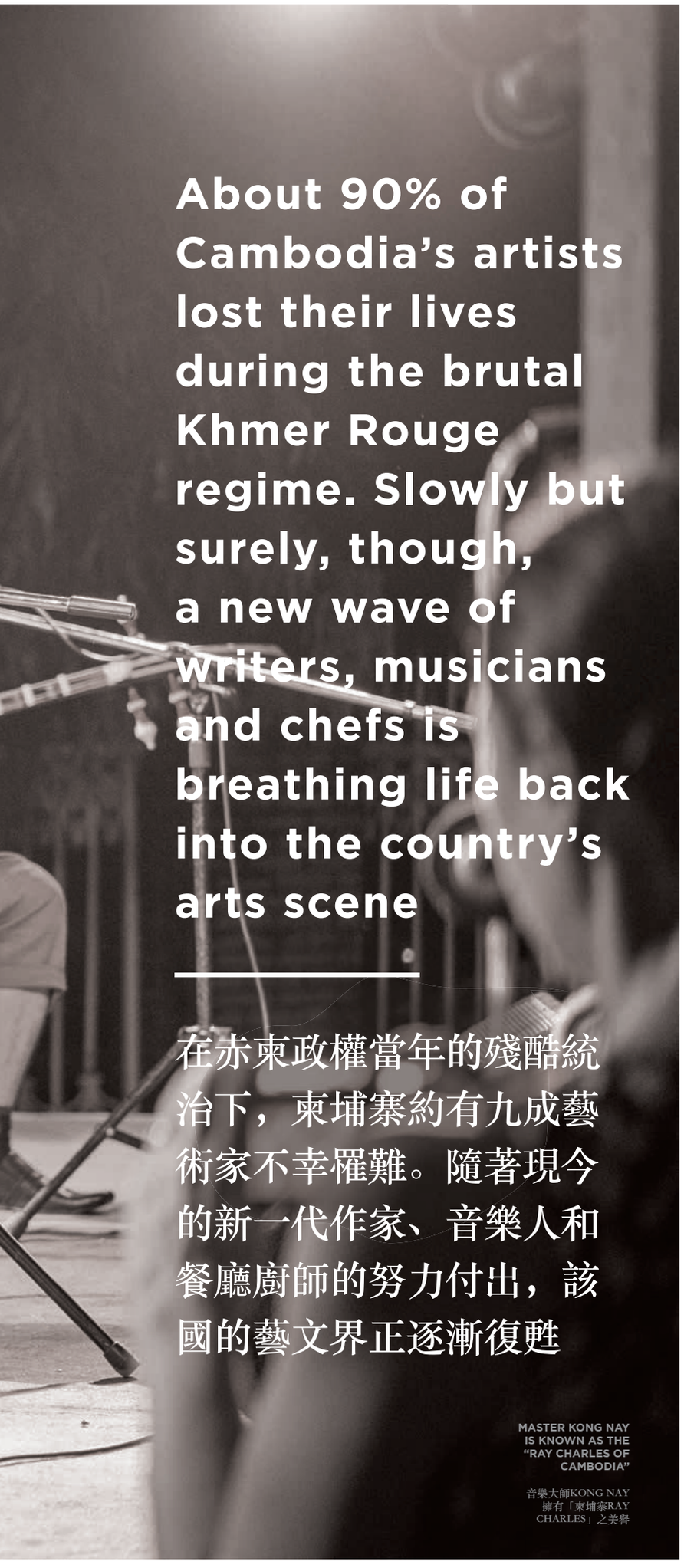
鳳凰再生

The rise of the phoenix

BY **JAMIE FULLERTON**
PHOTOGRAPHY **ANTOINE RAAB**



About 90% of Cambodia's artists lost their lives during the brutal Khmer Rouge regime. Slowly but surely, though, a new wave of writers, musicians and chefs is breathing life back into the country's arts scene

MASTER KONG NAY IS KNOWN AS THE "RAY CHARLES OF CAMBODIA"

音樂大師KONG NAY擁有「柬埔寨RAY CHARLES」之美譽

It was just past sunset in the riverside town of Kampot, a three-hour drive from Phnom Penh, and on a small outdoor stage, an elderly man in sunglasses had his audience in the palm of his hand. Also in his hand was an enormous guitar-like instrument with a sword protruding from its neck.

