have sprung up during the last two decades or so are accompanied by either pieces of the *mohori* [mahorī]⁷ repertoire pieces or the newly composed pieces as played in the *krab dance* and the *magic scarf dance*.

The musical ensembles used to accompany folk dance can be classified into two different types: the old combination of instruments and the new one. The former is used to accompany the indigenous dances of various regions in Cambodia. Those dances include the *peacock of Pursat dance*, the *wild ox dance*, the *sacrifice of buffalo dance*, the *peacock of Pailin dance*, etc. The latter is used to accompany new folk-dance creations. This new ensemble accompanies the *fishing dance*, the *harvest dance*, the *pestle dance*, the *krab dance*, etc.

Unlike the court dance ensemble--the *pinpeat* [biṅbādyā]⁸ of a set repertoire of pieces, many of which have designated functions--folk pieces are randomly selected from various repertoires to suit the theme and context of each dance. The drummer takes the most important role to dictate the dance movements and set the pace for the dance, whatever the consequences might be. The importance of the drum and its beats are generally agreed upon and stressed by many dance observers. "When the gestures and body movements began to fall into a regular pattern caused by the occurrence of accented beats and movements," Pholeric says, "people began to dance." (1980: 1) Observing Balinese music and dance, McPhee writes:

"Movement and gesture are bound to the music through the drumming, the vital link connecting dancers with musicians.... The drummer must rehearse many times with the dancers, who rely entirely on the drum continuity for direction.... Star performers,

⁷ Referring to both an ensemble and its repertoire. It comprises wind, string, and percussion instruments, and is often referred to as a light entertaining ensemble.

⁸ Known as the wind and percussion ensemble. It is considered to be the strongest in sonority of the Khmer ensembles. It is used to accompany court dance, mass dance, the shadow play, and religious ceremonies.

engaged to appear with different companies, prefer to bring their own leading drummer and cymbal players." (1966: 19)

Chernoff observes African music and dance and says: "The dancer must listen to the drum. When he is really listening he creates within himself an echo of the drum--then he has started really to dance." (1979: 143)

Drum patterns used in the Khmer folk dance are not necessarily borrowed from the traditional ones as found in the *pinpeat*, *mohori*, or wedding ensemble. Regardless of the origin of the repertoire pieces, whether from the *pinpeat* or *mohori* or a newly composed one, the drum patterns are newly created for each dance.

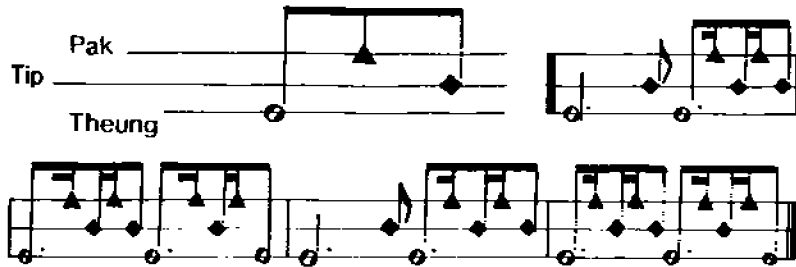
Traditional Drum Pattern

Musical notation for a traditional drum pattern. The notation is written on a five-line staff. The top line is labeled 'Tip' and the bottom line is labeled 'Ting'. Above the staff, the notes are labeled 'Pak' and 'Cheung'. The notation consists of a sequence of notes and rests, with some notes marked with an asterisk (*). The pattern is shown in two parts: a first part with a bracket above it, and a second part with a bracket above it. The notes are mostly quarter notes and eighth notes, with some rests.

Drum Pattern of the Krab Dance

Musical notation for the drum pattern of the Krab Dance. The notation is written on a five-line staff. The top line is labeled 'Ta' and the bottom line is labeled 'Leung'. Above the staff, the notes are labeled 'Ting' and 'Fak'. The notation consists of a sequence of notes and rests, with some notes marked with an asterisk (*). The pattern is shown in two parts: a first part with a bracket above it, and a second part with a bracket above it. The notes are mostly quarter notes and eighth notes, with some rests.

Drum Pattern of the Magic Scarf Dance



Khmer folk dance uses a variety of drums for its accompaniment, namely the hand drum of the worship of the spirit ensemble,⁹ the *chhayam drum*, and the *yike drum*, each from the ensemble of the same name. The drums used to accompany a particular dance are chosen to conform to the context of that dance. For example, the hand drum is used to accent the moving and exciting character of the *krab dance*. The *yike drum* is used to accompany the *magic scarf dance* of the Cham or Muslim origin from which the drum originated. The drum beats and patterns are played in various combinations, dispelling monotony and adding to the overall effect.

Some of the folk dances are accompanied by purely instrumental music without song, such as the *krab dance*, the *fishing dance*, the *bird wedding dance*, the *magic scarf dance*, and the *sacrifice of buffalo dance*.

