An Original Musical Retelling of a Classical Cambodian Myth
### Agangamasor & His Magic Power

**An Original Musical Retelling of a Classical Cambodian Myth**

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All songs composed by Sara Say (lyrics) and Chum Ngek (music)

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Scene from “Heavenly Dancers Play in the Garden.” Celestial dancers from left to right: Rachny Chhay, Kethmanida Sam, Danita Mani, Vathana Say, Limsothea Sam, Evelyn Thao, and Thida Riel. Photo by Stephane Janin.
This recording preserves music created for the original 2009 production of Agangamasor & His Magic Power by the dancers and musicians of the Cambodian Buddhist Society Cultural Group in Silver Spring, Maryland. Agangamasor & His Magic Power is the prequel to the Reamker, a uniquely Khmer adaptation of the Indian Ramayana.

Much of Khmer classical dance-drama is based upon great Cambodian literature, especially the Reamker. Like the Indian Ramayana, the Reamker is the story of the hero, Preah Ream (Prince Rama), who is the earthly incarnation of Vishnu (Preah Noreay in Khmer), the guardian of the universe.

The whole Reamker narrative, comprised of nearly 200 episodes, requires several days and nights to perform. Traditionally, this was done for ritual and entertainment purposes. Today, however, episodes are presented individually within public performances, or the story is abridged. Created for performance, much of what is known of this ancient text has been preserved over generations through the memories of musicians, dancers, and other artists.

Agangamasor & His Magic Power conveys the mythological world as it was prior to the birth of Preah Ream. While this part of the Reamker is known among older Cambodians, until this production, it has never been retold on stage. Thanks to the dedication of the artists of the Cambodian Buddhist Society, Inc. (CBSI)—especially Sara Say (producer & lyricist), Chum Ngek (composer), and Masady Mani (choreographer)—we can now enjoy this prelude to the Reamker story.

Both the Reamker as we know it today and Khmer classical music and dance-drama can be traced to the Angkor Empire (802–1432), a time in history when Cambodia was vast and powerful. Distinctive Khmer arts and culture flourished during this period.

In traditional Cambodia, music and dance were always respected as offerings to gods, spirits, ancestors, and teachers. They could also connect the human world with the supernatural world. As embodiments of sacred sound and movement, Khmer music and dance maintain and nurture relationships that keep heaven and earth in equilibrium. Many contemporary artists feel strong connections to their roles in this process, remarking that their arts have saved them from seemingly inescapable misfortune and death.

Masady Mani plays the role of Preah Noreay. Photo by Stephane Janin
Long ago in a celestial kingdom, a group of male angels (devada) made daily visits to Preah Eysor (Shiva), the God of Life, who protects and cares for all the beings of the world. Every morning, on their way to paying respects to Preah Eysor, they saw the palace guard, Agangamasor, standing by the gate. Joking and laughing with one another, each angel gave the guard a friendly ruffle or knock on the head as they passed by. This teasing had been going on for eternity, and as the angels knocked his head so often in their comings and goings, Agangamasor had grown quite bald! Nearly all his hair had fallen out. Over time, Agangamasor came to see this playful jesting by the angels as personal humiliation. He became angry and resentful towards the mischievous angels.

One day, after the angels left, Agangamasor went to see Preah Eysor and told him of his suffering and indignity. Preah Eysor listened compassionately to Agangamasor’s tale of misery and woe and was moved to help him. The god provided Agangamasor with a magic diamond finger to defend against the angels’ harassment. Preah Eysor told Agangamasor that when the angels attempt to knock him on the head again, he should point his magic diamond finger at them. This magic finger would blast them with great force and send them flying to the edge of the universe.

Soon after Preah Eysor gave Agangamasor the magic finger, one of the angels approached the gate. Agangamasor pointed his diamond finger at the angel, knocking him completely out of sight. As the rest of the angels approached, Agangamasor used his finger to blast them beyond the horizon. The heavens became quiet and deserted.

By the next day, the angels had become fearful of the vengeful guard. They refrained from visiting Preah Eysor to pay their daily respects and report on developments in the world. Looking at his empty court, Preah Eysor realized that giving such power to Agangamasor was a serious mistake. Pride and fear of losing face for making a bad decision prevented him from confronting Agangamasor directly. Only Preah Noreay (Vishnu), the God of Justice who restores balance in heaven and the world, would be powerful enough to accomplish the task.

To keep peace in the palace and to prevent further destruction by Agangamasor, Preah Eysor and his wife, Umaphakavatey, decided to flee.

