

Acting Edition

Cambodian Rock Band

by Lauren Yee

Featuring Songs by
Dengue Fever

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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“Uku,” “Family Business,” “One Thousand Tears of a Tarantula,” “Cement Slippers,” “Sni Bong,” and “Tooth and Nail,” all written by Dengue Fever.

All Dengue Fever songs administered by Ellipsis Music Corp. (ASCAP) and Pentagon Lipservices (BMI) on behalf of:

Chhom Chimney • 1 Armed Crab Pub • Foolish Mortal Pub • Noon Key Music • S W O P Songs • Troll Under The Bridge.

“The Times They Are A-Changin’”

Written by Bob Dylan

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“Jeas Cyclo” by Yol Aularong; “Today I Learnt to Drink,” “Old Pot Still Cooks Tasty Rice,” “I am Sixteen” by Voy Ho/Ros Serey Sothea; and “Champa Battambang” by Sinn Sisamouth.

All used by arrangement with Minky Records, Inc.

Additional Arrangements by Matthew MacNelly and Jane Lui.

CAMBODIAN ROCK BAND was commissioned and first produced by South Coast Repertory with support from the Time Warner Foundation, premiering on March 4, 2018. The performance was directed by Chay Yew, with scenic design by Takeshi Kata and Se Hyun Oh, costume design by Sara Ryung Clement, lighting design by David Weiner, sound design by Mikhail Fiksel, music direction by Matthew MacNelly, and dramaturgy by Andy Knight. The stage manager was Bryan Sommer. The cast was as follows:

NEARY / SOTHEA	Brooke Ishibashi
ROM / JOURNALIST	Abraham Kim
TED / LENG	Raymond Lee
POU / GUARD	Jane Lui
CHUM	Joe Ngo
DUCH	Daisuke Tsuji

Developed with support from The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Berkeley, California.

CHARACTERS

CHUM – male, 51 and 18, Cambodian

NEARY – female, 26, Cambodian American (also plays **SOTHEA**)

TED – male, 25, Thai Canadian (also plays **CADRE, LENG**)

DUCH – male, ageless, Cambodian

ROM – any gender, 20s-30s, Cambodian (also plays **JOURNALIST**)

POU – any gender, 20s-30s, Cambodian (also plays **S-21 GUARD**)

Chum, Neary/Sothea, Ted/Leng, and Duch serve mainly as actors. Rom and Pou serve mainly as musicians. Note: Rom and Pou are written as male and female, respectively, in this script, but the characters can be played by actors of any gender.

In scenes from the past, Chum, Leng, Sothea, Rom, Pou, and Duch speak in perfect English, standard American accents, to reflect that they are speaking fluent Cambodian/Khmer.

THE BAND

You can adapt this (and corresponding dialogue) according to your actors' musical talents, but here's a possible blueprint:

CHUM – electric bass guitar, vocals

LENG – electric guitar, vocals

SOTHEA – lead female vocals, tambourine

ROM – drums/percussion

POU – keyboard, vocals

DUCH – tambourine or cowbell (should he be so moved)

A sax and more percussion would be great, but not necessary.

SETTING

Phnom Penh, Cambodia (April 2008)

Outer Phnom Penh, Cambodia (April 1978)

Phnom Penh, Cambodia (April 1975)

