



***Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* to premiere  
nearly 40 years after the Cambodian genocide  
Powerful new work by Rithy PANH and HIM Sophy,  
featuring music, visuals, and movement,  
debuts at the Melbourne Festival on 13 October 2017**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PHNOM PENH, 24 2017 – Oscar-nominated director Rithy PANH (*The Missing Picture*) and acclaimed composer HIM Sophy – two survivors of the Khmer Rouge – join forces to create *Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia*. An extraordinary new piece featuring music, film, movement, and voice, it pays tribute to the two million killed in the nation's genocide (1975-1979). "*Bangsokol* is a vital act of memory," says PANH. "It is an attempt to give dignity to the dead; to reconcile with our own past; to give a face and a name to the victims, to give their souls peace." This new requiem, unprecedented in form and composition, features ceremonial elements from *bangsokol*, Buddhist funeral rites performed to give rest to the spirits of the dead, as well as traditional Cambodian music and Western classical forms. The world premiere of *Bangsokol* will be presented at the Melbourne Festival on October 13 and 14, 2017 before being seen in New York and Boston in December, and in Europe and Asia in 2018. The 65-minute piece, commissioned by non-profit organization Cambodian Living Arts (CLA), with co-commissioner Asia TOPA / Arts Centre Melbourne, will return to Phnom Penh in 2019 – 40 years since the fall of the Khmer Rouge.

The narrative of *Bangsokol* begins in the heavens and moves to a countryside funeral. It extends into remembrance of the horrors of the Khmer Rouge period, and culminates with the central Buddhist rite for the deceased, bringing peace and the acceptance of impermanence. Rithy PANH's film projections, capturing defining moments from Cambodia's history, feature a blend of surreal imagery and archival footage. HIM Sophy's score is performed by Khmer soloists HIM Savy and CHHORN Sam Ath; a six-piece ensemble of traditional Cambodian instrumentalists; and a Western orchestra and choir. The libretto was written by Trent WALKER, a scholar of Southeast Asian Buddhist music. Music Director Andrew CYR leads the orchestra. Melbourne Festival Associate Director Gideon OBARZANEK is Director of Staging, drawing

the various elements and the audience together through movement, making *Bangsokol* a truly immersive experience.

*Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* is the latest major production commissioned by Cambodian Living Arts, an organization working for more than 20 years in Cambodia to support the re-emergence and development of the country's arts and culture sector. CLA hopes that *Bangsokol* - a profoundly moving and relevant work about conflict and healing - will also bring global attention to the quality of contemporary Cambodian art. CLA is building capacity in Cambodia so that this artistically complex and challenging piece will be performed in the country in 2019, including supporting the development of a local chamber orchestra. *Bangsokol* ends with a message of hope: that even after atrocities, the transmission of arts and culture is not only possible but essential, a conviction that has been at the heart of CLA's work since its founding in 1998.

HIM Sophy said,

"When I composed the requiem, I re-lived the feelings I had during the Khmer Rouge times. It was hell on earth. It is important for the requiem to be shown around the world so that everyone can see that tragedy is a shared experience. There is hope in creation. I always tell people, 'Remember, never forget. Protect the future from repeating the past.'"

Rithy PANH added,

"Some have said that poetry after atrocity is not possible anymore, yet we need to have it. We must continue to create. We can't start mourning without knowing how, and part of knowing how is to accept something very painful, something unexplainable. Art such as *Bangsokol* may bring us answers, help us accept our pain and loss. Yet, it is more than an act of remembrance, it's an act of transmission and brings humanization - something which the Khmer Rouge attempted to take away from us."

Phloeun PRIM, Executive Director of Cambodian Living Arts, said,

"I'm thrilled that CLA, as commissioner and executive producer, can help tell this vital - and today, exceptionally relevant - story from Cambodia. *Bangsokol* shows the resilience of Cambodian people - artistry remains alive and now flourishes, despite a genocide and an attempt to eradicate our culture. *Bangsokol* offers that sense of healing, personal reconciliation, and renewed hope for the future, to Cambodians across generations living all over the world. I hope that those in other post-conflict nations will be inspired by this piece, and it can support their own healing, and the continued transmission of their cultures."

*Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* is a global collaboration centered in Cambodia, based on an original idea by CLA co-founder Charley TODD. It has been musically developed in collaboration with Grammy-nominated Metropolis Ensemble. Elena PARK, of Lumahai Productions, acts as Project Advisor. The Taipei Philharmonic Chamber Choir will form the chorus in the initial run of performances. In Melbourne, the orchestra will be drawn from leading players who perform frequently with Melbourne's established performing arts organizations, and in the USA, Metropolis Ensemble will perform. Cambodia's Amrita Performing Arts worked as line producer and company manager in Cambodia, and Bophana Center provided archival material and technical expertise. The producer is THE OFFICE performing arts + film. The Australian Embassy to Cambodia has provided invaluable support.

## *Performance Dates*

**13 & 14 October 2017:** WORLD PREMIERE, *Melbourne, Australia* | Melbourne Festival, Arts Centre Melbourne, Hamer Hall

**15 & 16 December 2017:** *New York, USA* | Next Wave Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Howard Gilman Opera House

**19 & 20 December 2017:** *Boston, USA* | ArtsEmerson, Robert J. Orchard Stage

**16 May 2018:** *Paris, France* | Cité de la musique, Philharmonie de Paris, Concert Hall

**2019 (details TBC):** *Phnom Penh, Cambodia* | 40 years since the fall of the Khmer Rouge

For further information, please see [bangsokol.cambodianlivingarts.org](http://bangsokol.cambodianlivingarts.org). For an online media kit, including photos and video, visit [bangsokol.cambodianlivingarts.org/press-media/](http://bangsokol.cambodianlivingarts.org/press-media/)

## *Notes for editors*

### **HIM Sophy | Composer**

Dr. HIM Sophy 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 gained 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.

### **Rithy PANH | Director, Designer, Filmmaker**

Rithy PANH was born in Phnom Penh, but expelled from the capital by the Khmer Rouge as a 11-year-old child 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, France, and graduated from the *Institut des hautes études cinématographiques*. He returned to Cambodia in 1990, and now 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 ever to be nominated for an Oscar, for *The Missing Picture* in 2013. In 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 Luong 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.

### **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, they 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.

### **Acknowledgements**

#### **Commissioner**

Cambodian Living Arts

#### **Producer**

THE OFFICE performing arts + film

#### **Co-Commissioners**

Taipei Philharmonic Foundation for Culture and Education

Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM)

Asia TOPA / Arts Centre Melbourne

#### **Partners**

Amrita Performing Arts

Bophana Audiovisual Resource Centre

Him Sophy School of Music

Metropolis Ensemble

Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music

#### **Institutional Donors**

Ministry of Culture, Taiwan (R.O.C.)

Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Australian Embassy in Cambodia

U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh

Cambodia Film Commission

#### **Supporters**

Narrowcasters

Roar Footage

EVA Airways