

reserved, so it always gives you some room for the imagination.” Thus, the sharply upturned eaves, so painstakingly designed, might serve to warn off the evil spirits, to admit light into the interior of a pavilion, or to simply divert the falling rain. And the tall, narrow rock may suggest a mountain, or it may simply be a stunning rock. But to the garden’s scholar, it always stands for something.

The best thing of all about *Blending with Nature* is the ever-growing, cumulative effect that accrues from the endless views of natural microcosms: a pond through an oval window, water flowing along an adobe wall, the moon above a sighing pine, a miniature tree flanked by calligraphy-filled scrolls, the shadows of a bamboo grove, intricate pebble arrangements. These gardens were created by Confucian scholars, artists all, who wanted visitors to experience nature as the mind knows it, and thus to become more sensitive human beings. Students may not come away from this film energized, but they should come away understanding the Confucian-Daoist cosmology with their senses as well as their minds. ■

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The Sound of the Violin at My Lai

Directed by Tran Van Thuy

Produced by the Central Documentary and Scientific Film Studio, Hanoi

“Best Short,” 1999 Asian Pacific Film Festival, Bangkok
1998. 32 Minutes. VHS. Color.

Distributed by The Video Project

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The *Sound of the Violin at My Lai*, winner of “Best Short” at the 1999 Asian Pacific Film Festival in Bangkok, opens with the story of former U.S. marine Mike Boehm, who plays his violin at the site of the massacre as an offering to the spirits of the dead, then stays to work for reconstruction and for the creation of a Vietnamese-American Peace Park. But Vietnamese filmmaker Tran Van Thuy’s documentary is not limited by nationality, nor by the past, though it is shaped by both. It is a story about a village, a story about war, about integrity in the face of atrocity, about rebuilding out of terrible destruction. It is a story made for

Vietnamese audiences that speaks deeply to Americans.

The film moves from past to present, between remembering and transformation. The sepia-toned images that accompany a straightforward narration of events are criss-crossed by bright-colored footage of laughing children at play. Scenes of school children running gaily down a village path once strewn with bodies are cut through by cameos of survivors holding famous newspaper photos of their mothers and sisters who died, reminding grandchildren never to forget. While one man sits by the tablet that marks the death of his entire family, other villagers work the fields and ply the river.

In one of the most touching segments of this very moving film, two women from the village share tea, fruit from their garden, and family photos with two members of a U.S. helicopter crew who intervened to rescue them and ten other people from the carnage. The occasion is the 30th anniversary of the massacre, marked by solemn offerings of incense by Vietnamese and Americans attending the commemoration, and by official ceremonies for the opening of the peace park. “We cannot forget the past,” Boehm says in his remarks, “but we cannot live with anger and hatred either.”

Perhaps it is safe to say that most teachers over the age of fifty remember “My Lai” (the internationally recognized name for a village known locally as Son My) as one of the most publicized dark moments of the war in Vietnam, as a place where U.S. soldiers massacred 504 villagers on the morning of March 16, 1968. Perhaps it is also safe to say that many of our students have never heard of it. How shall we teach them? What shall we teach them?

According to U.S. National Standards for History, students should be able to “evaluate how Vietnamese and Americans experienced the war and how the war continued to affect postwar politics and culture” and “to explore the legacy of the Vietnam War.” This film addresses these issues, but more importantly, will add nuance to how the Vietnam War (commonly referred to by the Vietnamese as the “American War”) is taught in the United States.

According to director Thuy, the key message of the film is that a person, or a nation, must feel shame for its past mistakes and the pain of their own wrongdoing before they can heal the wounds. “It is not easy to build something out of such a disastrous past,” the film concludes. Not easy, but it is what the villagers must do, what the veterans must do, and what much of the world must now find a way to do. This gentle, unflinching film makes an important contribution to that end.

Note: *The Sound of the Violin at My Lai* is being piloted for adoption by 5th grades throughout Vietnam—providing interest-



Image source: www.videoproject.net

ing possibilities for exchange, both by students and teachers. Two other films by Tran Van Thuy that teachers in the United States have found useful are *The Story of Kindness*, an award-winning work that exalts kindness over power as it probes the gap between words and deeds, and has been described as having an 'almost cult-like' international following; and *Story from the Corner of a Park*, a more recent release, a sensitive meditation on the grace with which a poor family faces the difficulties caused by the care of their two disabled children, thought to have been affected by Agent Orange. For further information on Tran Van Thuy's films, contact the Fund for Reconciliation and Development at <http://ffrd.org> or First Run Icarus Films <http://www.frif.com>. ■

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Hidden India The Kerala Spicelands

Direction, editing, and music by Jan Thompson
Written and hosted by Bruce Kraig

Produced by Food for Thought
Productions
2002. 60 Minutes. VHS. Color.

Distributed by PBS Home Video
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone: 800-752-9727
Web site: www.shop.pbs.org

Hidden India: *The Kerala Spicelands* is a colorful, vibrant presentation of many aspects of culture in Kerala, a state located on India's southwest coast. Described by its producers as an introduction to the "culinary traditions and culture" of Kerala, the video discusses topics ranging from growing and harvesting spices, to religion, to the legacies of historical contact with Europe and other areas of Asia.



Best known for its spices, Kerala is described as having "the highest literacy rate in India" (above ninety percent) and a better quality of life than "anywhere else in India, Africa, and most of Asia." The video segues smoothly through a variety of topics, beginning with a brief historical background that includes the introduction of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to India, and the coming of the European explorer merchants led by Portugal's Vasco da Gama in 1498. The growing, harvesting, and preparation of food is a recurring theme. Spices such as black pepper, cardamom, ginger, nutmeg, and turmeric are found in the mountainous Ghats, while staple foods such as coconuts and rice grow in the lowlands. Food markets in Kerala include non-native foods such as potatoes and chili peppers that were brought from Central and South America to India by Portuguese merchants. Host Bruce Kraig maintains his enthusiasm throughout his narration, even while chewing *paan*, an araca (betel) nut wrapped in a palm leaf. Paan is a mild narcotic and is used as a digestive aid.

Keralite culture is illustrated not only through food, but also through arts and religion. Kathakali, or "story dance," is a feature of the arts in Kerala in which actors portray all emotions through elaborate facial expressions. The dances are based on classical literature such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Hinduism is woven into segments that show a marriage ceremony, and describe the caste system, discussing the degree to which it is observed in Kerala. Viewers also observe festivals, such as the Great Elephant Parade, in which people costume themselves as representatives of Hindu divinities. The video concludes with a discussion of British and Asian legacies in India. The British introduced railroads, the parliamentary democracy form of government, and tea plants and rubber trees to south India. The Asian influence is seen in the Keralites' use of large fishing nets such as those used in earlier times by Chinese merchants. These help demonstrate Kraig's conclusion that in Kerala, "the traditional and the new exist side-by-side."

Hidden India: The Kerala Spicelands is appropriate for use in high school and college levels to introduce students to the culture, customs, religions, and foods of southwestern India. A caveat should be mentioned: the video describes Hinduism as a "polytheistic faith," which is not how many Hindus view it. Hinduism is monotheistic and henotheistic, recognizing a single Supreme God manifested in many forms such as Vishnu and Shiva. This point aside, the video beautifully and actively illustrates its topics, each of which lasts about four to seven minutes. The video could also be used in short segments to illustrate a specific point. ■

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