

The Need for a  
National Centre for  
the Performing Arts in  
Phnom Penh:  
A Preliminary Review

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SangSalapak – Building Arts  
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## Authorship

This report has been independently researched and compiled by SangSalapak and the collaborators named below, with no external financial assistance. SangSalapak is an independent association based in Phnom Penh which aims to support the arts in Cambodia through providing technical assistance and advice specialising in culture and development, facilities planning and arts management.

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## Foreword

The impetus for this short study report arose out of a series of informal networking meetings held in Phnom Penh in early 2004 involving an ad-hoc group of artists, performers, academics and producers. At one meeting in February 2004, around the date of 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the burning of the old National Theatre auditorium, there was a shared sense of sadness that in Cambodia there is no longer a National Theatre building where artists can develop their work and where audiences can regularly see Cambodian performing arts.

This energy and interest quickly formed into two parallel and connected projects. One was to organise an arts festival, then based around the old building, although now at another venue. The other, which resulted in this report, was to consider what issues would have to be addressed if a national venue for the arts were to be re-created. A core-group formed and was supported by a number of others working in the arts.

During initial discussions, it was decided to seek the views of a range of people involved in the arts through short interviews. Due to constraints in resources, the list of those interviewed was not intended to be representative or complete, but to give a taste of opinions; a more rigorous survey could be carried out later. The questions and a list of those interviewed are included in the Appendices.

It was recognised at the beginning that a review such as this would need input from and assistance from the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, along with its Department of Performing Arts. The involvement of the Royal University of Fine Arts was also seen as critical, both as an educational establishment but also in particular due to their involvement in producing works of Classical Dance/Royal Ballet. We were pleased to be offered the generous assistance of each of these bodies.

## Addendum

4 April 2005

This report was originally completed and published in draft form at the beginning of February 2005, at which time it was not known that the site of the Preah Suramarit National Theatre was to be leased to a private investor. Since this has now been confirmed in principle, this updated version of our report includes some adjustments to the recommendations section. However the general thrust of the recommendations remains the same, and the rest of the report is largely unchanged.

## Executive Summary

While the traditional performing arts enjoy a continued revitalisation in Cambodia, there has in the past decade been a significant overall reduction in the number of venues, and consequently rehearsal facilities. The National Theatre, designed by Vann Molyvann in the late 1960s and badly damaged by fire in 1994, is for many people in Phnom Penh a symbol of the need for a re-positioning of the arts.

Though many people want to see the National Theatre renovated and brought back to life, the cultural and social context today is not the same as in the 1960s when the original theatre was built. Questions arose during our research about audience needs and development, the requirements of the troupes in Phnom Penh, programming policy and future requirements, the possibilities of work being received from overseas, the financial costs and longer-term sustainability, and how a new venue could contribute to the cultural experience of young people and those who live outside Phnom Penh. This report addresses these key issues as a preliminary pre-cursor to a later, more detailed, study.

### **The Existing National Theatre**

The partially ruined building continues to be the home of the Department of Performing Arts (approx 280 artists). Despite a number of attempts by individuals or organisations to raise funds for renovation, no significant money has been available to spend on the building since 1994 and it continues to deteriorate. The land around the theatre site is being developed for commercial and government uses; we understand that the government may be considering the construction of a new theatre complex on a different site.

### **The Issues for Performers and Artists**

Through interviews with around 30 performers, teachers, academics and officials, we found that the most common desire is to again have a theatre like the old National Theatre which could be used for performances and rehearsal; for many there is a strong emotional attachment to the old building. There is both a great pride in Cambodian cultural forms and frustration at the lack of opportunity to perform. There was also a desire that Cambodia should be representing itself through its performing arts and traditional culture to both national and international audiences.

### **Arts Venues in Phnom Penh**

There are a number of theatre venues in the capital which, although not ideal, can be and are used for performances. For the artists, there are reasons either of practicality, location or cost which make these options unworkable and unattractive. Significantly, there is also for many the notion of a symbolic centre for the performing arts in Cambodia which is unsatisfied. There is presently no venue in Cambodia which has the technical capacity to host mid-large scale work from overseas.

The shortage of financial support for performances is a key issue which affects all troupes. Consideration of what type of new venue should be created should be prefaced by an analysis of what ongoing funding would be needed to sustain the activities of the venue.

### **Current and Potential Audiences**

The development of future audiences for the performing arts is a central issue. Alongside the conservation of traditional forms, the development of new derivations and innovation are issues which are relevant in Cambodia and are being addressed in other countries in the region. What local audiences would be interested to see and buy tickets for is not clear, though artists themselves identified audience development as a priority. As well as research amongst local and tourist audiences, the development of the performing arts in education has not yet been explored; an integrated approach to providing wider access to the arts including young people would be an important aspect in developing an audience a new national venue.

### **Programming Policy**

Programming policy is closely linked to artistic policy, audience development and revenue funding (running costs). The type of programming of a recreated venue does not need to be fixed and may develop over time as capacity for producing new work grows. However, financial sustainability and extent of external support will be a key determinant in deciding what and how much can be staged. Also the relationship of the national troupes to the venue is not predetermined and options should be considered.

### **The Present National Theatre Building**

The site of the present National Theatre is in many ways well suited to a public building such as a major theatre; also the present building is architecturally valuable and unique, while significant parts remain undamaged or repairable. The needs and goals which made the Theatre so successful originally have changed. Current requirements, capacities, policies, potential audiences and funding strategy need to be reviewed and clarified before assessing through a feasibility study how well the existing building and site would suit current and future needs.

### **Some Technical Issues for a Performing Arts Centre**

A range of possible activities for a new venue was raised during our research. These included concerts, theatre, cinema, art gallery, conferences, functions, rehearsal, storage, library, archives, offices, shops, restaurants and cafes. If a feasibility study was to consider a multi-use venue, options for master-plans and future growth should be considered. Also, technical theatrical requirements should be considered from an early stage, particularly if an auditorium is desired to house divergent types of performance with different acoustic and sightline requirements.

### **Financial and Organisational Issues**

Stable, predictable income for running costs will be central to the success of a venue. Case-studies we examined had often been provided with the means of generating their own income separate from artistic activity (endowment, commercial venture etc). Having a secure basis of operating funds is essential to a venue being able to present quality work on a regular basis.

The management of a venue would be closely allied to audience development and programming, requiring a range of skills and expertise. Training in arts management and opportunities for skills-development on courses in Cambodia and abroad should be investigated.

### **Recommendations**

The present and future needs of a recreated national venue should in our view be clarified through a process of discussion and collaboration, leading to a feasibility study. These needs will be influenced by national policies in cultural development but also in education and tourism. A group of experienced figures from government and the arts should be commissioned to manage this process.

A special committee could be established by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. Its objectives would be to confirm the requirements of a national venue and to define a strategy for its funding and programming. Then, practical options could be examined through a feasibility study, reviewing options for concept designs and costs.

The existing National Theatre is of historic and architectural value. The protection of the National Theatre building should be considered, until the feasibility study is completed.

In summary, there is now a concrete opportunity for a valuable and forward-looking development in the arts and culture in Cambodia; the issue of a national theatre venue could become the catalyst for ongoing debate, change and growth in the expression of the arts in Cambodia, which could over time make a real difference throughout Cambodian society.

