

Two young men become first Cambodians to join Cirque du Soleil

Battambang, Cambodia -- Sok Dina and Nem Sopha, two alumni from Cambodia's award-winning arts school, Phare Ponleu Selpak, are graduating from the National Circus School of Montreal in June, 2016 and will begin performing with Cirque du Soleil.

On September 10, 2011 Dina and Sopha boarded a plane bound for Montreal, Canada to attend the National Circus School of Montreal. The two young men, then 16 and 17 years old, never imagined they would be away from Cambodia for five years. Their living and studying expenses were supported by Phare Ponleu Selpak, many Cambodian-Canadian friends, scholarships, and also by working in summer jobs and performing stunts.

Now five years later, both young men are about to receive diplomas from the famous circus school. Dina has a two year contract to perform with Cirque du Soleil and Sopha is on standby to perform in an upcoming show with the same company.

The two young men are originally from Battambang, and grew up around Phare Ponleu Selpak. Both come from humble families, their fathers drive tuk tuks and mototaxis. The young men were introduced to the circus school by their siblings, but Dina and Sopha were extraordinary students from the beginning.

Khuon Chanreasmey, the deputy director of Phare Ponleu Selpak's Performing Arts School, remembers that as students, "Dina learned everything very fast, especially the tightrope. He is one of those people hungry for exploration. And Sopha, at Phare he learned balancing, flexibility, and contortion very fast."

Most importantly, Chanreasmey notes, the two young men "are a model for other young Cambodians who want to develop their skills."

Dina and Sopha are the first Cambodians to graduate from the National Circus School of Montreal, and will be the first Cambodians to join Cirque du Soleil. Their accomplishments send a message of hope, especially to the young students currently working so hard to improve their situations through classes at Phare Ponleu Selpak. The two are living proof that with the support of an organization like Phare Ponleu Selpak, along with plenty of hard work, anyone can rise above a challenging background and change their life.

About Phare Ponleu Selpak

For over 20 years, Phare Ponleu Selpak has improved the livelihoods of thousands of students through education, social support services, and artistic trainings. Currently the organization serves over 1000 students every year. The Performing Arts School (PAS) provides training in circus, music, dance, and theatre. The Visual and Applied Arts School (VAAS) provides trainings in animation, graphic design, and visual art. Every student has access to supplemental education services such as a library, computer and English classes; and social support services including first aid, counseling, and a free lunch program.

To support the student's professional aspirations, Phare Ponleu Selpak created two partner social enterprises. Phare Performing Enterprise, better known as Phare, The Cambodian Circus, is a professional circus troupe performing nightly in Siem Reap. Phare Creative Studios is a professional Graphic Design and Animation studio providing employment opportunities for VAAS graduates.

Through the combined efforts of providing access to education and employment opportunities, Phare Ponleu Selpak helps children overcome challenging backgrounds, and plays a key role in the rebirth of artistic culture across Cambodia.

For more, please visit www.phareps.org, and www.pharecircus.org

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