Master Kong Nay, known as "the Ray Charles of Cambodia" due to both his blindness and his blinding musical skills, played his two-stringed *chapei dong veng* and blasted out clucky vocals in the leafy garden of the Lotus Pond Villa.

The audience – expats, curious locals and English-speaking Cambodian schoolkids bussed in from the capital – were lucky to see him. Festival organiser Julien Poulson told the crowd that the musician almost met the same fate as many of his peers during the brutal 1975-1979 reign of the Khmer Rouge, when millions of civilians were killed. Kong Nay was tied up and marked for execution, only to be freed when Vietnamese troops arrived to topple his captors before they could swing the axe.

The musician was one of the biggest draws at the third annual Kampot Readers & Writers Festival back in November last year.

While modest compared to similar ones in the region, the festival is an important indicator that the arts in Cambodia have emerged from the long shadow of genocide. Touching on everything from traditional dance and music to hard-edged spoken word poetry to even back-to-basics Khmer cuisine, Cambodian artists today are energising one of Southeast Asia's most dynamic creative landscapes. These are some of the heavy-hitters to watch.

在赤柬政權當年的殘酷統治下，柬埔寨約有九成藝術家不幸罹難。隨著現今的新一代作家、音樂人和餐廳廚師的努力付出，該國的藝文界正逐漸復甦

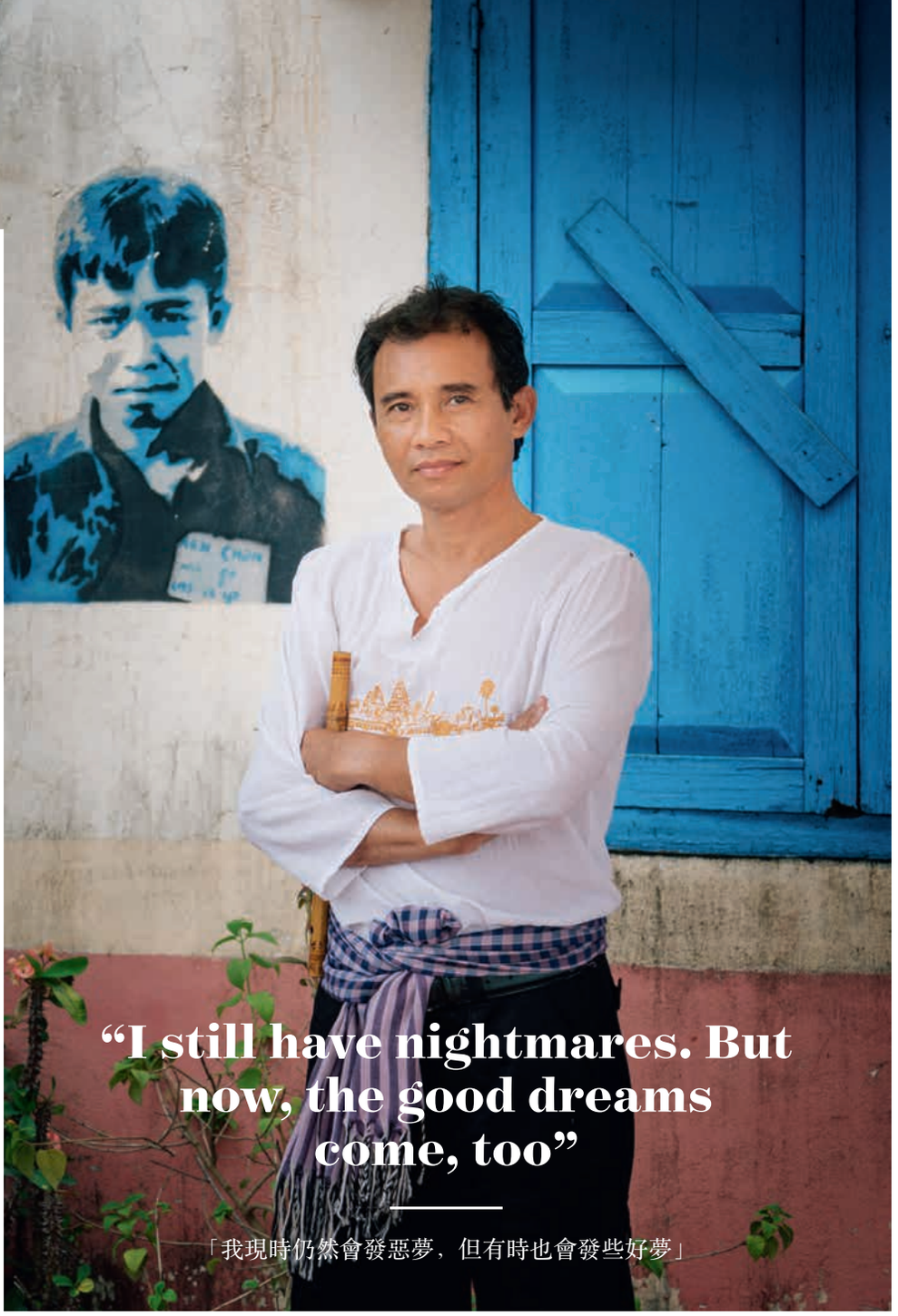
在距離金邊三小時車程的河畔城鎮貢布，夕陽剛剛下山。小型戶外舞台上，一位戴著墨鏡的年老男士，吸引了大批熱情的觀眾。他拿著類似結他的大型樂器，其刀狀結構從琴頸上伸延出來。

