

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU SACRIFICE TO FIGHT FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN?

A CAMBODIAN SPRING

A FILM BY CHRIS KELLY



22nd BUSAN
International Film Festival
12-21 October, 2017



LITTLE EASE FILMS, ZANZIBAR FILMS, DARTMOUTH FILMS & EYESTEELFILM PRESENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN & THE IRISH FILM BOARD 'A CAMBODIAN SPRING' WRITTEN, PRODUCED, FILMED & DIRECTED BY CHRIS KELLY, EDITED BY CHRIS KELLY, RYAN MULLINS & PAWEŁ STEC, WITH THANKS TO JOHN MISTER, ORIGINAL MUSIC BY JAMES HOLDEN, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS CHRISTOPHER HIRD, EDWINA FORKIN & BOB MOORE

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EYESTEELFILM

WRITER, PRODUCER
& DIRECTOR

Chris Kelly

EXECUTIVE
PRODUCERS

Bob Moore, Edwina Forkin
Christopher Hird

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Chris Kelly

EDITORS

Chris Kelly, Ryan Mullins, Pawel Stec,
with thanks to John Mister.

MUSIC COMPOSER

James Holden

FORMAT

120 minutes HD, Colour



FILMMAKER STATEMENT

Put simply my work is about the human condition. My work aims to explore life in all of its myriad ambiguities. I try to avoid overly simple narratives and try always to trace the moral, religious and political landscapes that underpin and shape our universal truths. I believe that people everywhere are, for the most part, driven by the same fears, desires and dreams. “A Cambodian Spring” is for me a deeply personal film, it is an exploration of what motivates us, what gives our lives meaning, and what happens when our personal desires colour and shape our actions. It is an unapologetically subjective portrait of my time in Cambodia, of the people who shared their lives with me and of the shifting landscapes, both physical and emotional, that I found there.

I knew from early on that I wanted to work with James Holden to produce the soundtrack for the film. His music is for me a perfect and universal metaphor for life, and I found that it embodies the slowly disintegrating landscapes that I found in Cambodia, both physical and emotional. His music is deeply melancholic, and decaying and disintegrating sounds rotate and revolve around their central motifs, before this discord and decay gives way to harmony and at least partial resolution.

My film is a sort of visual fugue, where in the beginning the separate elements play out on their own, before interlocking and finally coming together to form one central and harmonious whole. This mirrors the character developments and was a central idea in shaping the soundtrack for the film as the two character themes eventually combine. The film is not a social issue or activist film, but rather a film about activists and activism, filmed from my outsider’s perspective.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

“A Cambodian Spring” is an intimate and unique portrait of three people caught up in the chaotic and often violent development that is shaping modern-day Cambodia. Shot over 6 years, the film charts the growing wave of land-rights protests that led to the ‘Cambodian Spring’ and the tragic events that followed. This film is about the complexities – both political and personal, of fighting for what you believe in.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Fading from black, the frame fills with the image of a rice field, leaves of grass billow in the wind. Cut to construction along the Mekong river in the capital Phnom Penh. On the soundtrack the metronome of steel girders being pushed deep into the ground keeps time. In the foreground a young man prepares to cast his fishing net into the river as an old sampan fishing boat chugs by. In the background a new bridge is under construction, the sound of which marks the unsteady pace of progress in Cambodia. Abstract shots of the Phnom Penh skyline, littered with unfinished building projects that sit like grim concrete reminders of the boom and bust economy to which Cambodia prescribes.

The film is an intimate portrait of three Cambodian’s involved in forced evictions. We meet the characters at the very beginning of their journey, unsure of themselves and unaware of where they will end up after years of protests against their government. What began as a growing wave of land rights protests led by our characters, turned into an attempt to overthrow the dictatorial government of Hun Sen, which has been in power for more than thirty years.

Today Tep Vanny, one of the female protestors from Boeung Kak lake, is in prison on what are widely thought to be politically motivated charges, Sam Rainsy has stepped down as the opposition party leader and is once again in self-imposed exile after fleeing an arrest warrant, and the Venerable Luon Sovath continues to film and produce documentaries for his popular YouTube channel while dealing with death threats and most recently pro-government hackers. Srey Pov remains at home with her family and no longer participates in the ongoing housing rights protests.



FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

A Cambodian Spring had its world premiere at the prestigious Hot Docs festival in Toronto, Canada in May 2017. The film won the Special Jury Prize for International Feature Documentary. (Canada)

Hot Docs International Documentary Festival, May - Winner Special Jury Prize (Canada)

Brooklyn Film Festival, June - Winner Best Documentary (USA)

Galway Film Fleadh, July (Ireland)

Guth Gafa International Film Festival, August (Ireland)

Cambodiatown Film Festival, September - Winner Best Documentary (USA)

Irish Film Institute Doc Fest, October (Ireland) - In Competition

International Documentary Film Festival DocumentaQro, September (Mexico) - In Competition

Antenna International Documentary Festival, October (Australia) - In Competition

Busan International Film Festival, October (Korea) - Asian Showcase

DocsMX International Doc Festival, October (Mexico) - In Competition

Midbo International Documentary Festival, October (Columbia) - In Competition

Leeds International Film Festival, November (UK) - In Competition

Available Light Festival, Feb 2018 (Canada) - In Competition

Human Rights Human Wrongs Festival, Feb (Norway) - In Competition

One world, March 2018 (Czech Republic) - In Competition

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CREW BIO'S

WRITER, PRODUCER, CINEMATOGRAPHER & DIRECTOR

Chris Kelly

Chris is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and the founder of Little Ease Films. He has spent the last nine years making his first feature documentary 'A Cambodian Spring' which recently won the Special Jury Prize for International Feature Documentary at Hot Docs 2017 and Best Documentary at the Brooklyn Film Festival 2017. He is a regular contributor to the Guardian newspaper and in 2014 produced an award-winning undercover investigation into slavery in the Thai fishing industry. His work has taken him as far afield as South Sudan, Burma, the Philippines, Laos and Thailand. He is currently developing an animated feature film about slavery in the Thai fishing industry, and a Virtual Reality computer game about slavery and migration.



MUSIC COMPOSER

James Holden

The release of James Holden's long-anticipated second album *The Inheritors* in the summer of 2013 kicked off a bold new phase in the enduring British electronic guru's musical career. An epic 75 minute long English pagan saga, the immersive and idiosyncratic alternative electronic universe of *The Inheritors* was the product of Holden's late night studio jams on his modular synthesizer and custom hybrid analogue-digital machines. He is the founder of the Border Community record label and is published by Warp Publishing, one of the most original and highly regarded record labels in the world. "A Cambodian Spring" is his first soundtrack.



FILM EDITORS

Chris Kelly, Ryan Mullins & Pawel Stec with thanks to John Mister

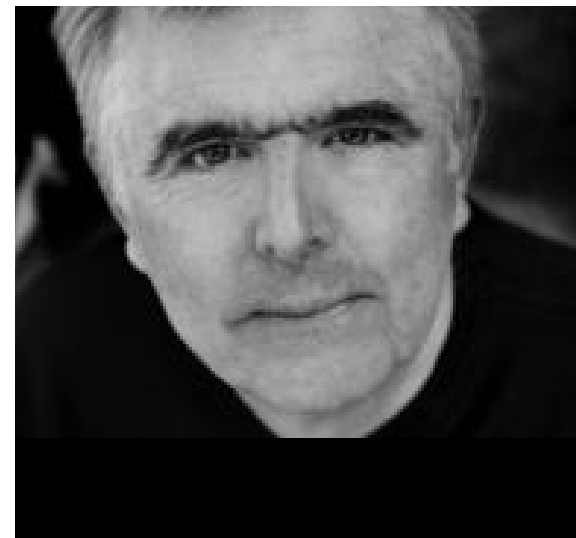
Ryan Mullins is a documentary editor based in Montreal, Quebec. He is the editor of the award-winning feature documentary *The Frog Princes* (Hot Docs 2012) and *Jingle Bell Rocks* (IDFA 2013). His film *Chameleon* won the Emerging Filmmaker award at Hot Docs 2014. He has since worked on several projects including *The Vote* and *A Cambodian Spring*, which will premiere at Hot Docs 2017. Recently, he worked as the editor on *I Am the Blues*, which won best Feature Documentary at the Canadian Screen Awards.



