

PAMINA DEVI: A Cambodian Magic Flute



Created by
SOPHILINE CHEAM SHAPIRO

Performed by
KHMER ARTS ENSEMBLE (CAMBODIA)

Commissioned by
NEW CROWNED HOPE, VIENNA AUSTRIA
Peter Sellars, Artistic Director

in co-production with
KHMER ARTS ACADEMY

in collaboration with
AMRITA PERFORMING ARTS

Executive Producer, New Crowned Hope:
Wiener Festwochen, Vienna

Premiere: December 8-13, 2006
Vienna, Austria



ON TOUR
USA FALL 2007 : INTERNATIONAL 2008 & 2009

Tour Management & Information

Deirdre Valente & Lisa Booth
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www.khmerartsacademy.org

Photos by John Shapiro and James Wasserman

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FALL 2007 USA PERFORMANCE CALENDAR

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27 *USA premiere*

Phillips Center
University of Florida Performing Arts, Gainesville, FL
www.performingarts.ufl.edu
(352) 392- 2787

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5

Memorial Hall
Carolina Performing Arts
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
www.carolinaperformingarts.org
(919) 843-3333

TUESDAY - SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9-14

The Joyce Theater
New York City
www.joycetheater.org
(212) 242-0800

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20 & 21

Power Center
University Musical Society, Ann Arbor MI
www.ums.org
(734) 764-2538

THURSDAY & FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25 & 26

Ina & Jack Kay Theatre
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
University of Maryland, College Park
www.claricesmithcenter.umd.edu
(301) 405.2787

Meet the artist activities are also scheduled at each venue. Contact venues for tickets and information.

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From the Press

ABOUT 'PAMINA DEVI' (VIENNA, DECEMBER 2006)

"Astonishing... Cheam Shapiro and her dancers and musicians tell the fairy tale of Tamino and Pamina, of Sarastro and the Queen of the Night so naturally that the material feels as if it was made especially for them. The potent movement vocabulary, musical rhythms and eye-popping costumes lend not only exotic flair to this 'Magic Flute;' they reveal hidden mysteries of this well-known opera." – [TANZ.AT](#)

"This Cambodian 'Magic Flute' is a must see. Cheam Shapiro's exotic realm of bejeweled dancers and formal patterns, full of elegance, filled the stage. Every finger of each backwardly arched hand, each raised foot while kneeling, all were accomplished with a calmly deliberate and beautifully fluid motion. This was an amazing experience." – [SALZBURGER NACHRICHTEN](#)

"An exuberantly acclaimed premiere....The narrative is made clearly understandable throughout its 100-minute duration. One is completely taken in." – [KURIER](#)

"A luxurious fantasy of visual pleasure. Here all of the elements of Khmer culture's court traditions match up with Mozart's vision. Its fairy tale charm, its symbolism, resplendent costumes, artful gestural language and its floating, flickering, rattling music, perfectly suits the theme, artfully melding cultures. – [KRONEN ZEITUNG](#)

"The thrill and adventure of this theatrical experience is watching Sophiline Cheam Shapiro astutely transform Mozart's psycho-mythological material into the mytho-poetic realm of the Apsara." – [DER STANDARD](#)

ABOUT 'SAMRITECHAK/OTHELLO'

"A beautiful and illuminating bridge between the two cultures." [LOS ANGELES TIMES](#)

"With 'Samritechak,' Shapiro adds a vibrant new work to the classical canon, while showing the work's universal appeal." [INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE](#)

"Authentic spectacle. A mesmerizing take on Othello. The piece literally shimmers, thanks to lush, traditional costumes of primary red, green, purple and gold, gold, gold everywhere, like the piles spun from straw by Rumpelstiltskin. The dance style itself is hypnotic: the shuffling, bent leg walk that simulates floating; the fingers and toes flexed in an unnatural S-shape; the mask-like facial expressions that shift with utmost subtlety. [ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER](#)

ABOUT 'SEASONS OF MIGRATION'

"A stunning new program of Cambodian dance and music. Shapiro's journey unfolds like a moving painting. Exquisite." [NEW YORK TIMES](#)