The Set List

Side A

“Jeas Cyclo Version A” by Yol Aularong

“Uku” by Dengue Fever

“Old Pot Still Cooks Good Rice” by Ros Serey Sothea

“Family Business” by Dengue Fever

“One Thousand Tears of a Tarantula” by Dengue Fever

“Cement Slippers” by Dengue Fever

Side B

“Champa Battambang” by Sinn Sisamouth

“Sni Bong” by Dengue Fever

“The Times They Are A-Changin’” by Bob Dylan

“Tooth and Nail” by Dengue Fever

“I’m Sixteen (Chnam Oun Dawp-Pram Mouy)” by Voy Ho/Ros Serey Sothea

“Jeas Cyclo Version B – Reprise” by Yol Aularong

“Today I Learnt to Drink (Doo Wop)” by Ros Serey Sothea

About the Music

The music in this play is raucous, loud, bubblegum, dissonant psychedelic surfer rock. We should hear in it the Jackson 5, Jefferson Airplane, and James Taylor, but also all their Cambodian counterparts. It should sound both familiar and foreign. Most of all, the music should be shit you want to get up and dance to. Music to get drunk and high to. The biggest, most epic, and possibly last concert of your life. Check out music by Ros Serey Sothea and Sinn Sisamouth to get started.

One More Thing

This will help you out: the word “Khmer” means “Cambodian.” It can refer to the language (we speak Khmer), the people (we are Khmer), and the Khmer Rouge (“Red Cambodia,” or the communists). “Khmer” is pronounced “Kuh-MAI.”

Special Thanks

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*For Joe Ngo and the Cambodian American community
that made this play possible*

ACT ONE

Scene One

*(An empty stage set up for a rock concert. Electric guitar, electric bass, full drum kit, keyboard, and mics. The **BAND – CHUM, LENG, SOTHEA, POU, and ROM** – comes out. Whoever is the guitarist sings lead vocals on this song.)*

[MUSIC NO. 01 “JEAS CYCLO VERSION A”]

LENG OR CHUM.

JEAS CEECLO TOV SA THMEY KERN SREY SREY
PEK AOUV PA-ERM KA YOUM SMAN TAE PA-EM
MEN MEIN PA-EM TE KER KE NI YOUM MOT THMEYI!
MOUY TNAI MOUY THNAI KAYOUM RORVOL TER JEAS
CEECLLO MERL SREY SREY
BER SIN JEAR KRAR NERN RERN JEAS CEECLO
MERL SREY SREY KOR KAYOUM SOK JEAT DER

LENG.

BOTSVANG!

SOTHEA.

BOTSDAM!

CHUM.

PLOONG STOP!

ALL.

CEECLLO!

JEAS CEECLO TOV SA JAS SREY SREY JRERN NAS
MA-SOA PENH MOK TOK SOK TI TOIY
AOUN-KOUY JOUN HOUNG DUNG PLAI SAU MAY PEK
AOUV PA-EM TEAT HOUYI!

MOUY TNAI MOUY THNAI KAYOUM RORVOL TER JEAS
 CEECLO MERL SREY SREY
 BER SIN JEAR KRAR NERN RERN JEAS CEECLO
 MERL SREY SREY KOR KAYOUM SOK JEAT DER

LENG.

CEE CLO!

SOTHEA.

CEE CLO!

CHUM.

CEE CLO!

ALL.

CEE CLO!

[MUSIC NO. 02 "UKU"]

SOTHEA.

OH, OH, OH

OH, OH, OH

JOM NOR KA DERK AOUY OUN NERK SROK

NERK DOL YEI TA MING MEAR PA-OUN BONG

JOM NOR KA DERK AOUY OUN NERK SROK

NERK DOL YEI TA MING MEAR PA-OUN BONG SA-AN TNAH

OH, OH, OH

OH, OH, OH, OH

OH, OH, OH

OH, OH, OH, OH

*(They get about halfway through the song
 when **DUCH** appears onstage and stops the
 song.)*

DUCH. Thank you! Thank you!

(One stray note plays.)

THANK YOU.

The Cyclos, everyone!

Weren't they great?

And that was "Uku."

"Uku"?

(A nod.)

From their first, last, ONLY album, recorded in Phnom Penh, April 1975.

A tape that – like so much of Cambodia’s music of the time – no longer exists.

Because in case you were not aware, music is the soul of Cambodia.

It’s true!

(He clicks through slides of Cambodia’s rock bands and musical acts. The people are young, vibrant, and of the period.)*

But that’s not what you think of when you think of Cambodia, is it?

