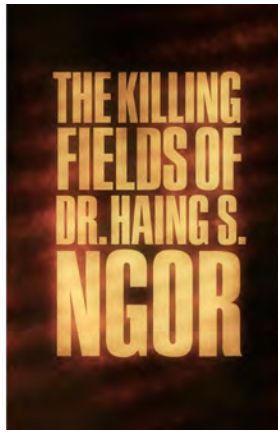


Pressbook



The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor

An Arthur Dong Film

A DeepFocus Production

87 minutes

English, Color, Black and White

Also: Khmer Dubbed Version with English Subtitles

www.HaingNgorFilm.com
[Facebook.com/HaingNgorDocumentary](https://www.facebook.com/HaingNgorDocumentary)

DeepFocus Productions, Inc.
P.O. Box 39548
Los Angeles CA 90039-0548
info@deepfocusproductions.com

Logline:

Set against the backdrop of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge reign of terror, *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor* chronicles a powerful journey of love, loss and reconciliation. The years encapsulating this horrific period are seen through the eyes of Dr. Haing S. Ngor, who escaped to America and recreated his experiences in *The Killing Fields*, winning an Oscar® for his first film. He became the de facto worldwide ambassador for truth and justice in his homeland, only to be gunned down in an alley in Chinatown Los Angeles – a case still surrounded by transnational conspiracy theories.

Synopsis:

When Dr. Haing S. Ngor was forced into labor camps by the Khmer Rouge, little did he know he would escape four years of torture and be called upon to recreate his experiences in a film that would earn him an Academy Award®. For the Chinese-Cambodian doctor, “Nothing has shaped my life as much as surviving the Pol Pot regime. I am a survivor of the Cambodian holocaust. That’s who I am.” And little did anyone know that some twenty years later, Dr. Ngor would be gunned down in a Los Angeles Chinatown alley. How could it be that he would survive the tyranny of the Khmer Rouge, only to be murdered by gangbangers in America?

The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor opens with a shot panning along stacks of irregular cardboard boxes in a musty Long Island basement. Sophia Ngor, niece and surrogate daughter to Dr. Ngor, and family friend Jack Ong rummage through the cases, which contain the slain physician's last remaining possessions. From there, we embark on a journey that traces Dr. Ngor's remarkable life – from rice fields in Phnom Penh to Oscar® gold in Hollywood. At a time when *The Killing Fields* (1984) movie would be the world’s first wake-up call to the horrors of the Khmer Rouge, Dr. Ngor used his Hollywood celebrity status to become the de facto “face of Cambodia” and commanded global attention to the devastation of his homeland. From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge’s social experiment to transform the country into a communist agricultural utopia caused the deaths of some two million Cambodians who perished from mass starvation, forced labor, torture, slavery, ethnic cleansing, and political executions.

Dr. Ngor was an early and staunch advocate for a Khmer Rouge tribunal, a process that finally began in 2009 and is still mired by political maneuvers. He opened an orphanage in Phnom Penh, built a schoolhouse in his home village, and delivered humanitarian aid to refugee camps. He publicly admonished world governments for ignoring the plight of his countrymen. Ultimately, Ngor's story is a survivor’s story: of love, loss, and reconciliation – inspired by memories of his wife who died in childbirth while under captivity.

Produced, directed, written, and edited by Oscar®-nominated and triple-Sundance award-winning filmmaker Arthur Dong, *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor* is a singular documentary on one of the most well-known survivors of the Cambodian genocide. It uses an iconic movie, *The Killing Fields*, as a springboard to combine history and biography into a dramatic transnational narrative. The feature-length film fuses animation with the spoken word, interlacing a rich palette of archival material. Anchored by an adaptation of Ngor’s richly layered autobiography, *Survival in the Killing Fields* (co-authored with Roger Warner), the film serves as a personal indictment of the global politics that were thrust upon Southeast Asia, and the consequences that continue to surface today as Cambodia grapples with corruption, poverty, and the impunity of aging former Khmer Rouge leaders still at large.

Filmmaker's Statement

Like many Americans, and perhaps like many people in other parts of the world, whatever knowledge I had about the events that took place in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge came mainly from the film, *The Killing Fields*. The 1984 film told the story of Dith Pran, a Cambodian journalist who was imprisoned by Khmer Rouge forces and eventually escaped to America. Notwithstanding the important role that the movie played in alerting an unknowing world to Cambodia's plight, Evan Gottsman, author of *Cambodia: After the Khmer Rouge*, wrote:

The movie, which takes place immediately before and during the Khmer Rouge regime, has a happy ending. The film ends as Dith Pran begins his life as a refugee. The Killing Fields – and its western audience – leaves Cambodia behind.

Count me in as a part of this “western audience.” Because of my passion for film history, however, I was at least aware that Dr. Haing S. Ngor, the actor who portrayed Dith Pran, was a survivor of the Khmer Rouge and won an Oscar® for his work in the movie, the first time he'd ever worked in film.

Did I also know that Dr. Ngor was murdered a while back? Yes, I think so – but it wasn't until January 21, 2010 when I paid close attention to his story. The *Los Angeles Times* ran an article with the logline: “Cambodian refugee and actor Haing Ngor was slain in LA in '96. Gang members were convicted but some still see a darker plot.” The impetus for that article was a 2009 session of the Khmer Rouge tribunal in Phnom Penh where Kaing Guek Eav, alias "Duch," director of the notorious Tuol Sleng (or S-21) interrogation and torture prison, testified: “Haing S. Ngor was killed because he appeared in the film *The Killing Fields*.” This chilling statement inspired me to find out more.

I picked up a copy of Dr. Ngor's autobiography, *Survival in the Killing Fields* (co-authored with Roger Warner). On the back was a quote from the *Chicago Tribune*: “Ngor starred in the best film on Cambodia that has ever been produced. And now he has written the best book on Cambodia that has ever been published.” That was quite a claim – one I can understand; the book was over 500-pages long and I couldn't put it down.

