

An outdoor theater at night. A large, brightly lit screen is the focal point, showing a scene with a person. The theater is filled with rows of red plastic chairs. The ground is dark and appears to be dirt or gravel. The sky is dark, and there are trees in the background. Two bright spotlights illuminate the screen from above.

# Breaking the Silence: A New Cambodian Radioplay

Script by Annemarie Prins

Produced by Amrita Performing Arts, Theatre Embassy & Documentation Center of Cambodia

Recorded by Studio Cambodian Living Arts

Sponsored by Voice of America (VOA) 

## Synopsis

This play is about regaining hope. We will tell you stories. The real stories of people who survived the Khmer Rouge era. Stories that continue to evolve. You're invited to imagine their future, which could also be your future.

A story about divided people: two women and two men in their 50's. A story about two women who were young, so very young when their lives were ruined: and now are two adult women in their 40's. A story about betrayal and guilt: a 76 year old woman, caring for her 51 year old son. A story about a student who dreamed about a better world: a man of 52 meets his mother of 75. A story about a little girl, who wanted to say sorry but could not: she's now 38 years old. A story about a girl who stopped talking: then she was a teenager, now she's 47. A story about a boy and a girl who were once upon a time dear friends: they are now nearly 50 years old.

“After Pol Pot we thought it was hate that made us strong, hate and anger. But now we realize that without love our minds would have been destroyed and our souls would not have survived. The love of a parent, the love of a brother, the love of a sister, the love of a grandmother, the love of a grandfather, the love of a neighbor, and even the love of our enemies.”

Transform the River of Blood into a River of Reconciliation. A River of Responsibility.

PRINTED IN CAMBODIA  
COPYRIGHT @ ANNEMARIE PRINS, AMRITA PERFORMING ARTS AND DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA, 2010.



Performance at Trapeang Thom.



Villagers watching the performance at Krong Ta Chan prison  
Photo by Jim Mizerski

## Breaking the Silence: A New Cambodian Radioplay

### Prologue

song

*Bung Kriel -*

*The lake were cranes meet.*

*by Ou Sam Oeur.*

*The paddy fields stretch beyond the horizon,  
Where water glitters, palm trees dance,  
Where egrets and herons flap after fish,  
Water buffalo charge each other, grunting like  
giants.*

*In the air,  
The birds dive out of the sun.  
Dragonflies quickly fold their wings and fall,  
And grasshoppers crouch in the grass.*

*Boys and girls fall into small clutches –  
Some play reak and bikom,  
Some sing in the trees,  
Others sprawl in the shade.*

*When the sun streaks across the horizon,  
The birds disperse and fly  
In ordered flocks to their nests  
And the herders lead their cattle home.*

*When darkness settles upon the plain*

*Insects, geckoes, and frogs rock this kingdom.  
A million stars drop everywhere,  
And farmers fall asleep in peace*

**Sovanna**

So many stories.

We have to tell our stories.

**Sina**

We're telling our stories  
out of a relentless urge.

**Sokly**

How did it happen  
that Khmer killed Khmer?

**Theary**

You must try  
to help us think this through.

### Scene 1

**Vutha**

This is a story about divided people.  
We are on a square in a small village.  
(whispering)

Here comes Mr. Akrak.  
He is 58 years old.

He can't handle the truth.

*(loud)*

Hello, mister Akrak.

Can you please tell us, what did you do during the Pol Pot period?

**Mr. Akrak**

I was a youth leader.

I educated youth to love the country.

**Vutha**

Did you give orders to arrest people?

**Mr. Akrak**

Yes, of course, we could not prevent it.

Even our parents and children were taken.

There was nothing we could do.

**Vutha**

You were an important person?

**Mr. Akrak**

No, not at all and I am telling you the truth.

Orders from higher up did not come to me directly because I worked at a very low level. I am illiterate. I was under their control. I did as I was told.

**Vutha**

You knew about the mass killings?

**Mr. Akrak**

The killings were in the other village.

**Mrs. Sophy**

You're a liar.

**Vutha** *(whispering)*

This is Mrs. Sophy.

She is 52 years old..

She wants to hear the truth and nothing but the truth.

**Mrs. Sophy**

You're a liar.

You can't deny knowing about the killings, everybody knew about the killings,

**voice**

A dead elephant could never be covered with a flat basket

**Mr. Akrak**

No one was killed here.

I did not do anything.

**Mrs. Sophy**

You're a liar!

**Mrs. Thida**

Stop it, don't talk with him, I don't want to talk with them.

**Vutha** *(whispering)*

This is Mrs. Thida.

She is 53 years old.

She does not want to talk, she does not want to hear, she does not want to see.

**Mrs. Thida :**

Stop it, I don't want to hear, I don't want to see.

