



# BREAKING THE SILENCE

A NEW CAMBODIAN PLAY



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Sath Bun Rith's Cambodian People's Lament,  
and Ok Kork's Could We Ever Forget*

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Singer: Yin Vutha

Dancer: Khiev Sovannarith

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# BREAKING THE SILENCE

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A NEW CAMBODIAN PLAY

SCRIPT BY ANNEMARIE PRINS

A NOTE FROM  
THE DIR



# ECTOR

In order to make this play, I have tried to understand this country of wonders and its wonderful people. It has been over four years since I was invited by Fred Frumberg, executive director of Amrita Performing Arts, to give a workshop for the theatre teachers at the Royal University of Fine Arts. Using text fragments of my beloved writer Samuel Beckett, I introduced six actors/teachers (four of which perform in this show) to the world of western contemporary theater. During these two weeks, some of the actresses started tell me fragments of their childhood stories. Those were the seeds of our first new play, '3 year, 8 months, 20 days': a production based on the memories of three actresses as young girls during Pol Pot's reign, featuring Morm Sokly, Kov Sotheary and Chhon Sina. They play was conceived as a small scale indoor performance and has been presented in Phnom Penh and at the 2007 Singapore International Arts Festival. It was only at that stage that I realized that this production, which delved deeply into Cambodia's recent history, would reach a very limited Cambodian audience. Having gained more and more insight into the effects of the genocide and the near extinction of entire generations of artists and intellectuals, I realized I had to make a second play. This new production would need to be made to tour throughout the country and deal not only with history, but also with the question of how to go on. *Breaking the Silence* is based on many interviews I conducted during a research trip in January 2008, several meetings with Chhang Youk – director of DC-Cam, the viewing of hours of footage and reading every available book on the topic. The main goal of this production is to find a way out of trauma's silence; contributing to open dialogue as part of the process of reconciliation.

Travelling, talking, reading, viewing and most of all: working with this amazing team, helped me get closer to knowing the Cambodian soul. And I am grateful to the beautiful Cambodian poets, especially Sam Ou Oeur who is very present in this show. They all helped me to begin to understand.

I hope you will appreciate *Breaking the Silence*.

*Annemarie Prins*



*Youk Chhang, DC-Cam Director and Sayana Ser, DC-Cam Team  
Leader of Student Outreach and Cham Oral History.*

TRANSFORM THE  
RIVER OF BLOOD  
INTO A RIVER OF  
RECONCILIATION.

A RIVER OF  
RESPONSIBILITY.

# SYNOPSIS

*O, darling, my darling!*

*Now you are dead.*

*You're shot dead... Buddho!*

*You've left me alone*

*in the middle of this island*

*From today onward*

*I shall have no hope.*

**From: *The Keening of Wives, Sam Ou***

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.

1. A story about divided people: two women and two men in their 50's.
2. 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.
3. A story about betrayal and guilt: a 76 year old woman, caring for her 51 year old son.
4. A story about a student who dreamed about a better world: a man of 52 meets his mother of 75.
5. A story about a little girl, who wanted to say sorry but could not: she's now 38 years old.
6. A story about a girl who stopped talking: then she was a teenager, now she's 47.
7. A story about a boy and a girl who were once upon a time dear friends: they are now nearly 50 years old.

*I won't mind*

*if you have thoughts*

*to add to mine.*

*I won't say*

*yours word are "good" or "not good"*

*If you have more to add*

*that would be wonderful.*

**From: *Could we ever forget by Ok Kork***



# PROLOGUE

## SONG

### *Everyone sings*

*I miss the farmland where I tended the cattle.*

*I miss the sound of cheering when we were together.*

*I miss the time when we cut down the bamboo to find bees.*

*I miss the farm, the village, and the ox cart.*

*Oh my dear, I miss the loom, farmland, and the waterwheel.*

*I miss the quiet night and voice of “Eak kite”.*

*I miss chatting at dawn.*

*I miss the pond where we used to swim after finishing our work.*

## SONG

### Sath Bunrith – The Cambodian People’s Lament

### *Sokly sings*

*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.*

### 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.

You are Mrs. Sophy.