## 1.1 Introduction

The past ten years have seen the continued revitalisation of the performing arts in Cambodia, which have undergone a remarkable regeneration since they suffered so badly during 1975 to 1979. Now, Government troupes perform internationally and, where funds allow, locally. A number of organisations which promote the performing arts have been established, including NGOs involved with training, production and performance.<sup>1</sup> Producers, directors and performers have visited from overseas to collaborate and stage shows which fill theatres to capacity. Applications for places in Classical Dance at the Royal University of Fine Arts far exceed places. Perhaps the recent event with the highest public profile has been the awarding of Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity status by UNESCO to the Royal Ballet of Cambodia in January 2004.

Paradoxically there has at the same time been a significant overall reduction in the number of venues, and consequently rehearsal facilities, for the performing arts. Some previously available venues have been privatised – ie are available for rent at commercial rents. And the well-liked Preah Suramarit National Theatre<sup>2</sup> in Phnom Penh, which had its 1,000 seat auditorium badly damaged by fire in 1994, remains un-repaired; as a result, the Department of Performing Arts, whose artists represent each different form of traditional performance, lost its main performance space and now rehearses in its leaking foyer<sup>3</sup>.

As we began our research, we had a sense that in the capital at least, there was both a desire and a potential for more public performance, and that this interest expressed itself in various kinds of activity; for example, in classes for young people in slum areas, in the collaborative projects involving local institutions and international companies, in an increase in the amount of theatre used by NGOs as a development tool both in Phnom Penh and the provinces, and in the productions by the national troupes both in Cambodia and more and more frequently on foreign tours.

Our initial enquiries suggested that there was still a strong interest in having a large-scale national venue, with many people wanting to see the National Theatre renovated and brought back to life. We did not know if this would be possible, but if a national venue was to be recreated, we knew that the cultural and social context today was not the same as in the 1960s when the theatre was built. We found ourselves asking questions such as: Who would come to a large theatre and what would they want to see? What size of space was really needed and realistic? Should a performance space be a priority at all? Who would perform there and who would programme the diary of performances? What was the relationship between a national theatre building, a national centre for the performing arts, and the national troupes? Would one or more troupes (or no troupes) be based there? How would a national venue fit into a strategy for cultural development of the country as a whole? Would the 'product' (the work shown there) be all locally produced, or would there also be touring productions from abroad and what would these need? Was there currently enough product to support a large theatre space? And what about the 1960s building; could and should it be renovated and brought up to current technical standards?

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<sup>1</sup> Examples are: Sovanna Phum Arts Association; Apsara Arts Association; Amrita Arts Association; Phare Ponleu Selpak; Salapak Khmer Amatak. A list of performing arts groups can be found in the *Cambodia Arts Directory*, published by Visiting Arts 2001, currently being updated.

<sup>2</sup> The Preah Suramarit Theatre, inaugurated in 1968, was named by Prince Norodom Sihanouk in honour of his father HM Norodom Suramarit. It is now commonly known as the National Theatre, the Bassac Theatre or, in Khmer, *Mahow Srop* (performance space). We have used the title 'National Theatre' in this report, to try to reduce possible confusion.

<sup>3</sup> We understand that between 1979 and 1994, rehearsal spaces for the national troupes included the National Theatre building itself, the National Cultural Centre adjacent, the Chaktomuk Theatre and a circus building on Mao Tse Tung Boulevard, none of which are now readily available.

## 1.2 Scope

In considering the above we recognised that we would not be able to resolve any of these questions in the short review we had in mind, but we felt that it might be useful to define these issues as a pre-cursor to later more detailed work.

Time and financial restraints limited the number of interviews we could do (29). We would also like to have interviewed more people, including senior people in the arts, members of the public who do not work in the arts, high level government officials and representatives of major donors, and suggest that all of these could be carried out in the next phase of the programme.

We mainly focussed the study on performing arts and only interviewed a few people in visual arts, so interviewee responses are naturally focused on the performing arts use of the space. For a more comprehensive picture of the possibilities of a multi-use arts venue, further interviews in the visual arts field would be necessary. Interviews and translation were all done on a voluntary basis by artists rather than experienced interviewers; some of the interviews were more rich in data than others.

## 1.3 The Existing National Theatre

The Preah Suramarit National Theatre was constructed by the Government of Cambodia and inaugurated in 1968. A high-profile public project, it was designed by Vann Molyvann to accommodate performances of many types; the inaugural event was an international film festival which featured the work of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The 1960s was a period of experimentation in Cambodian arts<sup>4</sup> and a wide variety of work was performed at the Theatre.

The building survived the conflicts of the 1970s and was returned to use through the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1994 an accidental fire caused major damage to the auditorium. The subsequent years have seen a number of unsuccessful approaches made to the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts by individuals or organisations wishing to see the theatre renovated (see section 1.7 below).

In the meantime, the Theatre which is the home of the Ministry's Department of Performing Arts (approximately 280 artists representing more than a dozen<sup>5</sup> forms of performance) continues to deteriorate due to being exposed to the weather and is a risk to those who use it.

During our research, we were introduced to many individuals working at different levels in the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts; our meetings were informative and enjoyable. Though we were unable to meet the Minister due to a change of administration during our research, we were advised us that one of the Ministry's aims for 2005 is to develop its national cultural policies, with the collaboration of UNESCO.

A number of individuals at the Ministry expressed their desire for a renovated and modernised theatre venue, with rehearsal and administrative spaces for the national troupes. In the immediate term, the Department of Performing Arts suffers from both a lack of rehearsal spaces and a lack of a suitable venue for

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<sup>4</sup> See *Cultures of Independence, An introduction to Cambodian Arts and Culture in the 1950s and 1960s*, 2001, edited by Ly Daravuth and Ingrid Muan, published by Reyum, Phnom Penh, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Theatre: yike, bassac, speaking, mahori, ayai/chapei. Dance: lakhon khol, folk dance, classical dance, big shadow (sbek thom) and small shadow (sbek touch). Music / Circus: classical music, modern music, traditional music, circus.

performance. As a short-term measure, the Department would like to have a new simple building on the theatre site for rehearsing and performing to an audience of 200-300. We understand this is a desire but there is no funding allocated.

#### 1.4 The Issues for Performers and Artists

To find out what artists and performers thought about no longer having a national theatre venue, we drew up a short questionnaire and interviewed a selection of people chosen from a variety of interests and backgrounds. As we mentioned above, this was not meant to be a 'representative sample'; a more rigorous survey could be carried out later. We met with performers, teachers, academics and officials; a list is included in Appendix 1.

The predominant issue for all the artists was one of a large-scale performance venue. The most common desire was to again have a theatre like the old National Theatre which used to be used for both performances and rehearsal. The artists interviewed were united in this ambition. There was both a sense of great pride in Cambodian cultural forms and a deep sadness and frustration at how the lack of opportunity to perform was allowing skills and knowledge to be lost.

There was also a strong sense that Cambodia should be representing itself to the outside world through its performing arts and traditional culture, to both national and international audiences. For many, the lack of a suitable central performance venue meant that this could not happen. Artists from both the national theatre troupes and independent troupes stressed the importance of a national stage. They felt that a renewed theatre should put on work from the capital, from the provinces and overseas, and that this work should be performed both by the national troupes and independent companies. There were mixed opinions about the balance of traditional and modern work.