On a biographical level, Dr. Ngor told a personal story that starts from the year of his birth in 1940. He wrote about rural roots and his rise to upper middle-class status as a physician, only to be forced into labor and torture camps under the Khmer Rouge's radical social experiment to transform the country into a communist agrarian utopia. And on another level, his lifetime laid out a geo-political timeline that started from the first Cambodian nationalist demonstrations against French colonial powers in 1942 and ends with the ouster of the Khmer Rouge by neighboring Vietnam. In between were the complex power struggles among Cambodia and China, the USSR, the United States, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. I was impressed by the way Dr. Ngor framed his own life experiences within the context of the Cold War between the so-called Free World, led by the United States, and the Sino-Soviet Bloc led by China and the Soviet Union.

– more –

Dr. Ngor also made clear to the reader that in order to understand the destruction of Cambodia, one needed to understand the ethnic conflicts between the Khmer population (the predominant ethnic group in Cambodia) and the Vietnamese, Chinese and Cham peoples. Although the cause of the Cambodian genocide is often attributed to communist class warfare, that belief overshadows the complexities of race as a critical factor. Dr. Ngor, who was of mixed Chinese-Khmer ancestry, reflected on these tensions as part of the larger picture.

Jumping forward to present-day, a part of Dr. Ngor's legacy lives on at the ongoing Khmer Rouge tribunal, which he advocated and campaigned for in order to bring war criminals to justice. Critics and observers have continually accused the current Cambodian regime of meddling, and the United Nations of failing to uphold the court's independence; the trials have been bogged down with procedural and political maneuvers. Hun Sen, Cambodia's Prime Minister, is a former Khmer Rouge officer himself and his staff and military includes former Khmer Rouge. (Although no Khmer Rouge is officially in office, the possibility of their resurgence had never left the minds of Cambodians.) Sen has stated that he'd rather the tribunal fail than to see additional trials. Moreover, he has insisted to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that further cases were "not allowed."

I've been working on this project since 2012, and in conversations about it with colleagues and friends, it's often that I need to summarize the history of Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge, and to bring listeners up to date with the tribunal; maybe it's the company I keep, but most of the time the information is a bit of a revelation – especially the tribunals. And what about Pol Pot? Sure, most people recognize the name – he was the maniacal totalitarian behind it all. But that's too simple, and Dr. Ngor's story is a way to delve into the subject.

My past films have examined political and social issues by using personal stories as prisms to explore how individual lives are affected by the larger forces surrounding them. While this strategy may not explain every nuance and fact about a particular issue (the way books can), I've found the method effective because it can engage audiences on an emotional level. For me, Dr. Ngor's life is an inspiring survivor's story of loss and reconciliation that contextualizes the Cambodian genocide within a personal framework. *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor* draws on my work on documentaries that examined violence and human rights abuses, and it brings together topics that I have covered in my films over the past 30 years to tell a story about one of modern history's most brutal episodes of the abuse of power.

–Arthur Dong

FUNDERS

The National Endowment For The Humanities

The National Endowment for the Humanities' Bridging Cultures through Film: International Topics program supports documentary films that examine international and transnational themes in the humanities. Funded projects spark Americans' engagement with the broader world by exploring countries and cultures outside of the United States, and are analytical and deeply grounded in humanities scholarship. The NEH awarded two separate grants to *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*: a research and development grant and a production grant. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this film do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Cal Humanities

Cal Humanities' California Documentary Project (CDP) is a competitive grants program that supports documentary film, radio, and new media productions that enhance an understanding of California and its cultures, peoples, and histories. Funded projects use the humanities to provide context, depth, and perspective and are shown to California and national audiences through broadcast and/or distribution. Since 2003, CDP has awarded over \$3 million to projects that document the California experience and explore issues of significance to Californians. CDP awarded two separate grants to *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*: a research and development grant and a production grant.

Sundance Institute / John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The Sundance Institute/John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Initiative is an award supported by a multi-year partnership with The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. This unique creative partnership helps Sundance continue to fund a vibrant cross-section of documentary filmmakers, and to maintain an applicant pool reflective of the diverse nature of independent storytellers in the United States. Sundance Institute and the MacArthur Foundation believe that this collaboration – with its robust network of resources, creativity, and capacities – enhances knowledge and awareness regarding critical issues.

The Center For Cultural Innovation

Artistic creation requires more than just talent – it requires an initial investment of time and money as well. For this reason, the need for grant support has become a critical part of the creative process for many working artists today, and the CCI's Investing in Artists grants program is designed to address this need by providing working artists in California with the financial resources and creative support systems they need to thrive. The Investing in Artists grant helped Arthur Dong upgrade his editing system to work on *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Arthur Dong, Producer/Director/Writer/Editor

The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor builds on Arthur Dong's 30-year track record of creating compelling documentaries that focus on personal stories to examine moments of history, social prejudice, and public policy concerns. His trilogy of films that investigate anti-gay prejudice were released in the DVD collection, "Stories from the War on Homosexuality," and features *Family Fundamentals*, *Licensed to Kill* and *Coming Out Under Fire*. His films about Chinese Americans were released in the follow-up collection, "Stories from Chinese America," and include *Sewing Woman*, *Forbidden City, U.S.A.* and *Hollywood Chinese*. His films have screened theatrically in the U.S., selected for festivals worldwide like Sundance, Toronto, and Berlin, and broadcast globally. Arthur's film awards include an Oscar® nomination, three Sundance awards, the Peabody, five Emmy nominations, the Berlin Film Festival's Teddy Award, Taiwan's Golden Horse Award, and two GLAAD Media awards. He has been named a Guggenheim Fellow in Film and twice selected for the Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship. He has served on the boards of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Film Independent, Outfest, and the National Film Preservation Board at the Library of Congress. Arthur's book, *Forbidden City, USA: Chinatown Nightclubs, 1936-1970*, won the 2015 American Book Award. He is currently Distinguished Professor in Film at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

Wayne Ngor, Voice of Dr. Haing S. Ngor

Wayne Ngor is the nephew of Dr. Ngor and reads his uncle's first-person narration based on his autobiography. In 1975, at the age of two, Wayne was forced into captivity by the Khmer Rouge regime, but made it to America in 1996. Today, he is a detective with the NYPD.

Mark Adler, Composer – Score

The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor will be Emmy Award-winning composer Mark Adler's fourth collaboration with Arthur Dong. His previous film scores include Dong's *Hollywood Chinese*, Wayne Wang's *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, and the Sundance award-winning film, *Picture Bride*. Mark's other credits include *Merchants of Doubt*, *Food, Inc.*, *The Rat Pack*, and *Focus*.

