

Sunday, October 2, 2011, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

Khmer Arts Ensemble

The Lives of Giants



<i>Choreography, Lyrics & Music Arrangements</i>	Sophiline Cheam Shapiro
<i>Scenic & Lighting Designs</i>	Marcus Doshi
<i>Costume Designs</i>	Merrily Murray-Walsh
<i>Producer</i>	Khmer Arts John Shapiro, <i>Executive Director</i>
<i>Touring General Manager</i>	Lisa Booth Management, Inc. Deirdre Valente, <i>Vice President</i>
<i>Technical Director</i>	Robert W. Henderson

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Cal Performances' 2011–2012 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

The Lives of Giants

CAST
(in order of appearance)

<i>Akaeng Khameaso</i> (child)	Chea Socheata
<i>Uma</i>	Keo Kunthearom
<i>Tevabot</i> (male angels)	Kong Bonich, Lim Chanboramy, Sao Phirom, Sao Somaly
<i>Tep Thida</i> (female angels)	Long Chantheary, Mot Pharan, Pum Molyta, Som Saymalyrou
<i>Akaeng Khameaso</i> (adult)	Rin Sreyleak
<i>Preah Eyso</i> (Shiva)	Chao Socheata
<i>Preah Visnu</i> (Vishnu)	Sot Sovannady

Instrumentalists

<i>Roneat Ek</i> (xylophone)	Nil Sinoeun
<i>Sralai</i> (quadruple-reed oboe)	Touch Sarin
<i>Sampho & Skor Thom</i> (drums)	Ros Sokun
<i>Gong Thom</i> (circle gong)	Soun Phally

Singer Cheam Chanthopeas

Dresser Sam Ratha

Costume Makers Angkor Thom Handicrafts, Iris Color Studio,
Kum Sokunthea, Hout Sokleng, Sim Chanmoly,
Vuthy Tailors and artists of the Khmer
Arts Ensemble

The Lives of Giants premiered in the United States on September 25, 2010, at
Palmer Auditorium, Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut.

Running Time 90 minutes (without intermission)

A note about Cambodian names: When written or spoken, a person's family name precedes the first name. The honorific is associated with a person's first name—e.g. Sao Phirom: Sao is the surname, and Ms. Phirom is the proper form of address.

THE LIVES OF GIANTS



THE LIVES OF GIANTS is drawn from the *Reamker*, the Cambodian version of the *Ramayana*, an ancient Sanskrit epic. Its principals, philosophy and character are fundamental to the cultural consciousness of South and Southeast Asians.

Akaeng Khameaso is a giant in Preah Eyso's heavenly realm who has been the target of relentless taunting and teasing by a band of mischievous angels since he was a child.

Eventually, he can take no more abuse. He complains about his plight to Preah Eyso, pleading for a way to protect himself. Pitying Akaeng Khameaso, Preah Eyso gives the giant a magic finger, despite Uma's protests that this will only beget more trouble.

Akaeng Khameaso celebrates his new weapon, though he's reluctant to use it. Nevertheless, when the angels return and start knocking him on the head, he points his finger at them, breaking them into pieces. Before long, he becomes drunk with power that rivals that of Preah Esyo and lays waste to heaven.

Panicked, the angels plea for Preah Eyso's help. But, worried for his own safety, he resists and flees in the opposite direction.

With her husband and leader now gone, Uma turns to Preah Visnu for help. Preah Visnu declares that the only choice is to kill Akaeng Khameaso. But Uma disagrees. She wants to put Akaeng Khameaso in touch with his sense of humanity so that he will renounce violence. Preah Visnu insists that her plan will never work but allows her to try. If she fails, he will step in and slaughter the giant.

Uma dances before Akaeng Khameaso. Entranced, he approaches, allowing her to redirect his voraciousness and rage toward beauty and transcendence. As he relaxes and joins in her dance, an impatient Preah Visnu enters and attacks. Despite Uma's attempts to protect the giant, Preah Visnu gets hold of Akaeng Khameaso's finger and points it inward. Emerging from the grace of Uma's dance, Akaeng Khameaso rages at Preah Visnu, proclaiming that he will be reborn with even more power in his next life so no one will be able to defeat him. Then he collapses into Uma's arms and dies.

Uma, foreseeing the coming violence, laments the triumph of violence over compassion.

Choreographer's Note

A number of my dances have explored different aspects of the same paradox: No matter how promising the rhetoric of change, it often results in the same cycles of abuse and humiliation that precede it. Having grown up in a country where political systems changed frequently and often in violent ways, I have long recognized the persistence of corruption, arrogance, rigidity and loss of compassion that those with power resort to—abuses that result in poverty, illness, ignorance, humiliation and, in the most radical cases, death among the governed. Power, of course, manifests itself within every level of society—families, schools, places of work, national governments—and its misuse infiltrates these communities from the top down and tends to repeat itself.