How is music chosen or composed for a dance realization? We are going to classify our dances into two separate categories: the adaptation and the new creation. The adaptation of an old dance piece does not allow as much room for new ideas as that of the newly created one. Usually the old music used in the original performance is closely conserved or modified only slightly. The music of the *sacrifice of buffalo dance* and the *peacock of Pursat dance* exemplify the above situation.

The process of creating a new dance piece is exciting and leads to a great motivation. It opens up new ideas and thoughts. It gives a wide range of parameter in which one can easily work. Dancers and musicians, especially the choreographer and the lead musician, work both individually and as a group day and night when creating a new dance piece. First of all, a theme must be chosen, be it nature as seen in the *coconut shell dance*, peasants' life as seen in the *harvest dance* and the *pestle dance*, or history as seen in

⁹Considered to be the oldest of the Khmer ensembles. It is primarily used to put a medium into trance to seek for causes of illnesses.

the *crossbow dance*.

After selecting a theme, movements and gestures are created with various combinations to suit it, and then they are set to music. Musicians have many ways to produce a piece of music. They can simply borrow an old piece from the traditional repertoire, or they can compose a brand-new piece. Whatever the circumstances may be, trying to fit the first piece of music that comes to mind with a new dance does not often work at once. In most cases, many pieces—old ones or newly composed ones—have been put through many trials before the artists arrive at the right choice. The right piece of music serves the right motif of the dance. For example, the piece called *the turtle eats water convolvulus* was chosen to accompany the *krab dance*, for the dance theme and motif call for lively character. This piece, subjectively speaking, is perhaps more lively than any other piece.

Some dance pieces require more than one musical piece for their accompaniment. The practical way to begin to choose a piece is to look at the title of the dance piece, which contains the motif or idea that pertains to the dance. Oftentimes this method works perfectly. The *gum-lac pounding dance*, for example, uses three pieces, each of which serves a different motif. The first episode—the search for the gum lac in a sampan is accompanied by the piece called *boat rowing*; the second episode—the pounding of the gum lac is accompanied by the piece called *gum-lac pounding*; and the last episode—the joy after the completion of the task is accompanied by the piece called *Laotian dance* of an amusing character.

Only when both dancers and musicians feel that the music and the movements suit one another do they finish the dance.

SONG

Song is one of the most concrete elements of dance, conveying clearly the subject of the dance. Khmer folk dance encompasses so many aspects of education, politics, history, custom, tradition, and recreation that the dances can only be understood clearly through song texts.

Songs used in Khmer folk dance are lyric songs which emphasize emotion more than storytelling and embrace various topics such as love, the beauty and value of nature, beliefs, customs, and tradition. The song of the *wild ox dance* denotes animism and belief, reminding us of our beautiful and peaceful natural world that harbors all sorts of creatures. The song brings a profound nostalgia to those of us who have been away from home and seek refuge in another land. It can be said also to reflect the simplicity of Khmer life. The *harvest dance* is performed to a song that perfectly describes Khmer peasant life. This song also stresses the tender love, care, and beauty of the Khmer women as disclosed through working activities. In the last episode the song projects the importance of the Khmer agriculture as well as the peasants' joyfulness after they have completed their work.

While some dances are created to serve animistic, religious, traditional, and recreational purposes, others such as the *pestle dance* embody various impulses and themes. The songs, culture, art, agriculture, economy, and politics of the Khmer are all blended together to accompany the dance.

CHAPTER FOUR

TROD DANCE

Trod dance is said to have originated in folk tales which are very popular in Cambodia. These tales are interpreted by a form of storytelling--an art form that has gradually been forgotten since the introduction of radio, movies and television. When Cambodia was still isolated from the modern world, many traditional art forms were greatly appreciated. Many people attended the shadow play, for example, which performed the *reamker* [rāmakertī]¹⁰ story for seven nights straight. Since movies and television have been introduced, this beautiful art form has been nearly forgotten, and today remains unknown to many.

During our primary school years in the 1950's, "storytelling" was part of the school curriculum. We remember that twice a week our friends used to tell the class a story that they learned either from reading a book or from listening to their grandparents. In the evening after supper in rural Cambodia, children gather on a bamboo bed outside of the house in a courtyard to wait for an elder, usually a grandparent, to tell them stories to make their evening joyful before they go to bed.

When more modern entertainment forms such as radio, movies and television came into use, people frequently turned to them for a larger variety of convenient entertainments. As time goes by, little by little the art of "storytelling" grows to be non-existent.

There were several such folk sources that gave birth to the *trod dance*. The religious one mentions that, before the enlightenment, Bodhisattva¹¹ wandered as a monk. During this time, a devil transformed himself into a deer to prevent Bodhisattva from attaining His goal. Bodhisattva then meditated and affected the godly world where aboded Brahma, Indra, and other Devas,¹² one of whom transformed himself into an ogre and killed the deceiving deer. Bodhisattva was thereafter escorted by the Devas and Devatas¹³ so that He could continue His monkhood and succeed in His enlightenment.