Wilson Wu, Animation Art Director & Composer

Wilson Wu is an award-winning director and designer with over ten years experience with animation, visual effects, motion graphics, and computer-generated imagery. He worked as a director/art director at Imaginary Forces, and since 2008, has been a designer and art director at Guillermo del Toro's Mirada Studios.

Yori Mochizuki, Animation Illustrator & Storyboards

Yori Mochizuki is an artist specializing in storyboards, animatics, and concept designs. His feature film credits include *Pacific Rim*, *The LEGO Movie* (1 & 2), and *Storks*. His TV credits include *Burn Notice* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

Bochan, Composer and Singer: *Like A Rose* (end credit song)

Bochan draws on her dual country upbringing to combine influences from urban Oakland with deep-rooted Cambodian inspirations. She grew up singing in her father's Cambodian American bands and now collaborates with pianist/producer, Arlen Hart, to bridge the East West gap with a

soulful yet sweet indie-pop vibe. Bochan's releases include her solo debut album *Full Monday Moon*, and *Hello HI*, a fusion of Khmer psychedelic rock with urban soul.

Grant Nellesen, Title Design & Photo Animation

Grant Nellesen's motion graphics and design work can be seen in the award-winning films, *How to Survive a Plague* (Oscar® nominee), *Vito* (Emmy), and *I Am Divine*. His most recent title and graphic designs are featured in *Tab Hunter Confidential*. Grant is a graduate of the American Film Institute, earning a MFA in Digital Media.

Joe Milner, Sound Designer & Re-Recording Mixer

Joe Milner began his career in music, transitioning from performance into engineering and production, and finally into sound for motion pictures. Over a span of 21 years, he's been involved with over 120 films, including *Das Boot: The Director's Cut*, *Vanilla Sky*, *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, *Ethel*, *Vito*, *I Am Divine*, *One Lucky Elephant*, and the Oscar® nominated *Last Days In Vietnam*.

Joe Hoffman, Post Production Supervisor

The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor will be Joe Hoffman's fourth collaboration with filmmaker Arthur Dong. He began his career as a documentary video editor in New York City, moved west as a special effects director/editor, followed by a promotion to VP for Engineering at One Pass/Editel in San Francisco. Joe owns and operates Jump House Design, an integrated media creation company.

Vanara Taing, First Assistant Editor

Vanara Taing was born at the Khao-I-Dang Refugee Camp to Khmer Rouge survivors. She earned an editing MFA from the American Film Institute Conservatory where she edited eight films as well as wrote the film, *Samnang*, which focuses on the Cambodian American immigrant community. She was previously an audio producer at *StoryCorps*, editing their Peabody Award-winning season on NPR's *Morning Edition*.

Asiroh Cham, Research Assistant

Asiroh Cham was born in a refugee camp in Thailand and belongs to the Cham ethnic group, which was the largest minority to be executed by the Khmer Rouge. With a master's degree in Asian American studies from UCLA, Asiroh is also a filmmaker and received the Linda Mabalot Legacy Scholarship from Visual Communications for her commitment to community justice and social issue documentary.

David Chandler, Ph.D., Advisor

David Chandler is considered one of the foremost scholars of modern Cambodian history and brings an extensive knowledge to *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*. For the past forty-six years, he has studied, taught, and written about the history, politics, and culture of Cambodia. His books include *A History of Cambodia*, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, and *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison*. Dr. Chandler is currently Emeritus Professor at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia.

Youk Chhang, Advisor

Youk Chhang is both the Executive Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) in Phnom Penh and a survivor of the Khmer Rouge, and offers a central point-of-view and a wealth of resources and referrals to *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*. The DC-Cam, a collaborating partner of our project, grew out of Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program to conduct research and documentation relating to the Khmer Rouge regime.

Jonathan H. X. Lee, Ph.D., Advisor

Jonathan Lee's academic specialization in religion, Southeast Asia, Asian American Studies, and in particular Buddhist and Cambodian American Studies, together provides *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor* a holistic understanding of the history and contemporary situation of Cambodians. As a bi-racial Chinese-Cambodian, like Haing S. Ngor, Dr. Lee bridges the insider-outsider polemics as his family was targets of the Khmer Rouge because of their mixed heritage.

Jack Ong, Advisor

Jack Ong's unique access into the private and professional life of Dr. Haing S. Ngor makes him a valuable advisor to *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*. As co-founder and executive director of The Dr. Haing S. Ngor Foundation, he worked alongside Dr. Ngor in his quest for democracy and the reconstruction of Cambodia. Mr. Ong's knowledge and perspective, corroborated by his close relationships with Dr. Ngor's surviving family and the people who knew him, makes him a unique member of our team. Mr. Ong also appears in the film.

Karen Quintilani, Ph.D., Advisor

Since 1988, Karen Quintilani has worked and conducted research in the Cambodian community in Long Beach, California and the surrounding areas, which host the largest population of Cambodians outside of Southeast Asia. She has produced visual anthropological projects representing Cambodian culture, history, and biography, like the Cambodian Community History and Archive Project. Dr. Quintilani's anthropological understanding of the Cambodian community is an important addition to *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*.

Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Ph.D., Advisor

Cathy Schlund-Vials's expertise in refugee literature, Cambodian genocide narratives, and trauma is specifically relevant to *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*. Dr. Schlund-Vials's research emerges from her own personal history as a biracial Cambodian American born in the final years of the American War in Vietnam. Her recent book, *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian Memory Work*, intersects with our film's thematic foci, which involve larger questions of reconciliation and healing.

