

tara tan
arts reporter

After a worldwide search involving 70 applicants, the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT) has picked its assistant artistic director, Janek Schergen, 56, for the job of artistic director.

The Swede succeeds co-founder Goh Soo Khim, who has held the post of artistic director for 20 years, and will take over the reins next January.

Mr Michael Hwang, chairman of the SDT board, said: "We looked at over 70 applicants from all over the world, some who have very illustrious careers.

"However, after much debate among the selection committee, we felt most comfortable with Janek. No other applicant is as familiar with the company or the local dance scene as he is."

Finally, it boiled down to three things Schergen possessed, said Mr Hwang.

"He knows where we have come from, he knows where we are at and he has a clear vision of where we are going."

It was also his experience and intimacy with the company that sealed the deal.

Goh said: "Janek has been working with the company since our very first performance and throughout these 20 years, has been very much a part of our growth and development.

"He is fully aware of where SDT has come from, and also has a clear vision of how to enhance the company's unique strengths. Also, his vast experience in the international dance field will help benchmark SDT with the best in the world."

When *Life!* spoke to Schergen yesterday, he said he was initially hesitant when approached to consider this post.

"It's not a decision you can rush into," he said. "But my fears were that anyone who didn't know the company would come in and disregard the history or repertoire it has and change the performers or look of the company.

"So the board confronted me with the question: Why not take on the role yourself?"

On his vision for the company, he said he wants to develop SDT as a



Think local, dance global

After a worldwide search for an artistic director, Singapore Dance Theatre picks Janek Schergen from its own ranks

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Co-founder and current artistic director Goh Soo Khim on Schergen (left)

ST PHOTO: ALAN LIM

standalone institution that is not pegged to any one director, choreographer or style.

"Three things hold up this company: its classical repertoire, established contemporary choreography and newly created work," he said.

Some of the works he would like to see staged are those by George Balanchine, Jiri Kylian and Goh Choo San.

He added: "I started off in contemporary ballet under Benjamin Harkavy, one of the co-founders of the Nederlands Dans Theater, but then fell in love with classical. Both are in my blood."

Mr Hwang has hinted that the next move for SDT would be to build a more defined touring repertoire: more contemporary works from the Asia-Pacific region.

He added: "When you tour, particularly outside of the region, you need a body of Asian works to interest audiences in Europe or the United States.

"They want to see what we can offer from this part of the world."

taratan@sph.com.sg