

Khmer Cultural Development Institute
Kampot Traditional Music School for
Orphaned and Disabled Children
Performance Project for Blind Students 2022-23



Professional Performance Project for Blind Students at KCDI - (*For the Creation of a Sustainable Traditional Khmer Orchestra*)

Background:

The Blind Students currently residing at KCDI entered our School in 2015, having previously been living at a shelter. Their shelter was closed down and the director asked us to help. After we had been already been giving them free Music lessons for the period of about a year, (and so knew them), we offered to house our Blind Students and Care for them and provide an Education for them full-Time, in coordination and with permission from their families and the local authorities.

From this period onwards, our Blind Students lived at our School (KCDI). For the first year, they had a special HouseMother, but as they matured, this was no longer necessary. We hired a Teacher who was a Specialist in Khmer Braille, so that they could attend State School and follow lessons. Since then, many have taken exams according to the National Curriculum, some coming top of their class amongst sighted Students. Two have furthered their studies at College and University.

As a form of therapy, but also as a real Vocation, we have been Teaching them Pin Peat Music, Mohori Music, Plein Ka, Yike and Smoet, as well as Chapey Dong Veng. This latter with the kind help by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.

Our Masters are Musicians from the National Theatre (Loak Kru Samouen), formerly from the Royal Palace (Loak Kru Sambo) and Loak Kru Bèm, Yike Master from Chhouk.

As an "amateur" Orchestra they have performed at the Kampot Readers and Writers Festival for the US and British Ambassadors and have also represented Disabled People in Cambodia performing for the occasion of Her Royal Highness, Princess Sirindhorn, Thailand.

To become a real and true Musician, many years of training are needed. This is why it has taken so long for them to reach a level where they can be considered Professional Players. Because of their Perseverance, hard-work, Faith and the Wonderful Gifts imparted to them by our Masters, they have formed one of the first Traditional Orchestras of Blind Musicians in Cambodia and perhaps the World.

They have overcome many obstacles, from the shame and distress and neglect encountered from their extended families and remote village communities, to overcoming self-doubt. They have Trusted us to help them. We have received them, as the greatest honour that can be bestowed from one Human Being to another. With their Kindness, Humour, Courage and Love, they have given a Light to our School and to all those whom they meet.

Professional Orchestra Project

To prepare them for a Life as independent adults and to help form them (at their request and agreement) as Professional Musicians, requires many aspects of preparation, including understanding how to organize engagements, how to plan, to travel, logistics and finance, as well as growth of Music Repertoire. Because they are all completely 100% blind, they will probably always need a good and honest sighted -person to facilitate some aspects of their work and travel.

In this first step, very kindly and generously funded by the **Michael Merriman Family Foundation**, our Blind Students, together with their **Master Loak Kru Samouen** and supported by our School Director, Loak Kru Sothy and Assistant Neark Kru Tara, have performed in four Districts of Kampot Province. These Districts represent the villages where they lived and were born. It has been their first step to show the fruit of all their years of study (often derided by their families and communities) and to bring forth and express their enormous talents.

They Performed in December 2022 on four seperate occasions in the Pagodas of these three villages and Districts. Wat Koh Andert (Kampong Trach District), Wat Angmuntrey (Angkor Chey District) Wat Koy (Chhouk District) and Wat Labeuk (Chhouk District).

At each event, many People came to attend, men, women and Children. We were very happy that so many would come and listen to Classical Mohori and Yike Music, including the very young. This means that the ancient Traditions in rural Cambodia, of gathering together to Listen to Music or watch Shadow Puppet Theatre is still very much alive.

Our Future Plans with our Blind Students, is to organize for them more public engagements both locally and nationally and make a Recording of them, especially of the Mohori (with Pi Chungvat - double rythmn, on the Skor Romonea drum). That they become firmly established as a Professional Orchestra of Traditional Khmer Music.

My most Grateful Thanks to our Donor, Mr Michael Merriman and to my dear Colleagues, Loak Kru Samouen, Loak Kru Sambo and Loak Kru Bèm and of course Loak Kru Sothy.

Catherine Louise Geach (founder)

KHMER CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
(K C D I)
Founded in 1993

**Kampot Traditional
Music School**



**For Orphaned
and Disabled Children**