Preah Eysor’s worst suspicions came true. Not long after they left the palace, Agangamasor arrived. As he gazed around the court, he noted the empty throne and the vacant seats usually full of noisy male and female court attendants. He realized that the kingdom was his to take. Consumed by power and greed, he climbed up the steps to sit on Preah Eysor’s royal throne.

Preah Noreay had a premonition of the troubles brewing in heaven. Sensing the imbalance in the powers of heaven and earth, he knew it was his duty to set things right again. Since Agangamasor’s power had grown to such a dangerous level,
Preah Noreay decided to transform himself into a beautiful tepapsar, a female heavenly dancer, in order to get closer to him. Using his powers, he created a heavenly dance troupe to assist him in deceiving Agangamasor.

Preah Noreay disguised as a tepapsar and his celestial dancers lured Agangamasor to the heavenly garden. Agangamasor quickly became infatuated with the tepapsar. While he flirted and danced with the beautiful heavenly dancer, she tricked him into pointing his powerful magic finger at his own leg, and he was knocked down by the power of his own magic. Preah Noreay removed the guard’s magic powers and restored peace and balance between heaven and earth.

Agangamasor indignantly accepted his death and admitted defeat by the Great Preah Noreay only because he is the God of Justice with immense supernatural powers. However, he appealed to Preah Noreay to be reincarnated in perpetuity as a powerful demon with 100 heads and 1,000 arms (Reapanasor aka Krong Reap, or Ravana) who will seek revenge.

Preah Noreay accepted the challenge and granted Agangamasor’s wish. He countered that he would reincarnate only as a human, Preah Ream (Prince Rama), who would still be able to defeat Agangamasor (Reapanasor aka Krong Reap, or Ravana). And so the struggle between Agangamasor (Reapanasor aka Krong Reap, or Ravana) and Preah Noreay (Preah Ream, Prince Rama) continued through subsequent chapters of the great Reamker story.

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**Artist Information**

**Chum Ngek** is one of the few living Khmer music masters worldwide who possesses a vast repertoire and command of multiple instruments across various genres. He is the 2004 recipient of the Bess Lomax Hawes Award, the NEA National Heritage Fellowship conferred upon one individual who has significantly benefited his or her tradition through teaching and preserving important repertoires. Chum has also received honors from The Maryland State Arts Council and Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County, Maryland. Born in Battambang Province, Cambodia, Chum first formally studied the repertoire and instruments of the major Khmer musical genres—pin peat, mohori, and phleng kar—at the age of ten under his grandfather. Although Chum’s grandfather did not want him to become a professional musician, his talent and love for music could not be denied. Consequently, Chum’s grandfather set up private apprenticeships for him with the province’s best musicians. By the time he was 18, Chum began to perform professionally and lead ensembles. In 1974, Chum was selected as his region’s representative for a national music contest and artist residency held at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) in Phnom Penh. Since arriving in the United States in 1982, Chum has been active advising, teaching, and performing across the country.

**Masady Mani** is a 1987 graduate and performing arts professor of the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), the premier art institution for Royal classical ballet and folk arts in Cambodia. Since 1991, she has been Art Director at the Cambodian Buddhist Society, Inc. (CBSI) in Silver Spring, Maryland. In this role, she has created many unique performing pieces that have been presented throughout Maryland and surrounding states. As a master dancer, Mani earned the coveted role of Preah Ream (Prince Rama) and taught at RUFA from 1987 to 1990. While she was in Cambodia, she performed for foreign dignitaries and at other prestigious events to represent the traditions and fine arts of Cambodia. She also toured extensively throughout Cambodia and abroad, including the Soviet Union, India, North and South Vietnam. In 1990, she toured the United States with RUFA, on the first westward tour since the fall of the Khmer Rouge. As a dance student, Mani studied performing styles for different leading roles, singing, poetry, and traditional song writing. In addition, due to her natural singing voice and talent, she was officially trained as a vocalist at RUFA. These skills are considered essential for an effective performer in this art form, as in combination they invoke spirit, emotions, and connection. Mani’s technical training combined with her natural singing voice continues to be a gift to CBSI.
Sara Say began singing when he was in high school in Cambodia, in a Khmer "modern music" band. He loved Khmer traditional music but had no chance to study until he came to the United States and joined the Khmer Classical Arts Association, Inc. (KCAA) as their lead male vocalist. KCAA was one of the first and few Khmer classical ballet dance troupes to perform outside of Cambodia at that time, touring throughout the United States and Canada to share Cambodia’s journey of loss during the Khmer Rouge and of hope and resilience after its fall. He has continued to perform Khmer classical and traditional music ever since. Also an avid reader and researcher of Khmer legends and folklore, Say is passionate about preserving and retelling those stories. It was in high school that he started officially studying the legends of the Ramayana and its various Khmer texts. However, Say’s love for oral tradition and storytelling of folk stories and legends such as the Reamker was prevalent throughout his youth, as he listened intently to elders, teachers, religious leaders, etc., and it endures to today. He perfected his poetry writing skills as he created and contributed to performances at the Cambodian Buddhist Temple’s arts and culture program. With these refined skills, he created this unique piece, Agangamasor and His Magic Power.