You are 52 years old..

You want to hear the truth and nothing but the truth.

You are Mrs. Thida.

You are 53 years old.

You don't want to talk, you don't want to hear, you don't want to see.

You are Mr. Akrak.

You are 58 years old.

You can't handle the truth.

**Vutha**

What did you do during the Pol Pot period?

**Sina**

I was a youth leader.

I educated youth to love the country.

**Vutha**

Did you give orders to arrest people?

**Sina**

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?

**Sina**

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?

**Sina**

The killings were in the other village.

**Theary**

You're a liar.

**Sina**

No one was killed here.

I did not do anything.



**Theary**

You're a liar.

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

'A dead elephant could never be covered with a flat basket'.

**Sokly**

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

**Theary**

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.

**Sina**

People just say those things.

There's no evidence.

**Theary**

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

**Sina**

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.

**Theary**

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

**Sokly**

What could we do? That's the turn the country took.

**Theary**

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

**Sina**

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

**Theary**

Because of you people were killed.

**Sokly**

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.

**Theary**

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

**Sina**

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.

**Theary**

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

**Sina**

Listen, I have to go now.

It's time to eat.

**Vutha**

Stop!

Someone wants to talk to you.

It is Mr. Preal.

He is 50 years old.

He hesitates day and night: revenge or no revenge.

**Sovanna**

Where is the body of my father?

You arrested him.

You killed him.

Where is his body?

I want to bury my father.

**Sina**

The killings were in the other village.

**Sovanna**

You lie.

**Sina**

You have no proof.

**Sovanna**

I saw you.

**Sina**

Sorry, I really have to go now.

**Sovanna**

No. You have to answer. You killed my father. But you dare not admit it. When he came out of the jungle I only asked him: 'what happened to my father. Where is my father.'

He was afraid I would kill him.

He said he did not know my father. He lied.

I had a gun and he knew I would shoot him if he confessed. I really wanted to kill him then.

But my friends warned me against killing a man because of the consequences for my Karma.

That's why I did not kill him. 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.

### **Sokly**

Who is bad, who is good?  
How bad is bad, how good is good?  
What is the country we give to our children?

### **SONG**

*Sam Ou Oeur - The Keening of wives*

#### *Vutha sings*

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

#### *Vutha sings, actresses humming*

*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!*



# SCENE 2

## Vutha

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

You are Sina.

You are 43 years old.

You always miss your father.

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

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

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

"He, what are you doing?" she screams, "can't you see your husband is dead. You are holding a corpse. "

Ma doesn't cry.

Ma doesn't talk.

I am ten years old and all empty inside. Ever since that day.

## Vutha

You are Mrs. Somphor.

You are 48 years old.

You carry the burden of shame.

**Sokly**

Why are you not sitting with us?

**Sovanna**

I am not sitting with you because I am ashamed.

**Sokly**

Have you listened to her story?

**Sovanna**

Yes.

**Sokly**

What would you do if you met the nurse who screamed at your mother?

**Sina**

I would run away.

I would be silent like my mother.

**Sokly**

What would you do if you met the little girl who sat with her dying father and her silent mother?

**Sovanna**

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

**Sokly**

Here she is, the nurse.

Do you remember her?

I think she wants to tell us her story.

**Sovanna**

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 droppings. 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.

**Sokly:**

Well, can you say to this woman that you are sorry for not helping her father?.

**Sovanna**

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.

**Sokly:**

Please, tell her you are sorry.

**Sovanna**

I am very sorry but we had no medicines, I could do nothing.

**Sokly:**

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.

**Sovanna**

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**

*Everyone sings:*

*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.*

**SOKLY SINGS THE SONG WITH DANCE TOING**

# SCENE 3

**Vutha**

This is a story about betrayal and eternal guilt.

You are Mr. Rithy.

You are 51 years old.

You lost the lust for life.

And you are Mr. Rithy's mother.

You are 76 years old.

You are the guardian of your son.

**Sovanna**

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.

**Theary**

They put you in prison?

**Sovanna**

They tied him up.

They wanted names.

**Sokly**

I did not give names.

**Sovanna**

They beat him.

**Theary**

You gave them names.