The above story is believed to have become the theme for the *trod dance*.

¹⁰Khmer version of *ramayana*.

¹¹One desirous to obtain perfect enlightenment.

¹²Gods.

¹³Goddesses.

In the dance, an umbrella becomes the *kañchhe* [kañchae].¹⁴ The musicians portray the Devas, and the dancers portray the celestial dancers who were Bodhisattva's escorts. Other dancers portray the deer and the wild oxen which represent the devils. One dancer portrays the ogre, who is in the form of a hunter. (Chap 1964: 34-35)

Once upon a time, according to Mr. Long Sam of Battambang,¹⁵ some wild animals entered the village, bringing with them some form of bad luck. This situation provided the basis for the creation of the *trod dance*. The troupe includes a deer, a wild ox, and peahens, all of which are wild animals brought to be present so that villagers can tie threads around their wrists, sprinkle perfume and powder on them, dress them with garlands and to save the whole village from danger, for if wild animals should enter the village again, the ceremony and offerings would already have been made for the security that there would not be any bad luck. (Chap 1964: 35-36)

Our ancestors affixed peacock tails to themselves. These tails symbolize the "sun", which was, according to our ancient belief, a god. People worshipped the sun for much needed rain for farms and fields. Consequently, during a drought season, the *trod dance* was performed frequently.

The *Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes* document by Mr. Meas Hamr, Mayor of Sautr Nikum, found that the *trod dance* existed within the Samre, a tribal group inhabiting the region north of Tonle Sap. In ancient times, the Samre performed the dance for the king during the New Year. That is perhaps why the dance continues to be performed during the New Year ever since, and remains solely a dance of the Siem Reap province, which was the former capital city of Cambodia. (Chap 1964: 10)

According to ancient Khmer belief, the deer personifies evil spirits. This belief and practice are found in many Khmer tales and stories, including the most famous epic *ream ker* in which *Reap* [rābanā],¹⁶ the demonic King, asks one of his followers to transform himself into a golden deer in order to deceive *Sita* [sitā], *Preah Ream's* [brah rām] wife.

One must know about this sort of belief and practice to understand the *trod dance* that we still witness today, especially in the province of Siem Reap from where the dance originated. Nowadays, the *trod dance* is performed for many purposes: to celebrate the New Year, to raise funds to support a local monastery, to encourage happiness and prosperity, to drive away evil spirits, to ask for rain, or even simply to have more children. It is performed during the New Year because the word *trod* [truṭi] means "to break" or "to cut off" and signifies a change from the old year to the new year.

¹⁴Some sources use the word *kañchhur* [kañchūr]

¹⁵A northwestern province bordering Siem Reap, where the *trod dance* was also found.

¹⁶Also known as *Ravana*, the ten faced demonic King of Lanka

Most often, especially in the province of Siem Reap, the dance is performed during the drought season in the belief that the deer is the evil spirit that stops the rain from falling. Therefore, the deer must be killed so that the people can receive the rain. In some regions the *trod dance* is performed during a hot day. After the deer is killed, water is poured over the deer, symbolizing the rain obtained.¹⁷

At the time of the New Year, the deer is also seen as the evil spirit of the village. The deer must be killed to allow the new year to begin with joyfulness, happiness, and prosperity. At those times the dance can last for hours. The village troupe, followed by children of the village, wanders from house to house to collect money as part of a fund-raising.

During the dance a deer hops and dances to the rhythm of *kamhchhe* and drums as it is chased by a hunter. Giants, peahens, long nailed witches, and wild oxen surround and scare the deer. Finally, the hunter shoots the deer, an act which brings joy to the troupe, for evil has finally been defeated by good, consequently bringing blessing and good fortune to the village.

The dance is accompanied by the performers' own singing. The solo vocalist leads the ensemble; everybody else sings a chorus alternately. The original setting of the dance was divided into four stages: the arrival, asking for alms, collecting the alms, and well-wishing the donors.

The lyrics as revealed have no association either with the New Year nor with asking for rain, but rather with fund raising. The University of Fine Arts' lyrical version eliminates all of the above and emphasizes purely the aesthetic aspect of the story that tells what is performed in the dance.

The *trod dance* itself offers many benefits to the people. It is educational and encourages the continuation of public interest. It is performed for public benefit. People perform this dance to raise money to support monasteries, schools, celebrations, and festivals, and, more importantly, to help preserve the Khmer culture.

¹⁷In 1969 we observed the situation in a performance of the *trod dance* on location in Siem Reap.