Most Cambodians interviewed said that they wanted to have a new national theatre; all the artists interviewed said that a new theatre space was one of things most needed, both in the short and long term. There was also for many a strong emotional attachment to the old National Theatre building, many expressing a wish to see the old building restored (and in some cases enlarged). Some were specific about the need for a venue to match technically what was available internationally.

For the artists and staff of the National Theatre troupes (Department of Performing Arts), the lack of suitable rehearsal space was clearly expressed. This issue did not arise for artists at RUFA, Apsara Arts Association or Sovanna Phum, we presume because performance areas also double as rehearsal spaces.

Interestingly, despite the obvious financial difficulties and the low wages of artists, personal recompense was not amongst the issues raised during interviews; performers stressed instead the deeply held – and what we saw as dignified – desire for built-spaces to maintain, develop and perform their skills.

Without further research, it is not possible to know whether the desire to have the National Theatre restored comes with consideration of, or exposure to, other possibilities. The interviews did not cover this or go into any depth on why many people considered restoration and or / enlargement of the existing National Theatre their preferred choice.

## 1.5 Arts Venues in Phnom Penh

Amongst the artists and performers we interviewed between April 2004 and September 2004 (see Appendix 1 for details), there was a broadly held view that in Phnom Penh there are no good spaces in which to perform. This intrigued us as, at first glance, there seemed to be a number of reasonable venues which are not used to capacity. It became apparent that for the artists, there are reasons either of practicality, location or cost which make these options unworkable and unattractive. In addition, there is for many the notion of a symbolic centre for the performing arts in Cambodia which is unsatisfied.

*"There are different places being used - RUFA, Chenla, Apsara etc - and the Chaktomuk is a meeting place, not a theatre place. But the Bassac (National Theatre) is a place for performing theatre. Even if we create performances we have no place to perform."*

We researched a list of current venues in the capital <sup>6</sup> and these are listed in Appendix 2. We visited most of these and where possible talked to the people responsible for them. Below we refer only to the most important or well used of the venues.

The National Theatre was undamaged during the war and, through the 1980s till the early 1990s, was used for public performances on a regular basis. Since the fire of 1994, the auditorium which held around 1,000 people has been unusable. A covered extension to the rear of the stage was undamaged and is currently used for circus rehearsals. The foyer (with its leaking roof) has become used for dance/theatre rehearsal and storage. There is also a basic timber building at the rear intended for the rehearsal of modern spoken theatre.

The theatre at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) holds an audience of nearly 500 and contains basic theatre equipment along with a large stage. While principally a university resource, it welcomes suitable collaborations: performed here in February 2004 Sophiline Shapiro's popular show of "Seasons of Migration" is an example of an outside producer/director working with local artists from the RUFA departments of music and choreography. With a stage of 15m wide and 12m deep, this is perhaps the only theatre in Phnom Penh which is large enough to hold a full troupe of classical (Royal Ballet) dancers and orchestra on stage. And while scale and sightlines are good, this is principally a university theatre, simply fitted out and not near the centre of Phnom Penh. While some upgrading would be of obvious benefit to the students and audiences, everyone we spoke to felt that the purpose and location of this theatre meant it would be unsuitable as a permanent national theatre.

Also at the north campus of RUFA, there is a circus rehearsal space. It's used by both the circus artists at RUFA and with outside collaborations such as one with La Mama, a New York based group that was produced by Amrita in 2002.

Many regard the Chaktomuk as the unofficial substitute for the damaged National Theatre. Designed in the 1960s as a conference hall, the stage is wide - 14m - but too shallow at 8m and too low for most traditional theatre. Seating for 592 is comfortable; hire fees are in the region of \$800 per day. Owned by the Ministry of Culture, it is used for official events (eg National Culture Day) and hired mainly to business or embassies for functions.

The Russian Cultural Centre is used for smaller performances (up to 200 audience). It has been used in the past by private groups such as the Phnom Penh Players (western theatre) but who no longer perform there, and by chamber groups. It is centrally located, but small - the stage is 11m x 4.5m deep - and with limited back-stage and technical facilities. The Centre Culturel Français (CCF) has a combined cinema and theatre

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<sup>6</sup> With acknowledgment to *Cambodia Arts Directory*, 2001, published by Visiting Arts in association with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and UNESCO Cambodia.

space which seats 130 and has a carpeted stage of 4.7m x 4.2m.

The Chenla Theatre, originally built in the 1960s as the state cinema, was recently renovated and is now named the Phnom Penh Cultural Centre (not to be confused with the National Cultural Centre in Tonle Bassac). Leased, we believe from the Municipality of Phnom Penh, by Overseas Cambodian Investment Corporation – the owner of Canadia Bank – it has 680 seats, a wide stage (16m by 10m deep) and modern equipment. It can be hired for approximately \$600 per evening.

There are two other venues in the capital where troupes are based and performances held: Apsara Arts Association is a dance and music school in Toul Kork which has a small stage and presents classical dance on a weekly basis. Sovanna Phum Khmer Arts Association has troupe of dancers, musicians and puppeteers which performs twice a week at its own venue in Street 360.

In addition, there are two roofed open-air venues with flat-floor seating areas and permanent stages. The National Cultural Centre in Phnom Penh (in Tonle Bassac) can accommodate an audience of around 500 on moveable seats; a leaking roof discourages wet-season use. The Vippasana Centre, 8km outside Phnom Penh in Takmau in a garden setting, is slightly smaller and can hold approximately 300.

The new Pannasastra University theatre has been used for performance, but again is expensive, and technically limited, with the sound and lighting controls behind rather than in front of the stage.

At the time of writing, there is one new hall under construction; the Japanese government are providing a Japan Cooperation Centre at the Institute of Foreign Languages on the Russian Boulevard. This is principally aimed at language training, and we understand it will include a space to accommodate up to 400 people for presentations and otherwise be used for holding examinations.

In summary, with the exception of the RUFA theatre, which is used by students, none of the venues mentioned above are regularly available to performers for rehearsing. And if we exclude the Chenla and the Chaktomuk due to their commercial rental policies, the largest theatre venue is the RUFA theatre, which is an educational resource.

It is clear that there is presently no venue available which can provide the facilities and the identity which the old National Theatre offered before 1994, and there is presently no venue in Cambodia which has the technical capacity to host mid-large scale work from overseas.

At the same time, there are venues in the capital which – although not always ideally suited in terms of size, equipment or location – can be, and are, used for performances. The shortage of financial support for setting up public performances seemed to us to be a key issue which affects all troupes and is more fundamental to whether performances are staged than having a venue to use.

It is rare anywhere in the world for a performing arts venue to be financially self-sustainable; venues usually rely on grants, or revenue support, or income from charitable trusts. In Cambodia, the arts presently suffer from a low level of funding, due in part to the understandable emphasis placed by Government and donors on poverty alleviation following nearly 30 years of military conflict. In the present context, it seems it may paradoxically be easier to attract one-off capital funding for a building project from an international donor than to secure essential ongoing financial support for an arts venue year-on-year.