In *The Lives of Giants*, I am looking specifically at cycles of violence. I believe the relationship between the glorification of war and the physical abuse of a child is a close one. Violence begets violence. The abused become the abusers. Within Cambodian society, state-led terror and genocide of the recent past has fed contemporary epidemics of domestic violence and human trafficking. This is an unfortunate truth in many parts of the world, in wealthy nations as well as poor ones.

Nevertheless, I believe compassion is an antidote. When we acknowledge our own and our enemies' humanity, we create room to step away from inhumane behavior. I'm a realist and recognize that this is a difficult task. Compassion often loses out to adrenaline-fueled revenge. But I hope that an alternative path exists. "What might have been" can become "what can be."

Like many of my compatriots, I have a deep love of storytelling, particularly in the forms of folklore and mythology. In *The Lives of Giants*, I have taken an episode from the *Reamker* epic that describes a previous life of the vengeful giant king Reap, and given it my own interpretive twist. With movement and melodies, costumes and light, *The Lives of Giants* conjures this mysterious and magical world as a reflection of our own.

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro

Dance in Contemporary Cambodia

Toni Shapiro-Phim

Dancers in Cambodia are responding to a contemporary environment that includes both lightning-speed development and reminders of a devastatingly violent past. During the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979), nearly a third of Cambodia's population perished. Large numbers of professionally trained dancers died, with a mere 10–20 percent surviving the genocide. Classical dance, with long historical roots intertwined with spirituality and with the monarchy, was nearly wiped out. With the loss of so much embodied knowledge, government arts officials have publicly prioritized the preservation of Cambodia's traditional dance heritage for more than 30 years. Stylistic innovation, officials claim, threatens efforts to recover and rebuild Cambodia's arts. As a result, younger generations of dancers—students of genocide survivors who had danced before the war, and their students—embody the main force of creativity in professional dance circles in Cambodia today.

Traditional repertoire and customary themes

Government-sponsored dance activity, beyond the teaching and performance of selections from the traditional repertoire of classical and folk pieces, includes both the restaging and completion of previously unfinished works, and the creation of new choreographies for state celebrations and festivals. These dances have been fashioned strictly within the classical or folk movement vocabulary, representing customary themes, such as the celestial, royal and sweeping mytho-historical focus of the classical repertoire. Thus, while the production of contemporary work in the state institutions of the arts, including the Secondary School of Fine Arts, is ongoing, it is most often only specific storylines that are new.

"Robam Sahasamay"—contemporary dance

Until very recently, discussion of professional Cambodian dance within the country revolved predominantly around "tradition." Though

innovation has been a hallmark of even traditional forms of performance, Cambodia's dancers have over the past several years come to translate the phrase "contemporary dance" as *robam* (dance) *sahasamay* (modern/of the same time period), acknowledging that this is a new construct on their part. Nonetheless, Cambodian choreographers, and the institutions supporting their work, are still often tied to concerns about national identity and history, and influenced by a traditionalist discourse. Many *sahasamay* dances employ common conventions of Western contemporary (and other) dance such as pedestrian costumes and movements, a variety of musical accompaniment, innovative choreographic patterns, projections and spoken word. These dances have often taken as a central theme the desire of the younger generation to explore new creative grounds while still honoring their country's long artistic heritage. Despite occasional criticism from teachers and peers for straying from strictly "Cambodian" performances, these artists are exploring their unique creative voices through movement and music, looking to literature, biography and autobiography, emotion, nature and politics for inspiration.

Expanding possibilities

The neoclassical choreography of Sophiline Cheam Shapiro represents another approach to creativity. Inspired by themes other than the divide between tradition and innovation, Ms. Cheam Shapiro experiments with and flexes the muscles of the robust classical aesthetic. Her company, the Khmer Arts Ensemble, established in Cambodia in 2007, performs both contemporary creations and works from the classical canon. Ms. Cheam Shapiro has a firm base as an accomplished performer and teacher of classical dance. She was a member of the first generation to study dance professionally after the ousting of the Khmer Rouge.

Since 1999, Ms. Cheam Shapiro has been expanding classical dance's possibilities through the development of original dance dramas that break with received storylines, and through experimentation with gesture, vocabulary, partnering, movement patterns and costume—all of which are often officially considered inviolate. She also makes pioneering use of traditional musical arrangements and instrumentation. These rigorous explorations link Ms. Cheam Shapiro to dance-makers across the globe, such as Senegal's Germaine Acogny, Indonesia's Sardono and the late Chadralaka from India.