Photo: UBA

TROD



<p>អើយកំប្លង់ពុទ្ធអើយ ពាំងបិទ្កបវិស្ស អាសា វាំសា វាំមុប្ប</p>	<p>នាំម្នា យេធាតុដី ជា រដ្ឋខ្មែរ រើយពុក្កីមុប្ប ។</p>
<p>អើយត្រុដ្ឋិម្នកដល់រើយ រទេន រទេន រទេន ណា នា ឯណា</p>	<p>ដល់ក្រៅ រទេន ម្នាល់រើយក្រុងធីត្រុទាម ក្រុងធីត្រុទាម ។</p>
<p>អើយធរយថិទេនាំ ក្រៅ ជំនាបតិស្វមទាម ណា នា ឯណា</p>	<p>ក្រែយក ចៅធីទៅផ្កា ម្នាល់រើយក្រពន្ធនាគឺយរ យេធា ក្រពន្ធនាគឺយរ យេធា ។</p>
<p>អើយម្នាធីត្រុបិទ្កណាស់ សុំក្រពន្ធនាគឺយរ យេធា ណា នា ឯណា</p>	<p>ធីត្រុបិទ្កណាស់ ម្នាល់រើយយេធាគឺយរ យេធា យេធាគឺយរ យេធា ។</p>
<p>អើយក្របិសម្បធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ក្របិសម្បធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ណា នា ឯណា</p>	<p>ក្រពាស ក្រែតធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ម្នាល់រើយក្រពាស ក្រពាស ក្រពាស ក្រពាស ។</p>
<p>អើយក្របិសម្បធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ណា នា ឯណា</p>	<p>ក្រពាស ធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ម្នាល់រើយក្របិសម្បធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ក្របិសម្បធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ។</p>
<p>អើយ ធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ទៅមុនធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ណា នា ឯណា</p>	<p>ធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ក្របិសម្ប ម្នាល់រើយក្របិសម្បធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ក្របិសម្បធីត្រុបិទ្កនាស់ ។</p>

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PEACOCK OF PURSAT DANCE

This dance originated in the province of Pursat where people of the Cardamom Mountain region preserve dances and perform them for the spirits before going on a trip to pick the cardamom.

Cambodia is covered by tropical forests where a variety of animals and birds dwell. Throughout the forests, peacocks and peahens float upon the mountain breeze as they play with their tails of fabulous green and black feathers. Their plumage bears the stamp of nobility.

During the performance, dancers with full green costumes and headgear of peacock tails floating in the air depict couples of peacocks and peahens playing with one another.

The musical accompaniment of a three-stringed fiddle known as *tro Khmer* [dra Khmaer], a kind of mouth organ known as *ploy* [blay], and a tom tom-like drum provides a fitting spiritual and religious tone and ambiance for this dance.

The lyrics, with their animistic implications, verbally help to set the complete aesthetic of the total performance achieving the initial animistic purposes as well.

Unlike any other dance, the *peacock of Pursat dance* appears to be more a regional phenomenon than a national one.



Photo: Sylvain Lim

PEACOCK OF PURSAT

Introduction

Tune



Three-Stringed Fiddle



អើយនាងអើយ

ឈឺអើយគឺថា ឈោកនិមន្តមក
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គឺបុណ្យ អើយពីរបីបណ្តាក់
ឈឺអើយគឺថា ឈោកអ្នកមានសក្តិ
គឺសក្តិ អើយពីរបីអង្គ គឺនាងអើយ។

អើយនាងអើយ

ត្រង់ទ្រីនទៅកាច់ទំពាំង ខ្លែង
គឺក្រមាមដៃនាងដូចអង្កាក់
ត្រង់ទ្រីនទៅកាច់ទំពាំងពក
គឺក្រចកដៃនាងដូចអង្កាវណា នាងអើយ។

អើយនាងអើយ

បងជិន លេងទ្រីនក្រួនកង្កែប
គឺក្រោករំលាយប្រែសាយ
បងជិន លេងទ្រីនក្រួនច្បង់ប្រែសាយ
គឺក្រោករំលាយប្រែសាយណា នាងអើយ។

អើយនាងអើយ

បងជិន ទ្រីនសីវីទៅ មើលទឹក
គឺទឹក អើយវាគង់សីវី
បងជិន ទ្រីនសីវីទៅ មើលពៅ
គឺពៅ អើយនាង បែកសន្លឹកនាងអើយ។

WILD OX DANCE

The *wild ox dance* is found in three provinces: Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, and Pursat. The dance is believed to have originated in folk tales retold by people of the Anhchanh Rong village of the Bariho district in the Kampong Chhnang province. The *wild ox dance* concerns a hunter who was sent by his King in search of game. The theme enacted includes nothing more than what was retold by the hunter of what happened and why he returned empty-handed upon the King's request, as follows: After a fruitless search lasting throughout the night, the hunter named *Por* came to a clearing where the following strange sight met his astonished gaze. A pair of wild oxen were engaged in tender courtship, dancing white beautifully encircled by bees that made melodious sounds. The hunter was so enraptured and hypnotized by the scene that he refrained from shooting at the oxen. Even the tiger that attempted to kill the oxen could not do it, but instead tapped his feet in a rhythmic accompaniment to the oxen. The hunter then decided to hasten home to tell the King about the strange affair.

