

Subject: [c-hope] UNOFF: Prach is in Newsweek

Date: Thu, 28 Jun 2001 10:41:15 -0700

From: "Phylypo Tum" <p.tum@trw.com>

To: <cambodianhope@yahoogleups.com>

I thought this is interesting about Prach. Congratulation...



International News

Hip-Hop About Pol Pot

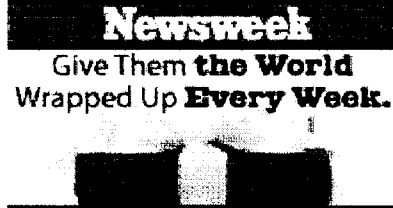
A pirated CD introduces rap music to Cambodia

By Adam Piore
NEWSWEEK INTERNATIONAL

July 2 issue — Prach Ly seems an unlikely voice for Cambodia's lost generation. The skinny 22-year-old spends his days hawking karaoke videos to middle-aged Cambodian women out of a closet-size shop on a gritty street in Long Beach, Calif. He wears low-slung bluejean shorts, sneakers and a backward baseball cap. And on a recent day he was more excited about meeting the town's mayor at a local protest than about events 10,000 miles away in Cambodia, his parents' homeland. So it was with some surprise that he received a call from a journalist in Phnom Penh a couple of months ago informing him that the CD he'd recorded in his parents' garage had somehow made its way to Cambodia, where it was causing a sensation. Prach Ly, it turned out, had become Cambodia's first rap star. And he'd never even really lived there.

ADVERTISING ON MSNBC

MSNBC
E-mail Extra
 SIGN UP!

**HIS PARENTS**

did open his eyes to Cambodia's brutal history. On the CD, "the end'n is just the beginnin," Prach Ly, who fled with his parents as an infant, spins out tales of genocide. Over hypnotic drumbeats and sampled piano and guitar riffs, alternating between Khmer and English, he tells the stories of political meetings, starvation, fear and executions that his parents impressed upon him virtually every night of his childhood in their Long Beach apartment. "We need help, now!" he shouts after narrating the devastating descent into Pol Pot's Kampuchea that began with the fall of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975. Later he details the resurrection of his family's fortunes, riffing, "It can only get better!" as he tells of their journey from the misery of Thailand's refugee camps to joyous freedom and California. His father, one of the few Cambodian

Newsweek International
July 2 Issue

- **ATLANTIC EDITION:** News and features from Europe, Africa and the Middle East
- **ATLANTIC COVER STORY:** Europe: Eat, Drink, and Go Slow
- **ASIA EDITION:** News and features from the Asia Pacific region
- **ASIA COVER STORY:** Japan: Dancing Into Exile
- **LATIN AMERICA EDITION:** News and features from Latin America and the Caribbean
- **LATIN AMERICA COVER STORY:** Mexico's History Test
- **WORLD VIEW:** Time To Make Room For Daddy
- **International Perspectives**
- **International Letters**

actors to survive the genocide, wanted to make sure Prach “would never forget that I lost aunts and uncles and that we barely made it,” he says. The CD “was personal. I had to let it out. It was building up for so long.” Apologetically, he adds: “I did it last year, so I sound kind of young.”

The rebirth of Cambodia’s decimated artistic landscape is in its infancy as well. The nation right now is hungry enough to devour even the exotic—the virtually unknown form of expression familiar to most of the world as American hip-hop. After 30 years of war and a genocide that claimed one life in four, the psychic scars in this tiny, shellshocked nation run deep. Yet 20 years after the Pol Pot regime wiped out the country’s artists, a tight-lipped stoicism has taken root. MTV and Western pop culture have yet to make a dent. Most Cambodian pop tunes are love songs that mimic those of the prewar 1960s. Most paintings are carbon-copy renderings of landscapes or the temples of Angkor Wat. No wonder Prach Ly’s incendiary tales of Cambodia’s past, told in the defiant tones of rap, hit Phnom Penh like a B-52 bombing raid. “I’ve never heard any music carry information like this,” says Kham Pouri, 21, a songwriter who runs a small Phnom Penh CD shop and was mesmerized by the songs when he heard them at a party. “I’ve never written a song about politics or society.”

But how did the CD end up in Cambodia? Ly had intended only to use it as a demo and to circulate it among his friends. But the songs, it seems, were simply too good to keep under wraps. They passed from person to person, onto Napster, eventually ending up in the hands of a Phnom Penh DJ named Sophann Sope Hul. “When I first heard it, I was shaking,” said Hul, who is Cambodian-American and heard the songs on a visit home. “This is exactly what Cambodia needed! And I had to find a way to get it out here.” Hul and several other DJs worried that playing the songs often would upset the government. But limited air time was enough to spark a word-of-mouth chain reaction in the capital. Chy Sila, 27, a manager at Phnom Penh’s biggest CD store, CD World, says he has sold 400 copies of the pirated CD. “It’s one of our biggest sellers,” he says. “Local people have never heard music like this about Cambodia. It interests them.” The newfound fame hasn’t affected Prach Ly much (though he has noticed more visitors to his home page on a Web site called khmerconnection.com). “I’m proud of it, but I’m not there to see it,” he says. “And I’m not getting a penny.”

Newsweek.MSNBC.com

Click on a section below for more News:

- National News
 - International News
 - Business & Money
 - Technology & Health
 - Lifestyle & Family
 - Entertainment
 - Opinion
 - Live Talk Lineup
-

Among the new fans is Nop Bay Yareth, 20, one of Cambodia's biggest homegrown pop stars. He says that most Cambodians don't "want to tell their children about the Khmer Rouge period because it hurts so much. This album can help inform many teenagers." Not to mention bring them up to speed on pop culture.

With Chris Decherd in Phnom Penh

© 2001 Newsweek, Inc.

MORE NEWSWEEK INTERNATIONAL

STORY 'This Can't Go On'

STORY On The Brink

STORY In the Shadow of Mandela

STORY A Union of Eunuchs

STORY The Crayon That Roared

HOME [MSNBC Cover Page](#)