Cambodian Buddhist Society Cultural Committee

The Cambodian Buddhist Society, Inc. (CBSI) is a religious, educational, and community-based organization that works to ensure the wellbeing of Cambodians and Cambodian Americans in the Washington, DC, area.

The Cambodian Buddhist Society Cultural Committee (CBSCC), an initiative of the CBSI, is tasked with preserving and sharing Cambodian culture and traditions within the Washington, DC, metropolitan area and broader Cambodian community. Since its inception, the arts and cultural programs have been a platform for Cambodian American dialogue and serve an especially important role in providing space for Americans of Cambodian heritage to explore identity, familial roots, and a sense of belonging. For decades, the committee has provided programs that not only highlight Cambodian art and culture but also strengthen family ties and invigorate bonds among communities.
1. ចម្រៀងអគង្គមាសូរ  
Chamreang Agangamasor  
(The Song of Agangamasor)

អឺ...ំឺយន្រះនឹងថ្ល្រថ្ល្រង  
Eur...euy nih noeung thlaa thlaeng

អឺ...ព្រះភូធរ  
Eur...Preah Phuthoar

នៅយាម  
Standing guard at His Majesty's gate

ដូចជីបុរាណ ំ  
Ooh...sirisaak

នាងមាសូរ  
Ooh...pee Agangamasor

ព្រឹកព្រ្រងភ្លឺសា្វ្រងសូរិយា  
Proeuk preang pleu svang soriya

When the brilliant morning sun appears

យាយីរំខាន  
Yeayih romkhaan.

They teased and pestered Agangamasor.

2. ឈ្មោះអារម្មណ៍ សិទ្ធិ  
Devoda Tver Bab Agangamasor  
(The Angels Tease Agangamasor)

ព្រឹកព្រ្រងភ្លឺសា្វ្រងសូរិយា  
Proeuk preang pleu svang soriya

When the brilliant morning sun appears

យើងទំងអស់គា្ន្ររីករាយកន្លង  
Yeung taeng ohs knea rik reay kan loang

We bustle about happily

ព្រឹកព្រ្រងភ្លឺសា្វ្រងសូរិយា  
Proeuk preang pleu svang soriya

When the brilliant morning sun appears
យើងទំងអស់គា្ន្ររីករាយកន្លង
Yeung taeng ohs knea rik reay kan loang
We bustle about happily

បានមកជួបភ័ក្ត្រអគង្គមាបង
Baan maok juop pheak Agangamea bang
We come to visit you, brother Agangamasor

សូមឆ្លើយឆ្ល្រស់ឆ្លងបងជាឬអ្វី?
Som chloeuy chlas chlong bang rea reu avey?
Let’s chitchat. Are you doing well, brother?

ម្ត្រចពើនៅធ្វើកន្តើយ?
Mdech peur nauw theur kanteuy?
Why do you stand still and ignore us?

អគង្គមាអើយយើងនឹកព្រកក្រ្រ
Agangamea euy yeung neuk paek kray
Ooh, Agangamasor, we missed you so very much

ម្ត្រចពើនៅធ្វើកន្តើយ?
Mdech peur nauw theur kanteuy?
Why do you stand still and ignore us?

បន់ឱយភ្លឺឆប់ប្រញាប់ឃ្ម្រតខ្មី
Boan oay pleu chhab pra nhab khmeat khmey
We can’t wait for the morning to come

បន់ ឱយភ្លឺឆប់ប្រញាប់ឃ្ម្រតខ្មី
Boan oay pleu chhab pra nhab khmeat khmey
We can’t wait for the morning to come

មកជួបជាថ្មីបានល្រងកំសាន្ត។
Maok juop jea tmei baan laeng kamsaan.
So we can come again to enjoy spending time with you.

3.

អគង្គមាសូរចង្អុលដ្រព្រជ្រ
Agangamasor Jong-ol Dai Pech
(Agangamasor’s Magic Diamond Finger)

3a.