Gregory Stanton, Ph.D., Advisor

Gregory Stanton founded The Cambodian Genocide Project (CGP) in 1982 and is its current director. CGP, a collaborating partner of *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*, was among the first to organize an international campaign to bring Khmer Rouge leaders to justice. Since 1992, he has worked directly on developments in Cambodia through the State Department's International Organizations/UN Political Office, their Office for Cambodian Genocide Investigations, and currently, as a legal advisor to the Cambodian government in negotiations with the UN to establish the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

CREDITS

A DeepFocus Production

an Arthur Dong film

The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor

Adapted from Dr. Ngor's autobiography,
Survival in the Killing Fields

Written by Dr. Haing S. Ngor with Roger
Warner

Selections from Dr. Ngor's book read by his
nephew

WAYNE NGOR

Producer, Director, Writer, Editor, Cinematographer

Arthur Dong

Animation

Wilson Wu, Art Director and Animator
Yoriaki Mochizuki, Illustrator and
Storyboard Artist

Music

Mark Adler

Sound Design

Joe Milner

Title Design and Photo Animation

Grant Nellessen

Advisors

Cathy J. Schlund-Vials
David Chandler
Gregory Stanton
Jack Ong
Jonathan Lee
Karen Quintilani
Youk Chhang

Research

Arthur Dong

Research Assistants

Asiroh Cham
Vanara Taing

Editorial Consultants

Carol Dysinger
David Zieger
Donald Young
Freida Lee Mock
Jean Tsien
Lisa Leeman
Noland Walker
Renee Tajima Pena
Roger Warner
Stephen Gong
Vanessa Whang
Walt Louie

Post Production Supervisor

Joe Hoffman

First Assistant Editor

Vanara Taing

Second Assistant Editor

Dan Myers

Digital Post Facilities: Chainsaw, Inc.

Andy Lichtstein, Colorist
Carlos Verdugo, Online Editor
Mark Cendejas, Lhenny Acuna,
Assistant Editors
Michael Levy, VP/Post Producer
Rick Marciano, Dan Gaynor,
Operations

Post Production Sound Services

Puget Sound, Inc.

Re-Recording Mixer

Joe Milner

Foley Recorded at
Sound Troop

Foley Artist
Miguel Barbosa

Foley Mixer
Diego Suárez Staub

Voices
Jonathan Dok
Jonathan Nhean
Luan Um Nhean

Voice-Overs Recorded at
Splash Studios
Tree Falls Post

Musicians
Mark Adler
Paul Viapiano
Tim Larkin

Best Boy
Reed Dong-Gee

Legal Counsel
Justine Jacob, Blyth, Lee & Associates

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Transcripts
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Bo K.S. Uce
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The Killing Fields promotional material,
Warner Bros.

Music

Like a Rose
Written by Bochan Huy and Arlen Hart
Special lyrics by Bochan Huy and Rotana Hay
Performed by Bochan

The Killing Fields score
Mike Oldfield

Glorious Seventeenth of April
Democratic Kampuchea anthem

First Anniversary of the Historic Victory
Democratic Kampuchea anthem

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This project was made possible with support
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COVER STORY

Atrocity survivor's harrowing journey

Documentary uses Cambodian doctor's autobiography to paint portrait of genocide's scars, activism's renewal

By G. Allen Johnson

You could forgive Arthur Dong, who fell in love with the movies as a working-class kid in San Francisco's Chinatown, for taking a victory lap this weekend as he is honored by his hometown festival for an excellent career's work.

But the legacy he's interested in this weekend is that of Haing S. Ngor, the doctor who survived Cambodian atrocities, became the first Asian male actor to win an Academy Award for acting ("The Killing Fields") and was a passionate political activist before he was murdered in 1996.

Dong's 10th film project, and first since 2007, makes its world premiere on Sunday, March 15, at the Castro Theatre as part of CAAMFest. "The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor" is Dong's attempt to tell Ngor's life story and that of Cambodia's troubles through Ngor's own words. To do this, he utilizes Ngor's autobiography from the 1980s, archival footage and photographs, some helpful animation and entrancing narration: Ngor's nephew, Wayne Ngor, who also survived work camps in Cambodia, speaks as Dr. Ngor.

"I wanted to have this per-



CAAMFest photos

San Francisco-born Arthur Dong directed "The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor," right, which illustrates Cambodia's horrors through archival footage and the doctor's accounts.

son, Dr. Ngor, who is dead, in the same room with me as if he was telling the story from a personal point of view," Dong said. "I wanted him to take me on this journey that was decades long and went through all these political changes.

"'Killing Fields' encompasses a lot of the subjects and topics and themes I'm passionate about — except for one: sexuality. It incorporates my concerns for human rights, for social justice, for (exposing) bigotry, especially racial

bigotry; and violence. Those are the themes that have recurred in my films.

"'The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor' covers all of that. It's a fascinating story."

Dong, whose "Coming Out Under Fire" dealt with gay soldiers in World War II and whose Sundance Award-winning "Licensed to Kill" shed light on the root causes of high-profile gay murders, says he was hand-selected by the gatekeepers of Ngor's legacy — his longtime friend Jack Ong, who heads the Dr. Haing S. Ngor Foundation, and Sophia Ngor, Ngor's niece.

They might have also thought of him as the director of "Hollywood Chinese," an essential documentary about Asians in American movies.

Incredibly, no one in the two decades since Ngor's death in a street robbery — or was it? — had thought to make a documentary about so fascinating a figure.

"For me, the underlying thread was the love for his wife," Dong said. "Love for another person. It kept him going. And if you believe what the police believe, that he was killed because he hung on to that pendant (with his late wife's picture), because he didn't want to give that up —



Dr. Ngor's not a stupid man. He had survival instincts. You would think he would just give that up to live. We'll never know what really happened."

What Dong is referring to is the police and prosecution's belief that Ngor was gunned down in Los Angeles' Chinatown on Feb. 25, 1996, because he refused to give up the gold locket with his wife's picture (his wife never made it out of Cambodia; she died in a concentration camp).

But while the perpetrators did get his Rolex, they didn't take the approximately \$2,000 in cash he had on him.

Although three were arrested and convicted — members of the notorious Oriental Lazy Boyz street gang who had previous convictions — rumors persisted that the Khmer Rouge, the party headed by Cambodian dictator Pol Pot, had him killed.

Dong says two of the three convicted were Cambodian



“I wanted him to take me on this journey that was decades long and went through all these political changes.”

Arthur Dong, director

Chinese. In 2009, Kang Kek Iew, a former Khmer Rouge official on trial in Cambodia, testified that Ngor was murdered on Pol Pot’s orders.

“The possibility that it was a direct hit from the Khmer Rouge totally fascinated me,” says Dong, 60. “There was a trial. There were three convictions. They’re still in prison. ... I don’t know. But justice was served.”

