

Ballet company co-founder bows out

**Singapore Dance Theatre
co-founder and artistic director
Goh Soo Khim to step down
in December after 20 years**

Tara Tan
ARTS REPORTER

THE co-founder and artistic director of Singapore Dance Theatre is stepping down after 20 years.

Ms Goh Soo Khim, who is in her 60s, set up the home-grown classical ballet company with the late Anthony Then.

The dance company's selection committee, which includes SDT board directors as well as National Arts Council chief executive Lee Suan Heng, has shortlisted six international candidates for the post.

The applicants hail from the United States, Britain, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, but no Singaporeans have made it to the final shortlist.

The dance doyenne says: "Through these 20 years, I have realised my vision of bringing the company to a level of international standing, with dancers who are mature and able to handle both classical and contemporary repertoire."

"It is now an appropriate time for me to retire on the occasion of SDT's 20th anniversary as it allows me to celebrate this momentous year with the company."

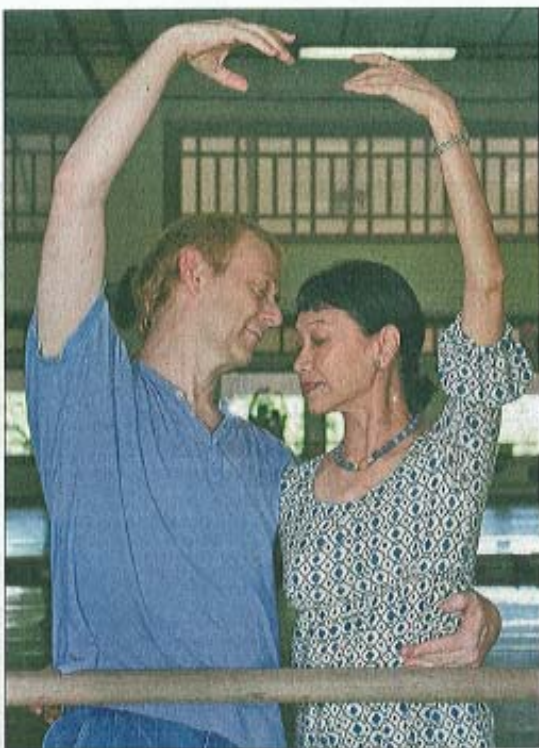
She adds: "The foundation has been laid, and I hope that my successor will continue to bring in challenging repertoire that will take the company to the next level."

The company of 22 dancers has a repertoire of works that range from those of the late Goh Choo San, Ms Goh's brother, to contemporary Finnish choreographer Jorma Elo.

They train under Janek Schergen, 56, SDT's ballet master, who is from Sweden and worked closely with Goh Choo San during his time at the Washington Ballet.

Over the years, SDT has also groomed notable dancers and choreographers such as Jeffery Tan and Kuik Swoe Boon. Tan, 39, received the Young Artist Award for Dance in 2000 and is SDT's resident choreographer.

Dancer-turned-choreographer Kuik, 35, made a splash last year with his work *Silence*, presented as part of the Esplanade's *dans festival*.



ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

MOVING ON: Ms Goh Soo Khim, here with ballet master Janek Schergen, will leave Singapore Dance Theatre as it celebrates its 20th year.

— as Goh's stepping down comes as the company celebrates its 20th anniversary celebrations with a series of shows.

Celebrations kick off this Saturday with a gala performance at Victoria Theatre, where its dancers will perform excerpts from landmark works over the last two decades, including Living Greens by Mohamed Noor Sarman, SDT's assistant ballet master, and Negro Y Blanco by Tan. The latter was presented as part of the Singapore Season in China last year.

They will be joined by principal dancers from the National Ballet of Canada and The Australian Ballet, who will be making guest appearances.

There will also be a Ballet Under The Stars performance at Fort Canning Park next weekend, featuring 11 excerpts of SDT's landmark works, including Beginnings by Goh Choo San, its first-ever performance.

Ms Goh says: "It has not been easy, but we have come so far. We started with just seven dancers and rehearsed on the second floor of a rickety old building in Lloyd Road.

"Whenever it rained, I remember we had to rush around with buckets to catch the water from the leaks in the roof. There was a restaurant downstairs, whose ceiling shook whenever our dancers practised their jumps."

SDT is now based in Fort Canning Centre, with four studios overlooking the lush greenery of Fort Canning Green.

It is funded by a mix of public and private funding, from the National Arts Council to corporate and private donations.

Ms Goh adds, with a smile: "We have performed over 100 classical and contemporary works from international and Singaporean choreographers in two decades. It's something to be proud of."

What of the future?

Schergen says: "I think we should be nurturing that strength right now. It takes time. We have a strong repertoire as foundation, but we need to settle and mature."

> taratan@sph.com.sg

> Celebrations In Dance: 20th Anniversary Gala Performance is on at the Victoria Theatre on Saturday at 8pm. Tickets cost \$70, \$150 and \$250 from the Singapore Dance Theatre office. For more information, log on to www.singaporedance theatre.com.sg or call 6338-0611.

> Ballet Under The Stars is on at Fort Canning Park from July 25 to 27 at 7.30pm. Gates open at 5pm. Tickets cost \$30 from Sistic (log on to www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555).

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Ms Goh Soo Khim