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Bangsokol:

A Requiem for Cambodia

Directed and designed by Rithy Panh
Music by Him Sophy
Libretto by Trent Walker

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House
Dec 15 & 16 at 7:30pm

Running time: approx. 65 minutes, no intermission

Presented in association with Cambodian Living Arts

Film by **Rithy Panh**
Stage direction by **Gideon Obarzanek**
Music direction and conducting by **Andrew Cyr**
Lighting design by **Bosco Shaw**
Costume design by **Romyda Keth**

Performed by **Keo Dorivan, Keo Sonankavei, Keo Sophy, Pov Reaksmeymony, Say Tola, Sngoun Kavei Serey Roth, Chumvan "Belle" Sodhachivy**
Ensemble **Metropolis Ensemble**
Choir **Taipei Philharmonic Chamber Choir** led
by **Yu-Chung Johnny Ku**

Season Sponsor:

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Support for the Signature Artist Series provided by the Howard Gilman Foundation

Major support provided by The Freeman Foundation and Edward Jay Wohlgermuth

Leadership support for Diverse Voices programming at BAM provided by the Ford Foundation

Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia is a multi-disciplinary stage production combining music, film, movement and voice. It is the first major symphonic work addressing the years of the Khmer Rouge, and the first collaboration between contemporaries Rithy Panh and Him Sophy, both survivors of the genocide and now at the forefront of Cambodia's cultural renaissance. Composer Him Sophy's score combines traditional Khmer instrumentalists and smot chanting with a Western chamber orchestra and chorus. Rithy Panh's poetic visuals blend archive footage and abstract and surreal imagery to capture the very essence of Cambodia's culture and history.

In Cambodian culture, a "bangsokol" ceremony is performed as a key part of Buddhist funeral rites. This word references both the white cloth placed over the deceased during a Buddhist funeral and the ritual surrounding the removal of the cloth. It is this act that signifies transmigration into the next life: the ritual

through which the spirits of the dead find rest. *Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* hopes to serve as an inspiration for post-conflict societies around the world—to rebuild, transmit, and innovate through arts. It offers a space for healing for those who have suffered violent conflict and forced migration, and honors those who have passed away. With a cast of performers from the emerging to the iconic, *Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* is an essential act of memory, reconciliation, and peace.

Cambodian Living Arts is proud to commission this unique piece, based on an original idea by co-founder Charley Todd. *Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* encapsulates its 20 years of work in the field of arts for transformation and healing, from the revival and transmission of cultural heritage, to nurturing cultural leadership and stimulating creativity.

bangsokol.cambodianlivingarts.org/

Music developed in collaboration with **Metropolis Ensemble**

Original idea by **Charley Todd**

Commissioned by Cambodian Living Arts. Produced by THE OFFICE performing arts + film.

Additional commissioning support provided by BAM 2017 Next Wave Festival, The Rainbow Initiative, Ministry of Culture Taiwan (R.O.C.), Taipei Philharmonic Foundation for Culture and Education, The Charles E. Culpeper Arts & Culture Grant, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Australian Embassy in Cambodia, and Asia TOPA/Arts Centre Melbourne.



RITHY PANH



HIM SOPHY



TRENT WALKER



GIDEON OBARZANEK



ANDREW CYR



YU-CHUNG JOHNNY KU

ARTIST STATEMENTS

RITHY PANH

Bangsokol is a beautiful work, complex and challenging. Him Sophy and I lived through the Khmer Rouge regime, and with this requiem we wanted to present to audiences— both in and outside Cambodia—the country's harrowing modern history through traditional music, reinvented.

Bangsokol is an attempt to honor the Khmer Rouge's victims by resuscitating the cultural heritage that the regime nearly wiped out, and passing it on to the next generation. *Bangsokol* may be a requiem, but it is less about death than about bringing the past back to life and restoring dignity to the disappeared. To create is to live.

Bangsokol—which was conceived, written, and performed by Cambodians—is yet more proof that our people's capacity for imagination and creation could never be destroyed.

A German philosopher is sometimes quoted as saying that it is barbaric, or impossible, to write poetry after Auschwitz. It is not. Writing poetry in the face of horror is a right—and to some of us it feels like a duty, toward both the dead and the living. Art helps transcend atrocity by giving expression and meaning to suffering that is too great to explain. Art is more than an act of remembrance; it is an act of resistance, and of healing.

Taking the full measure of the Khmer Rouge's crimes means looking beyond its total casualty toll: at least 1.7 million dead. It means remembering that this vast, anonymous number represents one person's unique story and another's and another's and another's... I hope that *Bangsokol* will allow each member of the audience to remember the dead as individuals, and intimately.

