



PHARE PONLEU SELPAK

AND



COLLECTIF CLOWNS D'AILLEURS ET D'ICI

...ONE FRUITFUL COOPERATION



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HISTORY OF PHARE PONLEU SELPAK

Phare Ponleu Selpak has its origin in 1986 in the **Refugee Camp of Site 2 on the border with Thailand**. It is around **drawing workshops**, intended for the children of the camp that is born the idea of an association **to promote Khmer culture and to help young refugees** to surpass, by the expression of an art, the traumatism of war.

The experiment continues after the **return of the refugees to Cambodia**, under the impulse of **eight young adults**, who create **Cambodian association Phare Ponleu Selpak**, in 1994. It acquires a piece of land in Anh Chanh, a village within the **outskirts of Battambang**. It is a **poor village** where many groundless peasants live, families of returnees from refugee camps.

The Association diversifies its activities and takes the name of *Phare Ponleu Selpak* (*ponleu* = light; *selpak* = art). To **drawing** join **music, circus, a library** and its many activities, an **animation centre, school support** and **alphabetisation** (elimination of illiteracy)... an **educational, social and cultural action** is developed within the village. Then, in 2002, in cooperation with the Cambodian Ministry for Social Affairs and UNICEF, a **house for children** accommodates **young victims of human trafficking, AIDS' orphans**, children living in **extreme social conditions** and finally, in 2003, in partnership with the Cambodian Ministry of Education, a **public school** is created, with capacity for 830 pupils. The establishment is opened to all children from the village. A college was opened in September 2006.



THE CIRCUS SCHOOL

The circus school of *Phare Ponleu Selpak* was **created in October 1998** by initiative of a drawing teacher, formerly from the workshop of the Camp Site 2 and founder of the association, **Khuon Det**, which has a solid training in martial arts and gymnastics.

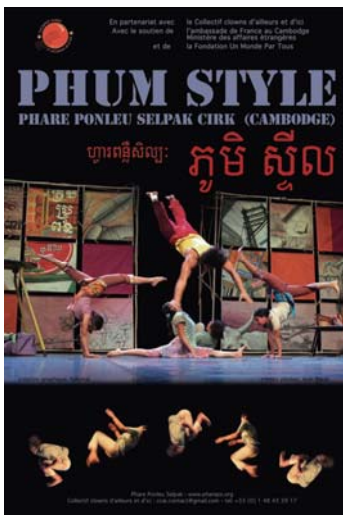
In Anch Chanh, there is a strong population of children delivered to themselves, in conflict with the law and their social environment. Through the circus, Det thinks of being able to **get these children off the streets**, off the violence cycle in which they evolve.

By its **entertaining and structuring side**, circus requires a personal and physical engagement, an individual and collective work, creating another relation with authority thanks to the acquisition of the safety requirements impossible to circumvent, nonnegotiable. It is a good way for them to **confront themselves with risk, within the protected framework of the school, contrary to the dangers, common, daily and without net, of the street.**

Khuon Det made a training course at the **national circus school of the Royal University of Fine Arts of Phnom Penh** and returns with **3 teachers** who will remain in *Phare Ponleu Selpak* for one month, time enough to put in place and launch the school. This partnership still exists. Once or twice per year, one to three teachers of the national school come and teach approximately a month in Battambang.

The circus school accommodates today **120 children daily** and teenagers, from 9 years, in a **building made in 2002/2003**. It acquired **recognition all over Cambodia** for the quality of its teaching and the shows presented. Its specificity is to work with a very vulnerable public. The circus becomes a personal development and insertion tool, but of communication also.

The pre-professional troupe



The first generation of the school is made up of 25 young circus artists and musicians from 19 to 25 years old. Created in 2002, Phare Ponleu Selpak's first creation "Ban touy ban tom et cie" toured in Europe with more than 30 performances during summer 2003, leading to meetings with many artists and to the discovery of several French circus schools.

The show regularly toured in Cambodia, mainly at Phare's school thanks to a partnership with the travel agency Asian Trails. The show seduced a large public by its freshness and artistic qualities.

The troupe has split in three groups, each one with its own show. Those performances are "**de 4 à 5**" (open-air), "**Holiday Ban Touy Ban Tom**" (big top) and "**Phum Style**" (big top and open-air). This division leads to a diversification in the tour possibilities and also enables some artists to meet their need of personal identity.

Those shows represent the first step towards the elder students' professionalization. Their technical and artistic level has now to be developed in front of the public: they are currently working on acts and performances to be publicly shown.

The prevention troupe

Compound of 18 people not going to school and aged 19 to 24 years old, the troupe **creates thematic shows mixing theatre and circus and involving local organisations working on the issues** tackled. Activities with the public follow the performances to verify and reassert the message.