Consideration of what type of new venue should be created should be prefaced by an analysis of what ongoing funding would be needed to sustain the activities of the venue.

## 1.6 Current and Potential Audiences

The development of future audiences for the performing arts in Cambodia is a complex issue. In one way, the current context of Cambodia's arts is unique (due to the loss of so many artists during the Khmer Rouge regime); the restoration and conservation of forms must continue to be a priority.

Further to this, the question of the exhibition of traditional forms and the development of new derivations, re-creating traditional forms to make them relevant to a young audience while still retaining their artistic integrity, are issues which certainly face Cambodia but also face other countries in the region; for example Thailand and Indonesia face similar artistic challenges. Debates rage around the world about how and what to document and preserve, the threats and benefits of tourism and globalisation, how preservation programmes run the risk of removing forms from the adaptation that has ensured their longevity, and the role of the arts in expressing changing cultures. Other countries have had more opportunity to address this and thus can act as case-studies.

To try to understand the specific context in Cambodia, we started by considering the situation in the 1960s and talked to some people who lived and worked through that period. The messages we received were mixed and represented differing perceptions. Some people said that in the 1960s there was a lively arts scene on Phnom Penh, that there were many theatres and cinemas in town, and that there were also small, local theatres built in timber in the suburbs and provinces which showed traditional work, mainly Bassac Theatre. They said there were special performances – a night-time floating theatre show on the river was one highlight – and at the National Theatre audiences were huge and performances sold out; shows would run for days or weeks till the audience had had enough before they were taken off.

Others described a less positive picture, saying that the National Theatre was used for performances a few times a year and seats were not always sold. Others referred to the theatre attracting an 'urban elite'.

We were interested to know whether people were accustomed in the 1960s to paying to see performances, as revenue funding is always a critical issue for arts venues wherever they are. It seems that probably local performances in small theatres were free, but tickets for the National Theatre were bought at prices that seem to have been not low but still 'affordable'. The situation today regarding paying for to see live performances has changed and a modern 'tradition' has developed of making shows free, or of charging but providing large numbers of complimentary tickets. Free shows seem to us a good way of attracting and developing audiences, but require the costs of the performance to be covered from elsewhere. The exception is the 'fund-raiser' which is marketed mainly to a foreign audience at around \$5 or more per head.

Discussions about costs and tickets led us in our interview with Alain Daniel to be reminded that many of the traditional forms in Cambodia have an origin in mythical and symbolic ritual. Historically, many traditional ritual dances and performances would have had a ceremonial function and lasted many hours; it was in the 1950s and 1960s that some were re-choreographed into shorter pieces more suited to public performance.

It seems to us that the origin of these traditional forms might have an important ongoing effect on how Cambodian audiences would feel about paying to see them, although anecdotally middle-class Cambodians do seem willing to pay modest sums to see live work. On the other hand, many foreign visitors want to see traditional performances and are willing to buy tickets. Artists themselves identified audience development as a key issue, and felt that a building with regular performances would help develop audiences in itself.

Most performances in Phnom Penh are of classical dance, folk dance, and shadow puppetry (Sovanna Phum and Apsara Arts), but almost all forms are presented intermittently, including Yike, Chapei, Lakoun Bassac, Lakoun Nijay, Lakoun Koal etc. On occasions such as National Cultural Day, shadow puppetry, Lakoun Koal

and Lakoun Bassac enjoy audiences of hundreds of people.

Those we spoke to in the event-planning business felt that there is also a strong emerging market in live popular and rock music, which could be significant for those responsible for programming a future venue. We sensed amongst some artists that there could be potential conflict between the desire for 'traditional' performance and contemporary programming; this is an area that would require careful consideration if a programming strategy for a new venue was developed.

The potential of the tourist audience in Phnom Penh is growing, though this can be quickly affected by external factors (eg political/health etc). Also, due to the opening of Siem Reap as an international airport, a significant number of tourists to Cambodia miss out Phnom Penh. Large, high-profile events – such as Les Nuits d'Angkor or operatic evenings – take place in Siem Reap where there is greater audience demand. As such, Phnom Penh without a National Theatre and despite being the base for the national troupes, does not have an image as a place to see performing arts.

Despite this, demand for live work in Phnom Penh appears to be increasing, if one can base this view on the increasing number of performances on offer. While in 1999 Sovanna Phum performed intermittently, in 2004 they are performing twice a week (currently the only place where tourists can regularly see performances in Phnom Penh). Apsara Arts Association presents classical dance every Saturday night. The French Cultural Centre has a monthly performance of a Cambodian form. The Royal University of Fine Arts has performance seasons a few times a year, dependent on raising external funds.<sup>7</sup> The Chaktomuk hosts intermittent performances, often by non-Cambodian artists and on a hire basis. The Phnom Penh Cultural Centre (the ex-Chenla Theatre) has not presented professional cultural performances since its opening weekend in 2003.

There is currently no venue in Phnom Penh that supports regular presentations of professional performance solely through ticket income. This is not surprising – most theatres other than the solely commercial receiving houses such as in London's West End or New York's Broadway depend on external funds. However, it is important to be realistic about the number of people who are currently prepared to attend performing arts events.

There are two types of venue in Phnom Penh where there are substantial Cambodian audiences on a regular basis. One is the regular, free open-air concerts presented by TV companies which are held most weekends and draw large crowds of young people. The other is at commercial cinemas, the number of which has grown quickly over the last two years; it remains to be seen whether this can be sustained. One interviewee said that many of the new cinemas were already losing money, though another thought that with improvements in film making quality sustainability might be possible.<sup>8</sup> The demand for artistic product and film in particular was demonstrated by the cinema festival organised by the French Cultural Centre (CCF) in Phnom Penh in early 2004. "Cine Mekong" was free of charge and attracted a total audience of 20,000 (5,000 during the open air projections and 15,000 in the CCF and the Cine Lux).

The seeds of interest in the arts are planted when we are at a young age and many countries specifically promote the arts amongst young people. While there is a relatively high demand for the intermittent, free productions which are offered now, the majority of Cambodians of all ages have infrequent exposure to the performing arts. An integrated approach to providing access to the arts for young people throughout the country, as well as having inherent value in itself, would in the longer term be an important aspect in developing an audience a new national venue. Many interviewees spoke of the importance of a diversity of

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<sup>7</sup> Sophiline Shapiro's production of "Seasons of Migration" at the Royal University of Fine Arts in February 2004, attracted more than five hundred people. The performance of Faithful Seta at RUFA in October 2004, by students and teachers at RUFA and supported by GTZ, attracted more than 800 people over 3 nights and involved 50 actors and musicians.

<sup>8</sup> Audiences for commercial film generally are under age 25; ticket prices are around 1 \$US.

activity in theatre spaces to draw in young audiences and make the spaces accessible. One interviewee said it was important that a new building should not be not too beautiful, as that would inhibit people from entering.

## 1.7 Programming Policy

Interviewees made many suggestions for the types of work that should be included in the programme; traditional forms, contemporary forms, work from Phnom Penh, work from the provinces, work from overseas. Some interviewees questioned whether there was enough work being produced in Cambodia at the moment to sustain anything more than a small space, while many others felt that the lack of a medium size and well equipped space was inhibiting the production of new work.

