

Dancers on the move

Claire Byrne

FOR three years now, Ravynn Karet-Coxen and her troupe of tiny dancers have taken their sacred ritual into the temples. But now, for the first time, the practice is being shown outside of Angkor: outside Cambodia, in fact.

The Samdech Preah Ream Buppha Devi Dance School from Banteay Srei brought its unique traditional repertoire to the sacred temple of Wat Phou in Champasak Province, Laos. The pilgrimage was arranged to coincide with Meak Bochea, one of the holiest days for Theravada Buddhists.

"It was amazing," gushes Ravynn. "All the officials were there, people were overwhelmed, it was incredible. It's like a rebirth. What was done in the ancient time was being revived again."

Along with their sacred ritual performance at Wat Phou, the children also performed for tens of thousands of inter-



Dancers from the Ream Buppha Devi School. PHOTO: MENG KIMLONG

national pilgrims on the closing night of the festival.

Ravynn choreographed a special dance to the music Luang Prebang, composed by his majesty King-Father Norodom Sihanouk in the 1960s. "We finished with this dance, and they were touched, most thankful for extending the friendship from Cambodia to Laos."

The most poignant moment of the journey for Ravynn was the reception the group had from the Laotian

people during a candle ritual. Together, the group carried 1,250 candles to commemorate the 1,250 disciples who appeared to Buddha before his accession.

"Monks came to light their candles from us. Normally we light our candle for the monks. It was surrounded by a lot of awe and spiritualism. The Laotian people gathered around us to repeat the Cambodian prayer. It was extraordinary," Ravynn recalls. **70**