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Lifestyle

Dancer crosses borders [\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)

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By: Janos Gereben
Special to The Examiner
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SAN FRANCISCO — In San Francisco’s Richmond district, the long-standing Russian-Chinese immigrant mix has been infused lately with an influx of Vietnamese, Mongolians and Cambodians.

Cambodian immigrants, upon hearing about a new film from their country, asked if it was about the killing fields.

The Pol Pot regime’s genocide in the 1970s created a lasting identification of the country with those horrendous events.

Happily, the new film, “Dancing Across Borders,” is not about Cambodia’s reign of terror, with its 2.5 million victims.

The movie begins in Cambodia, well after the 1979 fall of the Khmer Rouge. It’s 1994, and 10-year-old Sokvannara (Sy) Sar, the documentary’s subject, is studying Khmer temple dance at the Wat Bo School, as the country’s ancient, rich music and dance tradition — suppressed by Pol Pot — is slowly reviving.

In 2000, members of the World Monuments Fund, one of many organizations aiding devastated Cambodia, visited Angkor Wat, where Sar and his fellow students performed for Americans.

Anne Bass, a philanthropist and balletomane who was in the audience, was so impressed by Sar’s natural grace that — presaging Sandra Bullock and “The Blind Side” — she took the kid all the way to New York and the School of American Ballet.

A decade into the future, Bass directed this documentary “Dancing Across Borders.”

Ballet is as different from temple dance as English is from Khmer, and Sar had to make a huge



Sokvannara Sar appears in a Pacific Northwest Ballet production in “Dancing Across Borders.” (Courtesy photo)

transition in his art, along with dealing with his new home's strange food, environment and society. The film is impressively honest about the teen's struggle, discouragement and occasional bouts with the temptation to give up.

Sar's next big break came when he followed his teacher, Peter Boal, to Seattle where Boal became artistic director of Pacific Northwest Ballet.

Sar became a member of that company and placed as a semifinalist in the Varna International Ballet Competition. In the past five years, he has been featured in many important roles, including the opening night of the Vail International Dance Festival.

He even returned to Phnom Penh, dancing in "Square Dance," "Tchaikovsky pas de deux" and "Le Corsaire" at the celebration for the opening of the new U.S. Embassy in the Cambodian capital.

The film wonderfully mixes images of ballet training, rehearsals and performances in a saga of a young artist's struggle and success. It's also a personal story that deals with cross-cultural conflict and resolution.

MOVIE REVIEW

Dancing Across Borders

Three stars

Starring Sokvannara Sar, Anne Bass, Olga Kostritzky, Peter Boal

Directed by Anne Bass

Not rated

Running time 1 hour 28 minutes

Note: Bass and Sar will appear between the 6:45 and 9:10 p.m. Saturday screenings at Opera Plaza Cinemas in San Francisco and after the 5:10 p.m. Sunday show at the Shattuck Cinemas in Berkeley.

Topics

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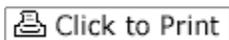
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