Programming policy is key to audience development, but we did not see much strategic thinking in the interviews about how the programme would link to audience development other than through tourism. Some interviewees made a connection between the low existing audiences and the lack of space, hypothesising that if there were a better space, more people would attend.

Some interviewees stressed the importance of vision in programming - that the vision of the programmer would be central to getting people to come to the space. It is our opinion that a detailed study needs to be undertaken in access to and interest in the performing arts to get a picture of who does attend and why it is that people don't.

The role of tourism in programming policy is one that would have to be carefully considered. While the tourist dollar is a valuable one, and tourists exposure to Cambodian arts can be a valuable means of transmitting knowledge of Cambodian performing arts to the rest of the world the balance between work that attracts tourists and work that attracts the people who live in Phnom Penh is delicate one. To stay alive in the long term art needs to change and develop in response to the culture it springs from, and short term gain in audiences and income needs to be balanced with space for experimentation that may not bring the same rewards immediately.

One interviewee bemoaned the way that traditional arts are presented in tourist restaurants, - with so little respect that the audience do not even clap at the end.

The link between the National troupes and a national centre for the performing arts was addressed by many interviewees. Without more probing questions it is difficult to say accurately, but we feel that some interviewees assumed that a national centre would have an emphasis on the national troupes. This is something that should be expanded and discussed in any further study. In terms of audience development, there are many possibilities with different troupes being based at a national centre. In many countries there are specific youth theatre companies based at the national centre with a specific remit of audience development and education.

Ultimately, programming policy is closely linked to artistic policy, audience development and revenue funding (running costs). The type of programming of a national venue does not need to be fixed and may develop over time as capacity for producing new work grows. However, financial sustainability and the extent of external support will be a key determinant in deciding what and how much can be staged.

## 1.8 Notes on the Present National Theatre Building

In the course of our research, we found that there had been many attempts to restore the theatre, but we were not able to verify the accuracy of some of the reports.

- In two instances, Cambodians living abroad unsuccessfully sought to raise funds (1995 and 2000). Also in 2000, a Japanese interest tried to secure funding.
- In the same year, a private investor proposed an eight storey hotel/restaurant development for the site which included a performance space; however the artists would have had to relocate and a rehearsal studio near Pochentong was offered by the developer - the scheme was not acceptable to the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.
- In 1989 UNESCO was approached by the King with a request to raise funds to realise a proposal costed by a Serbian Company, but because of the war in the Balkans, UNESCO were unable to assist.
- The Japanese Government made a donation towards the renovation of the theatre, but this was diverted to emergency relief of the major flooding which occurred in 2001.
- We also heard of Chinese Government interest in funding the restoration of the theatre in the 1990s, but which was not realised due to a large gap in cost expectations.
- In the late 1990s an organisation was founded by Didier Vuillecot in France under the name of ARTS (Association pour la Restoration du Theatre Suramarit). We had the opportunity to speak to him about this in France. His campaign had a relatively high public profile in France, but due to personal reasons the promoter felt that he was not able to pursue the project.
- More recently a Japanese Government interest entered negotiations with the Cambodian Government; the rebuilding/enlargement of the Theatre was agreed, in exchange for land adjacent being given to accommodate a Japanese Cultural Centre. The project is not proceeding in this form and instead a Japanese Cooperation Centre is to be built at the Institute of Foreign Languages on the Russian Boulevard.

### Should the existing building be renovated and restored?

We encountered a mix of views over whether the theatre should or could be renovated; some thought it was important to retain and repair it, while others assumed that the fire-damage meant that it would have to be demolished. We also understand from conversations with senior Ministry staff that the Government may consider the site too small for a large-scale venue and that other sites may be under consideration.

In our view there are some important issues to balance in relation to whether the damaged building should be renovated and upgraded.

- 1 The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, as we understand, have a preference that the location remains a place for performance and the home of the national troupes under the Department of Performing Arts. There is also a desire at the Ministry to see the Theatre renovated and, if possible, the seating capacity increased. In addition, they would like to have in the near future a small separate space for performances (audience of 200-300) and rehearsals.

- 2 The present location and site is generally well suited to a public building such as a major theatre. The site is relatively large, in a zone of other public buildings with good access and parking.<sup>9</sup> The Theatre presently has a generous area of open space around it, which could be used for an enlarged complex if required. The building also has a distinct architectural quality and heritage which, despite the damage it has suffered, suggest that renovation (along side upgrading and possible enlargement) should be considered.

The needs and goals which made the Theatre so successful originally have changed. Current requirements, capacities, policies, potential audiences and funding strategy need to be reviewed and clarified before assessing through a feasibility study how well the existing building and site would suit current and future needs.

### **Can the existing building be renovated?**

When the National Theatre burned in 1994, the foyer was generally undamaged but the auditorium became the heart of the fire; as a result it appears to have experienced high temperatures due probably to the burning of the timber panelling lining the walls. The steel roof over the auditorium collapsed completely and has been removed. The concrete structure has suffered damage, the extent of which could be technically assessed by the use of specialist equipment; as far as we are aware this has not been done. Generally in cases of fire-damaged concrete, repair may be possible but depends on, amongst other factors, the original design/quality of the concrete and proposed loading the structure is to bear in the future.

The underside of the concrete balcony also suffered heat damage; subsequent oxidising (rusting) of the exposed reinforcement due to moisture in the air means that spalling (breaking off of pieces of concrete) continues to take place.

In the foyer, roof coverings are leaking which is causing ongoing damage to ceilings, and there is minor cracking visible in the structure of the foyer which may be historic, as some cracks were filled and decorated before the 1994 fire. However the main structure and internal elements appear generally sound, with exception of the suspended ceilings some of which have collapsed.<sup>10</sup> The side elevations of the building, which contain distinctive concrete grilles and give the building its distinctive look, appear also to be in sound condition. However behind the stage, there is marked subsidence evident in the large curved brick-faced walls which may pre-date the fire.

The viability of repairing or reinstating the auditorium depends on the proposed future use of the theatre, which still needs to be established. The cost of repairs would have to be assessed against the cost of demolition and rebuilding of the affected areas.

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<sup>9</sup> Car parking for visitors to the National Theatre was apparently provided in an area to the south of the theatre site which is now occupied by timber housing; we understand that this land is owned by the Municipality of Phnom Penh. The theatre compound is adjacent to the National Cultural Centre (Department of Cultural Development); mutual sharing of buildings and spaces could be of benefit to both organisations.

<sup>10</sup> A full inspection has not been made, but the safety of those who use the building for rehearsals etc should be considered in light of the possibility of falling debris. It would be advisable to rope off areas to limit access, and to remove all weakened ceilings, prior to having a full condition survey carried out.

## 1.9 Some Technical Issues for a Performing Arts Centre

In our discussions with interviewees, a wide range of possible activities for a new venue were mentioned. These include a concert (maybe a dedicated concert hall), theatre (maybe 2 auditoria of different sizes), cinema, art gallery, conferences, function rooms, rehearsal, storage, library, archives space, offices, shops, restaurants and cafes. In addition to restoring and expanding the theatre, it seemed that it could be worthwhile exploring ideas of adding other activities and facilities – commercial and non-commercial – on the same site, so that there was a focusing of arts activity, as happens in many other cities.