"...akin to watching moonlight play across water. Each incremental shift of attention — the suggestion of a shrug here, the slightest hiccup of a filigreed step there — was so finely modulated in this art of nuance that one readily accepted the all-female troupe as the celestial creatures of myth." [LOS ANGELES TIMES](#)

PAMINA DEVI: A Cambodian Magic Flute

Choreography & Direction, Costume Design, Lyrics & Traditional Music Arrangements by
Sophiline Cheam Shapiro

Set & Lighting Designs **Marcus Doshi**

Performed by **Khmer Arts Ensemble**

CAST (subject to change)

Pamina Devi (Pamina)	Ms. Pumtheara Chenda	
Preah Chhapoun (Tamino)	Ms. Kong Bonich	
Sayon Reachny (Queen of the Night)	Ms. Sam Sathya	
Preah Arun Tipadey (Sarastro)	Ms. Chao Socheata	
Noreak (Papageno)	Ms. Sao Phirom	
Thornea (Monostatos)	Ms. Sok Sokhan	
Krut (Garuda)	Ms. Sot Sovannady	
Nory (Papagena)	Ms. Khut Sothavy	
Baksei (Birds)	Ms. Khut Sothavy	Ms. Mot Pharan
	Ms. Um Sreyvan	
Sayon Reachny Seney (Devotees)	Ms. Chan Sopheap	Ms. Pum Molyta
	Ms. Sam Ratha	Ms. Sin Sotheary
Preah Arun Tipadey Seney (Devotees)	Ms. Lim Chanbormay	Ms. Long Chantheary
	Ms. Nong Sophanmay	Ms. Noun Kaza
	Ms. Rin Sreyleak	Ms. Sao Somaly
	Ms. Sot Sovannady	
VOCALISTS	Mr. Cheam Chantopheas	Ms. Chhorn Niboran
	Ms. Meas Sambo	Mr. Sim Chanmoly
MUSICIANS	Mr. Chum Kong	Mr. Nil Van Noeurn
	Mr. Nol Kol	Mr. Ros Sokun
	Mr. Sac Sothea	Mr. Som Vanna
DRESSER	Ms. Peng Yom	

Instrumentation: Roneat ek (high-pitched xylophone), gong thom (low-pitched circle gong), gong touch (high-pitched circle gong), gong (standing gong), sampho (double-headed drum), skor thom (standing drum), sralai thom (low-pitched oboe), sralai touch (high-pitched oboe).

Executive Producer	John Shapiro
Technical Director	Robert Henderson
Production Manager	Fred Frumberg
Company Manager	Kang Rithisal
Assistant to the Director	Chum Chanveasna
Touring General Manager	Deirdre Valente, Lisa Booth Management, Inc.

Performed in Khmer with English surtitles.

A note about Cambodia Names: When written or spoken, a person's family name precedes their first name. Too, the honorific is associated with a person's first name - e.g. Sam Sathya: Sam is the surname, and Ms. Sathya is the proper form of address.

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Synopsis

Act I

In the Realm of the Night, Sayon Reachny and her *seney* (devotees) dance happily with her daughter, Pamina Devi. They exit, leaving Pamina Devi dancing alone when the lecherous Thornea abducts her.

Sayon Reachny bitterly laments the loss of her daughter.

A *krut* (garuda bird) enters, chasing Preah Chhapoun. Before it can kill him, Sayon Reachny's devotees rescue him.

Sayon Reachny tells Preah Chhapoun that she was happy to save him, but is sad that she was unable to save her own daughter. He promises to bring Pamina Devi home. Sayon Reachny gives him a portrait of Pamina Devi and the flute of compassion for protection. He falls in love with the portrait.

Along the way to the Realm of the Sun, Preah Chhapoun meets the bird catcher Noreak, who laments that he has no soul mate. Preah Chhapoun invites him to join his journey, saying they'll both meet their true loves.

Act II

In the Realm of the Sun, Preah Arun Tipadey rules with logic and order. Thornea brings Pamina Devi before her father. Preah Arun Tipadey explains that he had her abducted for her own good and to protect her from her mother's feminine influence. He asks Thornea to guard her.

Thornea tries to seduce Pamina Devi. When rebuffed, he imprisons her with magic. Preah Chhapoun plays his flute and entrances the guards. Noreak enters and frees Pamina Devi. He then introduces her to Preah Chhapoun and they fall in love. Before they can flee, they are caught and brought before Preah Arun Tipadey. The King decides that the prince is worthy of his daughter. But in order to marry her, he must first undergo an initiation of silence. The guards take Preah Chhapoun and Noreak away.

