

# New dance uses old forms

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro debuts her latest piece using Cambodian moves.

By **LAURA BLEIBERG**  
 THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

The seeds of a new dance piece, "Seasons of Migration," were planted back in 1991. Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, a classical dancer, had just arrived in Los Angeles from Cambodia, a newlywed with an American husband.

She immediately signed up for English classes. It came with a bonus lesson: learning how to cope with feelings of dislocation in a new country. Shapiro found the class in culture shock as valuable as the language lessons.

"I think it was a brilliant idea. It was really helpful and that was sitting in my head for 14 years now."

It has come out of her head and taken form as a four-part contemporary dance work that, though new in story and concept, was choreographed using the centuries-old, classical dance vocabulary of Cambodia. This is Shapiro's second major dance piece in a traditional style, the first being her successful adaptation of "Othello," which was called "Samritechak." (It was performed in Long Beach in 2003.) "Seasons of Migration" will have its U.S. premiere at Cal State Long Beach's Carpenter Center on Friday and Saturday. Excerpts from two ancient, rarely performed ceremonial pieces are also on the program, "Ream Eyso & Moni Mekhala."

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Shapiro is making a name for herself internationally as one of the few choreographers creating new dances in this elegant and beguiling form; Cambodian dance and its practitioners were almost wiped out during the Khmer Rouge's murderous rule, when more than 1 million were killed. Shapiro is a survivor of the Khmer Rouge and was in the first class of dance students admitted to the Royal University of Fine Arts after the fall of the regime.

Shapiro won a number of prestigious grants, including Guggenheim and Doris Duke Fund awards, to produce "Seasons of Migration." The piece will tour to six cities in the United States, including New York. In addition, Peter Sellars has invited Shapiro to interpret Mozart's "The Magic Flute" for his "New Crowned Hope" festival in Vienna, Austria, for 2006.

SEE DANCE • PAGE 5



**AUTHENTIC:** Sam Sathya as Neang Neak in "Seasons of Migration."

JAMES WASSERMAN

# A VOICE STILL RESONATING

Ten years after she was murdered, Selena remains a revered icon.

**By 23, Selena was already the** queen of Tejano music in her home state of Texas, filling the Houston Astrodome with 60,000 fans. With her catchy songs of love, she was well on her way to becoming an international pop phenomenon.

The singer's seemingly unstoppable rise to the top ended, suddenly and tragically, 10 years ago this week. She was gunned down by Yolanda Saldivar, the former president of her fan club, whom she'd caught embezzling money from her.

The shot Saldivar fired from a .38-caliber revolver silenced one of Latin music's most promising young

voices, but it did nothing to dim the legend of Selena. A decade later, she's arguably bigger and more significant than ever. Selena's family, fans, record labels and radio stations keep her alive through music and merchandising.

To commemorate the anniversary of her slaying, at least half a dozen CDs and DVDs have come out in recent weeks or are about to be released. Contestants on Telemundo's "Nuevas Voces de América," produced by Emilio Estefan, will sing her music tonight. Univision is airing a concert to pay homage to the singer with celebrities such as Thalía, Paulina Rubio and Pepe Aguilar.

**By JUSTINO ÁGUILA**  
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

SEE SELENA • PAGE 4

**ENDURING:** Gunned down in Texas 10 years ago, singer Selena is more popular than ever.



JAMES WASSERMAN

**FROM LIFE:** Yan Viphearun, Sam Limsothea and Sam Savin, from left, in "Seasons of Migration," which was inspired by the choreographer's experience of moving to the United States.

# DANCE: The art almost died under Khmer Rouge

FROM PAGE 1

## Dance and Music Ensembles: Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh

- **What:** "Seasons of Migration" and "Ream Eyso & Moni Mekhala"
- **When:** 8 p.m., Friday, Saturday
- **Where:** Carpenter Performing Arts Center, 6200 Atherton St., Long Beach
- **How much:** \$30-\$38
- **Call:** (562) 985-7000 or visit [www.CarpenterArts.org](http://www.CarpenterArts.org)