Dong, who lives with his partner and their 10-year-old

son in Los Angeles, has in the past few years been inducted into Galileo High School’s hall of fame and was San Francisco State’s alumnus of the year, giving the commencement address before 20,000 graduates.

But despite his latest honor, of being spotlighted — the equivalent of a career achievement award by the Center for Asian American Media — he is still restlessly searching for his next project.

“I love all my films, they’re like my children, but there isn’t one film yet that encompasses everything I want to say or do,” Dong said, “I’m still waiting for that project. I still have this yearning of something all-encompassing.”

Sounds like something Haing S. Ngor might have said. ■

G. Allen Johnson is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. E-mail: ajohnson@sfgchronicle.com Twitter: @BRfilmsAllen

DR. NGOR'S KILLING FIELDS

A new film chronicles the life and death of Khmer Rouge survivor and Oscar-winner Haing Ngor

BY GEORGE WRIGHT
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

HAING S. NGOR FOUNDATION
Haing Ngor on the set
of 'The Killing Fields'



On February 28, 1996, Haing Ngor, a Khmer Rouge survivor who found fame in his Oscar-winning role in "The Killing Fields," was gunned down behind his house in Los Angeles. Two years later, three members of the "Oriental Lazy Boyz" gang were found guilty of killing the doctor-turned-actor during a botched robbery.

But flicking through the morning's newspapers at his Los Angeles home in January 2010, filmmaker Arthur Dong came across an article about the Khmer Rouge tribunal in which former S-21 security center chief Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, offered a different explanation for the doctor's death.

"Haing Ngor was killed because he appeared in the film 'The Killing Fields,' and they wished to kill me and my wife in order to shut us up," Duch told the court in November 2009.

Captivated by Duch's claim, Mr. Dong delved into Haing Ngor's autobiography "Survival in the Killing Fields," which had been collecting dust on a shelf at his house. Hooked, he decided to make a documentary.

"I remember the murder of course, and what [Duch] said completely refuted the conviction and I'm not far from Long Beach, which is 'Cambodia Town,' and there had been rumblings in the community, but they had never spoken publicly about it and I was totally intrigued by the circumstances," Mr. Dong said in an interview earlier this month.

The filmmaker initially planned to make a straightforward documentary about Haing Ngor's life—his time as doctor in the 1960s, surviving the Pol Pot regime, finding fame in "The Killing Fields" and ensuing activism. But upon finishing "Survival in the Killing Fields," he decided to also address the political factors that led to the Khmer Rouge's rise to power.

"I think I'm typical of most Americans...in that what we mainly know about what happened during the war we learn about from 'The Killing Fields.' And that told a particular story and a particular point of view and it was a dramatized story," Mr. Dong said.

"What it didn't go into, which Dr. Ngor went into in his book, is all the complex global politics and maneuvering and the powers that play," he said, including U.S. incursions into Cambodia during the Second Indochina War and then-Prince Norodom Sihanouk's call for the peasantry to join the communist forces.

After receiving the go-ahead from Haing Ngor's family, Mr. Dong boarded a flight to Phnom Penh and began trawling Bophana Center's archives for footage of his subject. Sophia Ngor, who was raised by her uncle in the U.S. after they fled Cambodia and spent two years in a Thai refugee camp, also granted him access to a trove of VHS footage, journals and letters accumulated by her uncle, along with personal belongings including his glasses and sewing kit.

"After my uncle was murdered, we packed up the apartment

and put everything in the storage, all of his stuff, and we shipped it to New York and...I labeled everything and hoped that one day there would be a documentary," Ms. Ngor said from New York.

Mr. Dong finished "The Killing Fields of Haing S. Ngor" in April. The feature-length documentary entwines archival footage, animation and interviews the filmmaker conducted with family, friends and former colleagues.

The film is mostly narrated by Haing Ngor's nephew Wayne Ngor, a New York City police officer.

"He's not an actor, so it was a very interesting reading. I spent an afternoon with him in the recording studio in New York and I really wasn't convinced until the very last minute that that was the direction I would go with," Mr. Dong said.

"But emotionally, there is an impact there that can't be replaced, the emotional connection that you know this voice belongs to Dr. Ngor's nephew and no matter how eloquent or dramatic an actor can read the narration, you would never have that connection. After a while, Dr. Ngor and Wayne's narration just kind of melds."

Although Duch's sensational statements about the murder catalyzed Mr. Dong's desire to make the film, he did not end up unearthing any new evidence on the true story behind Haing Ngor's death and contented himself with documenting the different claims.

The final part of the documentary features footage of Pol Pot's former lieutenant Nuon Chea and Khmer Rouge head of state Khieu Samphan—the only regime leaders to have been convicted over the estimated 1.7 million deaths during the Khmer Rouge era—being sentenced to life in prison for crimes against humanity.

"I end it with a bigger question: Dr. Ngor's summation of what is going on, and what is still going on, is that we are still struggling and we're still trying to find blame, but we're still struggling at the heart of it," he said.

"The Killing Fields of Haing S. Ngor" has already been



YORI MOCHIZUCHI

Top: An illustration of Mr. Ngor based on a 1975 portrait
Bottom: An animated scene from "The Killing Fields of Haing S. Ngor"

shown at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival and at the Seattle International Film Festival, and Mr. Dong hopes to bring it to Cambodia this year for screenings in Phnom Penh, Battambang City and Siem Reap City, as well as in Haing's Ngor's home village in Takeo province.

"I didn't want the murder to be what people remembered. I think the murder is part of his life—it's the climactic moment of his life, you can't ignore it—but I wanted to treat it as a point in his life," Mr. Dong said.

"Murder doesn't end his legacy; in some ways, it propels it and keeps it going."



The Shadow and Legacy of The Killing Fields



Filmmaker Arthur Dong at the premiere of "The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor." KT Photo: Nou Sotheavy.

Sunday, 23 August 2015

By Nou Sotheavy

PHNOM PENH (Khmer Times) – Over 30 years ago, Hollywood released a movie about photojournalist Dith Pran, whose heroic actions helped an American reporter escape Cambodia before the country fell into chaos and destruction.