The shows are brought to the general public only after validation by an independent group of experts. The aim is to raise awareness of different publics among the most vulnerable part of the population, as well as enable young people, yesterday on the fringes, to be today prevention and development actors in their own country.

At present, there are many thematic shows like **“Danger, Mines!”**, **“Abilities of Disabled”**, **“Be Aware About HIV/AIDS”** which are presented all over the country and in different surroundings (factories, schools, villages, streets, train, etc.). A show on drugs is currently in preparation as well as another on human trafficking, two major plagues in Cambodia.

The youngest troupe



It is the circus school's **second generation**. They are 13, aged 15 to 19. They are all sent to school. They regularly present their work in Battambang.

Since November 2005, they have been working on acts and shows to be presented in festivals. In 2007-2008, they spent **one year in training at the circus school of Lomme, France** (for 10 of them) and at the circus school of Hanoï, Vietnam (for the others).

Since they are back, they have worked on **their end-of-school show which is called Putho!** This creation has been presented in Europe in summer 2009 and his coming in Europe for the second time in spring 2010.

All those young artists are paid for each performance. In the Cambodian context, it is essential. **It provides some of them with a reliable alternative to the street and others with an important support for their family.**

The circus school also makes sure, together with the social worker of the association, that all of them are sent to school. For the elders, those from the first generation, when going to school was not possible, the association put in place alphabetisation courses. Finally, the circus school provides an aftercare for the children; the association feeds 40 and lodges 35 of them.

ACTION OF THE COLLECTIF CLOWNS D'AILLEURS ET D'ICI

In 2000, the bases of a **project of support to the circus school of Phare Ponleu Selpak** (PPS) are **laid at the request of its responsible, Khuon Det**. In February 2001, thanks to the support of the AFAA, of World Education Phnom Penh, of festival *Furies* (Châlons en Champagne), of the Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok, in cooperation with the French Cultural Centre of Phnom Penh and the national circus school of Phnom Penh's Royal University of Fine Arts, **the Collective Clowns d'ailleurs et d'ici (CCAI) carries out the first training course in Battambang with PPS's circus school**. This constitutes the first step of an exchange which has since then developed.

In four years, the Battambang's circus school and its troupe acquired a respectability all over the country while showing a know-how and seriousness in producing prevention and leisure shows, and while placing itself as a partner of many national institutions, NGO's and other organizations working in the cultural and educational sector and on social action. This fast evolution could not have been possible but thanks to the extraordinary dynamism of *Phare Ponleu Selpak's* team, of its circus school and its pupils.



Several actions in Cambodia

The ascension of the school since its creation has been significant, in particular thanks to the construction of a new building exclusively dedicated to it, and its installation possible thanks to the material sent in a container in October 2003.

In three years, the number of pupils has largely increased, a **circus tent**, recovered in France, has been assembled to accommodate the shows, leaving place in the school for the rehearsals and repetitions. The purchase of **sound material** allowed, thanks to the training of three young people, to improve the quality of the shows. A new container, sent in November 2004 within the framework of the AFAA's Cirsasia program, made it possible to improve PPS's equipment, in particular the **lighting equipment** for the circus tent. The container also had material intended for the circus schools of Vietnam and Laos.

Since January 2001, one to three **training** courses are organized per year, going from fifteen days to one month. They use artists and trainers from all horizons within circus, physical preparatory play and work. That contributes to a better **structuring of the lessons**. There still remain, despite everything, gaps to be filled in the area of training the trainers, notably because the selected pupils are young. The school must still get a manager in order to ensure the follow-up and the maintenance of the material.

The **Great Prize** of the **Cultural and Social Initiative**, decreed at the time of the national Meetings of the live show of Nantes, in January 2004, rewarded the Collective CAI, among 82 structures in competition, for its various actions carried out in Cambodia. This distinction gave it legitimacy and an important recognition, while consolidating what is with the very essence of their project: the exchange.

In 2007, the Collectif has been the award-winning of the **"Make us dream" prize** ("Fais-nous rêver") of the Education through Sports Agency (Agence de l'Education par le Sport), rewarding associations of international solidarity through sports.

Finally, in June 2008, the Collectif and its partner Phare Ponleu Selpak have been involved in the opening of the World forum on human rights in Nantes.

Actions in France

An **exhibition**, made up of drawings and photographs with texts in French and Khmer recalling the first meeting between the actors of *Phare* and the first speakers of the *Collective Clowns d'ailleurs et d'ici*, was welcomed in many festivals and other places in France, Cambodia, Spain etc.