音樂大師Kong Nay由於雙目失明，再加上令人目眩的彈奏指法，故此擁有「柬埔寨Ray Charles」之美譽。他身處Lotus Pond Villa的翠綠花園，一面彈奏兩弦樂器長臂琴（chapei dong veng），一面以粗獷的嗓音放聲高歌。

觀眾之中有外國人，有好奇的本地人，也有懂得說英語的柬埔寨學童，專程從首都乘坐巴士前來——能夠一睹大師風采，實屬難能可貴。活動主辦者Julien Poulson告訴各人，這位音樂家險些遭遇同輩藝術家的悲慘命運。在1975年至1979年赤柬統治時期，該國多達九成的藝術家及數以百萬計的平民均被殺害。當時，Kong Nay已被縛起和標上記號，準備接受處死，幸好越南援軍及時趕至，推翻獨裁政權，他才能刀下逃生。

Kong Nay是去年11月舉行的第三屆貢布閱讀及寫作藝術節的重頭嘉賓之一。在這個盛產胡椒的寧靜小鎮，藝術節邀請了近80位來自柬埔寨和世界各地的作家、講者和音樂人，於不同地點聚首交流。

相比區內同類型盛事，貢布閱讀及寫作藝術節算是較為低調的一個，但也被評為過於著重外國觀眾。無論如何，這項活動絕對是一個重要的指標，顯示該國藝壇終於在種族清洗的陰霾下得到重生。今時今日的柬埔寨藝術家，領域涵蓋傳統舞蹈與音樂、風格狂放的詩歌朗讀，甚至是反璞歸真的高棉菜式，為這個東南亞最具朝氣的創意社群注入源源活力。以下為大家介紹幾位才華橫溢的藝術家。



THE ACTIVIST
ARN CHORN-POND

Under the Khmer Rouge’s campaign of mass extermination, Cambodia’s traditional art forms came close to extinction. But nearly two decades later, the newly founded Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) began work to rehabilitate these art forms and ensure their long-term survival.

The artist and activist behind CLA is Arn Chorn-Pond. Born in 1966, Arn Chorn-Pond was 11 when he was forced into a child labour camp by the Khmer Rouge, and later into becoming a child soldier. He avoided execution largely because his talent for playing the flute pleased his guards. Having survived the ordeal, with his story told by US author Patricia McCormick in the 2012 book *Never Fall Down*, his life is now rather different.

The CLA has created symphonic shows such as *A Requiem for Cambodia: Bangsokol,* which has toured in Australia and the US, and will be showing in Paris in May. Most nights in Phnom Penh’s National Museum, a charming showcase of young CLA dancers’ talents takes place on stage. Before each performance, Arn Chorn-Pond talks about the importance of CLA’s work to the audience, via video message.

Running the organisation has been important for his own mental health, too. “I still have nightmares: the Khmer Rouge come after me, shooting,” he says. “But now good dreams come, too. I run to the children, playing music and singing. My dream is for young people to have their own dreams, running wild with no guns in their hands.”