Sayon Reachny visits Pamina Devi in the night and instructs her to kill her father. Pamina Devi refuses.

Pamina Devi runs to Preah Chhapoun for help, but he is too engaged in his initiation ritual to pay attention. She decides to leave him, transforming her mother's dagger from a symbol of betrayal into a symbol of her own strength. Realizing his error, Preah Chhapoun follows after Pamina Devi.

Sayon Reachny and her devotees catch the two lovers and condemn them for failing to follow her orders. Preah Arun Tipadey enters with his devotees. The two armies engage in battle. Frustrated at being caught in other people's conflicts, Noreak strikes the Gong of Consciousness; the battle freezes and dissipates.

Noreak, hopeless in his quest for love, frees his prized bird. The bird transforms into Nory, his soul mate.

Finally, Pamina Devi and Preah Chhapoun, Noreak and Nory dance in circles. Each couple joins together as one. They zig-zag into their future, determined to survive the difficult path of compromise and consideration ahead.

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Of Roles and their Players

In Cambodia, dance is more than a mirror of society; it is an agent of history. Dance has been a primary medium of prayer and prophecy, an instrument of kingship, the expression of colonial defiance, a vehicle of modern geo-politics, an object of the Khmer Rouge's genocide and the refuge of many of its victims. It is an integral component of spiritual life and rites of passage and a popular form of entertainment for people the world over. In its performance, dance embodies the living chronicle of a people, transferred and enriched from one generation to the next.

Cambodian classical dance is generally performed by women who trace their art to carvings of celestial dancers on temples dating back 1,000 years to a time when what is now Cambodia was the center of the vast Angkorian Empire, and to stone inscriptions which pre-date those carvings. The dancers fashioned in stone were depicted in the heavens, dancing for the gods. Their earthly counterparts - dancers of the Kingdom of Cambodia - have for centuries been linked both to religious beliefs and the monarchy.

Cambodian dances of this tradition are populated with princes and princesses, male and female deities, giants (sometimes evil but also wise) and monkeys (often good-hearted). The



characters in Cheam Shapiro's *Pamina Devi* embody two of four archetypes: *neang* (female), *nearong* (male). Cheam Shapiro also revives a masked character – the Krut – or Garuda bird, for the first time in 50 years.

Kinetically, *Neang* play out Cambodia's complex and formal vocabulary of gestures and movements with the highest degree of refinement and grace. *Nearong* are a bit more open in their stance and arm placement.

Costumes for all are elaborate affairs made of silks, woven through by hand with silver and gold threads, sequined and bejeweled and complemented by gold arm bands, headdresses, anklets and bracelets.

Costumes provide important clues to gender. Males wear pantaloons (*kben*) rather than skirts and feature epaulets on their shoulders.

Pictured: Pamina Devi (left) and Preah Chhapoun in *Pamina Devi*. Photo by John Shapiro

Information in this section is drawn, in part, from essays published in 2001 as part of *Dance: The Spirit of Cambodia's contextual web site*. Visit www.asiasource.org/cambodiain/arts

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About The Work

In *Pamina Devi*, Sophiline Cheam Shapiro turns one eye toward Mozart's operatic exploration of enlightened change in the aftermath of the American and French Revolutions and another eye toward her own experience with 'enlightened' change and revolution, which came as the direct result of the cruelty and suffering inflicted by Cambodia's brutal Khmer Rouge regime (1975-79).



Sam Sathya as Sayon Reachny and Sam Savin as Pamina Devi. Photo by James Wasserman.

Working from within the conservative structures of classical Cambodian dance, Shapiro sets her piece in a mytho-poetic time and space and speaks through an elaborate vocabulary of refined gestures, bejeweled garments and percussive music. But she also pushes the form through the use of unexpected formations, an expanded kinetic vocabulary, reconceived musical arrangements and instrumentation, and innovations in costuming and settings.

I am a child of transformation. Having survived four radical regime changes, I view utopian ideas of societal and political transformation with caution.