Several **training trips** were organized in France for the trainers and for the pupils of the school:

- the director of the school of circus, Khuon Det, and its assistant, Sok Sophea had a training/meeting in June and July 2001. They were welcomed in many festivals and companies, in order to create and nourish the bases of an exchange with, for instance, the National Centre of Circus Arts (CNAC) in Chalons en Champagne and the national School of circus arts (ENAC) in Rosny.
- a Battambang's pupil was accommodated at the national School of circus arts of Rosny in September 2002 for one year of training. Khuonthan Chamroeun is now an assistant teacher at *Phare Ponleu Selpak's* circus school.
- two other pupils, Houth Hieng and Sombo Vibol, were accommodated in training by Lomme's circus school, from December 2004 to June 2005. They became, in January 2006, circus teachers at PPS.
- in 2006-2007, Houn Bonthoeun and Sim Sophal, two jugglers acrobats, have been welcomed by the circus school of Bordeaux in order to develop their technique in different areas (juggling, handstand, acrobatics).
- 10 young people from the second generation have spent the school year 2007-2008 in the Regional centre of circus arts of Lomme (Centre regional des arts du cirque de Lomme) to work on acrobatic porté and start thinking of the following creation.
- 5 Cambodian trainers have been to France for a 5 weeks session on educational methods during autumn 2007.
- 2 artists from « Holiday Ban Touy Ban Tom » have integrated the National Centre of Circus Arts (CNAC) in Chalons en Champagne
- 3 young artist will join the the national School of circus arts (ENAC) at Rosny Sous Bois this September 2010 for 2 years

These experiences have been very enriching for everyone involved. The Collectif wishes to strengthen those bonds and to renew this system for the following seasons.



The tours

In the follow up of the action of the CCAI, the tours organized since 2003 have been occasions to setting up relays and meetings, in a spirit of sponsorship, between local structures, festivals or theatres, companies or professional artists and these young troupes.

The **assistance in creating** is one of the important sides of the exchanges that the CCAI has set up with PPS. The goal of this work is to sensitize the Cambodian actors to new forms of expression, by giving them the keys which will enable them to work their future creations differently. That gives them the possibility of creating a new Cambodian circus, rich with a unique identity and able to take its stand on the international scene, all this whole still remaining accessible to the local public.

Extremely successful on the first three rounds, the CCAI, which wishes **to establish new partnerships to go with the school's development and to share its experience**, continues its diffusion work. Training and meeting times will be set during these tours, to continue discovering new artistic practices and to enrich the knowledge of these young professionals. Partnerships with French circus schools will also be reinforced as well as all bonds already built at any level (young people and managers). Residences are foreseen, before each tour, in order to work over again the show and the music. The construction of certain accessories and decorations is also foreseen in France.

Several Phare Ponleu Selpak's circus shows toured in Europe, Africa and Asia:

- 2003 / Ban Touy Ban Tom et Cie / France, Spain
- 2005 / De 4 à 5 / France, Spain, Algeria
- 2005 / Phum Style and Holiday Ban Touy Ban Tom / France
- 2006 / De 4 à 5 / France, Italy
- 2006 – 2007 / Phum Style and Holiday Ban Touy Ban Tom / France, Spain
- 2007 / De 4 à 5 / France, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Réunion (Fr.)
- 2007 / Holiday Ban Touy Ban Tom / Japan
- 2008 / Phum Style / France, Spain, Holland
- 2009 / Putho! And Phum Style / France Italy, Spain, Belgium



PARTNERS

- Accro'Balles
- Amitié et Coopération Avec le Sud Est-Asiatique (ACASEA) – Caen
- Asian Trails
- Association d'Aide à l'Humanitaire (AAH)
- Association française d'action artistique (AFAA)
- Ateliers sans frontières
- French Cultural Centre of Phnom Penh and its Battambang annex and the Cultural Service of the French Embassy in Cambodia
- Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD)
- Comité de Jumelage de la Ville de Torcy (77)
- Conseil Général de Seine-Saint-Denis
- Fondation Un Monde par Tous
- National Circus School of the Royal University of Fine Arts of Phnom Penh
- Ministry of Social Affairs of Cambodia
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of Cambodia
- Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia
- Ministry of Transportation of Cambodia
- National Centre for Disabled People (Phnom Penh)
- Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)
- Oxfam Québec
- Philippines Educational Theatre Association (Manille – Philippines)
- UNICEF Cambodian Delegation
- UNESCO
- Royal University of Fine Arts of Phnom Penh (URBA)
- World Education Phnom Penh

HOW TO JOIN THE PROJECT?



We invite you to join us in multiple ways:

- By buying one or more representations
- By accommodating the troupe in residence
- By receiving the troupe in a training course or by accommodating one of the pupils of *Phare* if you are a circus school
- By placing at our disposal material or services (freight, vehicle, communication support...)
- By supporting our action by means of a financial contribution...