Some stars in the night sky are long dead by the time we see their light. Much like them, the bright souls of the Khmer Rouge's victims are visible through the darkness of history.

HIM SOPHY

In 1970, the Civil War started in my country and my family fled from one village to another. During day time, we were afraid of bombs, at night we were worried about the Khmer Rouge soldiers asking us for information. We were living in misery and fear.

The Khmer Rouge evacuated people from city and created a tragedy for the whole country. We were working like animals in the fields with not enough food to eat, and they were killing people savagely. In 1976, I was working in a mobile youth camp where I got only 18 kernels of corn to eat; everyone got the same. I couldn't walk far; I looked like an old man, but I was just a young boy.

I saw with my own eyes people being beaten to death with sticks. I saw people pulling carts like cows, emaciated from working long, tough hours with no food. My eldest brother was killed by Khmer Rouge soldiers—and later my fifth eldest brother was also murdered. There were countless memories from the dark time that was the Khmer Rouge regime.

Returning to today, we see still confrontations between world leaders, we see people threatening nuclear war—seemingly without thought for the consequences for people all over the world. My generation in Cambodia experienced war—I lost my family, I saw people killed. I don't want that again for anyone. As a composer, as well as a human being, I want to share these feelings through *Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia*. It is dedicated to all those who died during the war in Cambodia, and in wars and conflicts around the world. May their souls and spirits rest in peace. I wrote *Bangsokol* to help bring peace to the world—today and in the future.

TRENT WALKER

Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia offers several Buddhist ways of responding to the horrors of the Khmer Rouge. The most common response to death in Buddhism is to contemplate it directly. The libretto invokes impermanence, suffering, and the loss of all we think of as

“I” or “mine” as inexorable forces in human life. Buddhist rites for the dead emphasize the importance of recognizing our own mortality and reorienting our life in this light. Many Cambodians believe that such reflection on death brings wisdom to the living and benefits that can be dedicated to the deceased for their easeful passage to the next world.

Cambodian bangsokol rituals are traditionally performed for the sick as well as the dead. Such “skin-shedding” (bok sbaek) rites assume that the gift of the white shroud—the gift of one’s own body—embodies the regenerative power of life and the body’s capacity to heal. By taking on the part of a corpse, shedding their skin, and facing death with open eyes, the living may find peace. The libretto brings us face-to-face with violence and loss, providing an opportunity to remember, contemplate, and begin anew.

The libretto ends, as do most Buddhist rituals, with prayers of goodwill for all beings. This boundless compassion for all, including those who have harmed us, is an essential Buddhist response to violence. Such an extension of kindness is not the same as forgiveness and is not a replacement for justice. It is a recognition that hatred ceases only through love.

Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia honors the countless private rituals and acts of memorializing performed by Cambodians since 1979. Many of these rituals were bangsokol rituals performed on behalf of those who suffered and died under the Khmer Rouge. The requiem is therefore by no means entirely new or unique. It gives voice and respect to what Cambodians have already done over the past four decades to reflect on suffering, death, healing, goodwill, and the memory of those who perished.

RITUAL AND TRANSMISSION

Cambodian rituals are always composites; they are woven together from many threads: texts, sounds, objects, and people. Indeed, for any Cambodian ceremony, one cannot find a single person who can explain every step involved. The monks have their role, the lay ritual specialists theirs, the laywomen theirs, and so forth. The ritual is not complete if it is missing any of these roles, yet no one narrative or narrator captures the whole process. Moreover, Cambodian rituals, just like Cambodian visual and performing arts, are transmitted primarily through example and repetition, rather than through written records and explanations. This intimate transferral of culture relies on the trust between teachers and students, between the old and the young. This process of transmission continues to animate Cambodian culture today, both at home and in diaspora.

KPAL SPEAN

Kpal Spean is an 11th-century archaeological site in the Kulen hills in northern Cambodia. A shallow stream in the jungle reveals an array

of stone carvings in and around the riverbed, including various Hindu deities and hundreds of śivaliṅga, or aniconic representations of Śiva. In some cases these śivaliṅga are framed by a base, typically known as a yoni. Śaivism, the strand of Hinduism that holds Śiva as the supreme deity, was the dominant religious tradition of the court during the Angkorian period (9th–15th centuries CE). Śivaliṅga are thus found in many ancient Cambodian temples and were worshipped through chant, flowers, and liquid offerings, which would flow out the yoni for collection as blessings. At Kbal Spean, the water of the stream itself flows over the śivaliṅga, sanctifying one source of nourishment for the metropolis that once thrived in the flatlands below.