**Mrs. Sophy**

You're a liar mister Akrak.

People were afraid of you then. They said that if you stared at a person, even for a moment, that person would disappear the next day.

**Mr. Akrak**

People just say those things.

There's no evidence.

**Mrs. Thida**

Stop it, don't talk with him.

.

**Mrs. Sophy**

I want him to tell the truth. You were aware of the killings, mister Akrak, and you yourself were involved in them. Don't deny it.

Tell the truth!

**The truth!**

**Mr. Akrak**

It happened everywhere, everyone was in the same situation.. We were ordered by top officials. We did not argue because we were afraid to die ourselves

**Mrs. Sophy**

You were afraid of dying? Don't you think we were afraid too?

**Mrs. Thida**

Stop talking!

That is the turn the country took.

**Mrs. Sophy**

Are you not haunted by the memories of all those thousands of deaths?

**Mr. Akrak**

No, they never plague my conscience. I was tied to the Angka. Whether it was genocide or not. Who can say?

**Mrs. Sophy**

Because of you people were killed mister Akrak

**Mrs. Thida**

Stop talking, stop fighting.

When we fight too much the murderous blood will return to this generation. Please, shut up. Let us dig a hole and forget about the past.

**Mrs. Sophy**

No

Too much blood has been spilled to forget or forgive them.

**Mr. Akrak**

It wasn't all for fun. I suffered too. When Angka was defeated an angry mob chased me into the jungle. But when I came back I was supported by villagers. They even provided me with food. I was not shot, that means that I did not kill anyone. I'm still alive today. Only good Karma will let you live for so long.

**Mrs. Sophy**

It's not your Karma, mister Akrak, that kept you alive, but the relatives of your victims who follow the teachings of Buddha.

**Mr. Akrak**

Listen, I have to go now.  
It's time to eat.

**Vutha**

Stop! Don't go, mister Akrak!  
Don't walk away.  
Someone wants to talk to you.

**Mrs. Preal**

Where is the body of my father!

**Vutha** (*whispering*)

It is Mrs. Preal.  
She is 50 years old.  
She hesitates day and night:  
revenge or no revenge.

**Mrs. Preal**

Where is the body of my father?  
You arrested him.  
You killed him.  
Where is his body?  
I want to bury my father.

**Mr. Akrak**

The killings were in the other village.

**Mrs. Preal**

You lie.

**Mr. Akrak**

You have no proof.

**Mrs. Preal**

I saw you.

**Mr. Akrak**

Sorry, I really have to go now.

**Mrs. Preal**

No. You have to answer. You killed my father.  
But you dare not admit it.

When you came out of the jungle I only asked you: 'What happened to my father. Where is my father.'

You were afraid I would kill you.  
You said you did not know my father.  
You lied.

I had the gun of my father and you knew I would shoot you if you confessed. I really wanted to kill you then. But my friends warned me against killing a man because of the consequences for my Karma.

That's why I did not kill you. But even today, all of this weighs heavy on my mind.

Perhaps if I had beaten him, then he would have told me the truth and I would have been able to bury my father. But I did not.  
I don't know what to do.

I know that revenge ends with no revenge; it never stops. I know that we are forbidden from killing all living beings, from all killing, of all creatures on earth, not even the mosquito that bites us. But I am not a god and until my death I will remain with this doubt.

**song**

*The Cambodian People's Lament*  
by Sath Bunrith

*The Cambodian people's lament*  
*Is like a turtle dove*  
*That is tossed in a storm.*  
*Caught in the rain and thunder,*  
*Left in the terrible cold*  
*Its eyes*  
*Filled with sorrow.*

## Scene 2

**Vutha**

**This is a story about two women who were young, so young when their lives were ruined.**

(*whispering*)

I am in a ricefield  
I see a woman  
Her name is Sina  
She is 43 years old.  
She always misses her father.

Listen to the story of Sina.

**Sina**

It is the year 1976.  
I am 10 years old.  
My father has been taken to the hospital.  
My handsome father, with his curly hair. My strong father with his brown skin.  
My father has oedema. That is the illness people get when there is no food.  
Known as 'the hunger illness'.  
His body keeps swelling up and down like a balloon.  
He cries out for help: "help, help! My belly aches so much!"  
A young nurse comes in and shouts at him:

**Nurse**

What a terrible noise! I can't get any sleep!

**Sina**

Mom puts her hands together and begs "Please help my husband. He is having a severe abdominal pain."  
The nurse reaches her hand into her pocket, takes out a handful of dark pills and leaves.  
Mom gives the pills to dad but it doesn't stop the pain. My father groans and moans. There comes the nurse again. She shouts at dad

**Nurse**

Why are you making so much noise? You wanna die or what?