Yet on a personal level I have found transformation to be a way of transcending the crippling circumstances that all that societal turmoil leaves in its wake. In the aftermath of Pol Pot's Killing Fields, I transformed myself from a child with a distended belly and head lice into a celestial nymph by studying, performing and entering the magic and mythology of the thousand-year-old art of classical dance. Within a few years, I, along with a whole new generation of artists, was touring my country and the world, reminding everyone that Cambodia is the heir to more enduring legacies than auto-genocide. A decade later, having exhausted the opportunities available to me in Cambodia, I immigrated to the USA, where I studied and explored and transformed myself from a standard-bearing performer into a choreographer who infuses a venerable form with new ideas and who turns a traditional tool of the

powerful into a vehicle for personal interpretation. Now I have returned to Cambodia, well-spring of my life's work.

In some ways, I feel like a lotus shoot that has struggled through mud and murky water to emerge above the surface where it blossoms in sunlight. I find a personal resonance in Pamina's tortuous journey, which, like mine, allows her to overcome betrayals and transforms her into someone who transcends the darkness from which she is born. – *Sophiline Cheam Shapiro*

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Background & Context



Classical dance is Cambodia's most enduring performing art form – a living testimony of a potent and significant cultural heritage. Originally a vehicle for worship in the temples of ancient Angkor, this world-renowned and highly stylized aesthetic is a repository of history and belief. Transferred from generation to generation, it is a form primarily set on women and remains a powerful source of identity, rebirth and vitality today.

In the 20th century, Cambodia's classical performance forms were under extreme stress, first as one of the few instruments of indigenous power under colonial rule, then as

a despised scapegoat of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime of the late 1970's, and then as a pawn in the civil war of the 1980s.

During the Khmer Rouge era (1975-1979) classical dance was banned. Alongside Cambodia's intellectuals, artisans and teachers, as many as 90 percent of the dance's practitioners perished from disease, overwork, starvation and slaughter.

In the immediate aftermath of this devastation, a small number of survivors returned to Phnom Penh to eagerly train a new generation of performers that was soon touring the country and abroad. This was a bold declaration that Cambodian culture would be known for more enduring legacies than auto-genocide.

At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fled war and poverty for teeming refugee camps along the Thai border. Under the *ad hoc* leadership of surviving teachers, dancers and musicians there, each camp formed a dance troupe (or troupes) and performances became an important part of camp life. When Cambodian refugees were resettled abroad, these new practitioners formed dance troupes in their adopted communities. Dance that until recently had been performed rarely outside royal palace walls now became a powerful expression for all Cambodians as they sought to embrace the positive aspects of their culture and affirm and transmit their identity.

During the 1980s and much of the 1990s, the form's greatest focus was on reconstruction and preservation. A new generation of dancers was trained in Cambodia and important repertory revived.

Following democratic elections in 1993, Cambodia emerged from more than two decades of war, terror and cultural and political isolation. As a result, dancers and musicians from Cambodia were once again free to share the rich and ancient performing arts forms with the entire world. During this same period, some overseas Cambodian artists returned to their homeland to help infuse venerable forms with new ideas and new energy. This post-KR generation of artists began to push the boundaries of conservation toward creation. One of these artists, Cambodian-American Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, has since led troupes in groundbreaking new works in classical dance – *Samritechak/Othello* – which toured to the Hong Kong Arts Festival, to the USA, and to the Venice Biennale in 2003, and *Seasons of Migration* which toured to major USA venues in 2005.

The USA is home to more than 175,000 Cambodians, the largest population of self-identified Khmer outside of Southeast Asia. Among this group are a number of world-recognized artists. Ease of travel, communications technologies and the need to share scarce resources have combined to create a new cultural paradigm. Cambodia's contemporary performing arts are now made and shared across national borders, combining living traditions with contemporary concerns, forms and methods.