CLOTH BANNERS

One of the many art forms Cambodians cultivate in honor of ancestors are elaborate hanging banners, typically fashioned out of cloth and bamboo rods along with decorative sequins and tassels. These banners may be plain white (for funerals) or consisting of many colors (for other temple festivities, including

annual rites for the dead). They generally consist of a distinct head, an articulated or limbed midsection, and a split tail, and may be hung from a pole outside of a house or monastic building, or within the sanctuary of a temple. Stories describing their origins abound; in most cases these narratives draw attention to their striking crocodile-like form. The raising of such banners is a ritual event in and of itself, one either signaling the ascension of the departed to a more fortunate realm or simply in celebration of an act of religious merit.

SMOT

Cambodians recite Buddhist texts in a variety of ways. Most often, they chant with a steady, rhythmic monotone, which allows large groups of monks or laypeople to recite texts with unity, clarity, and solemnity. For certain occasions, including end-of-life rituals and funerals, Cambodians also perform an exceptionally melodic, expressive, and melismatic form of chant known as smot. This vocal style, typically delivered solo, conveys the emotional gravity of the texts most commonly performed in such rituals, namely reflections on the universality of pain, old age, and death as well as paeans in honor of our parents, the Buddha, and his teachings.

KONG SKOR

In parts of southeastern and northwestern Cambodia, along with Khmer-speaking provinces of northwestern Thailand, funerals

may be accompanied not only by smot chanting but also by a three- or four-member ensemble known as kong skor (“drums and gongs”) or by various onomatopoeic names, including kantoam ming and tum mong. In some cases, this ensemble is known as trai leak (“The Three Characteristics”), referring to the Buddhist teaching that all things are inherently painful, transient, and without essence. The three instrumentalists sit with their backs to one another, symbolizing the dissolution of warmth, vitality, and consciousness at death. When a singer joins the ensemble as the fourth member, he or she often uses lyrics drawn from lullabies and traditional wedding songs, whose meaning is reinterpreted in the wake of a loved one’s departure.

DIASPORA

Khmer-speakers today live not only in Cambodia but also in Thailand, Vietnam, the US, France, Australia, Canada, and other countries. A few hundred thousand Cambodians fled their homeland during and after the Khmer Rouge regime, with many eventually being resettled in the West after years in refugee camps, largely in Thailand. Cambodians in diaspora, including the children and grandchildren of those who fled in the 1970s and 1980s, engage in a wide variety of ways with their Khmer heritage. In recent decades, the arts have emerged as a powerful legacy for Cambodians abroad who seek to creatively engage with Cambodia, its history, and its gifts to humanity.

CREATIVE TEAM

RITHY PANH (director, designer, filmmaker; Cambodia) was born in Phnom Penh, but expelled from the capital by the Khmer Rouge as an 11-year-old in 1975. He escaped to Thailand in 1979, and lived for a time in a refugee camp in Mairut. He later made his way to Paris, and graduated from the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques. He returned to Cambodia in 1990, and splits his time between Paris and Phnom Penh. An internationally-acclaimed documentary director and screenwriter, he was named Asian Filmmaker of the Year by the Busan International Film Festival in 2013. He is the first Cambodian filmmaker nominated for an Oscar for *The Missing Picture* (2013). The same year, he received a prize in the “Un Certain Regard” category at the Cannes Festival. His documentary *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* was awarded the prestigious Albert Londres Prize in 2004. Most recently, he worked as producer for Angelina Jolie’s film *First They Killed My Father*, based on Loung Ung’s memoir, released in September 2017. Panh is also the founder of the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center in Phnom Penh, which makes film, photography, and sound archives on Cambodia publicly available, and trains a new generation of Cambodian filmmakers and multimedia technicians.

HIM SOPHY (composer; Cambodia) was born into a musical family in Prey Veng Province, Cambodia in 1963. He started learning the piano in 1972 in Phnom Penh, but was forced out of the city in 1975 for the duration of the Khmer Rouge regime. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, he returned to his musical studies at Cambodia’s Secondary School of Fine Arts. In 1985, he won a scholarship to the Moscow Conservatory of Music, where he studied and earned his PhD. He returned to Cambodia in 1998, and opened the Him Sophy School of Music in 2013. His previous works, including the acclaimed rock opera *Where Elephants Weep*, have demonstrated an unparalleled facility for bringing Western and Khmer musical worlds into intimate conversation. This time, Sophy combines a Western chamber orchestra and chorus with Khmer instrumentalists and vocalists. These traditional musical forms are crucial for honoring the dead; unfortunately, live performances are seldom heard in the capital and rapidly disappearing in the countryside.