**Sina**

Dad screams. His eyes bulge.  
Mom begs "Please help my husband. His pain is getting worse..."  
The nurse approaches dad with a large syringe. She gives him an injection.  
Dad is quiet, silent.  
Mom hugs dad, she cradles dad.  
The nurse flashes a torch at mom

**Nurse**

He, what are you doing? Can't you see your husband is dead. You are holding a corpse.

**Sina**

Ma doesn't cry.  
Ma doesn't talk.  
I am ten years old and all empty inside. Ever since that day.

**song**

*The Keening of wives*  
by Ou Sam Oeur

*O, darling, my darling!*  
*Now you are dead.*  
*You're dead...Budho*  
*You've left me alone*  
*in the middle of this island.*  
*From today onward*  
*I shall have no hope.*

*We used to be together,*  
*Darling - you were faithful to me,*  
*loved me deeply.*

*Now you stare up at me in silence*  
*with blood still gushing from you*  
*sticking to my flesh.*  
*O, my heart is broken!*

*May you accept my apologies*  
*for all the wrongs I've done you.*  
*Please do forgive me*  
*that I have to bury you here.*  
*Goodbye, my darling-*  
*may your consciousness*  
*rise to heaven!*

**Vutha** (*whispering*)

I see another woman  
She crouches behind the ricesacks  
Mrs Somphor is 48 years old  
She carries the burden of shame

(*loud*)

Why are you hiding behind these ricesacks,  
Mrs. Somphor ?

**Mrs. Somphor**

I am hiding myself because I am ashamed.

**Vutha**

Have you listened to the story of Sina?

**Mrs. Somphor**

Yes.

**Vutha**

Mrs. Somphor, what would you do if you met  
the little girl who sat with her dying father  
and her silent mother?

**Mrs. Somphor**

I would walk into my house and softly shut  
the door..

**Vutha**

Sina, what would you do if you met the nurse  
who screamed at your mother?

**Mrs. Somphor**

I would run away.  
I would be silent like my mother.

**Vutha**

Sina, look, here she is, the nurse.  
Do you remember her?  
I think she wants to tell us her story.

**Mrs. Somphor**

It is the year 1976.  
I am 15 years old.  
There was an appeal for young girls to join  
the revolution, to come and work as a nurse at  
the Medical Centre. I was so happy, this was  
my dream come true. Me, taking care of sick  
people. Me, only 15 years old becoming a real  
nurse. I worked very hard.  
I was so proud. They even allowed me to give  
injections.  
But soon I realized that I could do nothing.  
That hospital simply did not function as it  
should have. We were only there to let people  
die. We had nothing to offer them. There was  
no medicine. Pills looked like rabbit drop-  
pings. They did not help at all.  
It was all wrong. I was confused and angry, so

angry. I wanted to hit the beds, I wanted to hit  
anything.

I hated the Khmer Rouge. I hated the patients  
who just kept dying one by one by one.  
I wanted to escape but that was impossible, I  
was trapped in this terrible situation.  
One day I dropped a syringe unintentionally.  
This was a big mistake.

The head nurse accused me of being a traitor  
and if this happened once more I would be  
reeducated. From that day on I did as I was  
told. I became a robot with rabbit pills and a  
syringe. Finally we were liberated. I went back  
to my hometown.  
Soon after, I married. I did not become a nurse  
as I had dreamed when I was so small.  
I have a quiet man and good children. We live  
a quiet life.

**Vutha**

Mrs. Somphor, can you say to Sina that you  
are sorry for not helping her father?

**Mrs. Somphor**

What could I do? We had nothing to offer  
hem. One cup of rice for 20 people. So they  
died. Even with medicine they could not be  
saved. What could I do? I was like a bird in a  
cage.

**Vutha**

Please, tell Sina that you are sorry.

**Mrs. Somphor**

I am very sorry but we had no medicines, I

could do nothing.

**Vutha**

Sina, do you accept these excuses?

**Sina**

I know I should forgive. But you killed my father and you yelled at my mother. It is so difficult I don't know how to deal with this situation. I don't know what I can say.

**Mrs. Somphor**

Something went wrong with my heart. My heart was locked.  
I have been ashamed all my life. I never stop being ashamed.  
This is the first time I told my story.  
Thank you.  
You have broken my silence.  
I have hope, little hope that I shall be forgiven.

**Sina**

I try to forgive. I long to forgive.  
But we should never forget. When we forget it is as if we lost parents, children, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles for nothing.

