



Cambodia Support Group

A Registered Canadian Charity

csg@cyberlink.bc.ca
www.cambodiacs.org



26 Years
1983-2009

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In CAMBODIA: c/o CDN CO-OPERATION OFFICE, 50 St. 334 Boeung Keng Kang I, Phnom Penh 855-16-722 021 Co-ordinator: Mr. KHEAV SAMNANG

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As in many Asian and other cultures, Khmer (Cambodian) custom places given names after family names. CSG follows this rule whenever practical.

Next Cambodia trip - now!

We found extraordinary interest plus many potential links for support in Cambodia during set-up and presentation of the concerts described in this issue. It seemed vital to return soon and "strike while the iron is hot" as they say.

To thank the many Founding Sponsors of our new 'brand name' CAMBODIA-CANADA FRIENDSHIP CONCERTS; work with our women's, disabled-service and other partners on a properly bilingual CSG newsletter; seek direct support for these partners in Cambodia; co-operate with others for the good of all - AND to keep working with trauma recovery in a postwar shattered society - the time now is ideal and the need ever more pressing.

My five-week itinerary includes all the above activities plus Hong Kong stopovers in both directions (see next column). The Winter edition of this newsletter will report on many developments to come.

We appreciate that many charities are seeking donor funds. Besides their fund-raising focus the CSG newsletters thank and inform past supporters, promote third-world awareness, and maintain the CSG profile in development circles.

If you feel moved to support CSG work, we assure you that this volunteer agency will put it to careful, efficient use according to your wishes; but we feel it just as big a success if you should choose to support another worthy cause that 'chooses' you. Let us all help SOMEWHERE - give just beyond our comfort level to some worthy cause - and watch the world flourish.

- Arne Sahlén, CSG President

The Choir in Cambodia -- Success beyond measure

Our last issue told of Canada's Prima-Chamber Singers Choir from the University of Victoria. While planning a four-country Asian tour, conductor DR. BRUCE MORE had asked CSG - way back in January 2008 - for help to provide a rich cultural experience in Cambodia. And help we did, setting up gala concerts May 8 and 9; training dozens of Khmer singers to join the Canadians onstage; wading through promotions, government contacts, etc.; planning events for learning, friendship, fun, and fascination; trouble-shooting non-stop; and more. In May the project finally burst forth - like an elephant born to a gecko.

Ideas here and there 'toppled forward' in domino fashion, to become exciting project features that in some cases created history. Much success was due directly to HY CHANTHAVOOUTH (Hee Chantavoot), the CSG-sponsored Khmer tenor studying in Canada. A tireless core planner for many months, he was named Goodwill Ambassador - first for the choir, then for CSG overall. His own solo recital three weeks later added to his and CSG's repute. Our superb ground crew worked intensely to bring Dr. More's thrilling vision to reality. See inside for more details.



Friendship first, then music --- dozens of happy singers at Kep seaside town

The above CSG masthead shows other good news:

1) We are breaking into Hong Kong! Mr. ANTHONY TAM has volunteered to set up fund-raising and other activities there, and to serve as our Hong Kong Director. He and his wife WINUS, renowned pianist-teachers, say that people there are eager to support charities. They and CSG will also introduce an international music exam system to Cambodia; meetings are set for early October.

2) CSG is now linked with Cambodia's Canadian Co-operation Office. CCO plans foreign affairs and funding work, and interacts with Canada-related agencies, businesses and individuals. These include many Khmer people schooled in Canada, who returned to help their homeland. CCO is managed, in fact, by Mr. MEN BUNLENG. Educated in French Canada's great city Montreal, he has worked nearly fifteen years in Cambodia - first at our Embassy, then at CCO. Also a fine singer, he is a great asset to his country. We are honoured to count him among CSG advisors.

Past Ambassador DONICA POTTIE called "overwhelming" Canada's often low-profile work in banking, medicine, trash collection, human service and more. The May concerts alone, and a Music Partnership Fund created from them, gained thousands of dollars from this sector. As Founding Sponsors of Cambodia-Canada Friendship Concerts, all will be listed in the winter issue.

We begin our new quarter-century riding through the narrow point of the hourglass. The 'grains' of twenty-five CSG years - refugee aid, directors, supporters, projects, learning experiences, experiments, philosophies, sponsors, successes - condensed into focus as the choir project and Chanthavouth's recital raised a great deal of media and other attention. We hope and believe that this attention will spread to all CSG work in child/youth, disabled, women's, and arts service. Visit www.cambodiacs.org after September 30 for full updates!

