

PHNOM-PENH

Centre

Culturel

Français

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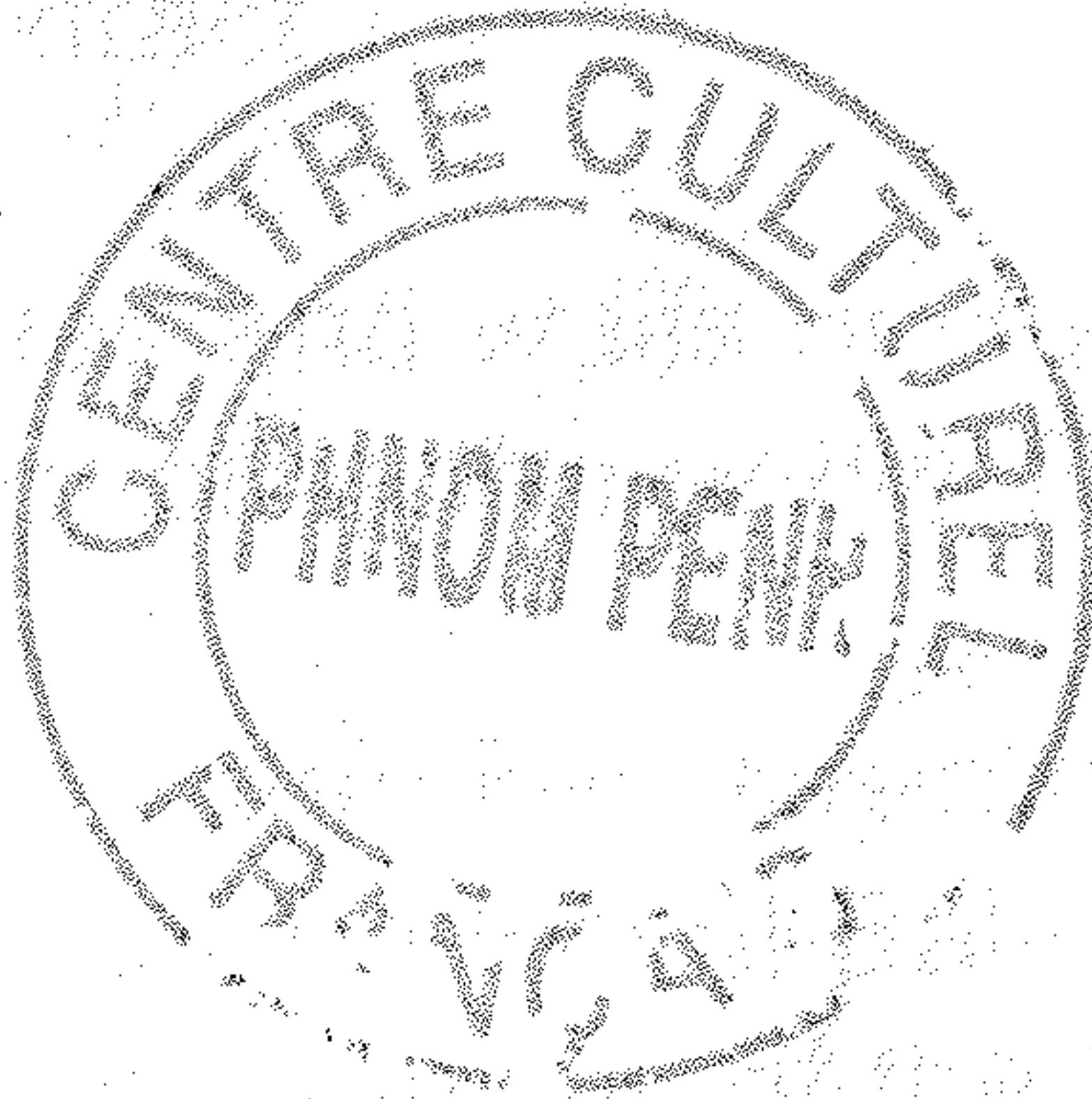
Ladies and Gentlemen:

As deputy director of the French Cultural Center, it gives me great pleasure to invite you to a press conference which will take place on Monday March 15 at 8:30am at the French Embassy. The conference will be held under the Royal patronage of H.R.H the Princess Bopha Devi and the French Ambassador MR André-Jean Libourel. The conference will give you the opportunity to discover two very important projects co-organised by CCF and National theater : The big Shadow theater in Angkor Vat and the european tour of the Royal Ballet of Cambodia. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at that time.

with documents of " The big Shadow theater".

I look forward to seeing you on March 15.

Respectfully Yours,



Roland Celette
Deputy
French Cultural Center

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THE LARGE SHADOW PUPPETS

The Cambodian Ramayana, the Reamker, has been greatly influenced by the two great Indian legends: The Ramayana and the Mahabharatha and has been passed down from generation to generation. The elders take great pleasure in reciting the stories to the younger generation and the children remember with great precision the names of the many characters such as Rama, Leak, Sita and especially the great monkey Hanuman on whom they bestow great admiration.

Despite the Indian origins, who's writers used it as a vehicle to communicate the ideals of Brahmanism and later Buddhism, the Reamker is distinctly Khmer. Throughout time, the story has been modified and has been adapted to the imagination and tastes of the Khmer people, with all characters becoming part of a national heritage.

The story is an essential part of Khmer literature. There are surviving manuscripts written on leaves recounting any number of excerpts. However it is in sculpture where the stories are most frequently presented. The Reamker appears on many bas relief, most notably the temples of Koh-Ker (921 - 944), Banteay Srei (968 - 1001) and especially Angkor Wat (1113 - 1152) which tells a large portion of the epic.

A Story Told by an Entire People

The Reamker holds a profound place in Khmer traditions and customs for a people who take great pleasure in reciting and listening to the many stories. The story tellers are always very impassioned and immerse themselves in the events and characters which may manifest itself in tears or laughter, depending on the particular extract.

Scenes of the Reamker line long galleries and walls of Buddhist temples. The gallery surrounding the Silver Pagoda in the Royal Palace depicts the entire Ramayana epic with its 102 characters.

In the domain of the performing arts, the Reamker is represented in a variety of forms. The most known is that of classical Khmer dance, or the Royal Ballet, in which most roles are played by female dancers. Other popular performance forms of the Reamker include Lakhaon Kaol (masked theater) which is exclusively for male dancers, and the Large Shadow Puppet Theater.

Cambodian Shadow Puppets

In Cambodia, there are three different forms of shadow puppetry:

1. The Large Shadow Puppet Theater which incorporates large, unarticulated puppets carved from single sheets of cow hide, and is considered a sacred art form.
2. The Colored Shadow Puppet Theater in which painted figures are attached to smaller sheets of leather.
3. The Small Shadow Puppet Theater, known to the Cambodians as Marionette Theater. The small leather puppets have articulated segments, making it possible to move the legs, arms and mouth.

Small Shadow Puppet Theater is extremely popular and can attract enormous crowds. The performance styles are diverse, presenting the Ten Lives of Buddha, or popular tales and legends. The Marionette Theater often includes burlesque scenes to the great enjoyment of the spectators, especially the young.

Much research has been done on shadow puppetry but the precise origins have yet to be revealed. The study of temple bas relief shows that the form has certainly existed since the Angkorian period.

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