社運分子
ARN CHORN-POND

在赤柬大屠殺的陰影下，柬埔寨傳統藝術一度瀕臨絕跡。接近20年後，藝術團體Cambodian Living Arts（CLA）得以成立，致力復辟不同藝術形式，並確保在新世代的支持下得以延續。

CLA的幕後功臣，就是藝術家兼社運人士Arn Chorn-Pond。生於1966年的Arn Chorn-Pond，11歲時被迫成為赤柬政權下的童工，後來更成為童兵。他之所以逃過處死的命運，大概多得他擅長吹奏笛子娛樂群眾，守衛才放他一馬。熬過多番苦難後，現在他的人生已變得截然不同，其故事也在美國作家Patricia McCormick的2012年著作《Never Fall Down》中歷歷重現。

CLA的作品包括多媒介舞台製作《A Requiem for Cambodia: Bangsokol》，最近在墨爾本、波士頓和紐約盛大上演，五月亦會移師至巴黎。每天晚上，CLA的年輕舞者踏上金邊國家博物館的舞台，施展渾身解數。於去年11月的貢布藝術節上，Arn Chorn-Pond及其團隊呈獻了CLA的最新作品《Khmer Magic Music Bus》，這項小型巡迴演出，旨在把傳統音樂和口述故事的藝術帶到柬埔寨每個省份。每場表演之前，Arn Chorn-Pond都會透過錄像向觀眾講解CLA工作的重要性。

營運這個機構，對他的精神健康也有裨益。「我有時仍然會發惡夢，夢見赤柬軍在追殺我，向我開槍。」他說。「但現在我也會發些好夢，夢裡我一邊演奏歌唱，一邊靠近孩子。我渴望讓年輕人追尋自己的夢想，自由自在地奔跑，手上沒有一支槍。」

cambodianlivingarts.org

新晉作家
THEANCHHAY BUN SEAVLING LIM

貢布藝術節其中兩位最前衛的作家，就是其首屆青年作家大賽的雙冠軍——來自金邊的Seavling Lim（左圖右）和Theanchhay Bun。

該比賽參加者可選擇以高棉語或英語撰寫故事（Seavling Lim和Theanchhay Bun均選擇以英語寫作），得獎者的作品會刊登於藝術節網站。該獎項地位雖然未及布克文學獎，並且不設獎金，但兩位勝出者認為，這是一個讓他們公開發表創作的罕有渠道。

現年18歲的Seavling Lim撰寫了一個短篇故事，內容描述未來所有人類都配戴面具示人，造成千人一面的景況，故事靈感源自一系列反烏托邦作品，如英國編劇Charlie Brooker的電視劇《黑鏡》。至於21歲的Thenchhay Bun則撰寫了一個三輪車伕如何面對家庭悲劇的荒涼故事。

柬埔寨公立學校的輟學率偏高，英語仍未普及。故此，接受私立教育的Seavling Lim和Thenchhay Bun均承認，他們都屬於有機會接觸外國文學的極少數人。「能夠翻譯成高棉語的作品，就只局限於《哈利波特》這類書籍。」Seavling Lim說。「而且該翻譯水平強差人意。」

她又補充，朋輩之中很少人像她這樣喜愛閱讀，故此貢布藝術節絕對是發揮創意的大好機會。「這是一個孤獨的興趣。這裡只有少數人喜歡閱讀文學和寫作。」她說。「再者，父母也毫不支持，他們總是催促子女當醫生之類的工作。」

Thenchhay Bun樂觀地表示，文學終有一天會在柬埔寨社會植根，而貢布藝術節和暹粒新成立的高棉文學節，就是正面的一步。

「我們生長於封閉的文化，電視等一切資訊都受到約束。」Thenchhay Bun解釋。「年輕人若要放聲批判世界的糟糕狀況，實非易事。這類型的活動，我在柬埔寨還是第一次見到。」

kampotwritersfestival.org

THE EMERGING WRITERS
THEANCHHAY BUN AND SEAVLING LIM

Two of the most forward-thinking writers at the Kampot festival were the joint winners of the event's inaugural young writers' contest: Theanchhay Bun and Seavling Lim, both from Phnom Penh.

Entrants could submit stories in either Khmer or English (both writers chose the latter), with the winners published on the festival's website. It's not exactly the Booker Prize, but the winners say it provided them with a rare public creative outlet.

Eighteen-year-old Lim wrote a short story about a future in which people are rendered anonymous by wearing masks, inspired by dystopian works such as Charlie Brooker's TV show *Black Mirror*. Bun, who is 21, wrote a bleak tale about a cyclo driver dealing with family tragedy.

