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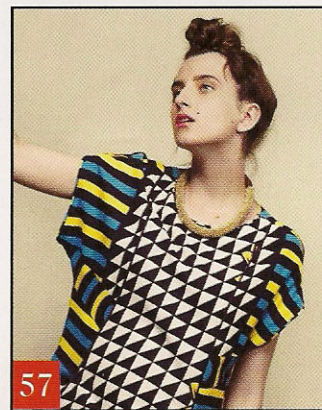
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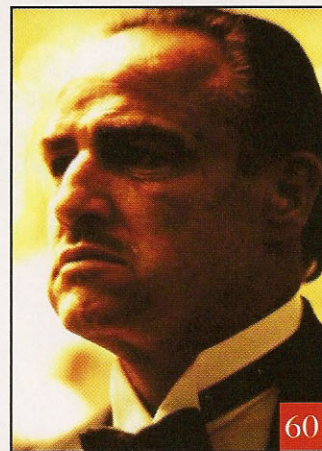
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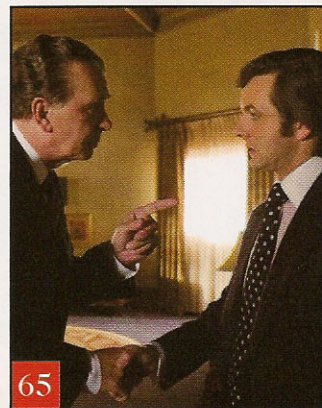
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LIFESTORIES

BASS ON POINT WITH ACCOUNT OF PROMISE



ON A TRIP NINE YEARS AGO TO CAMBODIA, ANNE BASS CAME UPON A 16-YEAR-OLD DANCER WHOSE GRACE AND ELEGANCE INSPIRED THE LONGTIME DANCE ENTHUSIAST TO ARRANGE FOR THE YOUNGSTER TO COME TO THE UNITED STATES FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE HIM THE TRAINING HE COULD NEVER OTHERWISE HAVE DREAMED OF. THIS IS THE BASIS FOR BASS' FILM "DANCING ACROSS BORDERS," WHICH SCREENED RECENTLY AT THE SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL. WHAT FOLLOWS IS BASS' OWN ACCOUNT OF HOW THE PROJECT CAME TOGETHER.

I did not intend to make a film. I did hope to help a very gifted young Cambodian dancer named Sokvannara (Sy) Sar realize the potential I had seen in him when I visited Cambodia in 2000.

In the process of his coming to New York and learning a new dance form, I took photographs and footage of his ballet classes so that his mother on the other side of the world could see what her child was doing. I had never used a video camera before and I enjoyed that challenge – as well as [that of] filming ballet, because I have taken a ballet class almost daily for many years.

After several years, Sy was invited to perform at a cross-cultural evening arranged by the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh to celebrate its new building. The performances were filmed for Cambodian television.

Shortly thereafter, Sy was a contestant in the International Ballet Competition in Varna, Bulgaria, and there was official footage from there as well. Because Sy's performances were so exciting, when I returned from Varna I had a student filmmaker put together all of this material in order to show to some friends who had been following his progress from the beginning.

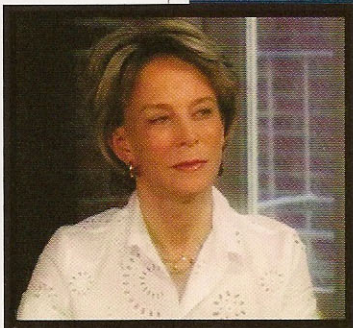
The whole idea had only been to entertain a few friends for an evening; but then, to my surprise, it was so well received that I was encouraged to make a real film. After thinking about this for a while, I decided there was the potential to make an interesting story of a gifted dancer from another culture who was developing under the guidance of a remarkable teacher, but I had no idea how to do it. Since I was in the privileged position of being able to make an attempt and to fail at it, I decided to give it a try.

My first intention was to find a director and let him or her figure out the best way to tell the story. After a short while, I realized it was unfair to ask someone to tell a story that I knew better than anyone else and to take suggestions from an amateur as I struggled to find my way.

The co-producer, Catherine Tatge, was highly recommended as she had worked on many ballet films, and she was a huge help in introducing me to two of the three very talented DPs we used: Tom Hurwitz, who shot some of the dance footage; Bob Elfstrom, who shot the Cambodian footage as well as additional dance scenes; and Anthony Forma, who had already shot some footage of Sy that I had made as a present for his family after he had been at the School of American Ballet for three years.

All of the DPs and their sound crews were so sure of themselves and so good at what they do that it made filming a really pleasant experience, even in a country like Cambodia where there was very little backup or resources for additional crew.

“... I decided there was the potential to make an interesting story of a gifted dancer from another culture. ... Since I was in the privileged position of being able to make an attempt and to fail at it, I decided to give it a try.” ANNE BASS



Catherine also proposed the very patient editor Mark Sutton, and some ballet friends subsequently recommended Girish Bhargava, who helped with the dance editing and stayed on to do so much more. They were both extremely generous to a first-time filmmaker, and it was interesting to work with two very different editors. Mark really understood the human side of the story and is very musical even though he had no previous dance-editing experience per

se. Girish, on the other hand, is the acknowledged supreme dance editor; award-winning producer-director Merrill Brockway has called him his “secret weapon.”

I loved the editing process and couldn't wait for the next session to begin. My editors usually worked on their own in the morning; in the afternoon (and many evenings), we would look at what they had done, try out new ideas and make plans for the next morning's work. The biggest challenge came in post-production because we had certain problems resulting from Mark having worked in Final Cut Pro and Girish in Avid.

The one area about which I now know less than I could but more than I would have anticipated is sound mixing. That was the hardest part of the post-production process for me. Getting the right balance between the front speakers and the surround was so important because we have so much music mixed with voice-overs. Finally, I did two edits – one in 5.1 and the other in stereo.

I also have a new appreciation for the role of graphics in a film. Luckily, I had the help of my good friend Richard Pandiscio, with whom I usually talk about our great obsession with gardening. He gave the film a great look and had the idea of organizing it through chapter headings. Because he is not a dance person and knew very little about Cambodia, he was really helpful in anticipating what might be challenging to some of the audience.

I felt extreme apprehension before showing “Dancing Across Borders” to Sy for the first time, and so it was a huge relief when he told me after the first preview screening that “it was the best dance/life-story film [he had] ever seen, and not because it's ours.” He also added that he liked the fact I had put in all the difficult times and future challenges, and said he thought it was a truthful portrait of him. I couldn't have asked for more! -MP