

802AD PRODUCTIONS
presents

POPPY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD REDUX

ច្បាប់ទៅហូលីវូដ

A FILM BY SOK VISAL

Cambodia / Director's Cut 2017 / 93 min / Color / Drama / 16:9 / 5.1



SALES

ASIAN SHADOWS

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SYNOPSIS

Mony is a loser who hangs out on the streets of Phnom Penh, until the day he witnesses a murder, forcing him to seek refuge with his older brother, a transgender performer in a drag queen club. Now on the run, hiding with his brother's friends and performers, dressed as a dancer and calling himself Poppy, the best place for Mony to hide seems to be Hollywood, a night club in the Cambodian countryside. With the mob and the police after him, Mony has to adapt to his new identity...



In Cambodia, as in neighboring Thailand, there is no word for “transgender.” There are more than 200 Khmer words used to describe LGBTQ individuals, and not one that the community itself likes to use, according to a survey conducted last year by Rainbow Community Kampuchea (RoCK).

Trans women – those who are biologically male but identify as female – prefer the term chae, or “sister,” which is peppered throughout POPPY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD.



INTERVIEW WITH SOK VISAL

POPPY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD is the first film with transgender main characters from Cambodia. How did you choose this subject and develop the story?

In early 2015, I was looking to shoot my second feature film. I was itching to do it and thought it was the right time. One day, at a company launch I met with Michael Hodgson, one of the writers of the original script. He pitched the script of POPPY to me, and I instantly fell in love with the concept and thought it could be turned into a cool and funny film involving the Cambodian transgender community. But I didn't want to make just any funny film with transgenders, and for sure I didn't want it to be clichéd. So I rewrote the script during pre-production and made it my way, more Cambodian, keeping the original structure almost intact, but giving more depth and life to the characters. I also added new characters and a few positive messages about the acceptance of LGBT people and female empowerment. I didn't want the LGBT characters to be depicted as odd people or victims. Mony, the straight loser character, is actually the character with issues, who thinks and acts like a victim. I wanted most of the male characters to be weaker and less smart, while the female characters (including the transgenders) to be more open-minded, positive and smarter.



How did you cast the characters, and who are the actors?

Our goal was to cast as many real transgender people as possible, and we selected based on their talent and special features. Most of the transgender people who came worked in the entertainment business as dancers. The real Poppy who plays Sasa, the team leader, and whose name inspired the movie title, is Cambodia's most famous transgender. She started as a model over ten years ago and then became an actress. Mimi and Nyta are both models, dancers, and do some acting. PEYPEY Dy, who plays Dina, the transgender who falls in love with the countryside boy, is not transgender in real life, but he is a very famous gay social media star, actor, comedian and activist. He loved every second of dressing like a woman for the film!



The actor playing Lyly, the old transgender and Hollywood club owner, is a famous TV comedian from the 90's who has also acted in a few films. I don't know about the sexuality of the two male actors who play Lena, the big brother, and our protagonist, Mony (also known as Poppy in the film). Both had no problems dressing as women or playing transgenders in the film.

Did you run into any problems, or do you have any stories shooting a group of transgender characters in these rural areas?

Villagers saw us as a film crew during the two weeks we spent in the countryside shooting POPPY. It wasn't the first time we shot there: we shot two films there before POPPY. So generally, I think people thought that the members of our crew who are transgender were all actors, so there were no issues overall. Since there were several famous actors and performers within the cast, we never had any major conflicts or difficulties.

But we did have problems with the gaffers and grips, who are Cambodian men with little educational background and exposure to these concepts. What started as jokes thrown around, became almost "hate" attacks. We had to have a meeting and put a stop to this behavior. We had to make clear that we were not making just any comedy. We were making a film that could have some positive impact on the issue.

How did people react to the film in Cambodia?

Reactions were overall pretty good. People had lots of fun watching the movie. Being a simple story, it was very easy to understand, and I think (and hope) I managed to send the message across, and it was well received. It is also the first movie featuring transgenders, who are not depicted as weird secondary characters or in degrading ways. So the audience will keep a positive memory of the characters and their story. I'm not sure if POPPY helped and inspired what is happening right now, but there are more and more transgenders (and cross-dressed supporting roles and characters) in recent local TV and film productions. Most people don't find it shocking anymore.

What is the status of LGBTQ people in Cambodia?

