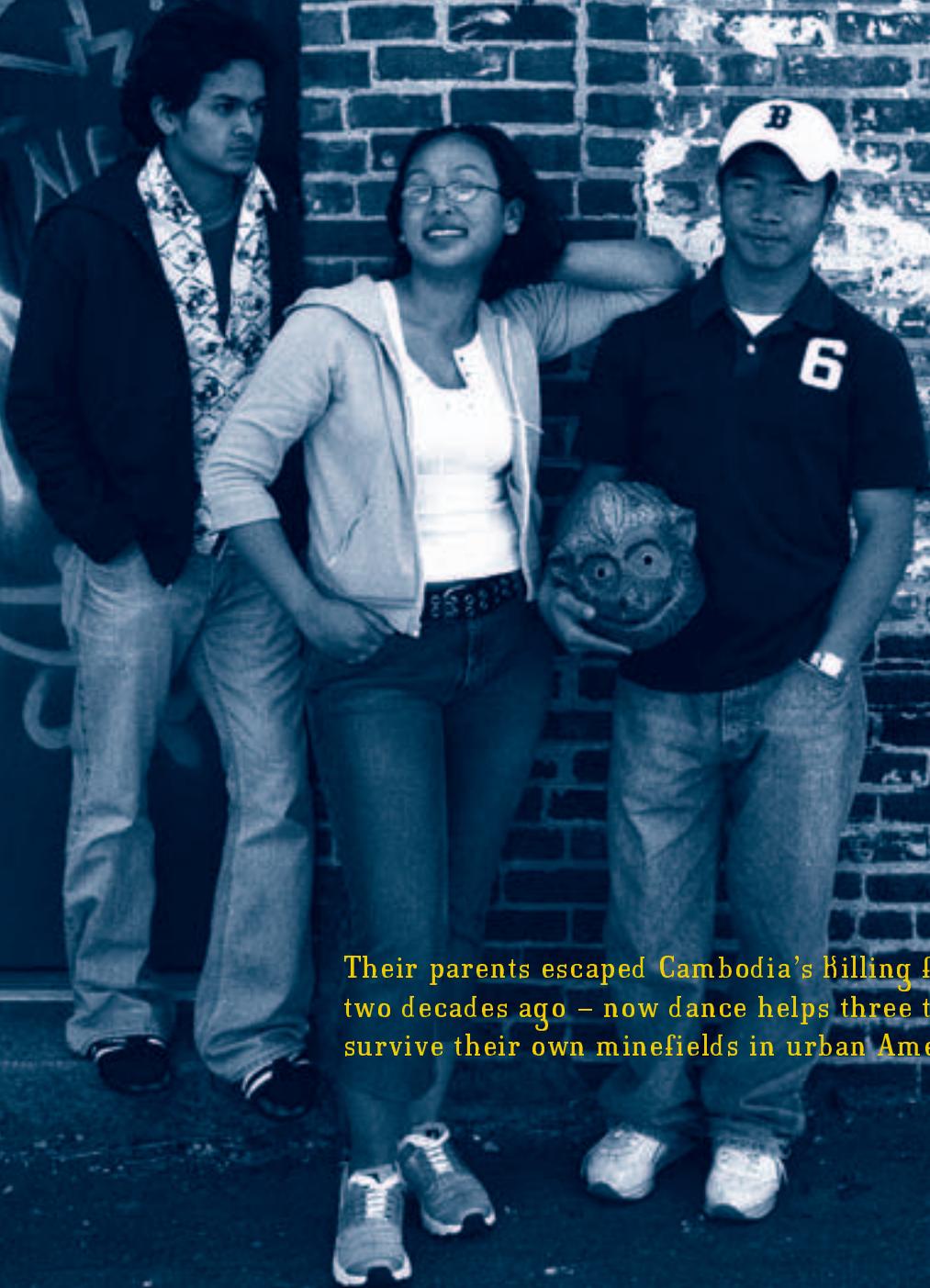


a documentary film by Julie Mallozzi

MONKEY DANCE



Their parents escaped Cambodia's killing fields two decades ago – now dance helps three teens survive their own minefields in urban America.

