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## Composer Seeks to Merge Western, Khmer Musical Traditions

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by Michelle Vachon | July 23, 2016

Chinary Ung is one of the foremost contemporary composers in the U.S. He also happens to be a Cambodian-American with a passion for encouraging the development of links between Western and Khmer music.

Mr. Ung has spent the past several years brainstorming a program to encourage musical composition in Cambodia, and his work is now coming to fruition, with a new composers' training workshop being held this month in Siem Reap City.



Chinary Ung works with Australian composer Corrina Bonshek during a session at the Nirmita Composers Workshop on Friday. (Seng Chansereypich)

“Our ancestors composed pieces all the time,” Mr. Ung said in an interview on Friday. “That’s why we have these pieces in front of us to perform.... We would like to see if we could

encourage living masters not only to teach as they have been doing, not only to perform the pieces of music as they also have been doing, but to compose new pieces according to tradition.”

Mr. Ung’s vision for the workshop was to bring together composers and students from the region and beyond to work together on ideas for composing both Western classical and Khmer traditional music. Organized in cooperation with Cambodian Living Arts, the Nirmita Composers Workshop culminates in a public concert on Saturday night featuring works by participating composers.

Held at the Apsara Angkor Resort & Conference, the concert will include works by Corrina Bonshek of Australia, Keo Sophy of Cambodia, Sean Heim of the U.S. and Koji Nakano of Japan as well as some of Mr. Ung’s own compositions.

A professor at the University of California, San Diego, Mr. Ung has accumulated a long list of awards and commissions from prestigious cultural institutions such as The Kennedy Center and the Guggenheim Foundation in the U.S., where he has lived since arriving as a clarinet student in 1964. Over the past 15 years, he has made a dozen trips to Cambodia.

“We wanted to see how we could develop the next generation of composers in the country,” he said.

In the workshop, Mr. Ung included composition classes for both Western contemporary and Khmer traditional music.

“Surprisingly...it’s not really different,” he said. Although this year’s workshop held separate sessions for the two art forms, he said, “my vision is that, three to five years from now...the two might merge together as a confluence of music-making.”

The concert starts at 7 p.m.

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