I have made a few gay and transgender friends in my 25 years living in Cambodia. But this does not make me an expert. Everything I know about the LGBT community in Cambodia is from my own personal experience. That was one of the reasons why I was okay doing not too serious of a movie. Of course I still tried to handle the issue seriously. I guess the status of LGBT people in Cambodia is the same as in any other third world or developing country. It used to be very hard for them to be accepted by others as 'normal' people, but the situation has greatly improved in the past few years, thanks to many different social and economic factors. But the struggle for general acceptance is still real and ongoing, especially for transgenders.



I think the situation is not too different from in Thailand, as we share many aspects of religion and culture. We're just a bit behind. But general acceptance of the LGBT community becoming a world trend. I think things can only get better from here, even though there will always be ignorant people...

In both your films, you mix music and humor. What is the role of music in your filmmaking?

I love music. Music has a huge place in my heart. I've been producing music since 2001 and in 2005, I founded Cambodia's first hip hop and alternative music label called KlapYaHandz. So naturally music is an important part of my films, mostly old Cambodian music from the Golden Era, right before the Khmer Rouge destroyed everything. I sample lots of old Cambodian songs from the 60's-70's and use them in hip hop tracks. The goal is always to try to remind Cambodian young people about our great musical heritage so that they don't forget about it in the future. Samples used in American hip hop from the 80's and 90's helped me discover so much good American music from the 60's-70's. The process of looking originals is like going back in time, and it's exciting to discover the music that has helped shape contemporary music.

So when I was given the opportunity to do the same in my first feature film, GEMS ON THE RUN, I didn't hesitate. I selected a bunch of old Cambodian Songs from the Golden Age and started to look for ones that could fit in the scenes that needed music. Cambodian music from the Golden Era was inspired by music from all over the world and mostly from the US because of the American presence in the region during the Vietnam War. So a lot of cool music from that era was inspired by American and English rock and roll and soul music. The sounds had a cinematic feel to them, and I felt they could be used in movies. Lots of the tracks sound cool and different from generic Cambodian music from that era.

It was a really fun process. And it helped the audience reconnect with these old songs. Many people have asked me about the song titles and where to find them. Two songs from the film's soundtrack, which were modern remakes of two old songs from then Golden Era, became huge hits in Cambodia and helped my music label reach people's homes, hearts and minds. That was really exciting! The theme song of POPPY also became a hit here in Cambodia, but on a smaller scale compared to the two hits from my first feature, GEMS ON THE RUN.

What is the situation of cinema in Cambodia?

This year was a bit quiet for the Cambodian film industry. 2015-2016 were big production years, but it has quieted down since then. I think slapstick ghost comedies (which were very popular) have started to lose audiences, and films like the recent hit JAILBREAK has helped raised the bar when it comes to local Cambodian films with different concepts and storylines. Slapstick comedies will always have an audience in Cambodia, but I think local filmmakers are looking into



producing different kinds of films now. This year has been quiet as well because many of the filmmakers are busy doing commercials for work. Feature films are not financially viable since the market is still small here in Cambodia. We have only about 7 or 8 cineplexes with a total of 12-15 screens in Cambodia.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Sok Visal (1971, Phnom Penh, Cambodia) first worked in advertising and graphic design as a creative director. He later began his career in film as the founder of his production company 391 Films in 2009. In 2013, he made his first feature film, GEMS ON THE RUN, a gangster comedy, which was co-directed by Quentin Clausin. In 2015, he re-established his production company under the name 802AD Productions. POPPY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD REDUX (2017) is his latest comedy film, which he both directed and produced.



FILMOGRAPHY

IN THE LIFE OF MUSIC (co-director)
in post-production

POPPY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD REDUX
2017, feature, 105 minutes

GEMS ON THE RUN (KROAB PICH)
2016 director's cut, feature

LOY 9 – SEASON 1
2011



CAST & CREW

CAST

MONY	UN Sothea
VANNY	DUCH Lida
SASA	Poppy
LENA	PEE Mai
DINA	PEYPEY Dy
NYTA	Pop
MIMI	Tata
LILY	SAN Mao
TONY	CHEN Choeun

CREW

SCRIPT	R. Johnnton FINN, Michael HODGSON, SOK Visal
DoP	BUN Chanvisal
EDITOR	YEM Sokheang, SOK Visal
SOUND	DJ Chee
PRODUCED BY	SOK Visal, NEAK Oukhna Kith Theang, CHY Sela, R. Johnnton FINN, Michael HODGSON
LINE PRODUCER	UK Theavin
PRODUCTION	802AD Productions - Cambodia
INTERNATIONAL SALES	Asian Shadows

