



The Shadow Puppet Troupe of Wat Bo will perform at New York City's World Financial Center for Season of Cambodia.

ANDERS JURAS

Connecting with Cambodia

NEW YORK CITY: Today, half of all Cambodians are age 25 or younger, as a result of the 1975–79 genocide and subsequent decades of unrest and poverty that decimated the population. It is estimated that as many as 90 percent of Cambodian artists and intellectuals died under the Khmer Rouge. What does all this mean for the

country's arts scene today? According to **Phloeun Prim**, executive director of the Phnom Penh nonprofit **Cambodian Living Arts**, it is a time of resurgence: A youthful populace is looking to art and culture for an understanding of the country's history and their place in it going forward. A vital component of that resurgence is connection with the rest of the world, and Prim's organization has

arranged for that to happen in New York City this month and next, through Season of Cambodia.

The program includes film, visual arts and humanities, along with a spectrum of performing arts both traditional and contemporary. Kicking things off at the **Joyce Theater**, April 9–14, choreographer/dancer **Sophiline Cheam Shapiro** and **Khmer Arts Ensemble** will perform *A Bend in the River*, featuring a score by **Him Sophy** and life-sized puppets by sculptor **Sopheap Pich**. At the **World Financial Center's Winter Garden** April 25–28, the **Shadow Puppet Troupe of Wat Bo** will perform the ancient ceremonial art form of Sbeik Thom, in which puppeteers and dancers manipulate large-scale

leather figures against a lit screen to enact a story from the *Reamker* (Cambodia's version of the *Ramayana*).

Amrita Performing Arts will visit the Guggenheim April 28 and 29 with Khmer/French choreographer **Emmanuèle Phuon's** exploration of the archetypal Monkey character in Cambodian classical masked dance.

In May, the **Royal Ballet of Cambodia**, whose artistic director is not only a prima donna but a real-life princess, will perform *Legend of Apsara Mera* at **Brooklyn Academy of Music**; the troupe previously toured the U.S. in 1971, and again in 1990 as the classical dance repertory was being reconstructed in the aftermath of war. See a full program at www.seasonofcambodia.org.

AN APP GETS WITH THE PROGRAM

ATLANTA: Arts groups are always looking for creative ways to use cutting-edge technology. So when Atlanta-based TV producer and tech innovator **Dave Stevens** pitched a way to bring "augmented reality" into theatre lobbies—via the ubiquitous mobile devices in patrons' hands—several Atlanta performance companies quickly got on board.

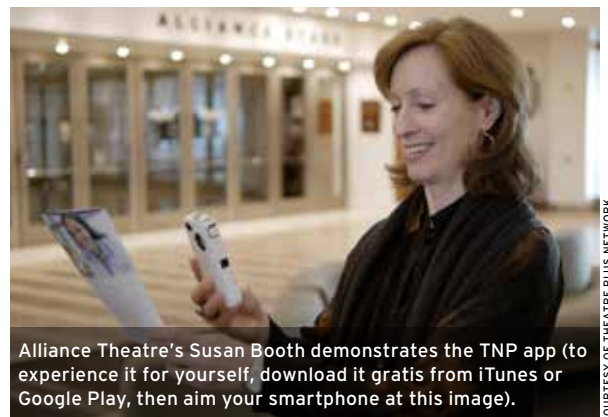
In fall 2012, Stevens introduced **Theatre Plus Network (TPN)**, a smartphone app that brings images in printed materials to life by linking them directly to a video, music or other multimedia content. Designed exclusively for performing arts organizations, which still rely heavily on printed playbills, TPN offers an enhanced show experience to audience members, as well as an enhanced marketing opportunity for advertisers.

Here's how it works: Patrons who have the TPN app on their smartphones (a free download from iTunes or Google Play) can point their phones at any image with the TPN icon next to it, and the encoded image triggers enhanced materials to appear on screen—similar to the way a QR code works. With the TPN app, the poster art for a production, for example, could call up a 30-second video trailer or a brief interview with the director, then take patrons directly to the online box office or another page on the organization's website.

"When you're looking at the program, it's nice to have that extra content—something else to see, something else to learn about the show," says **Nan Barnett**, outgoing executive director (see page 17) at **Actor's Express**, the first company to use TPN. She watches patrons experiment with the app in the lobby, knowing the new technology will carry the message beyond the theatre doors. "Every time a patron shows a friend and introduces someone else to TPN, what they're really doing is introducing them to Actor's Express and our marketing for the current show."

TPN is currently part of the marketing plan for five performing arts organizations in the Atlanta area: **Atlanta Opera**, **Atlanta Symphony**, **Alliance Theatre**, **Actor's Express** and the **Fox Theatre**. For one production, the Fox Theatre had 14 augmented pages in its playbill, including the cover, five advertising pages and four editorial pieces enhanced with unique video content.

Says Stevens, "Within a community, one app can serve many different groups. Patrons download it once, use it at one theatre and then go across town and find they can use it at another theatre as well." Stevens hopes the TPN app will soon expand to be a mainstay of marketing and audience engagement for organizations across the country. Visit www.facebook.com/theatreplus. —Margot Melcon



Alliance Theatre's Susan Booth demonstrates the TPN app (to experience it for yourself, download it gratis from iTunes or Google Play, then aim your smartphone at this image).

COURTESY OF THEATRE PLUS NETWORK