The *wild ox dance* is based on such an incident. It is also believed to have originated in the *Por* tribal group which settled along the Cardamom Mountain range in the provinces of Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, and Pursat, which are the only places where the dance was found. Moreover, the hunter named *Por* must have had a connection with the *Por* tribe.

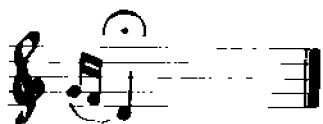
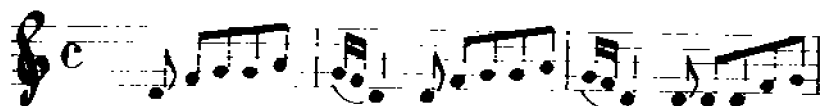
After the National Conservatory of Performing Arts in Phnom Penh, Cambodia was established, teams of teachers and students were sent to diverse regions across the country to conduct research and collect folk materials. Upon their return from the region called Anhchanh Rong, the *wild ox dance* was adapted for stage presentation. In the performance the attack and faint of the oxen at a slow tempo serve to enhance the rapt enchantment of the scene. The present set-up of the dance includes the hunter with a crossbow sitting in the background, represented by a singer who describes the story of the dance. The drummer with his drum-roaring sounds represents the tiger sitting at the side of the stage. The two oxen play, encircled by the bees, which is represented by a make-believe mouth organ player accompanied by real mouth organ sounds offstage.

The present setup of the *wild ox dance* has strong associations with animism. The scenes describing the activities of the oxen are revealed by the song. The old musical ensemble of one mouth organ, one drum, and one singer is closely conserved.



Photo: Sam-Ang Sam

WILD OX



ខ្ញុំបំបាត់ខ្ញុំវាចា
ស្លុក រលួយលុបបាត់

ផ្សេងពីខ្ញុំបំបាត់

ក្រោយថ្វាយព្រះនិព្វានការ
ព្រះគុណលោក អើយសប្បាយ។

ព្រះនរោត្តមទុំពៅព្រះន
ធ្វើការសង់ជាបីថ្នាក់
រួចបីបីរាយដាក់
បីថ្នាក់បន្ថែមព្រះនព្រះ

ព្រះន អើយពុំពៅព្រះន

កាប់ដើមពុំធ្វើទាន
ធ្វើតែពុំរួចបី
សង់ជាពុំបីថ្នាក់
ព្រះគុណលោក អើយព្រះនព្រះ

ព្រះណា ឧត្តមយំ
យំផងកណ្តាលវាល
ទីតែងដើមមាត់វា ទីតែង
វាលធំអាសូរខ្លួនកាល

ព្រះណា ឧត្តមយំ

ដើម ចើយពុំយំ
ឆ្ងាចវាពុំតែងដើម
កណ្តាលពុំវាល
ព្រះគុណលោក អើយខ្លួនណាស់។

ព្រះណា ឧត្តមវាល
កន្លែងគេពៅវាល

ព្រះណា ឧត្តមវាល

វាលព្រះពុំកន្លែង
ព្រះគុណលោក អើយវាល

ទីព្រះធម៌ប្លិក យំវាល
កន្លែងកន្លែងកន្លែង

ចងដើមពុំព្រះធម៌

ស្រាស់កន្លែងកន្លែង
ព្រះគុណលោក អើយកន្លែង

ទន្លេប្រាសាទទន្លេប្រាសាទ
ដោយទីព្រះធម៌ក្បួន
ក្បួនពុំដោយ
ក្បួនក្បួនក្បួនក្បួន

ទន្លេប្រាសាទទន្លេប្រាសាទ

ទន្លេប្រាសាទដោយ
ក្បួនពុំដោយ
ក្បួនក្បួនក្បួន
ព្រះគុណលោក អើយទន្លេប្រាសាទ

ចើទឹកក្នុងរូបចើយ

**រូបចើយប្របល់គ្នា វំ វ
ផលក្នុងរូបចើយ ទើប្រើប្រាស់**

**ទឹកទឹកក្នុងរូប
ប្រពន្ធសុខណាក រើយទើប្រើប្រាស់**

**ទឹកផល់ពុកពា វពាល
វលាវវសាយពុកពុក
រូបចើយពីទើប្រើប្រាស់ ឯ លោក**

**ពា វពាលពុកពុក
ចើបទជួន លោករូបចើយ
ប្រពន្ធសុខណាក រើយទើប្រើប្រាស់ ឯ លោក**

CANDLE DANCE

Candle and incense sticks are very important to Khmer worship. There has never been any instance that worshipping is conducted without lighting candles and incense sticks. They are tied to a dancer's life. At least once a week--on Thursday, which is considered to be a Guru day--a dancer privately conducts a simplified form of worship at home, keeping up traditions and insuring spiritual security. The flame symbolizes the Lord of Justice of Purity from which this dance is inspired. The dance is performed to placate gods and to ask for blessing.