YOU think of something a little more like this.

(He clicks on slides of Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge. Black and white. Gruesome.)*

Boring.

(Next slide.)

Tragique!

(Next slide.)

Genocide genocide genocide. Boo.

(He clicks off the slides.)

You think of everything that came after, once the shit hit the fan.

The Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot, and two million dead.

A story I’ve told a thousand times over, quite a lonely endeavor.

It’s enough to keep you up at night!

(The sound of a plane landing streaks overhead.)

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DUCH. But tonight, I find, I've got company.

Because for the first time in thirty years

his plane has hit the tarmac

his bags are in the cab

and it appears, oh yes, he is back.

Sooner or later, they all come back.

And while I am rather set in my ways, perhaps this is good.

Perhaps this is how I finally get some sleep.

So tonight – for one night only – my story

told just a little bit differently.

I may not appear in this story for quite some time.

I KNOW!

But even when I'm not HERE here, I'm still basically here, oh yes I am.

Watching watching always watching.

Is that confusing? Are you confused?

Welcome to Cambodia, 2008!

(Ting! He has a pair of finger cymbals that he plays himself or deputizes to ROM.)

The jewel, the pearl, the DETROIT of Southeast Asia.

The lost cause of lost causes!

The capital of music.

Welcome to my show.

Scene Two

(Phnom Penh. April 2008.)

(Lights up on the radio in the corner of the hotel room as music plays. CHUM, 51, has just entered the room. He hears the radio playing. He turns off the radio. Music stops. Silence. NEARY, 26, enters with a huge stack of manila folders, on a call.)*

CHUM. Neary!

NEARY. Frank, I'm going to have to call you back.

(She hangs up.)

Daddy, what're you doing here?

CHUM. I said I was your dad, they just GAVE ME the key. That's terrible! I could've been a stranger. We need to talk to them about that.

NEARY. No, no, no, what're you doing here? In Cambodia.

CHUM. You invited me.

NEARY. When I first got here, two years ago.

CHUM. You always said for me and Mom to come visit.

NEARY. I never thought you'd actually come.

CHUM. Hey, it's New Year's! New year, new dad.

NEARY. It's a really busy time for us. Why didn't you guys at least tell me you were coming?

CHUM. I try calling from the airport, but I couldn't find some change!

NEARY. No, like BEFORE today.

CHUM. Last-minute. You know your dad. Cambodian time!

NEARY. Weren't plane tickets like –

CHUM. Aah, don't worry! I just went to the airport and told them, "I'm Neary's dad, I gotta see my daughter

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for New Year's," so they put me on the next plane to Phnom Penh, no charge!

(Beat.)

That's not true. I maxed out the credit card.

NEARY. Mom let you do that?

CHUM. So how come you live in a hotel?

NEARY. One of our partnering NGOs runs it. It's convenient.

CHUM. They give you a good deal?

NEARY. On the room?

CHUM. How much they charge?

NEARY. Two hundred.

CHUM. DOLLARS?!

NEARY. Yeah.

CHUM. A MONTH?!

(We can't quite tell from his tone whether that's good or bad.)

NEARY. ...Yes?

CHUM. That's TERRIBLE! My daughter comes back to Cambodia and they put her in this room, SO SMALL.

NEARY. I didn't "come back."

CHUM. Oh yes you did!

NEARY. I've never been to Cambodia. So technically I can't be "coming back."

CHUM. Hey: I come from Cambodia, so you come from Cambodia. And now you come back and they don't even give you a good deal on the hotel? They should be ashamed of themselves! What kind of Cambodians are they?

NEARY. I don't even think they're Cambodian!

CHUM. What else could they be?

NEARY. I don't know, Thai?

CHUM. See? Can't trust the Thai!

NEARY. Daddy!

CHUM. We gotta move you outta here and across the street to the Sheraton!

NEARY. I'm not moving into the Sheraton!