With public school dropout rates in the country high and English not widely spoken, Lim and Bun, who were privately educated, acknowledge that they are part of a small percentage of people in Cambodia able to access foreign literature. "The only translations to Khmer are for things like *Harry Potter*," says Lim, "And they're rough translations."

She adds that she finds it hard to find peers who share her interest in reading, so the Kampot festival was a welcome outlet.

But Bun is hopeful that literature will get embedded more deeply in Cambodian society, and says that events such as the Kampot festival and Siem Reap's new Khmer Literary Festival are positive steps.

"We're raised in a culture in which TV, information, everything is controlled," Bun explains. "For a young person wanting to say something about how the world is problematic, it can be hard. I've never seen anything similar to these events in Cambodia."

THREE GREAT PHNOM PENH LITERARY SPOTS 金邊三大文化勝景

D'S BOOKS
Street 240 and 178; dsbookscambodia.com

Cosy and stuffed to the ceiling with secondhand books from a huge span of genres, D's is a prime spot for literary exploration. They also serve drinks and have seats for sipping and reading.

這間書店環境舒適，當中的二手書籍堆積如山，類型甚廣，是探索文學的絕佳去處。店內備有飲品供應和座位區，方便顧客一邊喝咖啡，一邊閱讀。

NATIONAL LIBRARY
Street 92

The Khmer Rouge destroyed most of the books in the National Library of Cambodia, but today it houses a healthy collection of English and French tomes.

柬埔寨國家圖書館於1924年建成，單單是其建築便值得一看。赤柬於1970年代後期摧毀了館內大部分書籍，但現時館藏仍有不少英文和法文巨著。

HUN SEN LIBRARY
64 Street 200; fb.com/hunsenlibrupp

Part of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, this fascinating little place was designed by the late Vann Molyvann: the godfather of the New Khmer Architecture movement.

作為金邊皇家大學的一部分，這間面積不大但魅力過人的圖書館是由新高棉建築運動之父Vann Molyvann設計。該運動在首都金邊催生出多座矚目建築物。

> “When I danced, I felt graceful, not desperate. It gave me pride about being a Cambodian woman ”

> 「每當起舞時，我都自覺漂亮優雅，絕望感一掃而空。舞蹈讓身為柬埔寨女性的我深感自豪」

THE CHOREOGRAPHER
SOPHILINE CHEAM SHAPIRO

Shortly after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, who was forced out of the city at the age of eight, enrolled in the Phnom Penh School of Fine Arts. Learning classical dance from the masters who survived the genocide, she found peace after the chaos.

“My hair had lice and I was malnourished,” she says. “But the movement, the spirituality, the beauty... when I danced I felt graceful, not desperate. It gave me pride about being a Cambodian woman.”

She has gone on to become the artistic director of a hugely respected dance organisation, Khmer Arts, headquartered in Takhmao province, which has raised the profile of Khmer dance forms both at home and abroad. Shapiro’s original adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, *Samritechak*, in 2000, was received enthusiastically in her home country, then abroad, helping her become a world-renowned choreographer.

Like most Cambodians, Shapiro lost family members to the Khmer Rouge, and for her version of *Othello* she made the main character ask for punishment rather than forgiveness for killing the Desdemona character. This was her way of working out her frustration about former Khmer Rouge soldiers escaping punishment.

“It doesn’t bring my dad and brothers back,” she says. “But if you go in the wrong direction, then reverse it and go the right way – that’s courage.”

Khmer Arts also has an annex in an area known as Cambodia Town in Long Beach, California, which provides Khmer dance education and performances for both the Cambodian diaspora and American audiences alike.

Shapiro’s next project is likely to be more upbeat: she wants to create a pop music-based musical about the pre-Khmer Rouge era Cambodian singer Pou Vannary. It would be a big departure from her usual work, which typically features traditional Cambodian songs. “Pop is so different to other types of music,” she says. “But history and culture – it’s what makes you what you are.”

