

The Columbian

Weekend

and beyond

Friday, April 9, 2010

Year of the Tiger

Dance troupe leads
Cambodian New Year
Celebration at Clark College

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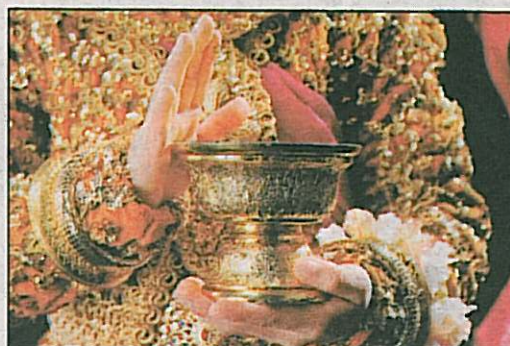
MOVIES: Fey, Carrell
team for a special
'Date Night' PAGE F4

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Wave rolls through
adversities PAGE F13

DINING OUT: Bantam
& Grouse Café offers
a serene setting with
British fare PAGE F26



COVER STORY



Charmony Chhing, 7, wearing a Pray Dance costume, will perform in her third Cambodian New Year event at Clark College this weekend.

TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian



STEVEN LANE/Columbian files

Dancers toss flower petals toward the crowd during last year's Cambodian New Year Celebration at Clark College.

Dancing in the New Year

Cambodian-American troupe continues local celebration

By MARY ANN ALBRIGHT
Columbian staff writer

Organizing the community's Cambodian New Year festivities runs in the family for Connie Mom-Chhing. Her late mother, Vann Hem, once a member of the Cambodian Royal Ballet and founder of the Khmer Angkor Dance Troupe in Vancouver, began putting together local Cambodian New Year events in 1987. Now, oversight for the annual

celebration, as well as the dance troupe, has fallen to Mom-Chhing. It's a way of helping the area's small but growing Cambodian-American community keep traditions alive.

This weekend will mark the third year Mom-Chhing's volunteer-run Cambodian New Year Celebration has taken place at Clark College. The Khmer Angkor Dance Troupe will perform a new routine, as well as revive a dance shelved for the past two decades. The event will feature classical and folk Cambodian dance demonstrations, social dance time, music and traditional Cambodian foods as it celebrates the year of the tiger.

The Chinese New Year goes by the lunisolar calendar, so the date varies from year to year. The Cambodian, Thai and Laotian New Years are always celebrated for three days on April 13, 14 and 15, said Mom-Chhing. But really, the entire month of April is a celebratory time, added the 40-year-old Vancouver resident, administrator for the Clark County Regional Support Network.

Dance is an important part of the celebration. Khmer, or Cambodian, classical dance is an art form dating back 2,000 years and was traditionally performed in the royal court and at

If you go

■ **What:** Cambodian New Year Celebration, feting the year of the tiger with traditional dance and music.

■ **When:** 6:30-11:30 p.m. April 10. 6:30-7:30 p.m. is a social hour, followed by a performance by the Khmer Angkor Dance Troupe from 7:30-8:45 and a social dance from 8:45-11:30.

■ **Where:** Clark College's Gaiser Student Center, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver.

■ **Cost:** \$14, free for children 12 and younger. Refreshments will be available for purchase.

■ **Information:** 360-944-9025 or 360-882-3646.

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CELEBRATION

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sacred rituals as a sacrifice to gods, goddesses and spirits of dance teachers departed. The dance uses highly stylized hand movements to tell a story.

Women perform classical Cambodian dances, taking on the male and female roles. Both men and women participate in Cambodian folk dances.

Mom-Chhing's been dancing since age 9 and teaches Cambodian dance at Firstenberg Community Center through Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation.

She will solo on April 10 in Robam Apsara, or Celestial Dance, which she hasn't performed in more than 20 years. The dance, which also features four of Mom-Chhing's advanced students, is a classical routine inspired by the more than 1,500 apsara, or celestial dancers,

carved throughout Angkor Wat, a Cambodian temple complex built in the 12th century.

Another classical dance the Khmer Angkor Dance Troupe will perform is Robam Boung Soung, or Pray Dance.

"It's asking for peace, happiness and prosperity for the upcoming New Year," Mom-Chhing said.

Five of Mom-Chhing's young students, including her 7-year-old daughter, Charmony Chhing, will perform Robam Chhma — Cat Dance — for the first time this weekend.

"It's depicting a group of cats chasing a mouse, and at the end, they catch it," Mom-Chhing said.

In addition to children's and classical dances, the New Year Celebration will include the Cambodian folk dance Robam Koah Trah Lauk, the Coconut Shell Dance.

This playful, flirtatious dance features 10 performers and "is very fast-paced, very rhythmic,"

Mom-Chhing said.

The dance makes use of actual coconut shells, which the troupe imported from Cambodia.

Beyond dance, the April 10 event will feature traditional Cambodian wedding songs, both sung and played on the tro sau, a two-stringed instrument.

After the performances, a disc jockey from All-Star Music & Events will kick off the social dance portion of the evening. There will be karaoke, as well as several different styles of Cambodian social dance.

Continuing the immersion into various aspects of Cambodian culture, volunteers are preparing traditional dishes for sale at the event. Items available will include papaya salad, beef satay, egg rolls, a Cambodian version of pad Thai and a dessert made from sweetened sticky rice, Mom-Chhing said.

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