Khmer pianist SOUN PISETH and tenor HY CHANTHAVOUTH have gained much from Canada's musical and social-action excellence - and they are 'paying back' symphony-size! Piseth has inspired his people with music much as Chopin did during the 1830s Polish Revolution; and during the Prima-Chamber Singers' recent Cambodia visit, Chanthavouth was embraced as a returning hero.

In 1997-98 the CSG brought Piseth (Pi-SETT) to study in Canada. He racked up an impressive list of achievements, learned English at breakneck speed, and made many friends. His playing showed splendid technique and expressive range - also splendid focus! At an Alberta festival, the wild racket of an often-struck low string, its copper winding loose, failed to faze him in Gershwin's *I Got Rhythm*. The audience went wild as well.

Piseth won numerous awards for playing and composing. He performed with the *Symphonie of the Kootenays*, and toured four cities with the *Okanagan Youth Symphony*. His Ballade for piano was praised for both Chopin-style expressive power and structural craft.

Now 28, Piseth has arranged children's songs; produced many artists' records; composed songs, cell phone tunes and major-ad jingles; and much more. Responding to foreign pressures and border disputes around a splendid Khmer temple, he composed the song *Proud to be Cambodian*. It brilliantly blends Khmer (Cambodian) classical and folk elements, western phrasing concepts, and up-to-the-moment features like hip-hop. This song was welcomed right up into government as an unofficial 'second national anthem'. Even young people, drawn at first by the *now* aspects, rise in cultural pride as this song and its music video pay homage to a thousand years of Khmer culture. Hear it on the web: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JblvVRGy8VU (45 sec. passes the opening promo; expect a few strange sounds but it's *worth the wait*, especially if you listen three or four times!)



Chanthavouth (left) and Piseth at Chanthavouth's May 30 recital
- Nick Axelrod photo

Wrote Michelle Vachon of the *Cambodia Daily* of Chanthavouth: "When this slim-built Cambodian tenor... starts to sing, he turns into a giant, his voice filling the room with strength, warmth and beauty." His Canadian studies are preparing him for a great and inspiring musical future - and the ideals of service have inspired him to combine arts excellence with goals of humanitarian and international service. Along with English (like Piseth, he is brilliant at it), he is now studying Cross-Cultural Communication.

Chanthavouth sings in many fund-raisers, serves as a CSG Director, and volunteers for worthy projects in Canada as well as Cambodia. His performing often earns standing ovations - for gripping passion and lively personality as well as for the music.

That passion and personality helped to make the *Prima-Chamber Singers* Cambodia tour the richest, said conductor Bruce More, in all his thirty-five years of touring. It also showed that a 'minor' in international studies complements his musical focus much more closely than his past idea of health care for seniors.

That these two young heroes are inspired to and skilled at musical and human service springs in no small part from their Canadian training and experience. The great passion for helping that we show throughout our society, combined with the quality and depth of our educational offerings, truly do help them to make history.



Rehearsal with fire ants (see Paragraph 1 in column at right)

The new logo and banner

If at 'firsts' you DO succeed -

On Day 1 of choir trip, Khmer students and teachers joined the choir for a bus trip to the seaside for sun, surf, sand, seafood and song! The first rehearsal' was to be casual, in order to reduce cross-cultural fears. Well, casual it was! - on a wooded hill near the lunch tables, with fire ants biting Dr. More's feet! An unplanned first - *Anty Maim* revisited, perhaps?

Part of the history-making involved Canada's stellar composer Healey Willan. His ethereal *Rise Up, My Love* was the first Canadian work ever sung by Cambodians. Equal Khmer and Canadian choir numbers formed a historically new venture in partnership.

The 80 voices sang *Rise Up* plus a spiritual arranged by Bruce More -- and two songs by retired Khmer King Sihanouk, a first for foreigners. One was in French, one in *Khmer language* - this too a foreign-first.

Khmer-designed certificates, a finance review, and letters of thanks were handed out at a windup party. Cambodians expressed amazement at receiving such finance detail, and being included so fully in work, fun and reporting.