ព្រះឥសូរនិងព្រះនាងឧមាភគវតី
Preah Eysor Noeung Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
(Shiva and Uma)

ព្រះនាងឧមាភគវតី
Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
Her Majesty, Queen Uma

ព្រះឥសូរនិងមហ្រសី
Euy...Ang Preah Eysor noeung mohaesey
Ooh...Shiva and his queen

ព្រះឥសូរនិងព្រះនាងឧមាភគវតី
Preah Eysor Noeung Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
(Shiva and Uma)

ព្រះឥសូរនិងព្រះនាងឧមាភគវតី
Preah Eysor Noeung Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
(Shiva and Uma)

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(Shiva and Uma)

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Preah Eysor Noeung Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
(Shiva and Uma)

ព្រះឥសូរនិងព្រះនាងឧមាភគវតី
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Preah Eysor Noeung Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
(Shiva and Uma)

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(Shiva and Uma)

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Preah Eysor Noeung Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
(Shiva and Uma)

ព្រះឥសូរនិងព្រះនាងឧមាភគវតី
Preah Eysor Noeung Preah Neang Umapheakavaktey
(Shiva and Uma)
អឺ…អឺ…អឺ…បានសុខា។
Eur…euy…baan sokhaa.
Ooh…ooh…with peace.

3b.
ប្រាប់ព្រះអង្គមាសូរ
Preah Eysor Aanet Agangamasor
(Shiva Takes Pity on Agangamasor)

អឺ…អឺ…អឺ…បានសុខា។
Eur…euy…baan sokhaa.
Ooh…ooh…with peace.

3c.
ប្រាប់ព្រះអង្គមាសូរ
Preah Eysor Aanet Agangamasor
(Shiva Takes Pity on Agangamasor)

សេចក្តីប្រយោជន៍
Mahethirith Jong Ol Dai Pech
(The Power of the Magic Diamond Finger)
អគង្គមាសូរច្រញទៅចុះបាល្រងមានគ្រ្រះធំទៀតហីយ
Agangamasor jeng tov joh baa leng mean kruih thom teat heuy.
Agangamasor, my child, take leave. There's no more threat or danger to you

ឃើញក្រៀមរបិស្ឋាននូវឈុតអាក្រក់បានឡើយបារើយនឹងសុខឥតសៅហ្មង។
Khmean norna preab jao ban leuy baa euy noeung sok eht sao mong.
Now no one can compare with you, My Child. You will be safe and your sadness will disappear.

4.
ប្រភេទឈ្មោះអាហ្សង់
Devoda Neung Agangamasor
(Agangamasor Banishes the Angels)

5.
ប្រភេទឈ្មោះអាហ្សង់
Preah Eysor Keut Tuk
(Shiva Becomes Worried)

ព្រះឥសូររីយ្យតារាម
Eysor has been overcome by my power
Min aach haan kla juop muk yeung baan
He is not brave enough to confront me

ព្រះឥសូរការសហគមន៍
Tae poneh reach sambatt taeng ambaal maan
Now, all the royal treasures will be mine

ព្រះឥសូរការសហគមន៍
Trouv baan yeung kroub kroang reak saa.
To control and rule

ឈ្មោរដែលមកពីអាហ្សង់
Knong phaen peephoup mean tae mneak
The span of the singular universe

ឈ្មោរដែលមកពីអាហ្សង់
Thkom thkeung jeang jak dbet hathaa
Because of my glorious hand

ឈ្មោរដែលមកពីអាហ្សង់
Jong-ol dai pech rithi klaa
And supremely powerful diamond finger
ក្នុងម៉ៅដោយបានឈ្នះយើងបានឡើយ។
Kmean norna yoak chneh yeung baan leuy.
No one can defeat me.

អស់ទ្រពអប្រសរនៅឯណ
Oss tep apsar neuv ae naa
Oh, celestial nymphs, where are all of you?

អឺ…អឺ…អឺយ…កាលអើយ
Eur…eur…euy…Preah Noreay…eur…eur…eur…eur noah
Ooh…ooh…ooh…about Lord Vishnu

៦. ស្ពះដ្ឋុំប្រព្រឹត្តិបត្តិការណ៍
Mahethirith Preah Noreay
(Vishnu’s Premonition)

៧. យាយម្មើងតើនាំគើន្រចូលមកឲ្រយហើយ
Tepapsar Krasal Suon
(Heavenly Dancers Play in the Garden)
ព្រ្លាក់ដំរើកថ្មី...មេឃ...អំពីក្រុង...មេឃ...។
Prawlit lomjong...euy...joam batuma...euy.
The lilies surround the lotus...ooh...they have a delightful
fragrance...ooh.