**Sovanna**

They tortured him.

**Sokly**

I gave them 2 names.

**Theary**

You denounced a lot of people.

**Sovanna**

They burned his hands, his feet.

**Theary**

You sent many people to the white bone village.

**Sokly**

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.

**Sovanna**

He was crying like a turtle placed on a fire.

**Sokly**

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

**Theary**

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.

**Sovanna**

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

**Sokly**

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.

**Vutha**

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

**Sokly**

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

**SONG**

*Sam Ou Oeur – Oath of Allegiance*

***Vutha and Sokly sing***

*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.

You are Sarun.

You are 52 years old.

You miss the love of a mother.

**Theary**

I am Sarun,

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.

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.

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.

### **Vutha**

You are the mother of Sarun.  
You are 75 years old.  
You miss the love of a son.

### **Sovanna**

I go to the market. I always go when my son will be there too.  
But when he looks at me I cannot return his 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.

### **Sina**

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:

### **Theary**

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

### **Sovanna**

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

SONG

*Sam Ou Oeur – The howling dead*

*Vutha sings*

*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.

You are Mrs. Sophorn.

You are 38 years old.

You don't want to become a useless parasite.

**Sokly**

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.

"Ma, look, someone was in the container last night!" I glance at the container and I see that the lid lies crooked.

I did not close it properly.

Ma says "maybe some rats got into it and stole some. Tonight I will seal it very tight. This rice belongs to all of us."

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.  
I want to confess. I want to be punished. I say nothing.  
I hate mom for not punishing me. I hate myself for hating my  
mom.

## SONG

### Sokly - Lullaby "Mother's Virtue"

#### *Sokly sings*

*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.*

#### Sokly

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 returns. I know I was very  
young 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.

I don't want to become a useless parasite.

# SCENE 6

**Vutha**

This is a story about a girl who stopped talking.

You are neighbour Ri.  
You are neighbour Ra.  
You are neighbour Rine.

**SONG**

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

*Vutha, Sovanna, Theary and Sokly sing  
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**

You are Chea.  
You are 47 years old.  
You are invisible.

**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.

**Theary**

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.

### **Theary**

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.

### **Theary**

They say Angka need Chea 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".

### **Theary**

The soldiers say: " sorry, but Angka needs Chea.

No bargaining.

Useless to discuss with Angka.

When he 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.

### **Sokly**

I also turn away when she passes by and my heart is racing.

Sometimes Chea marches straight into the group of people waiting for food. As if daring them to say something to her.

The gatherers shuffle their feet, cough into their hands and avoid eye contact. As do I.



We make 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.

"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

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

*Vutha, Sovanna, Theary and Sokly sing*

*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.

You are Mr. Saroun.  
You are 49 years old.  
You don't trust anyone.  
You are Mrs. Sophear.  
You are also 49 years old.  
You are a caring mother.

**Sina**

Do I know you?

**Theary**

No, no.

**Sina**

You look familiar.

**Theary**

No, I never met you.

**Sina**

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

**Theary**

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

**Sina**

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

**Theary**

Are you crazy?

**Sina**

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

**Theary**

Really?

**Sina**

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

### The Angkasong

*Actresses sing, Vutha yells*

*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.*

### Vutha and Actresses

#### Dance Toing

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.

#### Theary

You know something. I liked the rifle.

#### Sina

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.

#### Theary

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.

**Sina**

You still believe all that?

**Theary**

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

**Sina**

We did a lot of terrible things.

**Theary**

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

.

**Sina**

Why are you so angry?

**Theary**

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

**NIGHTMARE**

Dance Toing

**Vutha**

*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."*

**Sina**

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?

**Theary**

What do I do?

Nothing and everything. I sell books in the street.

**Sina**

What kind of books?

**Theary**

Books about those days.

**Sina**

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?

**Theary**

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?

**Sina**

I'm just curious.

**Theary**

What do you want?

You don't like me, do you?

**Sina**

No, that's not it. I feel shaky today. Sort of frightened.

**Theary**

Frightened of me?

**Sina**

No, that is not it. Don't pay any attention.

Tell me, how did you lose your happy smile?