Locating different kinds of activities next to each other in one cultural building or complex would raise some technical issues, but these are generally well understood amongst experienced theatre designers and a wide range of options have been tried in different parts of the world. Solutions vary according to custom, climate, budget and technical matters. Particular challenges arise when a single space (auditorium) is intended for two or more types of performance activity. For example, cinema and theatre have different sight-line and acoustic requirements, which affect the ideal seating layout for each, as well as there being issues of film-projection and viewing angles to be taken into account. Concert use and drama/theatre have conflicting acoustic requirements, which are greatly affected by the auditorium and the shape of the stage; acoustics are directly affected by the form and volume of a space and successful combinations of concert and theatre use are few and usually costly.

In terms of theatre, the type of stage and the desired relationship of performer to audience may take many forms, depending on the type of work being performed; the relationship of seats to stage may not always need to be the same and some flexibility may be desirable. The type of theatre performance will determine how large the back-stage and dressing rooms need to be and, for instance, whether there needs to be a fly-tower for lifting sets and backdrops (which is not desirable in a concert situation). Another aspect is whether a theatre produces its own shows or acts as a 'receiving' theatre; a theatre which produces its own work will need very different workshop and storage spaces than a theatre which only receives work produced elsewhere.

If the theatre has more than one auditorium, how the backstage facilities and workshops are shared will be important to the effective and efficient running of the theatre, and if there are many troupes based at the theatre, off site rehearsal and storage space may be required.

Technical requirements will form an important part of all options for the new venue and should be considered from an early stage. Whether it is a simple theatre or an arts complex which is required, what the building aims to provide for its users should in our view be established through a process of consultation which bears in mind both costs and technical limitations from the beginning.

## 1.10 Financial and Organisational Issues

### Financial

Finance is obviously key to the sustainability of a space. We spoke to some people who had experience in managing buildings overseas and in Cambodia. There are three principal considerations: set up costs, running costs, and financial management.

Case-studies we examined had often been provided with the means of generating their own income separate from artistic activity. One venue manager in Singapore stressed the importance of multi million endowments at the beginning that can be used to fund the running costs of the building after it has opened, and to try to find a space that has commercial opportunities. The example of the Australian National Ballet was given, where the Australian Government provided them with a space which the ANB had negotiated to have underground car parking. The commercial income from this now covers their overhead costs. The same venue manager in Singapore stressed the importance of buying high quality equipment in the beginning to reduce costs in the long term. She told us that money for projects and artists will come, but money for a building is hard to get after it opens.

One business adviser in Phnom Penh warned against the same issue, giving the example of the National Theatre in Hanoi, which was beautifully restored at a cost of several million dollars, but has limited use due to a lack of operating funds. Having a secure basis of operating funds is essential to a venue being able to present quality work on a regular basis.

We did not interview potential funders, however many interviewees suggested a variety of funding sources, including private foundations, individual donations from Cambodia and overseas and overseas Governments. It was also said many times that realising a project like this will require real political will from top levels of the Cambodian Government and the King.

### Organisational

When asked for their opinions on how a national cultural centre for the performing arts should be managed, interviewees suggested the involvement of a variety of different types of people and institutions, including Ministry of Culture staff, artists, finance and other specialists, and politicians. It was suggested by some people that there should be an advisory committee or board overseeing and supporting the day to day work undertaken by a specialist or specialists responsible for programme and management. In the UK many theatre companies which have buildings set up two separate companies - one non-profit company which holds the building and constitutionally exists to support a separate theatre company. Another model is that of The Substation arts centre and theatre, Singapore, which benefits from a building leased to it from the Government at 10% of the market value and is also supported by Government grants for running costs.

The management of a venue would be closely allied to audience development and programming, requiring a range of skills and expertise. Training was mentioned by some interviewees, and the importance of using the period between when a decision was made to build and the opening to ensure that staff had any training they needed to manage a new or adapted space and equipment. We are aware of two programmes in these areas; the NEFA programme at RUFA and a three year training programme in technical and arts management issues through the French Government, although we did not investigate the current status of either of these programmes in detail.

### 1.11 Preliminary Conclusions

Through our research, it is clear that there is a strong and widely-held interest in seeing more performing arts in Cambodia; and that for many people it is important to have a central arts facility which would be again the symbolic home of the performing arts in Cambodia.

For many of those consulted, the traditional performing arts are the highest priority; this is due to a perceived need to conserve the forms which have been part of Khmer culture for many centuries. At the same time, many people would like to see other types of performance as well: for instance, spoken theatre, traditional music, modern musical forms, and perhaps visiting works from abroad. It is also clear that as well as the performing arts, developments in other art forms are taking place in Cambodia, including the visual arts and film-making.

The location and construction of a national venue should have, and would require, the support of the Royal Government of Cambodia. Indeed, there are clear indications that the provision of a national theatre venue is seen as desirable by the present Government.

At the present time (April 2005) it is not known whether the National theatre is to be renovated or replaced. However the present and future needs of a venue should in our view need to be clarified through a process of discussion and debate, leading to a feasibility study. These needs will be influenced to some extent by national policies in cultural development but also in education and tourism; thus it is important that in planning a new major venue, these three sectors are represented.

A decision whether to retain and renovate the National Theatre may be made on a historical or heritage basis, but how well the existing National Theatre and its compound would be suit the new needs and requirements remains to be seen.

### 1.12 Recommendations

In light of there being a private investor who may be willing to invest in a theatre venue, we support the idea of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts to set up a special committee to identify the requirements of a national performing arts venue and base for the National troupes, and assist co-operation with the investor. The relationship between the committee and the investor should be determined jointly.

The committee could carry out, or commission, a feasibility study to confirm the requirements of a national venue and to define a strategy for its long-term funding and programming. The requirements for the venue and also its funding should be defined in relation to the current context and also in view of plans for the future development of the arts, education and tourism.

The stages of the Committee's role would have to be worked out by the Committee itself, but could be broadly as follows (some stages will overlap).

- 1 Establishment  
A Committee is established and its members selected, its constitution and aims agreed. The Committee sets out its targets, timetable and budget.
- 2 Policy Planning:  
Consultation and policy debate to establish a vision and set of requirements for the venue, in the context of wider policies, city planning, funding options etc.
- 3 Feasibility Study  
The feasibility study could research and review a range of practical options, along with costs, business plans, strategy for audience development, programming proposals etc. Funding options could be developed and assessed.
- 4 Approval:  
Formal discussion and approval at Government level of the proposals.
- 5 Procurement:  
Secure funding for capital expenditure on the building project.  
Procurement of full design and technical proposals, via the selection of consultants, competition etc.

It may be most effective if the Committee is made up of two parts, a Strategy Group and a Technical Group. The Strategy Group would have overall responsibility for setting direction and reviewing the key stages of the project, ensuring that decisions are made and the project is brought to a conclusion. The Technical Group would then have responsibility to the Strategy Group for administration, management of the process and coordination of the tasks and roles of those people and organisations contributing to the study.

The Strategy Group should be headed by someone with wide experience of the arts in Cambodia and who has, along with visionary qualities and leadership skills, the respect of other committee members and key institutions. The Committee would need a realistic budget to carry out its responsibilities. It may decide that specialist advice is needed for particular stages.

