

[Back to previous page](#)



document 1 of 1

Light From Heaven: Classical Music of Cambodia

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Abstract

The new CD "Light from Heaven" has eleven tracks of classical Cambodian Mahaori music dating from the Angkor Period - some recorded here for the first time. This genre of music was almost completely wiped out during Pol Pot's purge of Cambodian classical musicians and dancers. Fortunately, the music has been passed down orally for centuries and has survived in people's memories, ready to blossom again. An unexpected benefit of the Cambodian diaspora is this collaboration between Cambodian masters and western classically-trained musicians. The group Rak-Smey Khemera (Light From Heaven Falls On the People of Cambodia) has been performing and touring all over the United States since 1986, bringing traditional Cambodian music to Cambodian and western audiences alike. Rak-Smey Khemera is based in the Twin Cities.

Full Text

Light From Heaven: Classical Music of Cambodia

Rak-Smey Khemera, or Light From Heaven, is a traditional music group that features New International Trio members Bun Loeung, Dick Hensold, and Jane Lanctot, as well as Cambodian percussionist Thoeun Moen. For one night only, on September 28th, the Southern Theater's music audience had a rare opportunity to hear a concert of Classical Cambodian Mahaori music. They were joined by Classical Cambodian dancer Sarin Bun and vocalist Saroum Bun. This concert marked the release of their new CD "Light From Heaven."

Mahaori music is characterized by a floating quality that brings a sense of energizing peace to the listener. One can feel the complexity of the tropical jungle in the intertwining instrumental lines - it has the perfect balance of emotional intensity and equanimity. Rak-Smey Khemera features traditional Cambodian mallet instruments such as the roneat (a xylophone), khong thom (gong circle), khim (hammered dulcimer), as well as Cambodian drums and string instruments. The Southern Theater space was an ideal venue to experience the symbolist, ceremony, and color of the Classical Cambodian dances.

The founder and artistic director Bun Loeung is known throughout the world for his legendary prowess in all genres of Cambodian music. He has played in every conceivable venue - from the streets of Battambang, opium dens, to playing innumerable Cambodian weddings and Buddhist ceremonies, to performing with the Minnesota Orchestra. He began his career in 1945, touring for 25 years as music director for a Cambodian theater company, or lakhoun basak.

His recording "Cambodian Music in Minnesota" was selected by the Library of Congress as one of the best recordings of American Folk life, and his 1987 recording, The New International Trio (Atomic Theory Records) with Dick Hensold and Barb Weiss received very favorable reviews and national airplay. He received the Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowship in Music Award in 1986.

The new CD "Light from Heaven" has eleven tracks of classical Cambodian Mahaori music dating from the Angkor Period - some recorded here for the first time. This genre of music was almost completely wiped out during Pol Pot's purge of Cambodian classical musicians and dancers. Fortunately, the music has been passed down orally for centuries and has survived in people's memories, ready to blossom again. An unexpected benefit of the Cambodian diaspora is this collaboration between Cambodian masters and western classically-trained musicians. The group Rak-Smey Khemera (Light From Heaven Falls On the People of Cambodia) has been performing and touring all over the United States since 1986, bringing traditional Cambodian music to Cambodian and western audiences alike. Rak-Smey Khemera is based in the Twin Cities.

They can be reached at 651/646-6581. Copies of the new CD Light From Heaven can be ordered on amazon.com , cdbaby.com, is available from Roadrunner records (43rd and Nicollet, Minneapolis) or directly from Jane Lanctot 612/374-4588.

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Details

Subject	Classical music; Music
Ethnicity	Asian/Pacific Islander
Title	Light From Heaven: Classical Music of Cambodia
Publication title	Asian Pages
Volume	12

Issue	3
Pages	11
Number of pages	0
Publication year	2001
Publication date	Oct 14, 2001
Year	2001
Publisher	Asian Pages
Place of publication	St. Paul
Country of publication	United States
Publication subject	Asian/Pacific Islander, Asian Studies
ISSN	15268675
Source type	Newspapers
Language of publication	English
Document type	Audio review
Accession number	SFLNSASPS1201APT014000010
ProQuest document ID	195803156
Document URL	http://libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/docview/195803156?accountid=13876
Copyright	Copyright Asian Pages Oct 14, 2001
Last updated	2010-06-05
Database	Ethnic NewsWatch

Bibliography

Citation style: APA6

Light from heaven: Classical music of cambodia. (2001, Oct 14). Asian Pages Retrieved from

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