



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**FIRSTWORKS PRESENTS A CELEBRATION OF
CAMBODIAN DANCE TRADITIONS**
Featuring The Nationally Acclaimed Angkor Dance Troupe

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – On Sunday, June 7, 2009, FirstWorks will present a cultural event celebrating the ancient costumes and characters of Cambodian dance. This family-friendly program will feature the nationally acclaimed Angkor Dance Troupe in a 3 p.m. performance. An interactive “Dancing Silks” pre-show talk led by experts in Cambodian performing arts will take place at 2:15 p.m. The pre-show talk is FREE and dance performance tickets are \$5 for adults, \$1 for children and seniors. For reservations, contact Annette Robinson at annette@first-works.org, or visit www.first-works.org. Both events will be held at the RISD Museum/Chace Center Michael P. Metcalf Auditorium at 20 North Main Street, Providence, R.I.

The Angkor Dance Troupe will thrill families with a visually stunning journey through the sights and sounds of ancient Cambodia. Their hour-long showcase of Cambodian classical and folk dances will feature the characters of colorful mermaids and masked monkeys, meeting onstage in epic pursuit. In the hands of the Troupe’s young dancers, coconuts and fishing nets will bring to life the lively rhythms of the countryside. Crossing the generational divide, Angkor Dance Troupe’s youth-focused mission will enhance the performance with modern cultural influences ranging from hip-hop beats to breakdancing. Recommended for ages 4 and up.

As an exclusive FREE introduction to the Angkor Dance Troupe performance, a team of cultural experts led by Prof. Lindsay French, chair of RISD's Department of History, Philosophy and

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Social Sciences, will provide a closer look at the ancient costumes and characters of Cambodian dance. Featuring costumed performers from Angkor Dance Troupe, this interactive "Dancing Silks" presentation will explore the fabrics, fashions and archetypal figures that propelled Cambodia's riveting stories through centuries of live performance. Recommended for ages 10 and up.

Providing a positive social and educational outlet for urban youth, the Lowell, Mass. based Angkor Dance Troupe develops and teaches Cambodian dance, infusing these classical cultural forms with new life. Trained from pre-school age, the Troupe's young performers must master a series of complex hand gestures central to Cambodian dance traditions, which are passed down through the generations. In the late 1970's, Cambodia's time-honored dance traditions were almost lost to the ages during a reign of terror perpetuated by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. Angkor Dance Troupe's dedication to preserving this cultural legacy through the gestures of a new generation represents new hope for the Cambodian diaspora.

As part of FirstWorks' "Season of the Silk Road" educational outreach program, members of Angkor Dance Troupe introduced their art form to Rhode Island high school students, leading a series of interactive workshops in Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Woonsocket from January-March 2009. In these workshops, participating students practiced the traditional hand gestures of Cambodian dance, and observed as performers were stitched into their intricate costuming, a process that can take several hours.

"Angkor Dance Troupe truly resonated with the students participating in our educational outreach program," said Kathleen Pletcher, executive artistic director of FirstWorks. "On June 7, everyone will have an opportunity to learn more about Cambodia's amazingly rich culture and experience these visually stunning performers at their best."

The Angkor Dance Troupe and "Dancing Silks" program is presented by FirstWorks with support from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, New England Foundation for the Arts, the Carter Family Charitable Trust and the Felicia Fund.

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About FirstWorks

FirstWorks connects art with audiences year-round through the exceptional vitality of artists' first appearances, children's first experiences with performance and the premiering of new works. Beginning with an unprecedented collaboration with Providence's Department of Art, Culture & Tourism, FirstWorks was launched in 2004 as a vehicle to build community, reach underserved audiences, and present extraordinary arts programs that elevate Providence's national profile. In the five years since, FirstWorks has produced nine groundbreaking arts festivals, attracted 55,000 participants, and engaged more than 100 nonprofit community organizations and schools. Visit www.first-works.org to learn more.

About Angkor Dance Troupe

The Angkor Dance Troupe develops and teaches Cambodian dance, promotes an understanding and appreciation of Cambodian culture, and provides a positive social and educational outlet for Cambodian youth. The Troupe was formed in 1986 in Lowell, Mass., by two Cambodian dance teachers, along with a small group of dancers who learned this traditional art form in refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. They brought with them to the United States a strong desire to practice and perform Cambodian dance and a passion to teach others. Dance and its associated rituals and beliefs have become a way for Cambodian people to reconstruct a sense of community and culture, particularly for refugees who have resettled in other countries. Between 1975 and 1979, when Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia, more than 90% of the country's artists perished or fled. Today as Cambodia struggles to emerge from decades of war and poverty, the people look to the rebirth and recreation of dance as testimony to the endurance of their culture.

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