

# JULIE MALLOZZI PRODUCTIONS

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## MONKEY DANCE



SD Video, 65 and 56 minutes, 2004

Three teens come of age in Lowell, Massachusetts. Children of Cambodian refugees, they inhabit a tough, working class world shadowed by their parents' nightmares of the Khmer Rouge. Traditional Cambodian dance links them to their parents' culture, but fast cars, hip consumerism, and good times often pull harder. For the parents, Lowell held the hope of safety, employment, and a chance to finally rebuild some of what was shattered by the Khmer Rouge. But for their children, the city offers a dizzying array of choices – many of them risky. *Monkey Dance* is the story of how three kids navigate the confusing landscape of urban adolescence and ultimately start to make good on their parents' dreams.

**Their parents escaped Cambodia's killing fields - now dance helps three teens survive the minefields of urban America**



**Samnang Hor**, an athletic 16-year-old born in a refugee camp in Thailand, is driven to achieve to make up for his two older brothers, who dropped out of high school because of their involvement with gangs and drugs. Sam works hard, and his mentors encourage him to see education as a way out of the ghetto. On the exciting day he receives his college acceptance letters, he also realizes that getting into school is only part of the challenge – finding money to pay for it may be even harder.



**Linda Sou** is a freewheeling 17-year-old who struggles to overcome the shame cast on her family when her older sister was imprisoned for murdering an abusive boyfriend. Linda has been dancing since age three, when her father founded the Angkor Dance Troupe to preserve Cambodian culture in America. But as she grows up, her commitment to the troupe wavers and she becomes enamored of boys and fast cars. Finally a trip to Cambodia brings Linda a new awareness of her parents' losses and sacrifices.



**Sochenda Uch**, a lanky, fashion-conscious 16-year-old, works a series of part-time jobs to pay for the necessities and accessories of teen life – while his mother worries that he doesn't study hard enough. Too many distractions soon take their toll: Sochenda's grades start to slide, leading him to be rejected from all the colleges he applies to. Only after another year and a half of hard work to get into college does Sochenda begin to understand what success or failure means, both for himself and his family.



Dance – both traditional and modern – is ultimately what makes a difference for these kids. They belong to the **Angkor Dance Troupe**, a rigorous performance group preserving Cambodian dance traditions almost lost when 90% of its practitioners were killed in the violence of the Khmer Rouge. Cambodian dance provides Linda, Sam,

and Sochenda with a unique connection to their parents' culture at a time when many immigrant kids reject traditional culture as irrelevant to their lives here in America. By making the dance their own, each of these young people forge a link with the past while also finding their way in America, where creativity, self-expression, and individual achievement are critical keys to success.

**“Mallozzi’s film is a truly masterful work portraying the lives of youth and families who are trying to begin new lives in a strange land while making peace with the ghosts of their past.”**

- David Wilcox, Ed.D., Harvard Medical School Clinical Director of Adolescent Consultation Services, Middlesex Juvenile Court Clinics

In 2017 we made [DANCE FAMILY](#), a 12-minute follow-up to [MONKEY DANCE](#). Linda, Sochenda, and Samnang have returned to their Cambodian-American community in Lowell, Massachusetts, and are helping the next wave of immigrants and refugees. They reflect on the transformative nature of dance and the grounding support of their family-oriented culture.

## **DANCE FAMILY**

11:57

A short follow-up to our 2004 documentary [Monkey Dance](#). Linda, Sochenda, and Samnang have returned to their Cambodian-American community in Lowell, Massachusetts, and are helping the next wave of immigrants and refugees. They reflect on the transformative nature of dance and the grounding support of their family-oriented culture. (12 minutes, 2017)

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## **PRESS**

"Mallozzi demonstrates remarkable commitment to her subjects, making for an insightful end result."  
— Cheryl Eddy, San Francisco Bay Guardian

"Julie Mallozzi’s fantastic documentary looks at the lives of three Cambodian teenagers who live in the city... [her] approach flows with compassion."  
— Warren Curry, Entertainment Insiders