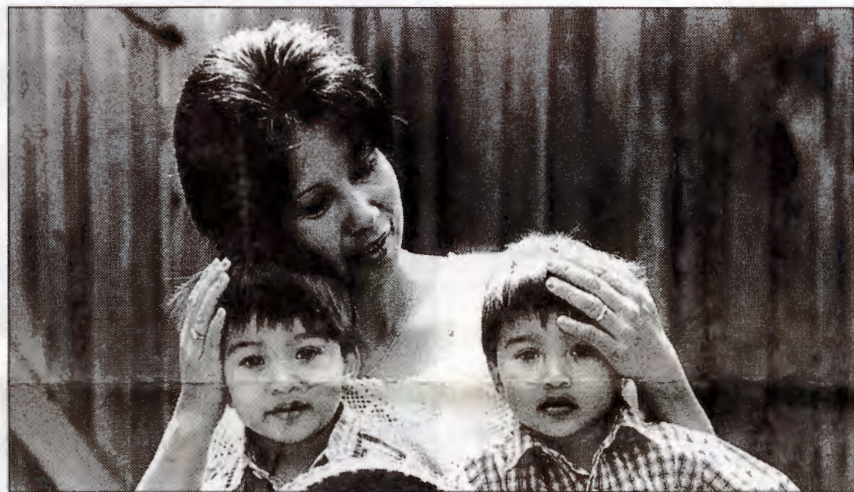
and my career is to help preserve Cambodian classical dance."

### PRESERVING CAMBODIAN DANCE

We were sitting in one of Long Beach's Cambodian restaurants on a recent morning. A neighborhood favorite, it filled up as the lunch hour approached. Shapiro had a plate of steaming vegetables and beef in front of her, but she barely touched it as she became more animated, recalling the hurdles she had to overcome.

Every art form has its traditionalists and its innovators, and the two camps often have a hard time seeing eye to eye. Yet, change is inevitable.

Chances are, Shapiro's innovations would strike audiences here as subtle, hardly avant-garde. For example, she first intended to use an



SCOTT STREBLE

**FAMILY:** Choreographer Sophiline Cheam Shapiro holds her two children. Her dances have been inspired by her life.

original score for "Seasons," which alarmed university representatives because it was to be Western orchestral music. In the end, the composer with whom she was collaborating pulled out of the project and she opted for Cambodian music.

For the choreography, Shapiro has not altered the graceful, slow steps, and the double-jointed hand and arms positions that are hallmarks of the dance. As with other dance forms from Southeast Asia, some poses represent specific meanings and characters; Shapiro has not changed those either. But she has experimented with new alignments of dancers and new means of expression, such as using two dancers to repre-

sent a single character.

"The form is very rigid, but once you recognize its aesthetic, its limitations, then you have to adjust your new idea into that aesthetic and limitation," she said.

The characters in "Seasons of Migration" are gods and mythological figures who arrive on Earth and are bedazzled by what they see. The novelty soon wears off, though, and they become upset by the differences between this world and their own. The piece attempts to show how they adjust and carve out an identity for themselves in what had seemed a hostile and strange place.

"In any mythology, the characters in the story are having the same

problems that humans would have - jealousy, betrayal, love. It's human issues and it's universal," she said.

"So many phases of life you have to evaluate your sense of identity and purpose, such as after having children, or after having a big job," she said. "You know getting a big job is a great thing, but there is responsibility and we have to develop a new sense of who we are. (Life is) always a re-examination of a sense of self and the environment that you are in."

This has been especially true for Shapiro, even now. At the university, she found she was an "insider-outsider," because it had been so many years since she taught there. She and her husband are currently deciding whether to establish their own company in Cambodia, so Shapiro could work without government and institutional interference.

Before that, though, "Seasons" will tour from Berkeley to Providence, R.I. She hopes that audiences here will see this piece as universal.

"I'm trying to do work that is meaningful for me. If the creator doesn't find that work meaningful to them, it doesn't move them and it doesn't move others. For me, this is an attempt to address contemporary themes through a traditional art form."

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**A BATTLE:** Chamroeun Samphors, left, as Vorachhun and Koy Sina as Ream Eyso in a scene from "Ream Eyso & Moni Mekhala." The piece is on the program at the Carpenter Performing Arts Center shows this weekend.



JAMES WASSERMAN

**CHANGING COUNTRIES:** Sam Sathya as Neang Neak in "Seasons of Migration."



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