TRENT WALKER (librettist; USA) is a young scholar of Southeast Asian Buddhist music. Trained in jazz and Western classical music, he spent several years in Cambodia studying with vocal masters Prum Ut, Koet Ran, and Yan Borin while working with Cambodian Living Arts. A former Buddhist novice monk, he regularly performs and gives lectures on the Cambodian Dharma song (smot) tradition of Buddhist chant. At present he is a PhD student in Buddhist studies at the University of California, Berkeley where his research focuses on Southeast Asian Buddhist liturgies in Khmer, Lao, Pali, and Thai.

GIDEON OBARZANEK (director of staging; Australia) is a director, playwright, and choreographer. He is also an artistic associate with the Melbourne Festival, chair of the Melbourne Fringe, and board member of Critical Path choreographic research center based in Sydney. In 1995, he founded the Australian dance company Chunky Move and was CEO and artistic director until 2012. Under his leadership the company established itself as one of the country’s most innovative, awarded, and internationally-recognized performing arts companies. Awards include Best Short Documentary for *Dance Like Your Old Man* (Melbourne IFF, Cinedans Festival), a Bessie Award for outstanding choreography and creation, and Australian Helpmann Awards for *Glow* and *Mortal Engine* (2009 Next Wave).

ANDREW CYR (music director; USA), a Grammy-nominated conductor, is a “prominent influence in the world of newly emerging music” (*Washington Post*) and a leader in the rapidly growing contemporary music scene. His passion for creating new platforms for outstanding emerging composers and performing artists led him to found Metropolis Ensemble in 2006. His work as conductor has been described by Esa-Pekka Salonen as “precise, rhythmically incisive and fluid. He made complex new pieces sound natural and organic.” In addition to championing new work from the next generation of composers, he also made his conducting debuts with the Colorado Symphony in 2013 and led the American Premiere of a new opera by David Bruce at New Victory Theater.

PERFORMERS

HIM SAVY & CHHORN SAM ATH (soloists; Cambodia) Him Savy is a singer, flutist, and teacher at the Secondary School of Fine Arts in





Phnom Penh. Chhorn Sam Ath is a well-known singer and actor who also teaches at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. In 2007, Sam Ath was invited to perform at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Both singers hail from famous artist families and have performed extensively in Cambodia, New Zealand, and the US.

KEO DORIVAN, KEO SONANKAVEI, KEO SOPHY, POV REAKSMEYMONY, SAY TOLA, SNGOUN KAVEI SEREY ROTH

Cambodian Ensemble (Cambodia)

The ensemble features some of the leading instrumentalists and vocalists in Cambodia. They have traveled and performed extensively around the world, in addition to some emerging musicians. Previous performances took members of the ensemble to China, Korea, Singapore, and the US. At present, some ensemble members work as independent artists while others teach at the Faculty of Music at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh.

CHUMVAN "BELLE" SODHACHIVY (performer and assistant to the director of staging; Cambodia) is a dancer/choreographer with Amrita Performing Arts, a contemporary dance and producing organization from Cambodia. Trained in Cambodian classical dance, Sodhachivy graduated in 2007 from the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) in Phnom Penh. With Amrita, she has participated in numerous contemporary dance workshops and residencies around the world and has been a featured dancer in many works by international directors and choreographers including Peter Sellars. Currently, Sodhachivy is also a dance lecturer at RUFA's Faculty of Choreographic Arts.

METROPOLIS ENSEMBLE is a dynamically evolving 21st-century orchestra. Dedicated to creating a future for classical music that is of and for the time we live in, Metropolis Ensemble's driving force is its founder, Grammy-nominated conductor Andrew Cyr. Metropolis Ensemble, through its unique collaborative process, exists to support ascending contemporary classical performers and composers, often engaging them with other bleeding-edge cultural innovators and artists. Frequently collaborating with artists who defy classification—such as Questlove, Deerhoof, Emily Wells, and Ragnar Kjartansson—Metropolis Ensemble has been presented by Lincoln Center, the Met, Creative Time, Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute,

