



ROSEMARY KAUL / Los Angeles Times

Cambodian Family Youth Dance Group will perform at the Westminster festival. Below, Sokchan Ing dances a story of the harvest.

By MARY ANNE PEREZ

**B**arefoot girls in loose, red pants, their *cramas*, or shawls, wrapped tightly around their heads, move slowly across the floor, dipping every now and then to tap their pointed fingers to the floor. In the Cambodian farming dance, they are planters, pushing the seeds into the ground.

They are barely finished rehearsing one recent evening in a studio in Santa Ana, when six young boys dressed in purple baggy pants, shiny black shoes and turquoise-colored T-shirts take the floor, hip-hopping to a hit by rapper M.C. Hammer.

Both groups are refugee children of the Cambodian Family Youth Dance Group, one of several dance and music groups performing this weekend at the Westminster International Festival. The Cambodian Family Inc., which organized the dance group, tries to keep traditions alive among the younger generation and introduce the children to American culture, said coordinator Dawn Toyama. The children and their dances—the mixture of traditions and styles—are examples of the variety scheduled for the festival.

The festival, which will be held at Buckingham Park next to Westminster High School, is trying to overcome a disappointing first year that attracted only half of the 30,000 people needed to break even, said Robert King, publicity director and special events coordinator.

With better planning, a better location than last year's year-

# WHIRL CULTURE

Westminster's International Festival Will Blend Traditional and Modern, East and West



lots near the Westminster Li- county fairs) and celebrities such as Kimberly McCullough, who plays Robin Scorpio on "General Hospital," Todd Bridges of

"Diff'rent Strokes" fame, Bugs Bunny and some American Gladiators on the bill this year, King expects a crowd of at least 50,000.

"We tried to make this a family-oriented event, but the main thing is our theme, 'Unity and friendship among all cultures,'" he said. "I guess the chamber saw a need to break down the communication barriers between the cultures—Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Spanish, African, Chinese and others—and we tried to unite them all in celebration."

To that end, King and his business partner Clodagh Lynn created super-hero Captain International, whose job is to promote positive intercultural relations. A true super-hero of the '90s, Captain International counts among his enemies a satanist, a drug lord and a terrorist. The character was created for the festival and has already been booked for an appearance at a Los Angeles parade next month. He is the official host and will introduce the daily encces and greet festival-goers.

"He's the first super-hero that represents all cultures. He's the guardian of international freedom and justice," King says.

Preaching aside, festival-goers stand to be converted by simply attending. Close to 100 vendors have been secured to sell foods from Thailand, Mexico, China, Greece, England and Italy, as well hot dogs and hamburgers. Crafts will include handmade jewelry, toys and clothing, bonsai

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## What

Westminster International Festival.

## When

Friday, Sept. 27, 6 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.; Saturday, Sept. 28, 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., and Sunday, Sept. 29, 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## Where

Buckingham Park, 6502 Homer St. (next to Westminster High School), Westminster.

## Whereabouts

From the San Diego Freeway, exit Golden West and go north to Westminster High School. Entrance to the festival is at Westminster High School off of Golden West Street. Buckingham Park is behind Westminster High School.

## Wherewithal

Admission to the festival is \$1, with parking available for \$1 at Westminster High School. Tickets for the carnival rides may be purchased at a discount through the Westminster Chamber of Commerce.

## Where to call

Westminster Chamber of Commerce, (714) 898-9648.

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# WESTMINSTER: 'Unity, Friendship Among Cultures' Is Theme

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trees, dried flowers, face-painting, handblown glass and items from Africa and Central America.

Cultural groups such as the Cambodian dancers will take the Main Stage throughout the three-day event. There will also be a petting zoo, contests to judge the cutest babies and the sexiest men's legs and demonstrations in gymnastics, square-dancing and the martial arts, performances by the Los Angeles Rams Cheerleaders and Medieval Times knights.

Entertainment varies from the Andy Rau Band, which plays bluegrass music, to Las Tapatias folkloric dancers, rock 'n' roll band Brigands, youthful rappers Toy Soldiers and guitar trio Brahma.

Northridge-based Toy Soldiers—three youths who dance and sing rap music—will lead off the lineup at 6:15 p.m. Friday.

Brahma, a guitar trio made up of recent graduates of the Guitar Institute of Technology in Hollywood, will perform Saturday and Sunday. Promoter Robert Arroyo described their music as "new wave Flamenco," similar to the style of the Gipsy Kings.



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their name from the Hindu religion.

The Cambodian children learn their traditional dances at the Cambodian Family Inc., a nonprofit center in Santa Ana set up to help the children and their families. In addition, group coordinator Toyama said, the center tries to teach the children about problems they might face growing up and how to confront them.

As the Cambodian dance continues in the studio, the girls, two in red-and-white-check *cramas*, two in blue-and-white-check, untie

the knots holding the scarves on their heads and take the ends in their hands. With graceful moves, they twist from side to side to traditional Cambodian music blaring from a boom box, taking a step forward each time.

The *cramas* are an important part of their costumes, explained Phalen Lim, a volunteer who teaches the dances to the girls. The cloth is used as a scarf, a shawl or even a skirt. But most significantly, it was sometimes the only possession allowed women in the Pol Pot regime, which many of the families

fled, she says.

"We use [the *crama*] a lot in Cambodian culture, for everything from taking a shower to wrapping around yourself. In the farming dance, you tie it around you, then use it to chase the birds out and clean your sweat off."

The Cambodian Family groups will perform at 4:45 p.m. Sunday afternoon.

Mary Anne Perez is a free-lance writer who regularly contributes to The Times Orange County Edition.

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"There's a mixture [of sounds] from Brazilian and Mediterranean. When I first heard them, I imagined they were all Spaniards," he said.

In fact, Brahma is made up of 20-year-old Blango Porter, a Mexican-American from Ohio, Jussi Wenger, 24, from Switzerland, and Rene Orfanidis, 25, a Greek who was born in Austria. They take