編舞藝術家
SOPHILINE CHEAM SHAPIRO

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro年僅八歲時被逐出金邊，隨著赤柬政權在1979年倒台，她報讀了金邊藝術學院，向逃過種族清洗的舞蹈大師學習傳統舞藝。一片頹垣敗瓦之後，她終於找到心靈上的平靜。「我曾患有頭蝨，還營養不良。」她說。「但那些動作、氣質和美態……每當起舞時，我都自覺漂亮優雅，絕望感一掃而空。舞蹈讓身為柬埔寨女性的我深感自豪。」其後，她更成為著名舞蹈團體Khmer Arts的藝術總監。該團體總部設於大金歐，致力在國內外提升高棉舞蹈的地位。Sophiline Cheam Shapiro於2000年以莎劇《奧賽羅》為基礎，推出原創改編舞蹈劇《Samritechak》，並先後在柬埔寨和海外廣受推崇，令她晉身成為世界知名的編舞家。就如大部分柬埔寨人一樣，Sophiline Cheam Shapiro在赤柬時期痛失家人，而在她的《奧賽羅》改編版本中，主角殺害苔絲狄蒙娜一角之後，沒有要求得到寬恕，反而接受懲罰。劇中的安排就是她抒解心中鬱結的方式，表達對前赤柬軍人逃離應有懲罰的不滿。她說：「這樣雖然不能讓我的父親和兄弟復活。但是，假如你走上歪路後，再走回正途，那就是勇氣的表現。」Khmer Arts在加州長灘設有分校，為柬埔寨僑民和美國群眾提供高棉舞蹈教育和表演。Sophiline Cheam Shapiro正在籌備一個題材較為輕鬆的全新項目：她希望創作一齣流行音樂劇，主角是赤柬時期之前的歌手Pou Vannary。相比其以往偏重傳統柬埔寨歌曲的作風，今次會是一次重大突破。「流行音樂與其他音樂種類分別甚大。但歷史和文化，就是成就身分的重要元素。」***khmerarts.org***

Inset photo Nobuyuki Arai

THE POET
KOSAL KHIEV

Spoken word poetry and the Cambodian capital might seem like an unlikely combination, but Kosal Khiev is proving otherwise. Having been deported from the US after serving 14 years in jail, Khiev arrived in Phnom Penh in 2011 and stumbled onto the stage.

Khiev was born in 1980 in a Thai refugee camp after his Cambodian parents fled the Khmer Rouge, and his family moved to the US when he was a year old. He discovered poetry during an 18-month stint in solitary confinement in a Californian jail, having been convicted for attempted murder while he was a member of LA's Tiny Rascal Gang, largely comprised of Cambodian refugees.

Later, in the capital city of his homeland, he found his voice. When hanging out with other Cambodian deportees at Nerd Night, an anything-goes, expat-led open mic arts night, he decided to get up and try out the poems he had written in the hole. It was a move that would end up defining his career.

Works performed in Phnom Penh such as "Why I Write" address the dark history of Cambodia and gained him a reputation as a gifted performer and writer. In 2012 he was chosen to represent the country at the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Now he earns a living plying the international literary festivals circuit.

Khiev's pre-jail literary loves were John Steinback and Edgar Allen Poe. His love of rapper Tupac Shakur, though, led him to spoken word poetry when he ended up in prison. His cell, where he spent 23 hours a day, consisted of a concrete bed and a stainless-steel toilet. "But you're allowed a pencil. I just wrote and wrote," he says.

"In 2012 he was chosen to represent the country at the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad"

「2012年，他代表柬埔寨參加倫敦的『文化奧林匹克』」

詩人
KOSAL KHIEV

說唱誦詩與柬埔寨首都，兩者看似風馬牛不相及，但Kosal Khiev卻證明凡事皆有可能。他曾在美國因企圖謀殺服刑14年，其後被驅逐出境。2011年抵達金邊後，他隨即開展表演事業。

Kosal Khiev在1980年生於泰國難民營，當時父母剛逃離赤柬統治，舉家移居美國時他只有一歲。他對詩詞的興趣，源自於加州監獄單獨囚禁18個月的經歷。他曾經隸屬洛杉磯黑幫「小流氓組織」，期間犯下企圖謀殺罪，幫會大部分成員都是柬埔寨難民。

返回家鄉後，他在首都金邊找到自己的聲音。他參與由外國人組織的現場即興表演聚會Nerd Night，認識了不少被遣返回國的柬埔寨人，也鼓起勇氣踏上台板，試讀在獄中撰寫的詩詞。這個決定，促成其表演事業的契機。

他在金邊發表《Why I Write》等作品，呈現柬埔寨的黑暗歷史，也讓世人得知他在演藝和寫作方面的才華。到了2012年，他更代表柬埔寨參加倫敦的「文化奧林匹克」。現時，他經常參與世界各地的文學節演出，也藉此謀生。