In summary, there is now a concrete opportunity for a valuable and forward-looking development in the arts and culture in Cambodia; the issue of a national theatre venue could become the catalyst for ongoing debate, change and growth in the expression of the arts in Cambodia. This could over time make a real difference to the whole of Cambodian society, privileged and disadvantaged, urban or rural. However the pressure of time is such that, for action to be effective, measures should be progressed positively and without delay.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: People and Organisations Consulted

The following were consulted during this preliminary study and we are grateful for their time and assistance. The list is arranged alphabetically by surname.

Mr CHHAY Sopha	Chairman, Apsara Arts Association, Phnom Penh
Mr CHET Sarin (Ta Saw)	Retired Lakoun Koal artist and RUFA teacher
Mr Etienne CLEMENT	UNESCO Representative in Cambodia
Mr Alain DANIEL	Former Professor of Khmer Language at INALCO, France
Mr Fred FRUMBERG	Director, Amrita Performing Arts, Phnom Penh
Ms Malissa GOUGH	General Manager, The Substation (Arts Centre) Singapore
HE Prof HANG Soth	Director General of Techniques for Culture, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
Mr ITH Chamroeun	Deputy Director of the Department of Performing Arts, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
Mr Guy ISSANJOU	Director, French Cultural Centre, Phnom Penh
Mr KEO Malis	Director, Department of Dance, RUFA
Mr LAW Sen	Spoken Theatre Artist
Mr LY Daravuth	Co-Director, Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture
Mr MAO Keng	Director of the Department of Performing Arts, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
Mr Chikahiro MASUDA	Assistant Resident Representative, JICA
Dr Ingrid MUAN	Co-Director, Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture
Ms NOU Sandap	Head of Spoken Theatre, Department of Performing Arts, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
Mr Osman OMAR	Managing Partner, Bite Productions, Cambodia
Ms Jenny PEARSON	Director, VBNK
Dr PEN Dareth	Advisor to the Council of Ministers, Secretary General of the Inter Ministerial Committee for Coordination and Evaluation of the Culture and Fine Arts of the Khmer Empire
Mr PROEUNG Chhieng	Vice Rector, Dean of the Faculty of Choreography, Royal University of Fine Arts
Mr POK Saran	Office Director of Arts Community in National Art Department
Mr Adam SACK	General Manager, Mekong Project Development Facility, IFC
Mr Seng SAMART	Co-director of Arts Community, National Arts Department
Ms Carol STRICKLER	Executive Director, Co-operation Committee for Cambodia
Mr SUON Bun Rith	Project Coordinator, Amrita Performing Arts
Mr TANG Sambath	Manager, Phnom Penh Cultural Centre (Chenla Theatre)
HE VANN Molyvann	Architect of the existing National Theatre
Ms VONG Metry	Vice-Chairwoman, Apsara Arts Association
Mr Didier VUILLECOT	Promoter

The following is the questionnaire used in some of the interviews we carried out; many interviews did not follow this pattern.

### Questionnaire on performing arts venue in Phnom Penh

The Preah Suramarit Theatre (named by the King after his father) was until 1994 a centre for the performing arts and was also a national symbol of culture. It was built in 1968 to a high standard and was well used. It was badly damaged 10 years ago and despite various attempts Phnom Penh still does not have a national theatre and the national troupes do not have rehearsing spaces.

Today there is an urgent need to address this issue for the development of performing arts and more generally arts in Cambodia. After different discussions in the last months, various individuals involved in arts (artists/producers, Cambodian and foreigners) decided to join their efforts together.

As a first step, it has been decided to collect opinions and information on performing arts in Cambodia: recent history, richness & difficulties, needs and dreams for the short term and long term. For this, we have decided to conduct a few interviews, such as this one today.

Based on these interviews, a more in-depth study might be conducted to further research on the different options and hopefully the final result could be to submit a proposal for funding to government and donors.

However, at this stage, we are just starting from the idea that Phnom Penh, Cambodia needs more rehearsal spaces and venues and there is no presumption about what should be done, where and how.

This idea of working on the building of a performing arts venue is currently only a dream for all of us, but we hope that by joining together our efforts dream might become reality.

For your information, this dream and the above ideas have already been shared with officials from the Ministry (among which HE Prof. Hang Soth, Proeung Chhieng and Mao Keng) who welcomed the idea positively.

At the back of the report we will write the names of everyone we interview, but will not attribute individual comments to individual artists.

Thank in advance for your attention and the time you will spend for this interview.

Family Name:

Given Name:

Sex:

Approximate age:

Occupation:

Employer/Organization:

Education background:

Contact details

Mobile:

Telephone:

Email:

Address:

Interviewer:

Date/Place of the interview:

### QUESTIONS

1. If money was no problem, what would you like to see in a cultural centre for the whole country? How would you like it to be?
2. Do you have thoughts on how such a cultural centre should be run and organized?
3. What does the performing artists' community need urgently, maybe within the next year or two?
4. What do you see as the main problems people in your job face?
5. Would you be interested in being kept informed on the development of this study?
6. Do you have anything else that you would like to tell us?

## Appendix 2: Data on Current Performing Arts Venues in Phnom Penh

The following is a brief summary of the performing arts venues in and around Phnom Penh; basic details have been included, to indicate size and type of venue. A detailed survey was carried out by Visiting Arts in 2001<sup>11</sup> which describes the venues available at that time in more detail; much of that information is still current, though some venues have changed.

### **Apsara Arts Association Theatre**

The home of the Apsara Arts Association, a local NGO providing training, accommodation and food to orphans and poor children.

Seats: up to 80 on removable chairs.

Stage: 10m wide and 7.5m deep.

An roofed outdoor space with simple equipment used on a regular basis by the Association; available for hire.

Location: 211, Street 598, Khan Russei Keo, Phnom Penh.

### **Chaktomuk Conference Hall**

Owned and managed by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts

Seats: 592.

Stage: approx 14m wide and 8m deep.

Refurbished in 2000, the hall is available for hire. There are no wing spaces to the side of the stage. Designed as a conference facility; limited height above the stage.

Location: Preah Sisowath Quay, Phnom Penh.

### **Chenla Theatre**

Leased by Canadia Bank from the Government/Municipality.

Seats: 680.

Stage: approx 16m wide and 10m deep.

10 x 6 metre cinema screen, with VHS/DVD projectors.

Originally designed as a cinema, the building was refurbished and reopened in April 2004 as a cinema/theatre, with new equipment and lighting. Available for hire.

Location: junction of Issarak/Monireth Boulevards (near the Intercontinental Hotel), Phnom Penh.

### **Centre Culturel Français Cinéma**

Managed by the Centre Culturel Français (CCF)

Seats: 130.

Stage: 4.7m wide and 4.2m deep.

Principally a well equipped cinema, the space is used for live performances of a small scale.

Location: 318, Street 184, Phnom Penh.

### **National Cultural Centre Theatre**

Owned by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts; home to the Department of Cultural Development.

Seats: up to 500, in moveable chairs on a flat concrete floor.

Stage: 16m wide and 12 m deep.

This is a basic, roofed outdoor space, with a concrete stage and a dressing room block; part of the National Cultural Centre. Available through the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.

Location: Preah Sisowath Quay, Tonle Bassac, Phnom Penh (next to the National Theatre).

