

CONTACT:
Christina Kellogg 510.643.6714
ckellogg@calperfs.berkeley.edu
Joe Yang 510.642.9121
scyang@calperfs.berkeley.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 26, 2011

**CAMBODIA'S KHMER ARTS ENSEMBLE BRINGS
THE WEST COAST PREMIERE OF *THE LIVES OF GIANTS*
TO ZELLERBACH HALL SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, AT 3:00 P.M.**

BERKELEY, August 26, 2011—Cambodia's **Khmer Arts Ensemble**, a troupe that uses traditional Cambodian movement, music and costumes to explore universal themes, returns to Cal Performances with the West Coast premiere of their most recent program *The Lives of Giant Sunday, October 2 at 3:00 p.m. at Zellerbach Hall*. *The Lives of Giants* is a new interpretation of an ancient tale of power and vengeance. The ensemble is made up of 19 dancers, musicians and singers and is led by **Sophiline Cheam Shapiro** who has been instrumental in preserving and advancing the performing arts traditions of the millennium-old Khmer civilization that were all but destroyed by the Khmer Rouge in the late 1970s. Cheam Shapiro has injected contemporary choreography and music into the company's work producing "innovative, enchanting [and] riveting" performances (*Voice of Dance*).

An original dance-drama, the story told in *The Lives of Giants* comes from an early episode in the *Reamker*, the Cambodian version on the ancient Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*. The philosophy and characters in *The Lives of Giants* are fundamental to Southeast Asian cultural consciousness, as Cheam Shapiro's work focuses on themes of power, responsibility and vengeance which still resonate today. In the story, Akaeng Khameaso, a giant, has been teased by other heavenly creatures since childhood. He complains to heavenly ruler Preah Eyso and his wife Uma and receives a magic finger to protect himself, but with unexpected consequences.

"I have long recognized the persistence of corruption, arrogance, rigidity and loss of compassion by those in power that results in poverty, illness, ignorance, humiliation and, in the most radical cases, death among the governed," Cheam Shapiro said when commenting on the themes in *The Lives of Giants*. The work premiered in fall 2010 and will visit Berkeley as part of a national tour. In 2009, Cheam Shapiro was named a National Heritage Fellow, a lifetime honor awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts

-MORE-

KHMER ARTS ENSEMBLE

Khmer Arts Ensemble was established in Cambodia in 2007 by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro with the goal of keeping ancient performing arts of the Khmer region alive and vital. The company performs both contemporary creations and works from the classical repertoire. The Khmer Arts Ensemble has been hosted at major venues around the world including Amsterdam's Het Muziektheater, the Venice Biennale, Vienna's New Crowned Hope and the Hong Kong Arts Festival. The group regularly tours throughout the United States and was last hosted by Cal Performances in 2005 with Cheam Shapiro's *Seasons of Migration*.

Cheam Shapiro has expanded Cambodian classical dance's possibilities through the development of original dance dramas that break with traditional storylines. She has also experimented with gesture, vocabulary, partnering, movement patterns and costume—all of which are often officially considered inviolate. Additionally, Cream Shapiro is pioneering use of traditional musical arrangements and instrumentation.

Khmer Arts, the parent organization of the theater group, is an independent non-profit organization founded in 2002 by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro and John Shapiro. The organization is dual-based in Long Beach, California—home to the largest Cambodian community outside of Southeast Asia—and in Cambodia. The Long Beach branch of Khmer Arts encompasses a school, a pre-professional company and a Salon Series, which showcases classical dance in Cambodian communities throughout California. The Khmer Arts campus in Cambodia is located in Takhmao, about seven miles outside of Phnom Penh's city center, which is fast becoming an important international center for dance training, exploration, creation and performance. Along with producing Khmer Arts Ensemble, Khmer Arts conducts media projects and has established an important international center for dance scholarship and documentation.

SOPHILINE CHEAM SHAPIRO

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro was born in Phnom Penh and at the age of eight was exiled with her family into the countryside when the Khmer Rouge came to power. She was a member of the first generation to graduate from the Royal University of Fine Arts after the fall of the regime in 1979, learning classical Cambodian dance from the few surviving masters of the art.

Cheam Shapiro studied all three major women's roles in classical dance—*neang*, *nearong* and *yeak*—and served on the dance faculty at the Royal University from 1988 to 1991. She immigrated to Southern California in 1991 and studied dance ethnology at UCLA.

In addition to the honor of National Heritage Fellow, Cheam Shapiro has been awarded a USA Knight Fellow. She also received the Nikkei Asia Prize for Culture in 2006, as well as Creative Capital, Durfee, Guggenheim and Irvine dance fellowships. In addition to serving as artistic director of Khmer Arts, she lectures and teaches at conferences and universities around the world and has published many essays on Cambodian dance and its relationship to human rights and social justice.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for Cambodia's **Khmer Arts Ensemble** performing *The Lives of Giants* on **Sunday, October 2** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$20.00, \$30.00, \$35.00, \$40.00, \$48.00** and **\$52.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.org; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens, other students and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$5 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperformances.org.

For select performances, Cal Performances offers UCB student, faculty and staff, senior, and community rush tickets. Rush tickets are announced three hours prior to a performance and are available in person only at the Ticket Office beginning one hour before the performance; quantities may be limited. Rush ticket sales are limited to one ticket per person; all sales are cash only. Rush ticket prices are \$10.00 for UCB students; \$15.00 for UCB faculty and staff (UCB ID required) and seniors age 65 or older; and \$20.00 for all other community members. Information is available on Cal Performances' Facebook page and at 510-642-9988; press 2 for the rush hotline, three hours prior to a performance only.

#

Cal Performances thanks Wells Fargo, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,
and Bank of America for their major support of the Season.

KDFC is media sponsor of the 2011/12 Season

#

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Sunday, October 2, at 3:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph Ave., Berkeley

World Stage

Cambodia's Khmer Arts Ensemble

Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, director and choreographer

Program: *The Lives of Giants*, directed and choreographed by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, features 19 dancers, instrumentalists and singers in a story, inspired by an ancient Sanskrit epic, of power and revenge in the heavenly realm.

Tickets: \$20.00, 30.00, \$35.00, \$40.00, \$48.00 and \$52.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.org; and at the door.

– Cal Performances –