About the Film

Monkey Dance follows the lives of three teens coming of age in Lowell, Massachusetts. Their parents fled war and genocide in Cambodia to resettle in the United States, hoping it would offer safety, employment, and a chance to faithfully rebuild some of what was shattered by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. But for their children, this historic mill city presents a dizzying array of choices – many of them dangerous.

Many Cambodian-American teens fall prey to gang membership, drug use, teen pregnancy, or domestic violence. Samnang, Linda, and Sochenda are determined to avoid the pitfalls their older siblings fell into. And they hope to become the first in their families to go to college.

What joins their stories is traditional Cambodian dance. All three are members of the Angkor Dance Troupe, a rigorous performance group that preserves a world-renowned Cambodian dance tradition nearly annihilated by the Khmer Rouge. Dance gives the three teens confidence, a sense of their roots, and a means of self-expression – especially through the *Monkey Dance*, a traditional folk tale that has been electrified by the troupe's addition of hip hop choreography. length: 65 minutes (56-minute TV version available)



Angkor Dance Troupe performs

*This Viewers' Guide is designed for use by audiences viewing *Monkey Dance*, a documentary film and PBS program directed by Julie Mallozzi. The film and this guide can help viewers understand what it means to grow up Cambodian American. These materials can also shed light on immigration issues, the Khmer Rouge genocide, parent-teen conflicts, and traditional Cambodian culture. See the accompanying Classroom Guide for activities students can complete after the screening.*





Samnang, an athletic 16-year-old when the film begins, was born in a refugee camp. He feels pressured to compensate for his two older brothers' dropping out of high school and their involvement with gangs and drugs.



Linda, a freewheeling 17-year-old who loves racing her car, struggles to overcome the shame cast on her family by her older sister, imprisoned for murdering an abusive boyfriend.



Sochenda, a fashion-conscious 16-year-old, works a series of part-time jobs to pay for the necessities and accessories of teen life – while his mother bemoans his poor school performance.

Choices and Values

The three teens in *Monkey Dance* face difficult choices about how to live their lives. Their parents want them to follow Cambodian tradition: to respect their elders, follow Buddhist practices, and be modest in appearance and relationships. Concerned teachers and mentors encourage them to study hard and get into college. Meanwhile, television and the other mainstream media hype sexuality and consumerism. And neighborhood street gangs push drugs and violence.

During the course of the film, Samnang, Linda, and Sochenda navigate this swirl of competing value systems, and begin to develop their own ideas of right and wrong.



Village life in Cambodia



Buddhist ceremony



Linda studies traditional dance in Cambodia

Traditional Cambodian Culture

Cambodia is a small country of about 13 million people located in Southeast Asia between Thailand and Vietnam. While similar in some ways to these neighbors, Cambodia has a distinctive culture that traces many of its features back to India, from its Sanskrit-based text to its mythic traditions and Buddhist religious practices.

During a period of about six hundred years, between AD 802 and 1431, the Angkor civilization of Cambodia was the mightiest kingdom in Southeast Asia. Dozens of magnificent stone temples were constructed, including the most famous, Angkor Wat. Its signature five towers adorn the Cambodian national flag. Today these temples attract tourists from all over the world, who marvel at the pinnacle of ancient Khmer architecture and art.

Currently, about four-fifths of Cambodia's population lives in rural areas. Many people survive as rice farmers, using water buffaloes to cultivate the flooded rice paddies. Traditional Cambodian, or Khmer, culture is very complex; some of its easily seen features include gracious hospitality, respect for elders, modesty, concern for community approval, and a desire to shelter young girls until they are married. Most Cambodians practice a form of folk Buddhism filled with personal rituals and public ceremonies to mark weddings, funerals, and seasonal events.

Ancient Moves

Traditional dance is a hallmark of Khmer culture. For centuries, female court dancers in gilded costumes performed classical dance exclusively for the king in his palace. By the mid-1900s, folk dances for men and women based on fishing, rice harvesting, and other village activities became popular. But in the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge regime targeted dancers and other artists for death because they represented Cambodia's old, "elite" culture. Approximately 90% of Cambodia's traditional dancers were killed. It is a testament to the strength of the Khmer people that the surviving dancers could piece together the remnants of their tradition so that both classical and folk dances can be enjoyed worldwide today.