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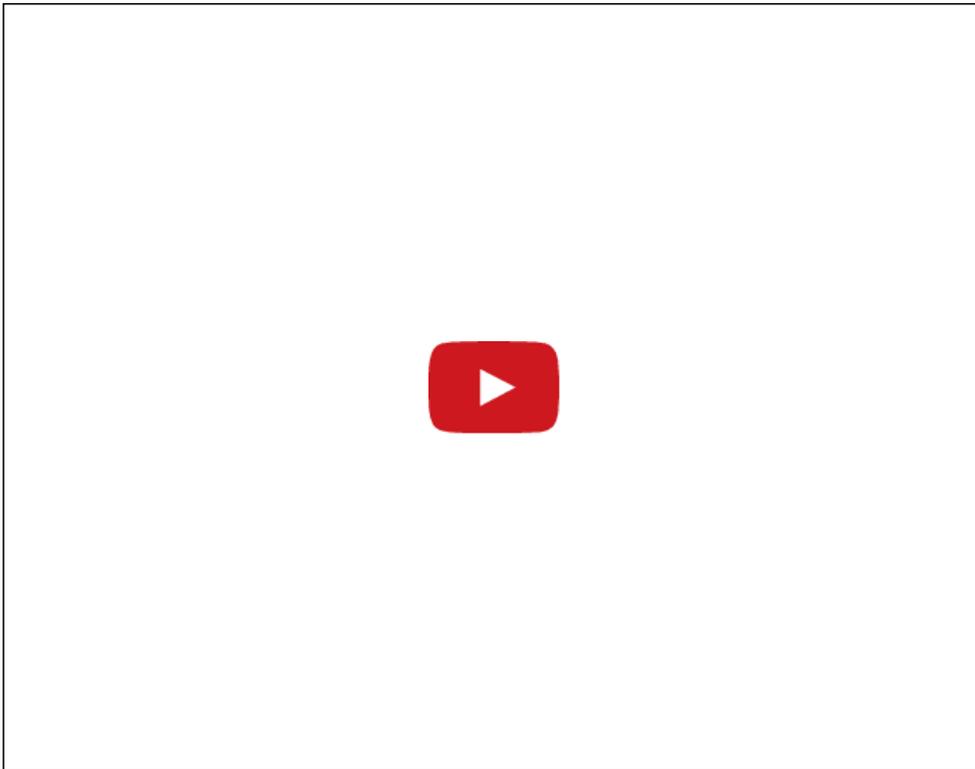
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An interview with Saymoukda Vongsay, the playwright behind Mu Performing Arts' "Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals"

By [Amina Harper](#), [The Art House](#)
October 08, 2013



Amina Harper interviews [Saymoukda Vongsay](#), poet and playwright. Her [Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals](#) premieres October 12 at the Southern Theater.

Mooks, how did Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals first come about? What was your journey in molding this story?

The play was inspired by dreams that I had for several weeks straight. I don't dream about zombies anymore, which pisses me off because I thought they were fantastic.

It's been about two and a half years since the first ten-page script was written and staged at

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the Playwrights' Center. Rick Shiomi from Mu Performing Arts saw *Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals*' potential and worked with me on it—not only developing the story but also me as a playwright.

The script has been through so many changes, close to 14 versions with some of the scenes having alternates. The hardest part about this entire process is trusting my vision to others. An example is that when I'm in rehearsals and I see the script on its feet, it can be a little hard. You try to be respectful as you can be and not take over. Unlike my spoken word poetry life, my playwriting life won't allow me to speak all the parts. I mean, I could if I were into writing one-woman shows but I'm not. I don't have great memory and I can't act.

Do you see elements of yourself in the characters and how did you find their story in your own?

I think most of the characters in the play carry a small facet of who I am. That wasn't the intention going into this thing. More important to me though, was to have strong female principle characters. Meghan Kreidler, the actress playing the primary protagonist really carries the entire story beautifully through her portrayal of Sika who is strong yet allows her vulnerability to seep through, beautiful and yet exhibits truly ugly moments.

Sika is a Lao-American woman and Araham is a Lao woman. Their experiences, moral code, philosophies on life, and martial arts skills are significantly different. The characters were each inspired by stories of people who had faced real atrocities. The leader of the cannibals, Mara, was actually inspired by my mentor and theologian Bryan Thao Worra who was instrumental in the character's development. Like a seven member boy band, I think there's a character in *Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals* for everyone. They're unique enough that they're relatable to someone out there watching this entire chaotic world unfold.

Is the story of KFZ driven by its characters or is it at the mercy of the world it's set in?

One of the main challenges I experienced was finding each character's narrative and how each of their stories was going to serve the rest of the play. Even the world being what it is in *KFZ*, it's no match for our protagonists' resilience.

KFZ has a great deal of action and physical movement. How does that movement translate from the page to the stage?

There are about nine fighting sequences in the play that will happen on stage. In the script though, about three of those fight sequences were described. Allen, our fight choreographer, has been working with the cast since August. With each character having a specific martial arts technique, Allen has figured out a way to amalgamate it all, especially in the long-ass epic battle at the end. It's so breath taking watching them work at rehearsals. Allen and Randy have been great about listening to my input—what I like, what I don't love—but at the end of the day, Allen is the mixed martial arts master, not me. Some things just can't be done. We don't have John Woo's budget for the wires and levitating. What we do have: a fighting chorus who has been dedicated to making *KFZ* a success from day one. I think audiences will see a lot of sweat, heart, and blood on stage. Yay, blood.

What projects are next for you and where can more of your writings be found?

I've been focusing on producing the soundtrack/concept album for *KFZ*. It features artists Desdama, Carnage, Fres Thao, Mayda, Jake Virden, Luke \$kywalker and others. Unlike the theatrical production of *KFZ*, the album isn't funded by the Jerome Foundation or Mu Performing Arts. We've been very lucky with our crowd funding campaign. On October 27, we're having the album release party and concert at the Nomad. Some of the artists listed above are performing and for just \$5 at the door, it's a steal.

After *KFZ*, I'd like to be able to refocus on the manuscript of poetry and novella that I've set aside for the last two years. It'd be refreshing if I could go off somewhere for a month and just write uninterrupted.

You can learn more about me and all the fun things I like to do

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at SaymoukdaTheRefugenius.com.

Also read [Ketmani Kouanchao's interview with Saymoukda Vongsay \(April 2013\)](#).

Coverage of issues and events affecting Central Corridor communities is funded in part by a grant from the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative. Reporting for this article also supported in part by Bush Foundation.

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Mu Performing Arts presents "Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals"



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- 10/13/2013 - 9:00am
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Amina Harper

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