ព្រះនារាយណ៍និងអគង្គមាសូរ
Preah Noreay Neung Agangamasor
(Vishnu in Disguise and Agangamasor)

8.

ព្រះនារាយណ៍និងអគង្គមាសូរ
Preah Noreay Neung Agangamasor
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កុំព្រួយពិសីគ្រ្រន់ត្ររាំមិនថ្វីបងមិនស្រដីជំទស់ឡើយណឱណ៎ក្រវ
Kom pruiy pisey kroan tae roam min tvei bang min srordey jumtas luey naa oh naa keov meas bang euy
Don’t worry, Beautiful. If it is just dancing, I won’t refuse you, Sweetheart.

បើដូចចិនា្ត្រខ្ញុំមា្ច្រស់ប្រ្រថ្ន្រប្អូនមិនសង្ក្រក្នុងចិត្តឡើយ
Beur doch chenda knyom mchas prathna paaun min sangkaa knong jett leuy
Well then, if you abide by my wishes, I will not distress.

ចាប់ផ្តើមរាំទៅចាប់ផ្តើមរាំទៅ ពៅត្រ្រណត្រើយរៀមរាំតាមហើយកុំឡើយ
Jab pdoeum roam touv jab pdoeum roam touv, pouv traantreuy ream roam taam heuy kom luey sang saiy
Let’s dance, then. Let’s dance. And don’t have any doubts.

អគង្គមាសូរ…euy…៖ឺយ…ជាតិទុរជន
Agangamasor…euy…euy…jeat turajun
Agangamasor…ooh…you evil demon

ឯងហា៊្រនមកប្លន់បល្ល័ង្កឥសូរនរបតី
Aeng hean maok phloann ballang eysor noroubadey
You dare to take the throne of Preah Eysor

យើងនឹងពិឃដ…euy…៖ឺយ…ឯង ឱយក្រស័យ
Yeung noeung pikheat…euy…aeng aoy ksai…euy…tuk nouv tveur avey
I will kill you…ooh…why should I let you live?

មិនថ្វីស៊ូសា្ល្រប់…euy…៖ឺយ…ចាកលោកា
Yeung jaanh kal pett…euy…pruh rith jehsdaa
You have defeated me…ooh…because you are powerful

យើងចាញ់កលពិត…euy…៖ឺយ…ព្រ្រះឫទ្ធិច្រសា្ត្រ
Yeung jaanh kal pett…euy…pruh rith jehsdaa
You have defeated me…ooh…because you are powerful

ឈ្ម្រះល្របីឮលាន់
Rithy khlang krai…euy…chmoah lbey leu lorn
I will be extremely strong…ooh…and famous

ព្រះឫទ្ធិច្រសា្ត្រ
Yeung rith jehsdaa…euy…pruh rith jehsdaa
You have defeated me…ooh…because you are powerful

វិញឱយសូន្រយសង្ខ្ររមិនឱយស្រសសល់សោះឡើយ។
Aeng winh aoy sown sangkhaa min aoy sehs sal saws leuy.
You will have nothing and absolutely nothing will remain. ◆
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[Logos of the funding organizations]
Credits

Produced by Joanna Pecore
Recorded, mixed, and mastered by Pete Reiniger
Concept and artistic direction by Sara Say and Chum Ngek
Song lyrics and retelling by Sara Say
Musical arrangements and instrumentals by Chum Ngek
Vocals by Sara Say and Masady Mani
Translation, transcription, and transliteration assistance by Bobbharatn Rithipol, Raci Say, Vathana Say, and Vathany Say

Front cover photo: Preah Noreay (played by Masady Mani, right) engages in battle with Agangamasor (played by Puthyrit Sek, left). Photo by Stephane Janin.
Annotated by Joanna Pecore
Executive producers: Daniel E. Sheehy and John Smith
Production manager: Mary Monseur
Production assistant: Kate Harrington
Editorial assistance by Carla Borden
Art direction, design and layout by Galen Lawson

Smithsonian Folkways is: Cecille Chen, director of business affairs and royalties; Logan Clark, executive assistant; Toby Dodds, director of web and IT; Will Griffin, licensing manager; Kate Harrington, production assistant; Madison Hart, royalty analyst; Fred Knittel, marketing specialist; Seth Langer, licensing assistant; Helen Lindsay, customer service; Mary Monseur, production manager; Jeff Place, curator and senior archivist; Huib Schippers, emeritus curator and director; Sayem Sharif, director of financial operations; Daniel E. Sheehy, interim curator and director; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, associate director; Jonathan Williger, marketing manager; Brian Zimmerman, sales and customer service specialist.

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