

SPIRITUALITY AND PRACTICE

Film Review

By Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Dancing Across Borders

Directed by Anne Bass

First Run Features 03/10 Documentary

Not Rated

This astonishing documentary charts the true story of a traditional male Cambodian dancer who comes to the United States and dazzles the ballet world with his talent, discipline, grace, and explosive leaps. The film is directed by Anne Bass, a longtime dance patron, who discovered 16-year-old Sokvannara (Sy) Sar while he was performing in a temple in Cambodia with a traditional dance group. She immediately noticed and was impressed by his authentic presence, graceful movement, and ability to connect with the audience. Bass returned home and offered to pay for this talented young boy's trip to America to see his reaction to ballet and the evaluation of other dance devotees about his abilities and possible future as a ballet dancer.

Sy agrees to study classical ballet but he is rejected by the prestigious School for American Ballet (SAB). But after some rigorous training with the legendary ballet teacher Olga Kostritzky, he is accepted to study at SAB. The documentary graphically depicts the rigors of his practice sessions which often end with Sy's legs cramped in pain. The dancer isolated from others by language, custom, and having no other students in his classes with his teacher. She does believe in his talent and potential for greatness.

After five years of hard work, Sy joins the Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB). He reaches the semi-finals of the International Ballet competition in Varna, Bulgaria, impressing many with his extraordinary talent after so few years of training. *Dancing Beyond Borders* offers an unusual and exhilarating behind-the-scenes peek at the rigorous art form of ballet and the uplifting story of a gifted outsider who is making his own mark upon the dance world.