**song (rep. last verse)**

*May you accept my apologies  
for all the wrongs I've done you.  
Please do forgive me  
that I have to bury you here.  
Goodbye, my darling-  
may your consciousness  
rise to heaven!*

## Scene 3

**song**

*The memories.  
Lots of memories.*

**Vutha**

**This is a story about betrayal and eternal guilt.**

**song (ctn'd)**

*They keep coming back as the spokes of a turning wheel.  
Always the same.*

**Vutha (whispering)**

We are in a little hut.  
I see Mister Rithy and his mother.  
They sit close together  
Mister Rithy is 51 years old. He had lost the lust for life.  
His mother is 76 years old. She is the guardian of her son.  
Listen to the mother.

**song (ctn'd)**

*As the spokes of a wheel.  
The wheel turns in my head*

**Vutha**

Listen to the mother.

**Mother**

We live in sadness.  
My son has problems with his head. He constantly strokes his head as if it hurts.  
My son is sick. Tied to his misery.  
My son is not a bad man.  
He never was one of them.  
But that day way back, when they took him to prison, that day destroyed our lives.

**voice**

They put him in prison?

**Mother**

They tied him up.  
They wanted names.

**Mr. Rithy**

I did not give names.

**Mother**

They beat him.

**voice**

You gave them names.

**Mother**

They tortured him.

**Mr. Rithy**

I gave them 2 names.

**voice**

You denounced a lot of people.

**Mother**

They burned his hands, his feet.

**voice**

You sent many people to the white bone village.

**Mr. Rithy**

They hung me upside down.  
I gave them 5 names.  
They nearly drowned me.  
I gave them 8 names.  
They nearly whipped me to death.

**Mother**

He was crying like a turtle placed on a fire.

**Mr. Rithy**

I denounced whoever came to my mind.  
10 names, 20 names. Names and names until they were satisfied.

**voice**

You gave them 30 names.  
If each of them gave 30 or 40 names, and so on, within a year or two, there would be no one left.

**Mother**

He did not want to do that.  
Who killed whom? I did not know.

**Mr. Rithy**

I think of the dead everyday. I pray to the gods that if I denounced them, their spirits

will not suffer the consequences..  
Day after day it still torments my heart.  
It haunts me everyday why I am not dead myself.

song

*The memories.  
Lots of memories.  
They keep coming back as the spokes of a  
turning wheel.  
Always the same  
As the spokes of a wheel.  
The wheel turns in my head.*

Vutha

Mr. Rithy, if one of the dead came back to life,  
how would you react?  
What would you do?

Mr. Rithy

That would make me extremely happy. I  
would bow deep down and ask for forgiveness.  
And ask the dead to lift the Bad Karma.

Sokly

Who is bad, who is good.  
How bad is bad, how good is good.  
What is de country we give to our children.

song

*Oath of Allegiance  
by Ou Sam Oeur*

*If I am a rake  
Let me not survive,  
If I'm just a weight on the earth  
Let me drop dead,  
Let me sink with the sun  
If I'm noncommittal  
To the land of Kok Thlok.*

## Scene 4

Vutha

This is a story about a student who dreamed  
about a better world.

*(whispers):*

Look who is coming.  
It is mr. Sarun, the schoolteacher.  
He is 52 years old.  
Every week he comes to the market and stands  
still on a corner.  
Always alone.

Let us listen to his story.

Mr. Sarun

I am Sarun, I live alone. I teach at my old primary school. When I was young, I was a good student here in the village school. My parents were very proud of me. My father worked hard so I could go to University in Phnom Penh. He dreamed of me becoming a professor.

It was during the Lon Nol period, and the situation was bad. There was so much corruption and violence in the country. We students we were idealistic. We wanted a better society, a better world. We organized large demonstrations against the government and many of us were arrested. In prison I was tortured. They beat me up and burned me by electric shock. But this only increased my anger towards Lon Nol even. When I was released I ran off into the woods and there I met the Khmer Rouge. They fought for a better society, for a free country. No corruption, food for everyone. I really believed this. So I wanted to join them. I realized that I could not show that I had higher education. I worked hard to make my hands look rough and exposed my face to the sun so that I looked dark like a farmer. I was willing to humble myself for the good cause. In the end I did everything they wanted. I lay underneath huts to spy on families, I arrested people, I did very cruel things. I could not think as a human being anymore. I became like a dog who looks up at his owner, wagging its tail, afraid to be beaten.

song

*The Fall of Culure  
by Ou Sam Oeur*

*I will be nowhere  
I will have no night*

*I will have no more day anymore  
I will be a man without identity*

After the revolution I went back to my home village. Now I live alone and teach at my old primary school. I heard that my father was killed while working in the rice field. My gentle father who dreamed of me becoming a professor. They beat him to death because he was too weak to do the work.

Sometimes I am angry, sometimes I am sad. It's all a confused mess in my head. I cannot understand how a whole country could be cheated. How I could be cheated. Yes, I blame the Khmer Rouge for misleading me, but my Karma is in my own hands so I can do nothing but blame myself.