How come you are still alive?

Why don't you say anything?

**Theary**

I have a headache. This splitting headache.

**NIGHTMARE**

Dance Toing

**Vutha**

*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.*

**Theary**

It was all for Angka. We would make a better world.

**Sina**

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.

**Theary**

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 two years old at that time.

Yes, maybe they were hard times, but today is hard as well. We were all wasted.

**Sina**

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**

Dance Toing

*Sokly sings*

*Don't forget about the headless witches.  
At night when the witches go to sleep their heads separate from their bodies.*

*The heads fly so fast with their intestines dangling behind.  
Their tongues lick blood and puss.  
They eat flesh of dead bodies.*

**Sina**

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.

**Theary**

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



**Sina**

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 it.

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?

**Theary**

Maybe I'll go.

**Sina**

I'll be here at 11 o'clock.

# EPILOGUE

**Vutha**

This is the story of Breaking the Silence.

**SONG**

*Vutha sings*

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

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

**Sokly**

You have witnessed 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,

**Sokly**

and even the love of our enemies.

**SONG**

*All sing*

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

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

*Vutha sings*

*Speak, speak, speak.*

# THE END

# ABOUT THE COMPAN



Y



**Annemarie Prins, the Netherlands (Director)** Annemarie Prins – the Netherlands (Director) is an established director, author and actress from the Netherlands. Born in 1932, she has directed theater, modern opera, film, television and radio in a career that spans over forty-five years. From 1965-1969 Annemarie was Artistic Director for the “Side Track Theater”, the first political theater company in Holland that was committed to using theater as a means of dealing with the social and political climate of time. In the mid 70’s, Annemarie directed a series of seven Brecht plays and in the early 80’s expanded her directing repertory to include such diverse projects as “Monkey Defeats the Bone Spirit” and “Houdini”, both with the Netherlands Opera. In 1985 Annemarie founded “De Salon”, a state subsidized theater group exploring new free form performance styles using text by Duras and Beckett, introducing interplay between actors, musicians, video and sound tracks, exploring the outer and inner world of these complex works. From 1994 – present, Annemarie has continued her search for diversity by both directing and acting for the stage and film, performing her own monologues tracing her family roots and the horrors of war; she has performed a lead role in a feature film and danced with a modern dance company to music by Tom Waits. She is currently playing the lead role in a major television series and writes scripts and acts as advisor to young theater students.

**Nan van Houte** Even before she graduated at the University of Amsterdam in literature, theatre and aesthetics, Nan van Houte (1954), has been working in contemporary theatre. Her professional fields of experience include: dramaturgy, theatre journalism, programming & producing, teaching & lecturing, organising & presiding conferences and, managing several arts institutions and festivals, and the presidency of the international network for contemporary performing arts IETM.

Last year she stepped down after a 15 years appointment as the director of Theatre Frascati: a landmark-venue for contemporary performing arts in Amsterdam, also active as a producer of - mainly - emerging artists. Since August 2008 she is working as the program director at the Dutch Theatre Institute, TIN.

**Chey Chankethya, Cambodia (Choreographer)** started her classical dance training as young as 6 years old. Upon completion of the school in 2000, she pursued her study at the Royal University of Fine Arts and obtained her BA in 2005. She also holds a BA degree in English from the Royal University of Phnom Penh. As one of Cambodia’s best classical dancers, she has performed and participated in numerous dance workshops nationally and internationally. She was awarded a Choreography Arts Management’s fellowship for a three-month residency at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Being a classical dance

teacher, Kethya also founded *Trey Visay*. (Compass), a contemporary dance initiative to explore and create contemporary dance vocabulary.

**Fer Smidt, the Netherlands (set Design Advisor)** studied set and costume design at the High School of Arts in Utrecht, The Netherlands where he graduated Cum Laude in 1990. Since then he has designed sets and costumes for numerous productions in theatre, opera and dance, both classical and contemporary. He has designed sets and costumes for over twenty opera-productions for the New Opera Academy (DNOA) based in Amsterdam and The Hague. In musical theatre he worked in Baroque Opera and modern musical theatre with conductors and directors such as Kenneth Montgomery, **Javier Lopez Pinon**, Paul McCreech and Cynthia Buchan. His first collaboration with Annemarie Prins was in 1999 with Purcell's opera "Dido and Aeneas" at DNO and they have worked together frequently since then. He is currently teaching costume-design at the Amsterdam School for Dramatic Arts while continuing to design for dance, opera and theater.