The *candle dance* was created out of the need to project the historical imagination of the artistic glory of our ancient past. The candle's ceaseless flame represents the meditating and mysterious atmosphere found in a religious ceremony.

In this dance candlelight takes the place of the more modern flood- and spotlights usually used for a presentation. The sparkling candles follow the dancers' lines of movement, tracing their displacements through space. The delicate illumination of little candles, one in each dancer's hand, emerges from absolute darkness, casting fabulous choreographic lines projecting the dance's complete aesthetic qualities.



Photo: UBA

CANDLE



COCONUT SHELL DANCE

Cambodia is filled with coconut trees that make up one of the main agricultural resources of the country. They serve as a means of sustenance for Khmer country folk, and they are a particular characteristic of Khmer villages. From a distance one can see coconut trees rise above other trees, hiding peaceful houses, and sheltering lives, human and creature.

During national and religious ceremonies, coconut midribs and leaves are fashioned into beautiful decorations to enhance the occasions. It is also said that the coconut tree is a symbol of hospitality. Travelers on foot who walk many kilometers from village to village often end up under a coconut tree to catch their breath before they proceed to their destination. Being so tired and exhausted, the travelers appreciate a few sips of coconut water to energize their bodies.

When the fruit is left on the trees to ripen, it falls. People collect coconuts to prepare their favorite delicacies. After the meat is taken, the hard shells are often collected, cut nicely, and shined, making them objects of art for home decoration.

Artists who are inspired by nature use coconut shells as instruments for games. From the same inspiration, teachers and students of the University of Fine Arts in Phnom-Penh created the *coconut shell dance*.

Originating in the province of Svay Rieng, a popular game called *coconut shell* provided the idea to use the coconut shells in the contemporary dance that we see today. The coconut shell game was played during all kinds of ceremonies, but most often during wedding ceremonies, engagements, or times when the groom is escorted in a procession to the bride's house. The game was a one-man show then, and played only by a man. In the present spectacle, a group consisting of equal numbers of male and female dancers is required to perform the dance.

Perhaps because it was once used in wedding ceremonies, the dance includes a wedding piece called *sampong* [samboŋ] in the opening, followed by a folk tune to bring the dance to its close.

The theme of the present version is didactic, made explicit by what the song conveys. The lyrics carry political overtones in addition to the natural Khmer leaning towards nature and love. As usual, art during the present time is used to serve the country's political ends. Consequently, when a governmental regime is changed, as in Cambodia, a newly formed lyric containing new motifs replaces the old form.

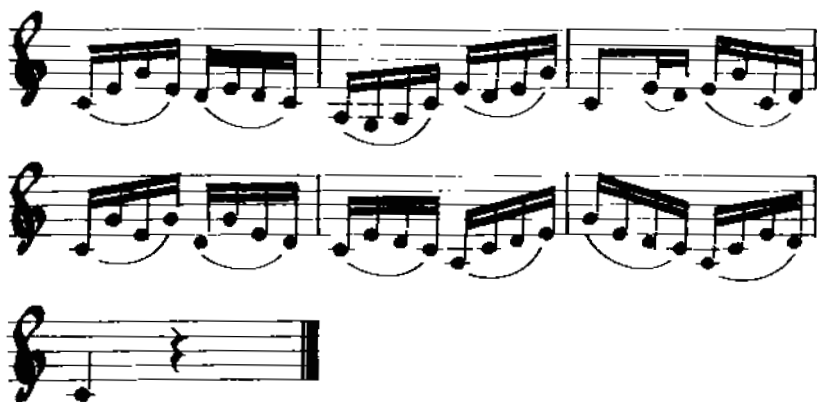


FIGURE 1. Sam-Ang Sam

SAMPONG

The musical score for 'SAMPONG' is written in 2/4 time and consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The second staff continues the melody with a similar rhythmic pattern. The third staff introduces a more complex rhythmic structure with sixteenth-note runs. The fourth staff features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The fifth and sixth staves conclude the piece with intricate sixteenth-note passages and a final cadence.

The image displays seven staves of musical notation, each beginning with a treble clef. The notation is arranged in a vertical column. The first staff contains a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes, some beamed together. The second staff features a series of eighth notes, some with slurs. The third staff shows a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some beaming. The fourth staff consists of eighth notes, some with slurs. The fifth staff has eighth notes, some with slurs. The sixth staff features eighth notes, some with slurs. The seventh staff contains eighth notes, some with slurs. The notation is clean and professional, typical of a music manuscript.