To CSG from Bruce More

"Wow! What can I say? You contributed so much to our southeast Asia tour! From the beginnings, through the planning and the final realization of this wonderful event, you were an inspiration and joy to work with. What a blast it was! It was hard work and stressful at times, but most of the time it was great fun! Our only regret is that we didn't have more time to spend with you..."

"Please extend a special thank-you to your Cambodian colleagues whose English isn't up to a direct thank you from meEspecially Mr. Bhuntan (sic), that wonderful man. I would have loved to get to know him better - he was really special! It all went by so quickly..."

"Know how much love and appreciation is in the hearts of all of us for what you have done. The memories will last forever!"

"Thank you so much again for your enthusiastic organization and shepherding of our visit. We loved the audiences, the breathtaking places and mostly the gentle and wonderful Cambodian people..."

The splendid ground crew!

This choir project brought together a tremendous team for CSG. It is completely true to say we couldn't have done it without them.

Mr. POL VANN CHAOM MONY (MONY) is a 'walking wealth' of musical knowledge, computer and studio-type skills, superb English, and knowledge of Cambodia's government and other systems. He prepared CDs and sheet copies of the choir music for Khmer students to learn; translated letters with finesse to government, royal family, booking agents and others; aided immensely with promotion; and did much more besides.

Mr. YAN BUNTHAN had been one of Chanthavouth's main music teachers in years past. With great skill and patience Bunthan trained the Khmer choir that joined the Canadians onstage. His work 'blended' junior, intermediate, advanced and graduate students - and even some teachers - with varied backgrounds and learning skills into a cohesive unit. So successful was he that it took just one full rehearsal for conductor Bruce More to bring both choirs together into one performing unit.

CSG is planning with Bunthan a 'teaching tour' to child-safe sites around the huge Stung Meanchey garbage dump. His dreams are to give a strong musical foundation to poorest children, and to prepare a large children's choir for future concerts.

CHAN THATCHANRATANA (RATANA), Bunthan's son, worked as Team Leader to gather, track and communicate regularly with the choir students. He and Chanthavouth also served as main tour organizers and guides for the Canadian choir members.

SOUN PISETH (see page 2) offers to CSG his many and varied skills. He mastered the past HOME BREW CDs used for past fund-raising, has some CSG-planned recordings in development, and will serve as Artistic Consultant for future events. He accompanied Chanthavouth twice, to great acclaim, during the concerts last May.

SAM VIKDETH (ANNA), Piseth's wife, has vast experience in hotel administration and promotion, project and event planning, etc. She has joined CSG as Promotions Director.

KHEAV SAMNANG, the long-serving CSG Co-ordinator, proved himself a master of - among other skills - financial tracking. His endless devotion to this and other projects is a true backbone of CSG success in Cambodia.

##News flash! Three University of Victoria students plan to set up a CSG club at the University. Wrote one of them: "I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful experience we had. Cambodia was amazing and I plan to visit again. I know Heather, Lindsay and I have all been seriously considering starting a club at UVic to aid the Cambodian Support Group. We would really love to help any way we can and after seeing firsthand the positive effect it has had on people I feel even more sure that this will happen. ... It would be a wonderful opportunity for us to create new relations and develop the ones we have already made. Please let us know what we can do to be of help. Sincerely, Cassie

Please contact CSG for more information or a link to the club; more details will be given in the coming Winter issue.

Cambodia Support Group - Monthly pre-authorized withdrawal form and order form

Donation address: 135 Thompson Street, Kimberley BC Canada V1A 1T9 Ph/Fax 250-427-2159 csg@cyberlink.bc.ca

The monthly contribution form may be used for regular donations to support CSG projects.

Name _____ Phone (____) _____
Fax (____) _____ e-mail _____
Address _____
Postal Code _____

Please include a Organization (if applicable) _____

Post-dated cheques - please include a supply of them with this form

Automatic withdrawal \$ _____ monthly - Start date: y____/m____/d____

Use as needed or Which project(s) _____

Total Enclosed: \$ _____ *Thank you for your support. Tax receipts will be issued for all donations.*

Large-print newsletters Newsletters by e-mail

Feed the hand that bites us

In e-mail letters, we did state at times that not all was rosy. In fact, some serious attacks and blame came even from people who stood to gain greatly from the experience and exposure. Angry accusations, rumours started and spread, even attempted corruption-extortion - this in a music project!? Wearing indeed it was, but after all ...