I go to the market and I see my mother. She does not greet me. She lowers her head and turns away.  
I want to tell her that I need her.

song

*The heart of a mother  
is a deep abyss  
at the bottom of which  
you will always discover  
forgiveness.*

Vutha *(whispers)*

Here is the mother of Sarun.  
She is 75 years old.

She misses the love of a son.

### **Mother**

I go to the market. I always go when my son will be there too.  
But when he looks at me I cannot return her look and I walk away. I am ashamed of him. My husband was beaten to death and I lost my son when he became one of the murderers. I hear he is a good teacher who never beats the children, but always explains very patiently and then I am secretly proud of him. When I go to the market I know that he wants me to forgive him, but this is so difficult.

### **voice**

The mother and the son stand still.  
They waver just one moment too long.  
And then the son finally approaches his mother. He bows and says:

### **Mr. Sarun**

Mother, will you please forgive me. I have done bad deeds and I am so very sorry. What can I do to be cleansed?

### **Mother**

It will never be the same.  
It will never be the same.

### **song**

*The Howling Dead*  
By *Ou Sam Oeur*

*Oh, my love!*

*You induce in me everlasting sorrows.  
Henceforth my world is different.  
Henceforth I will live in the trees.*

*Listen to my howl through the winds,  
Look at my sorrows through the grey skies,  
Feel my tears through the rains,  
O, my incomparable love!*

## **Scene 5**

### **Vutha**

**This is a story about a little girl who wanted to say sorry but could not.**  
*(whispers)*  
Here comes Mrs. Sophorn.  
She is 38 years old.  
*(loud)*

Please, Mrs. Sophorn, will you tell us about those days?

### **Mrs. Sophorn**

It is the year 1976.  
I am 7 years old.  
We live in a small hut, Ma, my two brothers, my baby sister and me.  
One damp night I woke up. I was so hungry. That day I found a fat juicy earthworm and I wanted to eat it, but when it crawled in my mouth I spit it out and vomited.  
So now my stomach is growling.  
I think of the jar in which Pa has hidden our

very last bit of rice “for when it is really needed” he said. That was before he was taken away for reeducation.  
I think of the jar, I think of the tasty rice. I am drawn toward the jar. Nothing can stop me. I get up.  
I tiptoe over the other sleeping bodies. My stomach growls loudly. I stop. Have they heard my stomach? No, they continue to sleep. My mother, her arms around my baby sister with her face swollen by hunger. My fingers can feel the jar. I try not to breath. I slowly lift off the lid.  
My hand reaches in and takes out a handful of uncooked rice and quickly shoves it into my hungry mouth.

I soften the grains with saliva. When it is soft enough, my teeth ground the rice grains, they have a sweet taste that slides easily down my throat. I want more, more.  
The next morning my sister screams

### **Sister**

Ma, look, someone was in the container last night!

### **Mrs. Sophorn**

I glance at the container and I see that the lid lies crooked.  
I did not close it properly.  
Ma says

### **Mother**

Maybe some rats got into it and stole some. Tonight I will seal it very tight. This rice be-

longs to all of us.

### **Mrs. Sophorn**

I want to scream: “It was me, Ma, I stole from the family. Please forgive me.”  
But I say nothing.  
I am bad and I can see that Ma knows it. She told us once that children should be good. That doing bad things will create bad Karma and they will come back in the next life as snakes, slugs or worms. But that their bad Karma can be healed when they confess their bad deeds and apologize.  
I want to confess. I want to say I’m sorry.  
But I say nothing. I am silent.

### **song**

#### ***Mother’s Virtue***

*This is the heart of the mother.  
Whether near or far,  
she always thinks of her child  
and she never minds whether the child is good or bad  
since either good or bad the child still belongs to her. This is how mother and child are linked to each other.*

### **Mrs. Sophorn**

I am 39 years old now.  
Baby Geak died from hunger in 1977 and soon after Ma also. My older brother was taken to a youth group, I never heard of him again.  
I survived.  
My life is quite good, I studied and I became a doctor. On damp nights, the guilt always re-



turns. I know I was a child in those days, I know the hunger changed people into animals who would do anything to grab whatever might be edible.

But this guilt stays with me and I wish someone would help me.

I wish Ma was there again, so I could confess my sin to her, which I dared not confess when I was only seven years old.

song

*The Boddhitree*  
by *Ou Sam Oeur*

*May the boddhitree be free to grow  
May the sugar palm be free from blame  
May the supernatural devils be banished from  
Cambodia My peace be restored to the people  
of this land.*

## Scene 6

Vutha

This is a story about a girl who stopped talking.