COCONUT SHELL



FISHING DANCE

Earth and water are two of Cambodia's natural resources from which many Khmer arts and ceremonies originate. The *fishing dance*, for instance, is a perfect example of the Khmer's sentiment toward the natural world in which they live. The majority of Khmer are peasants, farmers, and fishermen, for in Cambodia earth and water are heavenly blessed, giving rise to a saying: "where there is water, there are fish."

During the rainy season, the great lake Tonle Sap swells and spreads its excess water to inundate nearby lakes, ponds, and rivers, bringing along many varieties of fish. After the water goes down, the fish remain in those lakes, ponds, and rivers, providing the Khmer with a year-round food supply. Because fish are so plentiful, fishing is the occupation of many Khmer. Fishing methods and equipment are numerous in Cambodia, but the most widely used are the *angrut* [qaŋrut], a braided bell-like bamboo trap, and the *chhneang* [jhnān], a braided bamboo basket.

Aside from relying on fishing as part of their sustenance, young couples use the fishing quarter as their meeting place where sometimes meetings end in courtship. The *fishing dance* was inspired by the above situation. It brings the real Khmer fishermen's life to the concert hall. The fishing methods, equipment, and activities—even the courting scene—can all be observed in the dance.



Photo: UBA

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FISHING

Introduction

The musical score for the introduction of 'FISHING' consists of five staves of music in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and slurs. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature. The second staff contains a double bar line. The third staff features a first ending bracket labeled '1'. The fourth staff features a second ending bracket labeled '2'. The fifth staff concludes with a first ending bracket labeled '1' and a second ending bracket labeled '2'.

FROG DANCE

Nothing perhaps is more delicious than a dish of marinated frogs. But, before there are frogs to cook, they must be caught. Frog catching is conducted at night. Under absolute darkness, frog catchers engage in the rice fields, each with a lantern in one hand and a whip in the other.

With delicate and agile movements, the catchers walk and at times run in rhythm with a smile on their faces while dropping the whip "clap!" on the poor frog.

When both nature and lifestyle inspired artists to create this dance, the elements and concepts of art and aesthetic were incorporated. Dancers play the roles of both the catchers and the frogs. The interpreted characters can be identified through the distinctive behaviors of both man and frog.



Photo: Sam-Ang Sam

FROG

The musical score for 'FROG' is written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature, followed by a quarter note G4, a half note A4-B4, and a quarter note G4. The second staff continues with a quarter note G4, a half note A4-B4, and a quarter note G4. The third staff continues with a quarter note G4, a half note A4-B4, and a quarter note G4. The fourth staff concludes with a quarter note G4, a half note A4-B4, and a quarter note G4, ending with a double bar line.

កង្កែប ក្របីបី
តែមិនដឹង រឿងអ្វី
ជិះ រលីងខ្លា ក្របី
នាំគ្នា លេង រកម្ហូប
យំអូប ក្នុង ឃ្មៅ ។

យំណាស់ ក្របីបី
ភូមា ពី រសាត់
កាន់ ច្បាប់ មួយ នៅ ដៃ
ដួង ដឹង ក៏ ក្របី បណា ។

ភូមា ជា ព្រាត
ហាក់ ដេញ មាន ក្របី
រត់ ចូល ក្នុង ក្របី
ក្របី ដៃ ព្រាត ក្របី បណា ។
មាន ទី ជា រណា ដៃ ។

ដោយ ក្របី ក្របី បណា
ក្របី ដឹង ខ្លួន
តែ មិន ដឹង ទ្រង់ ក្របី
យក ទៅ កាំង ក្របី បណា ។

HARVEST DANCE

Again and again, folk dances stress the importance of nature and reflect the lives of the peasants and farmers. The title of this dance is suggestive enough and signifies nothing beyond its literal meaning.

As one of the new creations in the University of Fine Arts' repertoire, the *harvest dance* is performed to reflect Khmer peasant activities, from planting rice to harvesting it, with the very last episode depicting the display of joyfulness after all the hard work has been completed.

The movements are slow and soft, performed to the accompaniment of the peasants' tunes. The dance is composed of graceful bending, swaying, and turning, and is accented by stamping feet. It shows the movements and gestures of the actual processes of planting and harvesting rice as well as the happiness the people get from their productive crops.

The dance is said to reflect the Khmer peasants' lives by means of music and song, agricultural tools, national dress, and movements and gestures that can immediately be recognized. It is a literal dance taken directly from life.



Photo: Sylvain Lim

KHMER STRINGS FLOWERS

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "KHMER STRINGS FLOWERS". The score is written in a single system with five staves, all using a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The first staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is composed of five staves of notation. The first staff contains a short phrase followed by a repeat sign and a longer phrase. The second staff continues the melody with a slur over the first two measures. The third staff features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The fourth staff continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The fifth staff concludes the piece with a final melodic phrase. The notation includes various note values, rests, slurs, and a repeat sign.