The actor chosen to play Mr. Pran in “The Killing Fields” now has his own story of survival, loss and love on the big screen in a film by Arthur Dong called “The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor.”

In a premiere screening by the American embassy and Bophana Center on Friday, the audience was moved to see the romantic and painful life of the man whose face will be forever known for introducing the horrors of Cambodia’s dark history to Hollywood.

“I was one of the victims and one of the survivors,” audience member Sophoan Livan said. With his face worn with age and his eyes saddened by the destruction of his childhood, Mr. Livan said he was only 12 years old when he was tortured by the Khmer Rouge.

“The film reminded me how I suffered a lifetime of pain,” Mr. Livan said. The black and white animated scenes based on Dr. Ngor’s autobiography triggered his memories.

“I was persecuted once by being buried in the ground up to my shoulders, questioned simply because a cow I took care of went to eat villagers’ rice.”

Dr. Ngor’s recollection of the lack of food and struggle to survive in the film triggered Mr. Livan’s own memories of how he almost died of hunger. Many like himself who admired the doctor for his acting in “The Killing Fields,” were shocked to hear about the end of Dr. Ngor’s life. He was violently killed in an alleged mugging by gang members.

The Death Conspiracy

Dr. Ngor was murdered in Los Angeles – 12 years after the movie made him famous. His murder, deemed solved, was blamed on three men who tried to steal his gold necklace, which held a lacquer portrait of his late wife. The gold necklace, which represented Dr. Ngor’s love and pain, is where filmmaker Arthur Dong started his story.

In 2010, Mr. Dong came across an article about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal that included quotes from the testimony of “Duch” Kaing Guek Eav, the man behind the tortures at S-21, also known as Tuol Sleng Interrogation Center. The infamous killer claimed that Pol Pot assassinated Dr. Ngor because he appeared in “The Killing Fields.”

Fascinated by the story, Mr. Dong read Dr. Ngor’s autobiography and worked to bring it to the screen. The film focuses on Dr. Ngor’s love for his wife Huoy, who died in a Khmer Rouge labor camp while giving birth to their child. It continues into the later part of his life when he worked for those who survived.

Locating rare footage shot by the Khmer Rouge that was saved and restored by the Bophana Audio Visual Center as well as acquiring some of Dr. Ngor’s own belongings from of his life in America, Mr. Dong worked with a team of animators to bring the written words of the doctor to life.

Mr. Dong has 30 years of experience creating documentaries that focus on a person’s life to examine moments of history, social prejudice, and public policy concerns. The film is winding its way through the Kingdom.

Mr. Livan will be taking his children to the next screening later this week. “They’ll be horrified, but hopefully they will learn from the past and history and can help prevent the rebirth of such a regime,” he said.

The tour will make its way out of Phnom Penh with private screenings in Battambang at 6:30 on August 25, Siem Reap at 6:30 pm on August 26, and will return to the city on August 28 for a 3 pm screening at Major Cineplex. The screenings are free, but reservations are required.

Contact info@bophana.org or call 077 811 668 for more information.

Tragedy Behind the 'Killing Fields' Star Who Won a Supporting Actor Oscar



Haing Ngor's best supporting actor Oscar for 1984's 'The Killing Fields,' with the family of his niece, Sophia Ngor Demetri.

by Rebecca Sun

March 4, 2016

Haing Ngor won for the 1984 movie, the first and only Asian man to ever be named best supporting actor. He was later fatally shot in Los Angeles. Now, the niece whom he carried out of Cambodia to escape their Khmer Rouge captors, dodging land mines and eating rats for food, has possession of his Oscar: "This is for you. I did this for you," he told her.

Even the last leg of the unlikely journey that took Sophia Ngor Demetri and her uncle, Haing Ngor, from massacre-ravaged Cambodia to the red carpet at the 1985 Academy Awards had a dramatic twist. Their limousine got snarled in traffic, and they weren't in their seats when Linda Hunt introduced the best supporting actor nominees. Ngor rushed down the aisle of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion just in time to accept his award. (Demetri wound up seated next to Prince.) Ngor gave an acceptance speech thanking casting director Pat Golden, Warner Bros. and Buddha. Later that night, he gave the Oscar to his niece, telling her: "This is for you. I did *this* for you."

This being their entire shared ordeal, which began in 1979, when Ngor and his orphaned niece, then 10, fled their Khmer Rouge captors and made a hazardous escape, dodging land mines and eating rats for food, to a Thai refugee camp on foot (sometimes with Demetri on her uncle's shoulders) and eventually to the U.S. Four years later, Golden, who was on a nationwide search

for a Cambodian man to portray real-life journalist Dith Pran in *The Killing Fields*, discovered Ngor at a wedding in Long Beach, Calif. "He had an innate gift for acting," says Golden.

The former surgeon had to be persuaded to take the role, which required him to leave Sophia with a guardian while he shot on location in Thailand. There, Ngor revisited past traumas, such as when he had to watch his wife die in childbirth at a camp (exposing himself as a doctor would have gotten them both executed). Ngor wasn't afraid to channel that pain: "He was very brave," says the film's director, Roland Joffe. "Acting means you have to give of your soul, and he did that."

Ngor, who continued to act and appeared in more than a dozen movies and TV shows over the next decade, regularly "borrowed" the statuette for speaking engagements and return trips to Cambodia, spreading awareness about and delivering aid to a country that lost approximately 2 million lives under the communist Khmer Rouge regime. The local and overseas Cambodian community nearly unanimously believes that Ngor's outspoken advocacy is why he was fatally shot at the age of 55 outside his Chinatown apartment in downtown Los Angeles on Feb. 25, 1996. But investigators did not uncover evidence of a political hit, and three local gang members eventually were convicted of murder in a robbery gone awry — according to the prosecution, Ngor resisted surrendering his prized possession, a locket bearing his only photo of his late wife. "I want to believe that our judicial system worked," says Ngor's best friend, Jack Ong, the executive director of his namesake foundation. "That way it's easier to move on."