In *The Lives of Giants*, you see and hear all of these elements at play. Choreographic patterns are dynamic and sometimes asymmetrical; movement flows out of but is not restricted to codified gesture, vocabulary or posture. Melodies that never before accompanied classical dance are employed to great emotional effect. Merrily Murray-Walsh's costumes synchronize with Marcus Doshi's scenic abstractions of water and light while referring to traditional motifs in decorative patterns and accessories. The lighter weight of the printed costumes harmonizes with both canonical and Ms. Cheam Shapiro's innovative movements. Akaeng Khameaso's mask incorporates a metal mesh with traditional *papier-mâché* elements, allowing dancers to breathe and see more easily.

This essay is adapted from "Professional Dancers and their Contemporary Context in Cambodia," <http://www.goethe.de/ins/id/lp/prj/tac/zgt/kam/enindex.htm>.

Khmer Arts is an independent nonprofit organization founded in 2002 by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro and John Shapiro that is dual-based in Long Beach, California—home to the largest Cambodian community outside of Southeast Asia—and in Cambodia. Khmer Arts/Long Beach encompasses a school, a pre-professional company and a Salon Series, which showcases classical dance in Cambodian communities throughout California.

The Khmer Arts campus in Cambodia is located in Takhmao, about seven miles outside Phnom Penh's city center. It is fast becoming an important international center for dance training, exploration, creation and performance. Khmer Arts is the producer of the Khmer Arts Ensemble, Ms. Cheam Shapiro's company of highly accomplished dancers and musicians. Khmer Arts also conducts media projects and has established an important center for dance scholarship and documentation.

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro is a choreographer, dancer, vocalist and educator. Her work has toured to four continents, hosted by such notable venues as New York's Joyce Theater, Cal Performances, Cambodia's Les Nuits d'Angkor Festival, Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Venice Biennale, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Carolina Performing Arts, University Musical Society/Ann Arbor, Reunion Island's La Foire Internationale des Mascareignes, Amsterdam's Het Muziektheater and Vienna's New Crowned Hope Festival. Works include *Samritechak* (2000), *The Glass Box* (2002), *Seasons of Migration* (2005) and *Pamina Devi: A Cambodian Magic Flute* (2006). *Spiral XII* (2008), a collaboration with composer Chinary Ung, was commissioned by the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and *Munkul Lokey/Shir Ha-Shirim* (2008) was commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum's *Works & Process* series.

In 2009, Ms. Cheam Shapiro was named a National Heritage Fellow, a lifetime honor awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts, and a USA Knight Fellow. She was awarded the Nikkei Asia Prize for Culture in 2006, and has received Creative Capital, Durfee,

Guggenheim and Irvine dance fellowships, among many other honors.

Born in Phnom Penh, Ms. Cheam Shapiro was a member of the first generation to graduate from the School of Fine Arts after the fall of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime and was a member of the dance faculty there from 1988 to 1991. She studied all three major roles for women (*neang*, *nearong* and *yeak*), which is rare. With the school's ensemble, she toured India, the Soviet Union, the United States and Vietnam. She immigrated to Southern California in 1991, where she studied dance ethnology at UCLA. She is co-founder and Artistic Director of Khmer Arts.

Ms. Cheam Shapiro lectures and teaches at conferences and universities around the world, and her essays have been published in numerous anthologies.

Rin Sreyleak (*Akaeng Khameaso*) has danced the coveted role of Ream Eysa and has performed on four continents with the Khmer Arts Ensemble. In 2009, she was a visiting artist at Dance Advance's "By Gesture/By Word: Modifying the Classical" at Philadelphia's Performance Garage. Before joining the Khmer Arts Ensemble in 2007, she studied classical dance at Phnom Penh's School of the Fine Arts.

Chao Socheata (*Preah Eysa*) has performed leading roles in *Shir-Ha-Shirim/Munkul Lokey*, *Pamina Devi*, *Ream Eysa & Moni Mekhala*, *Seasons of Migration* and *Spiral XII* throughout Asia, Europe and North America. Before joining the Khmer Arts Ensemble in 2006, she studied classical dance at the School of Fine Arts.

Keo Kuntheaom (*Uma*) has performed as Preah Mae in Sophiline Cheam Shapiro's *Rice* as well as the solo Neang Neak from *Seasons of Migration*. She has toured widely with the Khmer Arts Ensemble. She is a graduate of the School of Fine Arts.

Sot Sovannady (*Preah Visnu*) has performed a wide range of characters, including the role of Preah Arun Tipadey in *Pamina Devi* and Ream Eysa, one of classical dance's most challenging

and important roles. Before joining the Khmer Arts Ensemble in 2006, she studied classical dance at the School of Fine Arts.