EXECUTIVE PRODUCER & DISTRIBUTOR

Bob Moore

Bob Moore is a Creative Producer and Co-President of EYES-TEELFILM in Montreal, specializing in the creation of cinematic documentaries such as *Last Train Home*, *China Heavyweight*, *I Am the Blues* and *Forest of the Dancing Spirits*. With partners Daniel Cross and Mila Aung-Thwin, Bob has produced films that have been recognized by international awards including the Emmys and Golden Horse, as well as numerous festival grand jury awards. Bob also oversees EYESTEELFILM's theatrical distribution company and its new Creative Reality Lab, which focuses on meaningful interactive and immersive storytelling. He has degrees in Philosophy, Fine Art, and Law, and regularly lectures at and consults with film institutions around the world.



EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Christopher Hird

Christopher Hird is a leading figure in UK independent documentary making. With Dartmouth Films he has pioneered new ways of funding, producing and distributing documentaries in the UK, as well as promoting the work of new and emerging filmmakers.

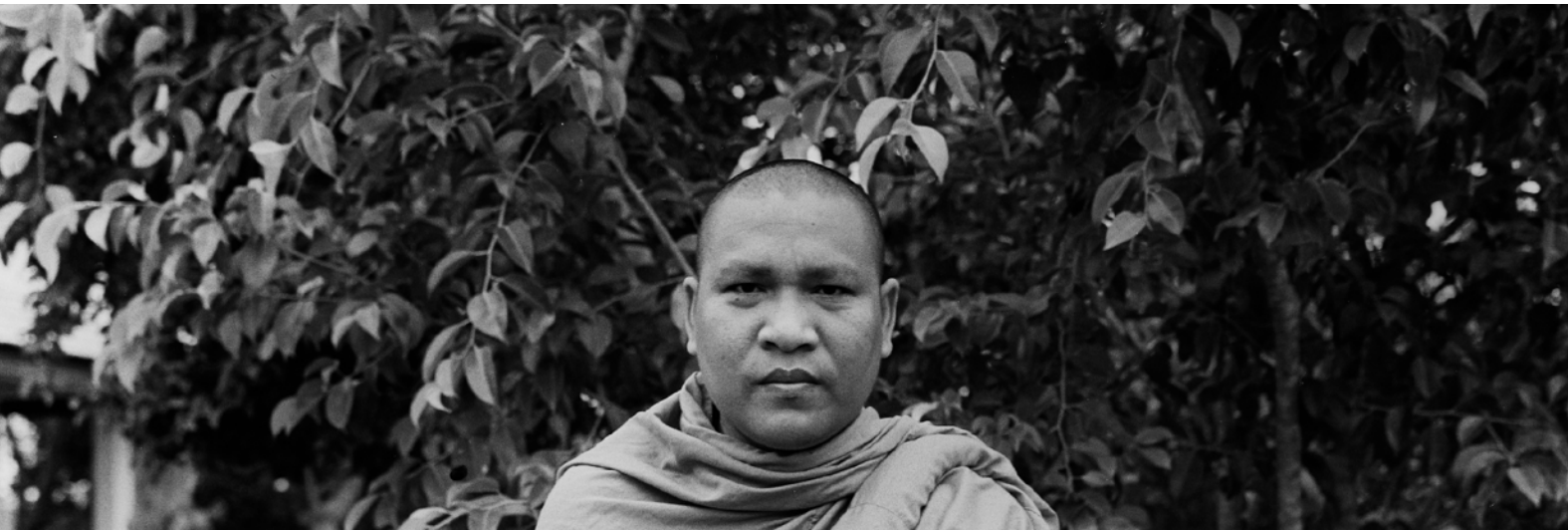


EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Edwina Forkin

A dynamic, motivated, energetic producer with over fifteen years' experience in Film and Television production. Currently the creative producer and CEO of Zanzibar Films - working from initial development through to production and marketing, always with an eye for quality content and a primary focus of working with emerging Irish talent. Edwina has over seventeen years experience in Film and Television production.