Her name is Chea.

She is so beautiful, beautiful like an angel

song

*The angel performs a heavenly dance*  
by *Ou Sam Oeur*

*An immaculate carpet of grass;  
Greenness stretches beyond the horizon.  
An angel with hair the color of gold  
And the complexion of polished ivory*

*Sways her body with the grasses,  
As she dances a classical ballet  
Her long hair floats in the air  
In a pattern which dazzles my eyes.*

*Then she dances in the manner of a butterfly.  
The breeze keeps raising her hair in an aureole,  
[The longer I contemplate her dance  
The more indescribable its beauty becomes.*

*Only God is my witness to this.  
Oh, Nagaraja's pearl,  
It's unbelievable! I shall  
Treasure this scene in my mind forever!*

Vutha

Now listen to the story of Chea.

Sovanna

It is the year 1976.

Chea is a teenage girl.

She is thirteen years of age.

Chea is so beautiful.

Her supple body shows the beginning of womanhood.

She has curly hair.

Smooth skin, full lips, large round brown eyes with long lashes.

Vutha

The soldiers gaze at her wherever she goes.

Sovanna

Chea's parents guard her intensely.

They smear mud on her face to hide her beauty.

Her head is always covered with a scarf.

Vutha

The Khmer Rouge soldiers gaze at her wherever she goes.

Sovanna

One evening in March 1976 three soldiers come to the hut of Chea's family.

Soldier

Hey you there, Angka needs your daughter to pick corn.

Sovanna

Chea's mother wraps her arms around her daughter.

She cries: "Take me, I can work faster and pick more corn for you than my daughter."

Chea's father pleads on his knees:

"Take me, I am much stronger and will work for you the whole night".

Soldier

Sorry, but Angka needs Chea.

No bargaining.

Useless to discuss with Angka.

When Angka tells you what to do, you do it.

Sovanna

The soldiers take Chea into the woods. She looks back until she can see her parents no more.

In the black night Chea's mother wails like a she-wolf that has lost her cub.

Yes, true to their word, the soldiers returned Chea to her parents the next morning.

She is not Chea anymore, beautiful smiling Chea.

Her face is swollen, shoulders slumped, arms hanging like dead weights.

Since then Chea does not speak anymore.

Never.

Her body walks as if there is no more life in it. Her head is always down.

Nobody comes near her.

Nobody talks to her.

People turn away when she passes by.

Theary

I was there too, in the same camp. In the year 1976. I also turned away when Chea passed.

Like the others. We made Chea invisible

Now, thirty years later,

Chea lives in my village. A silent woman.

Nobody comes near her.

Nobody talks to her.

People turn away when she passes by.

Always when I see her my heart starts racing.

I feel guilty, guilty.

I say to myself: "I was just a little girl.

I could not help it, I did what the elders did,

just a little girl”.

I say to myself:

“I betrayed Chea. Left her all by herself in her loneliness, her horror. I was a coward” .

Today I see Chea.

My heart races. I sweat.

I have to soothe my heart.

I cannot bear the guilt anymore.

Slowly I take one step toward her. Two steps.

*(to Chea)*

Chea, will you forgive me, please.

Will you hold my heart and forgive me.

Please come with me so we can drink a cup of tea together.

Chea does not look, does not speak.

Maybe I am too late.

Tomorrow I will try again.

song

*The angel performs a heavenly dance* (last verse)

by Sam Ou Oeur

*Only God is my witness to this.*

*Oh, Nagaraja's pearl,*

*It's unbelievable! I shall*

*Treasure this scene in my mind forever!*

## Scene 7

Vutha

This is a story about a boy and a girl who once upon a time were dear friends.

*(whispers)*

Mr. Saroun sits on the stone wall at the river-side. He is 49 years old.

He does not trust anyone.

There comes Mrs Sophear with her little ananas car.

She is also 49 years old.

Mrs. Sophear

Do I know you?

Mr. Saroun

No, no.

Mrs. Sophear

You look familiar.

Mr. Saroun

No, I never met you.

Mrs. Sophear

We were driving through Phnom Penh on the same truck and we were together for a month in the same unit. Remember now?

Mr. Saroun

No, I don't know you. What do you want?

Mrs. Sophear

It is nice to see you again. You had a funny face and a big smile.

Mr. Saroun

Are you crazy?

Mrs. Sophear

We sang and we danced. You were the best dancer.

Mr. Saroun

Really?

Mrs. Sophear

Sure.

Watch and listen and you will remember.

We walk up to the front and stand facing the crowd.

We are wearing beautiful black shirts and pants, shiny and new, with bright red scarves around our waists.

