



Sleepwalking through the Mekong 2009/E Certificate

Synopsis of the film

Sleepwalking through the Mekong is a 2009 documentary about the American rock band Dengue Fever touring through Cambodia. Although five members of the band hail from Los Angeles, lead vocalist Chhom Nimol is Cambodian and Dengue Fever's music is largely based around Cambodian rock and pop from the 1960s. When the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh in 1975, they set about destroying all existing culture as part of their programme to create a 'year zero' in Cambodia. The thriving rock and roll music of Cambodia was lost and some of its most prominent stars such as Sinn Sisamouth and Ros Sereysothea were killed during the Cambodian Genocide. *Sleepwalking through the Mekong* follows Dengue Fever as they meet those within Cambodia who are trying to revive Cambodia's lost music culture.

HMDT Review

Please note that the review may act as a spoiler for the film.

The film features brilliant musical performances throughout, both from Dengue Fever and the practitioners of traditional Cambodian music they encounter. As we see the film from the perspective of Dengue Fever, *Sleepwalking through the Mekong* is a good introduction to Cambodian music for those who have not previously heard it.

Ultimately, the film reminds us just how much was lost in the Cambodian Genocide – flourishing cultures, as well as millions of lives.

Potential issues and reflection points

The film has a certificate E as it hasn't been classified, but it does feature some minor use of drugs, as well as occasional swearing.

1. the film begins with a black and white shot of children crowding outside of a gate. How does this opening play on some commonly seen images of South East Asia in Western media?

2. occasionally in the film we see the band struggling with their cultural identity – do you think that music can be judged by values of authenticity?
3. what resonance does an American band playing Cambodian music in Cambodia have to Cambodian people?
4. do you think that music can play a cathartic or healing role for those affected by the Cambodian Genocide?

You can use HMD resources to find out more about:

The Cambodian Genocide <http://www.hmd.org.uk/genocides/cambodia>

Sokphal Din's survival of the Khmer Rouge's attempt to destroy Cambodian society
<http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/films/untold-stories-sokphal-din>

How Var Hong Ashe could have been killed by the Khmer Rouge simply because she was a teacher <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/podcasts/i-never-believed-for-one-second-that-a-country-could-be-run-without-a-teacher>