THE HARVEST

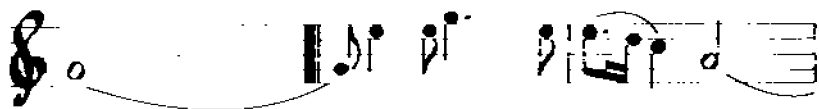
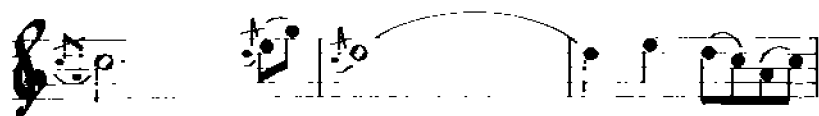
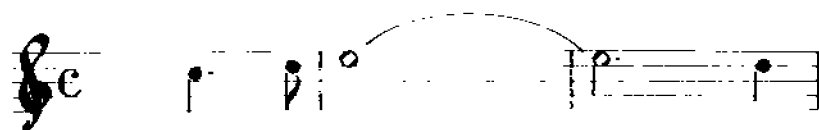
The musical score for "THE HARVEST" is presented on six staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music consists of six staves of notation. The first staff contains a few notes followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. The second through fifth staves feature continuous melodic lines with various note values and slurs. The sixth staff includes a first ending bracket labeled '1' and a second ending bracket labeled '2', both containing melodic phrases. The notation is clear and uses standard musical symbols.

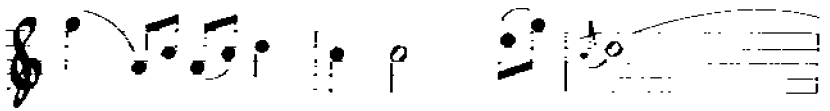
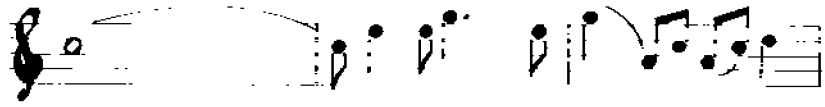


ដើរតាងច្រូតច្រូង	ច្រូតនឹងកន្សោង	
ត្រីកូចរាងរាវ	កន្សោងដំបងកោយ	ៗ

ដើរត្រីតាងច្រូត	ត្រីកុំបណោយ	
មើលមុខមើលក្រោយ	ប្រយ័ត្នមុតដៃ	ៗ

LAOTIAN DANCE





ជើងកងិករ
 គាំគ្នា ធ្វើការ
 សម្បូរផល
 ផុតទុក្ខវេទ ។

មា នចិត្តស្មោះសេរ
 សម្បូរដ៏លឿន
 កងិករ ខេមរា

ជើងកងិករ
 គាំគ្នា ទៅរក
 ជីវិតវាលធន
 សូមអញ្ជើញទៅ ។

មា នចិត្តស្មោះសេរ
 គំនិតលឿន
 ប្រុងស្រីមាសក្រុង

PESTLE DANCE

Agriculture is a fundamental necessity of the agrarian society of many countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Thus, there is no doubt that this theme, under diverse forms, is depicted in the various regions of those countries.

The pestle and mortar are used in Cambodia as an old-fashioned, traditional way of milling the rice paddies. Usually two people, each with a pestle in hand, pound alternately in a constant rhythm, an action which provides the basis for the present dance.

Long ago, according to the correspondents of the *Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes* of the Buddhist Institute, the *pestle dance* was found in almost every region of Cambodia. Today it exists only in those remote areas where modern civilization cannot reach, such as the regions of Samrong Chongkal and Chaom Ksan, and is conserved there in its original form. (Chap 1964: 54)

According to the document of Mr. Koy Huoth of Sautr Nikum district, Siem Reap, the dance was called *Kuoy dance*. (Chap 1964: 63) Many other sources of the *Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes* agree with this and state that the dance has a very old origin which can be traced back to Austro-Asian civilization.

However, the dance in its present form is the recent creation of the University of Fine Arts. It bears many dissimilarities to the old forms. Only the pestles can be said to be a derivative of the old form. Other aspects such as performance context, theme, music, lyric, movement and gesture, and costume are all new, originating from the current events of the country. The old ensemble of one *khse muoy* [khsae muay] (musical bow) and one *angkuoch* [qaŋguac] (jew's harp) (sometimes with one additional hand drum and a pair of bamboo slats) has been replaced by a complete *mohori ensemble*.

In the dance, pestles are aligned on crossbars, one at each end, and hit in rhythm by two persons. Couples of male and female dancers dance between the pestles in perfect synchronization while clapping hands and singing. As the dance progresses, the rhythm accelerates to a climax and then ends abruptly. Finally, a coda with a slow tempo sets in and brings the dance to its close.