We wear red ribbons across our foreheads with red fake flowers made of dyed straw.

song

*Angkasong*

*We are children, we love Angka with no limits. Because of Angka we can survive and have a prosperous and happy life.*

*Before the revolution we were so poor and had such a hard time.*

*We lived like animals.*

*Nobody cared about us, we were abandoned.*

*We were just skin and bone, day and night we*

*lived in fear.*

*We had nothing to eat except for what we begged from each other.*

*Now we are healthy and strong because of the support of our great Angka.*

We are the children of the Angka.

We are fearless.

We are the future.

We learn how to fight.

And this is the rifle.

The rifle is easy to shoot.

A child can shoot it.

Mr. Saroun

You know something. I liked the rifle.

Mrs. Sophear

I liked that boys and girls were treated the same. I liked the singing and the dancing. I liked that we were together like a family.

Mr. Saroun

Yes. They were great times.

We were going to make a better world.

Angka said: You are the future. You are the children of Angka. From now on Angka is your real and only family.

Angka relies on you to make the revolution a success.

We mattered.

It was serious business.

They said: Always be on guard.

There are many enemies.

The city dwellers with their soft hands, do not

trust them.

From now on they will do real work, honest work to make our glorious country into one plentiful rice field, giving food to everyone. If they are lazy or sick they are useless and Angka will have to get rid of them. They said the wheel of history is turning. Anyone who dares to stop the wheel will be destroyed. It was serious business. We were the wheel of history.

**Mrs. Sophear**

You still believe all that?

**Mr. Saroun**

I did then, of course. I have never again felt as important as then. Yes, sure, I did believe them.

**Mrs. Sophear**

We did a lot of terrible things.

**Mr. Saroun**

But this was war, you remember. It was the revolution. Obey or die. Who wants to die?

**Mrs. Sophear**

Why are you so angry?

**Mr. Saroun**

I'm not angry. I just have a headache. This splitting headache.

**voice (flashback)**

It is the year 1975.

You are a boy of 15 years.

You spot a little girl with some fruit. She goes to put it in her mouth, but you, the boy of 15 years beats the girl to death.

You scream:

“All fruit belongs to Angka. You are stealing from Angka. You are the enemy.”

**Mrs. Sophear**

You look pale.

Do you want a drink?

Let's talk a bit.

How is your life now?

Are you married?

What work do you do?

**Mr. Saroun**

What do I do? Nothing and everything. I sell books in the street.

**Mrs. Sophear**

What kind of books?

**Mr. Saroun**

Books about those days.

**Mrs. Sophear**

I am a widow and I have three children.

I sell drinks and pineapple.

We manage.

My children went to school.

They can read.

I cannot read and now I am too old for that.

Otherwise I would have read your books.

Have you read them?

**Mr. Saroun**

Who wants to read them? They are just for the tourists, they love all of that.

If I sell one of those books a day,

I can have a meal.

That's what books are good for.

Anyway, why are you asking all these questions?

**Mrs. Sophear**

I'm just curious.

Tell me, how did you lose your happy smile?

How come you are still alive?

Why don't you say anything?

**Mr. Saroun**

I have a headache. This splitting headache.

**voice (flashback)**

It is the year 1976.

Three young soldiers come to the hut of Chea.

You are one of them.

You are a boy of 16 years.

The three soldiers drag Chea into the woods.

Chea screams.

The three soldiers rape Chea.

You are one of them.

**Mr. Saroun**

It was all for Angka.

We would make a better world.

**Mrs. Sophear**

Yes, that is what they said, but I did terrible things.

I was frightened day and night, so I did terrible things to please them.

**Mr. Saroun**

What do you mean by terrible things?

We had to sacrifice ourselves.

I did as I was told and that was hard enough.

When I came back to my village I found out that my parents were killed by angry villagers.

And the neighbour hit my head with an axe because I was Khmer Rouge.

My younger brother is alive, but he doesn't

want to see me.

Why, what does he know, he was only 2 years

old at that time.

Yes, maybe they were hard times, but today is

hard as well. We were all wasted.

**Mrs. Sophear**

May I please tell you something?

It is important for me to say this.

One day so much happened: It was 1977.

I was 15 years old.

I betrayed a woman because I overheard her

when she was singing an ancient lullaby to her

child.

She was taken for reeducation right away and

never came back.

That same afternoon our section had to

destroy the Buddha statues in the temple.

That night I had this terrible dream.

I heard a voice call out to me:

### song

*Don't forget about the bodiless witches.  
At night when the witches go to sleep their  
heads separate from their bodies.  
The heads fly so fast with their intestines dan-  
gling behind.  
Their tongues lick blood and puss.  
They eat flesh of dead bodies.*

### Mrs. Sophear

When I woke up I knew that the dream meant  
that I had landed in a land of Bad Karma.  
But today I know that that terrible nightmare  
saved a tiny part of my soul.