### **Pannasastra University of Cambodia Amphitheatre**

Part of Pannasastra University South Campus

Seats: 500

Stage: Unknown

Airconditioned space used for talks, lectures and occasional performances.

Location: Norodom, south of the Independence Monument.

### **Royal University of Fine Arts Theatre**

Faculties of Choreographic Arts and Music.

Seats: 497 on concrete tiers.

Stage: 15m wide and 12m deep.

This is a basic indoor theatre with some standard equipment. Available for hire.

Location: 4 Street 70, Phnom Penh (near the Japanese Friendship bridge)

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<sup>11</sup> *Cambodia Arts Directory*, 2001, by Visiting Arts in association with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and UNESCO Cambodia.

**Russian Cultural Centre Auditorium**

Russian Centre of Science and Culture.

Seats: 200 removable seats, on tiers.

Stage: 11m wide and 4.5 m deep.

A rectangular hall with some lighting, sound and projection equipment, available for hire. Used regularly for NGO workshops, conferences and Christian religious services.

Location: 103 Norodom Boulevard, Phnom Penh.

**Sovanna Phum Theatre**

The home of the Sovanna Phum Arts Association.

Seats: up to 120 on benches.

Stage: 10m wide and 5m deep.

An outdoor, roofed space with simple equipment used on a regular basis by the Association and other arts companies.

Location: 111, Street 360, Phnom Penh.

**Vipassana Centre**

A privately owned venue in a religious garden setting.

Stage: forestage 17m wide and 11m deep; raised rear stage 16m wide and 6 m deep.

Seats: approx 500 on moveable seats; the floor is flat with two levels of tiers on each of three sides.

An outdoor, roofed space with basic equipment and dressing rooms.

Location: Takmau, 12km from Phnom Penh centre.

### Appendix 3: Quotations

The following quotations are selected from the interviews we carried out. They are not intended as a representative sample.

"Arts and culture are going down because we don't have a theatre. I want to have a national theatre for the country, for the sake of the artists and for the nation."

"We need to have frequent performances for Cambodians, national and international audiences to promote Cambodian culture. Some artists when they finish school aren't proficient in dancing. We need performances."

"I want both the traditional and the modern to grow, not for one to grow and the other to be smothered. I want more audiences and supporters of classical dance. Khmer classical dance is not so known overseas or sometimes in the provinces. People in the countryside want to see it. They should have freedom to."

"I really want to see a really modern stage for artists to perform for national and international guests. Also a small theatre with a small exhibition space to exhibit unique items to tell the story of Cambodia's cultural history - it could be books, writing, anything..."

"Space for all the different skills to rehearse is important - not in the theatre itself but round it. We also need offices for each department."

"I need a rehearsal space, a place to perform and a place to keep sacred objects."

"There are different places being used - RUFA, Chenla, Apsara etc - and the Chaktomuk is a meeting place, not a theatre place. But the Bassac (*National Theatre*) is a place for performing theatre. Even if we create performances we have no place to perform."

"Nowadays changes in our country, the region and the world force us to prepare ourselves and walk forward. In these modern times we need to catch up with performance for the Cambodian people. Since the theatre was burned it seems like the boat has nothing to row it with."

"Really, necessarily and urgently for the artists we need a theatre."

"A big problem is the lack of rehearsal space. We should like to see a small hall which can be used for rehearsals as well as shows for tourists."

"We are artists and we have no place to rehearse. We have no place to rehearse. Everybody loves his or her own house, even if it doesn't have a roof. If you use another space you always have to pay money to rent it."

"We need a big space for us to have meetings and rehearse. But different spaces for people to work on different things. Spaces for people to work on their own too. A small space for classes..."

"You have to create an audience and adapt."

"There are enough performing spaces. What is needed is not a building but increased commissioning of performances."

"An artistic director is essential. It has to be a strong person. Someone who loves Cambodia and knows the international scene... If the artistic director has a real cultural policy it will be possible for him/her to develop opportunities and be inventive with them."

"What's missing is climate, space, an environment, something, of creative opportunity. Sometimes struggle is good for creativity but the stress level here is such that it is not."

## Appendix 4: Possible Tasks to Include in a Feasibility Study

The recommendations in section 1.12 above suggested possible stages for the special committee's activities. These are preliminary and we anticipate they would be debated and developed by the committee itself. Our initial thoughts on the Feasibility Study Stage are included below for information and discussion:

### Feasibility Study Stage:

- 1 Carry out a detailed review of physical and spatial needs, audience development issues, programming and arts policy issues, management structures etc.
- 2 Carry out consultations and interviews; audience surveys; workshops.
- 3 Establish a set of detailed requirements for a venue, probably on the basis of 'ideal / preferred / minimum'.
- 4 Develop a range of outline 'concept' options and costs; review these with stakeholders via presentations and workshops. Select up to three possible options.
- 5 Develop the selected options in more detail: business plans, audience issues, programming, organisational structure, funding and architectural concept proposals (including a review of the existing building and suitability of the site) with broad costs.
- 6 Produce a full report including architectural concept drawings and other findings.
- 7 Review with stakeholders, through presentations and workshops.
- 8 The Commission selects one preferred option.

## Appendix 5: Author's Credentials

### **Geoffrey Pyle**

has a background in architecture for the arts over twenty years. He has worked with a range of private and local-government arts clients in managing feasibility studies and strategic assessments, covering business and arts programming as well as space and physical requirements. He worked on a number of cinema and theatre projects (Almeida Theatre Islington, Queen's Theatre Barnstable, Ocean Village Cinema Southampton) before setting up his own architectural consultancy in London which specialised in arts projects. He was responsible for feasibility studies for the Churchill Theatre in Bromley, the Studio Media Centre in Bromley, Chichester Arts Centre, and the Phoenix Cinema in Finchley which was supported by the National Lottery. Proposals for a major visual arts centre in Gateshead won 'runner-up' in an international competition.

He lives in Phnom Penh and practices architecture, as well as coordinating Khmer Architecture Tours which he co-founded in 2004, and being an advisor to Phnom Penh Arts Festival. He has taught architecture and is a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. His drawings have been exhibited in London at the Royal Institute of British Architects, the British Council, the Royal Fine Arts Commission and the Royal Academy.

### **Jane Martin**

has worked in theatre as a producer, administrator, project manager and arts for development consultant for fifteen years. She has an MA in Arts from Glasgow University and is currently writing a thesis for the MA and Media for Development from the University of Southampton. Her UK theatre work includes project design and management of the People Show's UK National Lottery bid to purchase, renovate and equip their rehearsal and performance space in East London, a feasibility study for the Oxford House performance space, tours and co-productions in venues from Barlinnie Prison to the National Theatre, London and the Bouffes du Nord, Paris and the management of a nationwide project to recruit young people to train and perform in the central show of the Millennium Dome.

She currently works as an arts and development consultant in Cambodia on design and facilitation of arts for development projects. Clients have included Social Services of Cambodia, Sovanna Phum, RACHA, Mlup Baitong and PACT. She is currently the co-director of the Phnom Penh Arts Festival, a research associate with the Center for Advanced Study on a three-country study on developing cultural indicators for development, and a consultant with Family Health International and Social Services Cambodia.