Nil Sinoeun (*musician*) learned to play *roneat ek* (xylophone) with his father, Nul Nil, who was a professor of music at the School of Fine Arts. Since joining the Khmer Arts Ensemble in 2006, he has performed throughout Cambodia and in Europe and North America. He also teaches *pin peat* music to students in the village of Preak L'vea, where he lives.

Marcus Doshi (*scenic and lighting designer*) designs for theater, opera and dance, as well as collaborating with artists and architects on a wide array of non-theatrical ventures. Previous work with Sophiline Cheam Shapiro includes lighting for *Samritechak* and scenery and lighting for *Pamina Devi*. His work has been seen internationally in Edinburgh, London, Amsterdam, Castres, Venice, Vienna, Mumbai, Delhi and Phnom Penh. Recent designs in the United States include *Measure for Measure*, *Othello* (Lortel Nomination) and *Hamlet* (Drama Desk Nomination) for Theatre for a New Audience, *A Boy and His Soul* for the Vineyard, *Things of Dry Hours* for NYTW, *Queens Blvd (The Musical)* and *The First Breeze of Summer* at the Signature, and work with the New Group, Soho Rep, Joyce, Lincoln Center, Chicago Shakespeare, Seattle Rep, Portland Center Stage, Yale Rep, Hartford Stage Company, Seattle Opera, Virginia Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Greenwich Music Festival and Florentine Opera, among others. He has collaborated on a number of competitions and exhibition lighting designs, including the permanent exhibition at the Museum of Chinese in America: *With a Single Step: Stories in the Making of America*. He has led workshops exploring the interaction of light and movement on the stage, most recently in Jakarta, Indonesia. He holds degrees from Wabash College and the Yale School of Drama.

Merrily Murray-Walsh (*costume designer*) began her studies of costume design as an undergraduate majoring in American History and

Government at Mills College in Oakland. After graduation, she worked three years of internship at the Oregon Shakespearean Festival. She completed her M.F.A. degree in costume design at Carnegie-Mellon University, and landed her first design job back at the Festival. Early in her career, she served as design assistant to John Conklin and Tony Walton. Since then she's designed for television, film, Imax, theater and opera. In recent years, her most important ongoing collaboration has been with the theater and opera director Tazewell Thompson, for whom she has designed productions at Glimmerglass and New York City Operas, Opera Columbus, Arena Stage, Westport Playhouse, Hartford Stage Company, the Children's Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Indiana Repertory Theatre, City Theater Company and Florida Stage. She has had the good fortune to work with numerous noteworthy directors, including Carroll O'Connor and Robert Falls (theater), Michael Dinner and Tommy Schlamme (television), and Paul Newman (film).

Robert W. Henderson, Jr. (*technical director*) is a New York-based lighting designer. Recent credits include *Khmeropedies I & II*—Festival of Arts & Ideas, Connecticut, and New York City's Baryshnikov Arts Center; *Christmas Carol* (Associate Designer)—Hartford Stage, Connecticut; *Mary's Wedding* and Tazewell Thompson's *A Christmas Carol*—Westport Country Playhouse, Connecticut; *Rent*, *The Laramie Project*, *I Am My Own Wife*, among others—Theatre Three, New York; Associate Designer for the Permanent Exhibition at the Museum of Chinese in America, New York; and, select Harry Winston and Barney's New York display windows. He also worked on the international premiere of the new opera *Where Elephants Weep* presented in Phnom Penh. Mr. Henderson received his M.F.A. from N.Y.U.'s Tisch School of the Arts Department of Design.

Lisa Booth Management, Inc. (LBMI) is a New York City-based producing and management firm specializing in contemporary

performance. LBMI tours artists worldwide, produces U.S. tours for artists from abroad, and initiates and manages special projects. Since 1983, LBMI programs have taken place in more than 300 cities in 30 countries on six continents. Current and upcoming projects include Handspring Puppet Company, Spirit of Uganda, Hugo & Ines, and Doug Varone and Dancers. LBMI is General Manager of Center Stage, a new cultural exchange program initiated by the U.S. Department of State, and served as the inaugural General Manager for State's DanceMotion United States from 2010–2012. LBMI has worked with Cambodian performing artists for more than a decade. LBMI co-produced *Dance: The Spirit of Cambodia* in 2001, toured *Weyreap's Battle* (Amrita Performing Arts) in 2007, is the performing arts consultant for *Season of Cambodia*, a major New York City festival scheduled for 2013, and has served as General Touring Manager for the Khmer Arts Ensemble since 2004.

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Khmer Arts

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