Demetri, now 46, finds it too painful to dwell on the case. "He's all I had — he was both my parents, my uncle and my friend. When he was killed, they took four people away from me," she says. Ngor's Oscar usually is draped with a black cloth in her living room (to thwart potential burglary), and over the past 20 years, she has been hesitant to give interviews. "But then I thought, I have to be strong. He used his fame to educate people, and today, every time people see his Oscar, they ask me about Cambodia, and then his legacy goes on," says Demetri now, uncovering the statuette and taking it out of its display case. "Maybe that's the reason he won an Oscar in his first time acting. He had his mission to fulfill."



Ngor (left, with Sam Waterston) remains the only Asian man to win an Oscar for a supporting performance.



The Life and Strange Death of the Khmer Rouge Survivor Who Won an Oscar, Then Got Murdered

By Simon Henderson
February 25, 2016



Haing S. Ngor and Sophia Ngor at the Oscars in 1985. Photo by Mark Elias, courtesy of Arthur Dong

Twenty years ago today, Khmer Rouge survivor and Academy Award-winning actor Haing S. Ngor was gunned down just yards from his Los Angeles home. Ngor had been made famous for his role in the 1984 film *The Killing Fields*, for which he won the Oscar for best supporting actor. Officially, three teenaged members of the Oriental Lazy Boyz gang were convicted of Ngor's murder, but many in Cambodia believe his assassination was ordered by Pol Pot, who led the Khmer Rouge.

The controversy around his death—and the remarkable achievements of his life—are charted in *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*, a film made last year by filmmaker Arthur Dong. Dong, a former Oscar nominee who was recently appointed distinguished professor of film at Loyola Marymount University, has spent four decades of movie-making on issues of race, gender, and violence. To make *The Killing Fields of Dr. Haing S. Ngor*, he dug through the Ngor family's personal records and archives of the Pol Pot era, blending the footage with interviews and original animation to paint a life-size picture of a reluctant star who used his fame to campaign for justice in his homeland.

Ngor suffered four years of torture and starvation in labor camps before escaping Cambodia in 1979, but his wife—along with almost 2 million people—died under the Khmer Rouge regime. His murder 12 years later was seen by some as payback by Pol Pot, still alive and controlling large parts of the country, for starring in *The Killing Fields* and speaking out against the regime. To many in the Cambodian-American

community, this explanation made more sense than the official conclusion that Ngor's murder was a gang-related robbery (Ngor's Rolex had been stolen, but his Mercedes and \$2,900 in cash were left in plain sight at the scene of the crime). Then, in 2009, during a UN-led Khmer Rouge tribunal, Kang Kek Leu (or "Comrade Duch") testified that Pol Pot had indeed ordered Dr. Ngor's assassination, adding to the conspiracy theories.

As a filmmaker, Dong was intrigued by Duch's claims, but he had always planned to turn his lens on Ngor's life story rather than focus on his death.

VICE: As a filmmaker, what brought you to the story of Haing S. Ngor almost a decade after his death?

Arthur Dong: His was such a dramatic journey, such an emotional human story. You know, if you read his book, you see that it is really a love story—for the love of his wife who he lost during the war. So that's how I constructed the film, as a love story. Throughout my body of my work, I have always looked at culture and social justice issues, but it's always told through the lens of human experience and how these larger issues are framed through a person's life. And Dr. Ngor's life was so exhilarating.

How important was it to contextualize period in Cambodian history that Dr. Ngor survived?

I quickly learned that the history of that era is so intricate, and there were so many international forces at work in Cambodia at this time. [Making this film] told me how little as an American I know, especially about America's involvement during this period. But as a filmmaker, the emotional story is my job; as an audience member, I am only ever engaged when the story is emotional. When a film starts to get didactic, that's a different type of film and not the kind I am interested in. So I knew from the start that this was a film about Dr. Ngor's life journey, and audiences wouldn't be interested if it was bogged down. I also understood that the hardships that he lived through, the atrocities that he witnessed, and his accomplishments in life wouldn't have the impact if the audience didn't understand what had gone on. So I had to find a really intricate balance between his story and what the audience needed to know about the history at a minimum to really appreciate what he went through.

The film was widely acclaimed in the US, but you recently went to Cambodia and showed the film in four different cities. How did audiences there respond there?

You know, when I first landed in Phnom Penh, I had a debriefing by the US Embassy, and the people there warned me that Cambodian audiences hardly ever stayed for the credits, never mind for the Q&A. They tried to prepare me. But at all our screenings, people stayed behind and talked about the movie. We were pleasantly surprised—it was a big success.

In Dr. Ngor's hometown of Samrong Yong in Takeo province, a tiny little village, we screened it in the yard of a primary school he financed, and it was like a big carnival—kids running around, old people in wheelchairs came, vendors selling toys and candy and food I'd never seen before. I've been to a lot of screenings in my life, but that one was the most amazing audiences I have ever experienced.

How did they react to an American telling this story?

One of the questions that would always come up in Cambodia was, "What am I?" Meaning, am I Cambodian? And of course, I'm not. But they were surprised because they felt the movie has an authentic Cambodian sensibility. At one one of the screenings, the young Khmer filmmaker Kulikar Sotho, who directed the movie *The Last Reel*, told me she worries when foreigners try and tell the story of her country—she called me a foreigner, too. But she also told me this movie felt was very true to her, very authentic. I was very proud of that.

Would you say Dr. Ngor's story resonates with young Cambodians who didn't live through the Khmer Rouge era?

Well, I'm not an expert on Cambodian culture and history, which is why I relied on a panel of advisors to help me produce this film, but as far as I am aware, there were few heroes during this period that people looked up to. That's why Dr. Ngor's story is so important because he survived this not as a victim but as someone who asked, "What can we do about this?" It is not uncommon for people who experienced this kind of trauma to want to forget about the past, to not want to talk about it, and that has happened in Cambodia to a certain extent, and it is a very common response. But Dr. Ngor didn't want that. He fought for these crimes to not be forgotten, and he wanted those who were responsible to be brought to justice. In many ways, Dr. Ngor gave a voice to younger people in Cambodia by saying it's OK to tell this story, we don't need to be quiet about this, they can try and hide the extent of what happened, but they won't hide it forever. He needed the truth to come out, and he worked hard to bring the truth to light by speaking out and working with the UN, for example. And of course, he wrote it all down in his very popular book, and this film is very much an extension of his project.

Do you think there is something fundamental about his story to the immigrant experience in the US?

