

# Mixing high art and low pop culture

By **AMANDA DE GUZMAN**

FOR the purists, classical ballet to the tunes of 1990s diva Annie Lennox borders on the blasphemous.

For Janek Schergen, artistic director of the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT), this combination of high art and low pop culture is all about having fun.

The result is *Pop!*, a 20-minute, six-part pastiche featuring traditional choreography from Schergen set to music from the likes of Tom Jones and Shirley Bassey.

It will be part of a larger programme at this year's *Ballet Under the Stars*, SDT's long-running outdoor dance extravaganza.

"When it comes to ballet, some people think that everything has to be dark and serious," says Schergen. "We can do fun things, and have something for everyone."

There truly is something for all tastes, from those with a predilection for tradition – there will be a performance from the classic *Sleeping Beauty* – to those who like their dance accessible and hip.

This is where *Pop!* comes in to play.

"The thing is that dance sometimes gets so obscure and removed that people

stop caring," notes Schergen.

"When you watch *Pop!*, you will *feel* it. However, it's not cheesy. It's got sophisticated dancers doing fun things."

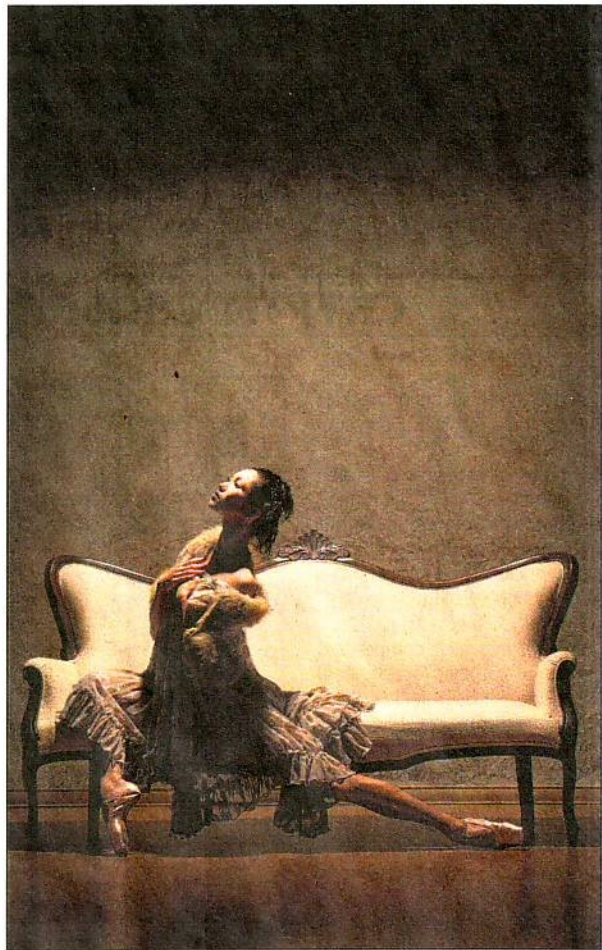
Schergen is clearly excited about the prospect of doing something new with SDT's repertoire.

"*Pop!* is not there to preach, but to entertain," he states about the segment's frothy qualities. "You try to build a programme like a meal, and *Pop!* is like a great big dessert."

Divided into very different parts, *Pop!* includes performances that range from tongue-in-cheek to campy: Schergen delights in a sequence where "the man is turned into the sex object, with all the girls thinking, 'let's just break his heart and walk away', as well as 'big butch guy number', where they all jump around and pound their chests".

However, this airy concoction is grounded by its underlying message, which is close to Schergen's heart. "I don't think anyone will really get it, except for me," he says.

With most of the company participating in *Pop!*, Schergen sees the piece as a reflection of a dancer's



**Fun with ballet:** *'Pop!'* is a six-part pastiche featuring traditional choreography from Schergen set to music from the likes of Tom Jones and Shirley Bassey

journey in a company.

For Schergen, their weaving on and off the stage is representative of "dancers entering the company and doing certain roles. It's like a river, people come in and go, and that's just how things

flow."

*'Ballet Under The Stars'* will take place from July 17-19 at Fort Canning Park from 7:30pm-10:30pm. Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased on [www.sistic.com.sg](http://www.sistic.com.sg)