"The Cambodian monkey dance celebrates a pan-Asian folk hero, part trickster, adventurer and warrior, whose mind is as agile as his body. The subjects of this documentary are equally agile in negotiating between the lures of American youth culture and the expectations of their parents who survived the Khmer Rouge atrocities of the 1970s... Filmmaker Julie Mallozzi creates a moving portrait of these teenagers as they navigate the landscape of urban adolescence."  
— Mary Carbine, Bridges: Asian American Studies Newsletter, U. of Wisconsin

"Julie Mallozzi has made two vivid, touching documentaries about the immigrant experience... [Monkey Dance]’s treatment of the refugee experience is enlightening."  
— Ken Gewertz, Harvard University Gazette

Download a [Press Kit](#).

## CREDITS

Director/Camera/Editor: Julie Mallozzi  
Editing Consultant: Shondra Burke  
Writing Consultant: Rebecca Sherman  
Composer: Jorrit Dijkstra

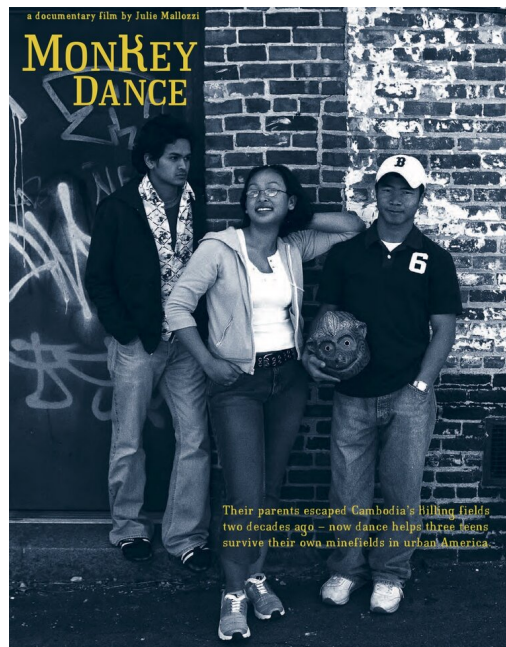
## FUNDERS & PRESENTERS

Produced in association with the [Independent Television Service](#), the [Center for Asian American Media](#), and [WGBH-TV](#) with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional support was provided by: [Sundance Institute Documentary Fund](#), [Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities](#), and [LEF Moving Image Fund](#).

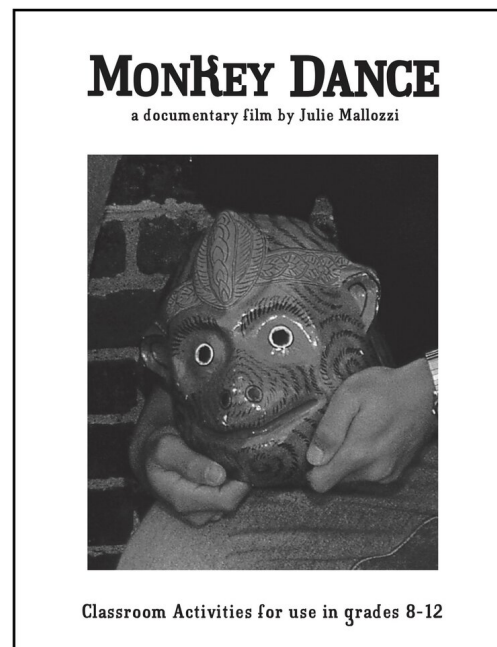


## SEE THE FILM

MONKEY DANCE is available for educational use through [Berkeley Media](#) and the [Center for Asian American Media](#). Our free [Viewers' Guide](#) contains background information, context, and other resources. The [Classroom Activities](#) booklet has discussion questions and handouts for grades 8-12.



Download [Viewers' Guide](#)



Download [Classroom Activities](#)

Please [email](#) us if you are an individual who would like to see the film for personal use.

## MORE INFORMATION

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