### Mr. Saroun

Please stop talking. I wish you would stop.  
I don't want to hear.  
I want nothing.  
I don't want my headaches anymore.

### Mrs. Sophear

No, now I cannot stop anymore.  
I have to put one question to you and I want  
you to listen.  
You know what the Buddha says: never join  
the fight, but don't hide from t.

That is why I go every year to Tuol Sleng so as  
not to hide from the past, and tomorrow is  
that day.  
Before I go I always feel frightened as I do  
now. When I am there and I see all those  
faces, the little children, I think that I should  
be dead instead of them.

Then I feel miserable.  
I ask forgiveness from their spirits and  
I make offerings. And the next day I am sad.  
But I do not have my terrible nightmare  
anymore.

Maybe you want to come with me tomorrow.  
Maybe it will bring an end to your headaches.  
Do you have the courage to come with me?  
Will you come?

### Mr. Saroun

Maybe I'll go.

### Mrs. Sophear

I'll be here at 11 o'clock.

## Epilogue

### Vutha

This is the story of Breaking the Silence.

### Sokly

You have listened to a story of war, but it is  
also a story of love.

### Sovanna

After Pol Pot we thought it was hate that  
made us strong, hate and anger.

### Theary

But now we realize that without love our  
minds would have been destroyed and our  
souls would not have survived.

### Sina

The love of a parent, the love of a brother, the  
love of a sister, the love of a grandmother, the  
love of a grandfather, the love of a neighbour.  
And even the love of our enemies.

### song

*Transform the River of Blood  
into a River of Reconciliation.  
A River of Responsibility.  
Speak, speak, speak.*

## About Front Cover Photo

Before the performance at Trapeang Thom pagoda. The birthplace and home village of former high-level Khmer Rouge official, Chhit Choeun (alias Mok) is just a few hundred meters away from where the play was performed. Currently, many of Mok's relatives including cousins, nephews, nieces and grandchildren live in and around the village. Although one of Mok's sisters, Ung Poun, died just one month prior to the performance, many of Mok's relatives were invited to watch the play. Prior to 1975, the area around Trapeang Thom was one of the largest revolutionary bases in the Southwest Zone. In the early 1970s, Mok's rebel forces, composed of only trusted cadre members and Mok's family members, who followed his leadership completely, maintained utmost secrecy and hid effectively from Lon Nol forces. The pagoda itself was covertly used as a place where communist doctrine was taught and the area was not easily penetrated by the government. In 1967, Khieu Samphan and Hou Youn were able to hide in these revolutionary areas under the guidance and care of Mok, who became Southwest Zone Secretary a year later. During the Democratic Kampuchea regime, many of Mok's relatives and trusted neighbors were promoted to important positions of authority. Trapeang Thom was home of several Khmer Rouge leaders who held positions in the Southwest Zone between 1975 and 1979.

# Credits

## Director/Librettist

Annemarie Prins (the Netherlands)

## Poems by U Sam Oeur

Except: *The Cambodian People's Lament* by Sath Bunrith

## Dramaturge/Research

Nan Van Houte (the Netherlands)

## Actors:

Morm Sokly, Kov Sotheary, Chhon Sina, Pok Sovanna,  
Kham Sokneang

## Singer:

Yin Vutha

## Composer & Musician:

Ieng Sakkona

## Produced by Amrita Performing Arts

Executive Director: Fred Frumberg

Country Director: Suon Bun Rith

Office Manager: Sin Sokunthea

Assistant Director/Translator: Chey Chankethya

## Documentation Center of Cambodia

Youk Chhang, Director

Ser Sayana, Team Leader Student Outreach  
and Cham Oral History Project

Recorded by Studio Cambodian Living Arts



Top: Performance at Trapeang Thom. Middle: The audience, some of whom are Mok's relatives, watching the performance at Trapeang Thom. Bottom: Actresses (left to right): Pok Sovanna, Kov Sotheary, Morm Sokly

Photographer: Nhean Socheat



**Breaking the Silence is produced by Amrita Performing Arts, Cambodia and Theatre Embassy, The Netherlands.**

Breaking the Silence performance at Former Kraing Ta Chan prison. The site was used as a Khmer Rouge prison from 1974 to 1979. More than 30,000 Kraing Ta Chan prisoners were killed and buried nearby. The performance evoked strong reactions from many villagers, some of whom were Former Khmer Rouge cadre members. There are numerous Former Southwest Zone cadre members living in the area and some of them live just outside the courtyard of the Former prison. Some of the Former Khmer Rouge cadre members are now government officials at the village and sub-district levels. At least two Former Kraing Ta Chan prisoners and numerous Former cadre members attended the show.