For immigrants and refugees, there is no one path. I come from an immigrant family myself, and some families like my own stayed steeped in the culture they were from. Some want to forget and assimilate, and say, "This is America. This is our new home." Some are a mix. With Dr. Ngor, he couldn't forget his experiences, and at the beginning, he didn't want to participate in *The Killing Fields*. He was a social worker in Chinatown in the US trying to help immigrant communities, and he just wanted to get his practice going, but he was chosen by the filmmaking world to be a voice, and he was finally persuaded by those around him to be the voice to tell their story—little did he know how powerful that voice would become.

Both Dr. Ngor's niece and nephew were involved in the movie, and his estate granted you full access to its archives. Was it difficult to convince the family to revisit his death after gaining closure of sorts through the murder trial?

Since his death in 1996, Dr. Ngor's family members have been approached by many filmmakers, but they have turned them all down. But the executive director of the Haing Ngor Foundation is the actor Jack Orm, and when I became interested, I contacted him and asked him what it would take to get access to his story. He said, "Are you serious? We've always wanted you to do it, but we thought you were too busy." So they were waiting for the right filmmaker to come along, someone who they felt they could trust, and when we started, they didn't ask me for any editorial input and really let me do the movie how I wanted. And of course, his nephew Wayne Ngor did voiceover, and his niece Sophia Ngor Demetri has come to a lot of the screenings and Q&As. Thankfully, they liked the movie.

The gang members sentenced for his murder are still in prison. But after working on this movie in light of the sensational comments made by "Comrade Duch" that Pol Pot was being behind the killing, do you think justice has been served?

There were three trials. Each one of the defendants had a trial, and there were convictions. They went through their appeals and were denied, and they have now exhausted the appeal process. That's the American justice system. But for me, the jury's still out. I acknowledge the convictions, but you also have to acknowledge that no one forced Duch to say what he did. No one even asked him. He was just describing the tactics Pol Pot used to get rid of his enemies, and he just included this comment about Haing Ngor. You know, talk to some people, and they'll say Duch is crazy; others will argue that he was inside the regime and knew exactly what went on. For me as a storyteller, it was certainly a key, dramatic moment, and for those who raise questions about Dr. Ngor's murder, it gives a reason for the conspiracies to continue.

Before Dr. Ngor's death, his family feared his life might be in danger. During the making of your own movie, did any of his family members feel threatened due to their involvement?

You know, things are still happening in Long Beach [where many Cambodians who fled the genocide settled]. In fact, when we had our premiere at the Cambodia Town Film Festival, there were some security procedures—especially for his niece, Sophia. So those kind of threats, I guess, are still real in some communities. To put that into perspective, when we were screening the film in Dr. Ngor's village in Takeo province, there was commotion among a cluster of people who were yelling and screaming. I don't speak Khmer, but my interpreter said we needed to get security guards over there quick because a former Khmer Rouge person who still believed the KR virtues was commenting on the film and being righteous about what had happened to Dr. Ngor, saying this is the way it should have been. So the security guards had to intervene. I mean, you know the history of the current regime in Cambodia. And look at the funeral last year for Ieng Thirith [Pol Pot's sister-in-law and "First Lady of the Khmer Rouge," who was also on trial but freed by the tribunal after being declared unfit for trial due to Alzheimer's disease]. What was going on there? It was reported as being this wonderful, lavish funeral, and she was one of the senior KR figures. So it's not surprising that there is still conspiracy.

Ngor was an early advocate for the Khmer Rouge tribunal, and toward the end of the film, you show footage of the only two regime leaders convicted by the tribunal for crimes against humanity. Do you see this as closure of a sort, or is the process just beginning?

It's part closure, part chronology. It's certainly an outcome that Ngor would have wanted, but it's not the end, and the final scene of the movie shows Dr. Ngor expressing that sentiment. For some viewers, I felt it would be important to know that even though it's symbolic, some of the leaders were convicted. But it's not everybody—a lot of people got away with murder. And the footage is real, it's what happened. There's been progress yes, on some levels, but there's also a lot of work still to be done.

There are still an awful lot of issues, a lot of poverty. People have said to me, "So you've been to Cambodia. Wasn't it fun? Wasn't it beautiful?" And I say, "It depends on where you've been." If all you do is hang out downtown in Siem Reap and go see Angkor Wat, then sure, it's fun. It's like saying America is great after walking down Madison Avenue. But I didn't want the film to end on a pessimistic note, and I don't think it does.

You mean with the shot of Dr. Ngor's wedding?

Yeah. Visually, the film ends with a photograph of Dr. Ngor's wedding party, and the sticky notes on top that specify if a person is still alive or how a person died, but the sticky notes slowly disappear, leaving them all in a better place at this wedding party. I wanted an emotional lift: Everybody is still alive, and whatever religion you are, you recognize they're in a good place. The music that closes the film is a beautiful love song by the Cambodian-American singer Bochan. She does a lot of rap tracks but has this one beautiful song that she re-recorded with Khmer lyrics. I wanted to end with a woman's voice, symbolically representing the love between Dr. Ngor and his wife. It's an emotional song and closes on a note of hope.



AN ARTHUR DONG FILM

THE KILLING FIELDS OF DR. HAING S. NGOR

វាលពិឃាត ឆេដ្ឋ. ហ៊ាំង នៅ

DEEFOCUS PRODUCTIONS, INC. PRESENTS THE KILLING FIELDS OF DR. HAING S. NGOR ADAPTED FROM "SURVIVAL IN THE KILLING FIELDS"
AUTHORED BY DR. HAING S. NGOR WITH ROGER WARNER FEATURING SOPHIA NGOR JACK ONG NARRATOR WAYNE NGOR ANIMATION BY WILSON WU & YORIAKI MOCHIZUKI
MUSIC BY MARK ADLER "LIKE A ROSE" WRITTEN BY BOCHAN HUY & ARLEN HART SPECIAL LYRICS BY BOCHAN HUY & ROTANA HAY, PERFORMED BY BOCHAN
SOUND DESIGNER JOE MILNER PHOTO ANIMATION GRANT NELLESSEN POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR JOE HOFFMAN
PRODUCER, DIRECTOR, WRITER, EDITOR, CINEMATOGRAPHER ARTHUR DONG



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