CHUM. My cyclo driver was telling me, they got a full buffet and everything! We check you into the Sheraton, take a dip in the fish spa!

NEARY. The what?

CHUM. The fish spa! You ain't been there yet? You pay the people money and they eat the dead skin off your feet. The fish, not the people. You come with me, maybe they give us the Cambodian price! A two-for-one deal. *(Re: number of feet.)* Or a four-for-two deal.

NEARY. If you and Mom want to stay at the Sheraton, fine, but I'll be here –

CHUM. Nah! We stay, we stay all together.

NEARY. In this room?

CHUM. I just sleep on the floor.

NEARY. Daddy, you're not sleeping on the floor.

CHUM. I used to sleep on the floor all the time! Back then, you used to be lucky, you had some floor like this to sleep on. You be like, "Wow, look at that floor! I'mma sleep all over that!"

NEARY. And Mom wants to sleep on the floor, too?

(TED enters in swim trunks. He towels off.)

TED. Oh hey.

CHUM. Who're you?

NEARY. Ted, this is my father.

TED. OH! MR. CHUM! I didn't know we were expecting you.

NEARY. We weren't.

CHUM. New year, new dad!

NEARY. Ted works with me at ICTJ.

CHUM. Oh! The International Center for Tricky Justice!

NEARY. Transitional justice. We work for the International Center for Transitional Justice.

CHUM. War crimes, I know.

TED. (*In Khmer.*) *Lok, chom reab suor.**

CHUM. (*Can't hear.*) What?

TED. (*In Khmer.*) *Lok, chom reab suor?*

NEARY. Just say it in English, Ted.

CHUM. In my GOOD EAR!

(*Re: left ear.*) This one don't work no more.

TED. Hello, Mr. Chum.

CHUM. Hello –

TED. Ted. Patpong.

CHUM. Patpong. Thai.

NEARY. Half-Thai.

CHUM. So Ted PATPONG, whatchu doing all the way here
from THAILAND?

NEARY. Ted's never been to Thailand.

TED. I was born and raised in Toronto.

CHUM. So you switch off?

TED. Excuse me?

CHUM. You work for Thailand, you work for Cambodia?
Either way!

NEARY. Ted is from Canada.

CHUM. Well, very nice to meet you Ted the Canadian
switch-hitter who SOMEHOW lives in Cambodia.

TED. Will we see you at the party?

CHUM. What party?

NEARY. No party.

TED. Over at the Sheraton.

CHUM. Oooh, the Sheraton!

NEARY. Just to toast New Year's.

TED. They've got live-band karaoke and everything.

NEARY. My dad doesn't do karaoke.

TED. Still, you should come!

*Hello, sir.

CHUM. Well, I see you there.

(TED waits.)

You looking for something, Ted Patpong?

TED. Sorry, I gotta change.

NEARY. Do it in your room.

TED. This is my room.

NEARY. You changed rooms.

CHUM. This is Neary's room.

NEARY. So go to YOUR room.

TED. Oh. Yes.

(He slowly collects everything that's his.

CHUM *maybe hands him a sock.)*

Anyway, SO EXCITED you're here, Mr. Chum. That you'll get to be around for this.

CHUM. For what?

(TED picks up a file from the bed.)

TED. Duch's case.

CHUM. What about the Duch?

TED. Monday? Near didn't tell you?

NEARY. Okay, Ted. Bye.

(TED exits.)

I'll see if we can get you guys another room.

CHUM. Aaaah, don't worry. Call in the maid. Slip 'em a dollar.

NEARY. You and Mom aren't sleeping on the floor.

CHUM. Mom's not coming.

NEARY. What?

CHUM. Mom don't know I'm here.

NEARY. Why not?

CHUM. You know your mom! You tell her one thing and she's gotta know everything else.

(He sees the maid outside the door.)

CHUM. Oooh, there's the maid. I'mma go get her to change those sheets your friend got wet.

(He slips out of the room.)

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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