The development sector is in Cambodia *precisely because* this society was torn apart. Perhaps our presence served as a sort of 'lightning rod' to draw out some smoldering emotional issues left over from those past horrors.

The whole CSG team felt after these major events that, now that this gecko has *had* the elephant, we must care for it by planning future events that advance on all we learned this time. To prepare the ground we must quell any dark undercurrents if possible.

One of my main duties this trip is to seek out those responsible, and - while rejecting wrong actions - keep up a respectful dialogue, fighting fire with cool water rather than explosive gasoline.

Wish us luck! Watch the CSG web-site and future newsletters for updates.

Elegy for an Embassy ...

In a sad and shocking coincidence: nine days prior to our Cambodia-Canada choir concerts, *Canada's Embassy closed in Cambodia*. Why? Budgets, priorities, world interests: not our wish, but what's done is done. Over two decades, though, this small Embassy wove wonderfully into Khmer society. It also served resident or travelling Canadians and Khmer Canadians, helped families to reunite, and aided many great projects. Impacts were deep, direct and **VISIBLE** - in ways hard to match in larger countries.

The final Ambassador, Donica Pottie, appeared in the news each week at times: meeting, presenting, granting, honouring... One instance was her grand and gracious gesture to a team of Khmer police, whose selfless work had helped to nab and convict the first Canadian child-sex predator caught overseas under our expanded child protection laws. Not content with simple thank-yous, Donica hosted a champagne reception at the plush Hotel Cambodiana. Our RCMP had worked closely with Khmer police; front-line member Brian McConaghy and other Canadianians presented certificates. Media and dignitaries were there; speakers praised each person and the spirit of partnership. A professional photographer took personal and group photos.



Khmer police and other locals were agog. Gratitude in the past had been no problem, but not a big deal: pat-on-the-back standard or "Thanks, and what we want from you now is..." This one event, widely reported, burnished Canada's profile nationwide - and had influence well beyond, since people of countless countries live and work here *and* the electronic media reach Cambodians around the world.



Donica also dazzled CSG Co-ordinator Kheav Samnang, just by sitting casually on the sofa beside him when he first met her at the Embassy. He had seen Ambassadors only in limousines, on stages, giving speeches - all formal, stern and distant. Her regular-folks friendliness sent a simple but powerful message. She gave insights, advice and support over time in all CSG focus areas. This much-valued Embassy relationship had begun in 1995 with then-Ambassador D. Gordon Longmuir. (Now in Ontario and BC, Donica and Gordon both remain CSG-linked to our great honour and gratitude.) In between, we also received wise guidance from Ambassador Stefanie Beck. She and Donica showed splendidly the place of women in high positions, an important issue as Cambodia moved - and still moves - slowly toward accepting that vital reality.



Gordon Longmuir

Samnang and Donica

We of Canada are indeed well liked here, and seen as quite down to earth overall. Once, after a foreign music teacher had blown up over things not to her liking, I mediated a cool-down meeting. Later, a Khmer friend sighed: "You Canadians are so normal..."

Though the Embassy is indeed lost, there is at least some good news.

The Canadian Co-operation Office (see page 1) has been active for years. Canada's development arm CIDA is still at work there, as are Canadian businesses and service agencies. Perhaps best of all: hundreds of foreign-educated Cambodians are back here making a real difference in their homeland. And many dozens of Khmer people support CSG and its work through personal contributions, community fund-raising projects and other ways.

A European Community observer said long ago: "We have worked in Africa and also in Asia, and we have never seen a harder working people. Cambodians are trying very hard to get their country back on track. They just need a helping hand."

Cambodia Support Group - Membership/Donation Form

Donation address: 135 Thompson Street, Kimberley BC Canada V1A 1T9 Ph/Fax 250-427-2159 csg@cyberlink.bc.ca

The annual membership fee is set at CDN\$15.00. Name _____ Phone (____) _____
 Fax (____) _____ e-mail _____

For all donations above that amount, the first \$15.00 will be set as a membership fee. The full amount is tax-creditable for Canadian donors. Address _____ Postal Code _____

Organization (if applicable) _____

Membership \$15.00 New Membership Renewal

Date _____ Membership is valid for one year from date of receipt.

Donation \$ _____ or Monthly by post-dated cheque

Use: as needed or which project(s) _____

Total Enclosed: \$ _____ Thank you for your support. Tax receipts will be issued for all donations.