

Dancing Across Borders
Quad Cinema, March 26-April 1

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Sokvannara Sar performing at the International Ballet Competition in Varna. Photo by Stoyan Lefedzhiev.

In 2000, Sokvannara Sar was a 16-year-old boy studying traditional Khmer dance in his native Cambodia. Seven years later, he was a member of Pacific Northwest Ballet. *Dancing Across Borders* follows this journey, celebrating human achievement even as it raises questions about the sacrifices demanded for art. The film screened in this year's Dance on Camera Festival at Lincoln Center and opens at Quad Cinemas this month, then in select theaters nationally.

Anne Bass is both the filmmaker and the person responsible for Sar's transformation from Cambodian temple dancer to classical ballet dancer. Bass, a major ballet supporter

in New York, recognized Sar's extraordinary talent when she saw him perform at Preah Khan Temple in 2000.

Unable to forget him, she invited Sar to audition at the School of American Ballet. The audition didn't go well, but master teacher Olga Kostritzky, then head of the SAB Boys Program, agreed to train Sar herself. After just a few months with her, he made it into the school.

In the film, Sar's progress is astounding but agonizing. He suffers from debilitating body aches and homesickness. When Kostritzky gives him a correction, he looks ready to throttle her.

In addition to documenting Sar's years at SAB and then PNB, *Borders* follows Sar to Cambodia, for a homecoming that's both triumphant and heartbreaking. After living as an isolated foreigner abroad, he returns home only to find that he no longer belongs there, either.

The film doesn't sugarcoat Sar's ambivalence about his fate, but it does skim over some key questions. We never learn much about Bass or how she feels about having altered Sar's life so dramatically. The film doesn't delve very deeply into Sar's feelings, either. Does he truly love ballet or was his experience a kind of indentured servitude?

In a poignant coda to the film, Sar appeared for a Q&A following a Lincoln Center screening. The crowd gasped when he said he'd left PNB. He was trying to figure out what to do next, he said, but now that he'd left he genuinely missed dancing. Maybe he just needed to leave to see if he could.