CHARACTER BIO'S



THE VENERABLE LUON SOVATH

“Religion belongs to the government now.”
Siem Reap Religious Official.

When I met the Venerable Sovath in August 2009, he was alone, studying philosophy and painting the story of Buddha on the walls of his quiet, rural pagoda in Siem Reap province, Cambodia. He told me that he became a monk as a child to escape the bloodshed of the civil war that was consuming his family. A few months before his brother and nephew were shot during a violent forced eviction, in which many of his family and community lost their land to a wealthy businessman. When he arrived at the hospital, he started to film, and afterwards he made a short documentary to share with others. This was the turning point that transformed Venerable Loun Sovath from an artist into a filmmaker activist.

Now dubbed the multi-media monk, because of his technical proficiency in filmmaking and editing, and because of his innumerable gadgets, Venerable Sovath is trying to combine the teachings of Buddha with his new role as a Human Rights Defender, creating documentaries that highlight human rights abuses across Cambodia. For him, the path to enlightenment and the path of a Human Rights Defender are inexorably linked, yet how successfully he can reconcile these two drives is at the heart of his own personal struggle.

He uses video as a tool for his advocacy, both bearing witness to history and sharing information. He uses social media such as Facebook and his blog to share his videos with an increasingly connected and online Cambodian population.

He is fulfilling the now neglected traditional role of the Buddhist monk in Cambodian society, providing moral and spiritual guidance, and acting as a counterpoint to the power and corruption of an authoritarian government and a corrupt religious Sangha.

Venerable Sovath's story begins in his sleepy rural pagoda. We follow him over six years as he films what is happening around him, beginning with the forced eviction of his own community, then documenting other eviction cases and finally filming the political protests that engulfed the country and culminated in a Cambodian Spring in 2013.



TOUL SREY POV

“The revolution devours its young”
Jacques Mallet du Pan.

Srey Pov is a Cambodian housing rights activist and mother of three. She owns a small house on a valuable piece of land in central Phnom Penh. She came from a life of poverty and worked hard to save money, buy her home and provide a better life for her children. During her time as an activist she emerges as one of the community leaders, she is outspoken, articulate and insightful and is instrumental in her community obtaining an admission of wrongdoing from the World Bank. When her best friend Tep Vanny is put forward by others as the community leader a division appears within the group. As Vanny is invited abroad to speak on behalf of their community, Srey Pov remains at home, in the shadow of Vanny's growing fame. Eventually Srey Pov leaves the group entirely, however it is never clear if she was bought out by the government or if she was the victim of rumours spread by Vanny.

The tragic end to her story reveals a fragile and lonely figure, longing for the friendship and solidarity that gave purpose and meaning to her life.



TEP VANNY

Dubbed a 'professional protestor' by the Cambodian government, Vanny is a young mother of three and the appointed leader of Cambodia's most high-profile forced eviction. She emerged as a leader during the later part of the protests mostly because she was the only member of their group able to speak English. Her role was cemented by Hillary Clinton when she intervened in their arrest and subsequent conviction. Vanny's trajectory is on the rise throughout the film, while Srey Pov eventually pales away into the background, Vanny finds herself centre stage during the political protests that engulf the country, speaking on stage to tens of thousands of protesting Cambodians during the protests of the Cambodian Spring. Tep Vanny is now in prison in Cambodia, serving a two-year sentence for what many believe are politically motivated charges.

EPK Photo captions:

A_Cambodian_Spring_1 The Venerable Luon Sovath or 'multi-media monk' films during political protests in 2013.

A_Cambodian_Spring_2 The body of Mao Sok Chan is draped with a Khmer national flag after being shot during political protests in 2013.

A_Cambodian_Spring_3 A man removes the remnants of his home from Boeung Kak lake after being forcibly evicted in 2011.

A_Cambodian_Spring_4 Protesters film a burning police car after election-day violence in 2013.

A_Cambodian_Spring_5 A man stands outside a makeshift shelter in Boeung Kak lake after being forcibly evicted from his home in 2010

A_Cambodian_Spring_6 a man looks on as company excavators move sand at Boeung Kak lake in 2010.

YES FILM



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