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Who's Who

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro (artistic director) is a groundbreaking choreographer, dancer, vocalist and educator whose challenging work has infused the venerable classical form with new ideas and energy. Her choreography includes SAMRITECHAK (2000), THE GLASS BOX (2002) and SEASONS OF MIGRATION (2005), which she has set on Cambodia's finest performing artists and toured to three continents. Notable venues include Cal Performances, the Hong Kong Arts Festival, New York's Joyce Theater and the Venice Biennale. PAMINA DEVI had its world premiere at the Schonbrunn Palace Theater as part of Vienna's New Crowned Hope Festival (2006). Her most recent project, a collaboration with composer Chinary Ung for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, is scheduled to premiere at Walt Disney Concert Hall in November 2008. She has received numerous honors, including Asia 21, Creative Capital, Durfee, Guggenheim and Irvine Dance Fellowships, as well as the Nikkei Asia Prize for Culture. She was a member of the first generation to train at and graduate from Phnom Penh's School of Fine Arts after the fall of Pol Pot, and she has studied dance ethnology at the undergraduate and graduate level at UCLA's Department of World Arts & Cultures.



Sophiline Cheam Shapiro with her twin sons. Photo by Scott Streble.

Cast The Khmer Arts Ensemble is a 31-member independent classical dance and music troupe that specializes in the original choreography of its artistic director, Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, as well as rarely performed works from the classical canon. The Ensemble tours internationally and performs at its own breathtaking pavilion-style theater in Takhmao, Cambodia. Its performing artists were all trained at Phnom Penh's National School of Fine Arts (Cambodia's official fine arts conservatory), the Royal University of Fine Arts and the Royal Palace.

Khmer Arts Academy is dedicated to fostering the vitality of Cambodian arts and culture. Based in Long Beach, CA, and Takhmao, Cambodia, and co-directed by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro and John Shapiro, the Academy produces Cheam Shapiro's works, houses a dance school and both amateur and professional companies. Visit www.khmerartsacademy.org.

Amrita Performing Arts is an international performing arts production company based in Cambodia and California and founded and directed by Fred Frumberg. Derived from the Sanskrit word meaning 'eternity', Amrita works to sustain all forms of traditional Cambodian performing arts, increase capacity building in production management and administration, and promote and assist in creation of new works. Visit www.amritaperformingarts.org.

Lisa Booth Management (Lisa Booth, President; Deirdre Valente, Vice President) is a producing and management firm based in NYC. LBMI tours artists worldwide, produces US tours for artists from abroad, and initiates and manages special projects. Since 1983, LBMI programs have taken place in more than 300 cities in 30 countries on six continents. LBMI co-produced *Dance: The Spirit of Cambodia* in 2001, toured Sophiline Cheam Shapiro's *Seasons of Migration* in 2005 and serves as General Touring Manager for *Pamina Devi*.

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Glossary

Angkor The vast and powerful empire that spread over much of present-day mainland Southeast Asia from the 9th to the 15th centuries, ruled by Khmer kings. Centered in what is now northwestern Cambodia, its most famous symbol is the magnificent Angkor Wat (temple) which distinguishes Cambodia's national flag (right).



Baksei In *Pamina Devi*, the captive birds of Noreak, the bird-catcher.

Kben Worn by all performers in dance classes and rehearsals, and as costuming for males and giants, it is fashioned from large, single piece of cloth that is tightly wrapped around the lower body and secured with a belt to make a kind of pantaloons.

Khmer Majority ethnic group of Cambodia. Commonly used interchangeably with "Cambodian" in reference to language, food, music, etc.

Khmer Rouge Communist group that ruled Cambodia from 1975 to early 1979. During their time in power, the country lost almost a quarter of its population to disease, starvation, overwork, torture, and execution. It is estimated that up to 90% of Cambodia's artists, intellectuals and teachers died during this three-year period.

Krut A garuda, king of the birds, one of three principal animal Hindu deities and a masked character revived for *Pamina Devi* (pictured right).



Neang Generic term for a female character in classical dance.

Nearong Generic term for a male character in classical dance.

Pin Peat Music ensemble made up of xylophones, gongs, cymbals, drums, and an oboe-like instrument, that accompanies classical dance, Buddhist temple ceremonies, and shadow puppet plays.

Preah Khmer word meaning "divine" when preceding the name of a deity and "majesty" or "highness," when preceding a high-ranking member of a royal family.

Robam kbach boran Khmer name for Cambodian classical dance whose roots are traced back to ancient inscriptions and carvings on temples that refer to dancers performing for the gods, and for the kings. Also called Court Dance.



Map and flag of Cambodia courtesy CIA World Factbook; Krut photo by John Shapiro.