**Kong Vollak, Heng Ravuth, Khvay Samnang, Cambodia (Design Team)** are professional visual artists known for painting, sculpture and photography, and all three graduated from the Royal University of Fine Arts in 2006. They have worked as a team and individually in presenting numerous exhibitions and installations. They are also teachers of visual arts to school children. This production marks their first design work for theater which they have taken on with great enthusiasm and look forward to further opportunities to design for stage.

**Morm Sokly, Cambodia (Actress)** was born in 1965 in Phnom Penh and began her studies in acting in 1981 at the Royal University of Fine Arts and graduated in 1988 upon which she immediately began to teach acting at RUFA while working as a professional actress for such organizations as BBC, "Friends", Royal Air Cambodge and the National Election Committee. Sokly collaborated with Singaporean artist William Teo in his Cambodian play "Year Zero" in 1995. Sokly has performed in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Singapore. She is also very gifted in poetry recitation.

**Kov Sotheary, Cambodia (Actress)** graduated in 1986 and in the same year became a teacher of modern theatre. In 2000, she entered the BA Program at the Faculty of Choreographic Arts and in 2004 received a Bachelor of Arts in directing modern theatre in. She has worked as a freelance actress in educational theatre and film projects for various Cambodian-based NGOs.

**Chhon Sina, Cambodia (Actress)** began her studies in 1984 and began working as a teacher at the school of fine arts in

1991. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts from the Royal University of Fine Arts Faculty of Choreographic Arts in directing modern theater. She has been involved in educational theatre and film projects on drug abuse, domestic violence etc. She collaborated with Singaporean artist William Teo in his Cambodian play “Year Zero” in 1995. She is currently a modern theatre teacher at the National School of Fine Arts.

**Pok Sovanna, Cambodia (Actress)** was born in 1966 in Phnom Penh and began studying acting in 1981 at the National School of Fine Arts (NSFA) and since graduating in 1988, has been a teacher of modern theater. She entered the University of Fine Arts in 2000 and received her BA in 2004 in directing. Sovanna works as a professional actress for such organizations as BBC and the Cambodia Women Media Center.

**Ieng Sakona, Cambodia (Musician)** entered the music school in 1993. He continued his studies at the Faculty of Music 2001 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Musicology. Sakona has participated in various collaborative and exchange projects with artists from Indonesia, Japan and Burma. In his spare time, Sakona is a professional make up artist.

**Yin Vutha, Cambodia (Singer)** went to the Secondary School of Fine Arts in 1993 where he was trained in *Yike* theater. In 1999, he pursued his BA which he obtained in 2003. He then became a professional artist of the Department of Performing. He has performed in more than 20 *Yike* productions and 6 films. He has also worked in outreach program against human trafficking in the rural areas.

**Khiev Sovannarith, Cambodia (Dancer)** also known as *Tonh*, started school in the *Lakhaon Kaol* classical male masked dance section. He is currently pursuing his BA at the Royal University of Fine Arts and will graduate in 2009. He dances the lead role of *Hanuman*. Tonh has participated in a number of contemporary dance workshops in Cambodia and abroad. He is pursuing his ambitions as a contemporary dancer while remaining faithful to his traditional forms.

**AMRITA Performing Arts** is an International NGO based on Phnom Penh, with US nonprofit status. Its mission is to promote, preserve and sustain Cambodia’s ancient heritage of dance and theater, while encouraging contemporary creativity. AMRITA collaborates with the Royal Cambodian Ministry of Culture and freelance artists in mounting professionally staged performances of traditional classical work both locally and internationally, while developing contemporary creative expression in music, dance and theater. Capacity building underpins all of AMRITA’s activities; growing technical resources require more complex theatrical skills, as well as competence in arts management and fundraising. [www.amritaperformingarts.org](http://www.amritaperformingarts.org)



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