未入獄之前的Kosal Khiev，早已熱衷文學作家約翰史坦貝克和愛倫坡；鐵窗生涯時期，他愛上饒舌歌手Tupac的作品，並引領他走上說唱詩詞的道路。他每日在囚室待上23小時，室內就只有一張混凝土床和不鏽鋼廁盆。「不過囚犯也獲派一支鉛筆，所以我就不斷寫寫寫。」

fb.com/kosal.kiev; spokenkosal.com

主廚
KEK SOON

柬埔寨菜一直未如越南菜和泰國菜般受人景仰，但事情終於有所轉變。金邊不少餐廳，如大受歡迎的Friends，都以復興本土飲食文化為己任，同時為弱勢社群提供就業機會。暹粒也成為了廚藝復興重鎮，集中推廣街頭美食。貢布市餐廳Kama則憑藉創意無窮的咖哩美饌嶄露頭角。這裡集餐廳和藝術中心於一身，是貢布閱讀及寫作藝術節的集思大本營，不時舉辦詩歌活動和放映會。Arn Chorn-Pond和Kong Nay等柬埔寨藝壇人物的肖像，都繪於牆壁之上。現年33歲的Kek Soon是Kama的主廚。小時候，一道咖哩蝸牛啟發她踏上廚藝歷程。她憶述：「我記得當時大概十歲吧，為弟妹烹煮這道料理。我們住在市集旁邊，所以我就到處打聽食譜——人們說材料有椰奶和辣椒，也要把蝸牛泡在米水裡去掉污垢。煮好之後味道相當不俗呢！」經過一輪艱辛鍛鍊和自學之後，Kek Soon在三年前開設Kama的餐廳生意。年少時，由於母親要在別處的海草場工作，所以Kek Soon很早就要輟學，照顧弟妹。她也當過漁船清潔工人，同時努力學習本地食譜。接著她前赴馬來西亞當家傭，於工餘時間苦練廚藝。返回家鄉貢布時，她已精通高棉和世界各國菜系，繼而在暹粒的餐廳工作和鑽研烹飪技巧，最後在Kama開設自家餐廳。Kek Soon表示，她之所以積極參與藝術節，是因為只有少數擁有類似背景的柬埔寨人，才有機會培養閱讀和寫作技巧。她說：「我希望下一代能夠懂得閱讀、藝術和音樂為何物。也許，在未來的20年左右，會有一番新景象——我們會盡力而為。」 ***keksoon.com***

THE CHEF
KEK SOON

Cambodian cuisine has long been in the shadow of neighbours Vietnam and Thailand. But that's starting to change.

In Phnom Penh, many restaurants such as the popular Friends, are reviving local cooking culture and providing work for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Siem Reap has also become a hotbed of culinary revival, with a focus on street food.

In Kampot, though, the kitchen at Kampot Arts & Music Association (KAMA) serves its curries alongside a heavy dose of creativity. The restaurant-cum-arts centre is the spiritual home of the Kampot Readers & Writers Festival and hosts poetry showcases and film screenings. Depictions of arts figures such as Arn Chorn-Pond and Kong Nay are daubed on the walls.

For KAMA's chef, 33-year-old Kek Soon, it was snail curry that kicked off her culinary journey. "I was about 10 years old – I remember cooking it for my sisters and brother," she says. "We lived next to a market so I asked around – people said I needed coconut milk, chilli and to soak the snails in rice water to get rid of dirt. It tasted great!"

Kek Soon opened the restaurant section of KAMA three years ago – after years of hard work and self-education. As a child she dropped out of school to look after her siblings while her mother worked away from home, farming seaweed. Kek Soon also worked, washing fishing boats, but absorbed local recipes. She later became a domestic worker in Malaysia, poring over recipes in her spare time. Returning to Kampot armed with knowledge of both Khmer and international cooking styles, she worked in restaurants and researched cooking in Siem Reap, before finally opening the kitchen at KAMA.

Kek Soon says she was keen to get involved with the festival because few Cambodians from backgrounds similar to hers get the chance to develop great reading and writing skills.

"I want the next generation to understand what reading, art and music is," she says. "Maybe over the next 20 years or so it'll change – we try the best we can." ✱

Hong Kong Airlines flies to Phnom Penh daily. For more information, visit hongkongairlines.com

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