Wordless Music, Celebrate Brooklyn, BAM, (Le) Poisson Rouge, and the Phillips Collection. Equally dedicated to making a difference in its local community, Metropolis Ensemble also runs an ambitious education program teaching music composition and creativity to hundreds of middle-school children. Metropolis Ensemble is excited to embark upon its 11th season, including a new recording with New Amsterdam Records (featuring the music of William Brittelle) and concerts at Symphony Space, (Le) Poisson Rouge, Arts Emerson, and the Met Museum with newly-commissioned music by Timo Andres and Caroline Shaw and the early-music ensemble Tenet. Metropolis Ensemble is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. metropolisensemble.org

TAIPEI PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER CHOIR

(Taiwan) was founded in 1972 and, through the efforts of its conductors, has put together an extensive repertoire and cultivated a reputation as one of the most prestigious choirs in Taiwan. From among 140 members of the larger chorus, a smaller 30-voice chamber choir has been established to tour and perform more selective musical works. The Taipei Philharmonic Chamber Choir (TPCC) has been to all continents of the world and performed in more than 30 cities.

CAMBODIAN LIVING ARTS

For almost 20 years, Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) has worked tirelessly to regrow Cambodia's arts sector and provide opportunities for artists to write the story of the country's future. Founded in 1998 by genocide survivor, musician, and peace advocate Arn Chorn-Pond, it initially focused on the preservation of endangered art forms and rituals. As 90% of Cambodia's artists did not survive the Khmer Rouge regime, the arts that had been transmitted between generations were in danger of being lost forever. Over the following two decades, the work of CLA evolved with the development of Cambodia and its rapidly re-emerging arts sector. They began to offer scholarships and fellowships, to create jobs for artists, and to support research, international exchanges, and networking. CLA's mission today is to be a catalyst in a vibrant arts sector, inspiring new generations. They are working to integrate arts and culture into the Cambodian education system, and to build links with arts communities around the region. Aiming to foster creativity and innovation in the sector, CLA sees arts and cultural expression as essential to a thriving future for Cambodia.

THE OFFICE PERFORMING ARTS + FILM

THE OFFICE performing arts + film is an independent curator and production company based in New York and London. It works in ongoing partnerships with festivals, venues, and institutions to create cultural programming that is unique and mission specific, with a particular emphasis on serving communities. Across all of our projects, we aspire to create new cultural platforms that resonate with audiences of all shapes and sizes. THE OFFICE is the Curator of Performing Arts and Film at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, programs the BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival, New York's longest running free outdoor performing arts festival, and created and programs the

CenterSeries at the Williams College '62 Center for Theatre and Dance. The past year has brought many wonderful and diverse highlights. In our continuing work with South African artist William Kentridge, we had the pleasure of producing his expansive project *Triumphs and Laments: A Project for Rome*, which revitalized the banks of the Tiber River with a semi-permanent 500-meter frieze. THE OFFICE is also in the midst of producing Carrie Mae Weems' powerful new piece *Grace Notes*, which examines themes of race and identity in our current political moment. The Office's projects are united by their commitment to the close link between art-making, community building, and social justice.

Production Team

Technical Director and Stage Manager: Brendon Boyd
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The team behind *Bangsokol* would like to give special thanks to our presenting partners; to Cambodian Living Arts' staff and Board of Directors; and to the many volunteers, supporters and friends who have made this production possible. We are immensely grateful to each individual donor who has contributed to making *Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* a reality.

Chorus and Orchestra

TAIPEI PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER CHOIR

Chi-Chun Hsu	Soprano
You-Jhong Liang	Soprano
Yi-Wu Lin	Soprano
Chia-Hsin Chen	Alto
SzuYun Hsieh	Alto
Hsiao-Shu Liu	Alto
Yung-Jye Lee	Tenor
Ming-Che Lu	Tenor
Yu-Chia Chen	Tenor
Fu-Hung Chuang	Bass
Ming-Mou Hsieh	Bass
Tzeng-Ming Li	Bass

METROPOLIS ENSEMBLE

Siwoo Kim	Concertmaster
Henry Wang	Violin
Amy Schroeder	Violin
Keiko Tokunaga	Violin
Jennifer Liu	Violin
Rachel Lee Priday	Violin
Erin Wight	Viola
Nate Schram	Viola
Caitlin Mary Lynch	Viola
Andrew Yee	Cello
Michael Katz	Cello
Sofia Nowik	Cello
Ashley Jackson	Harp
Andrew Roitstein	Double Bass
Sean Statser	Percussion

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Him Sophy School of Music, Phnom Penh
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We would like to sincerely thank our dedicated hosts who helped support our fundraising efforts and ensured we were able to engage audience and communities around this important piece.

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