

lunchdate

Out for lunch with...

JANEK SCHERGEN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SINGAPORE DANCE THEATRE

WORDS JOY JATHNIEL
PHOTOGRAPHY CALVIN TAN, FLAME PRODUCTION STUDIO



a life on stage — with bright lights, appreciative audiences and thunderous applause — is something most of us can only dream about. Yet for Singapore Dance Theatre's (SDT) new artistic director Janek Schergen, all these are part and parcel of his everyday life for over 30 years. 'I started dancing when I was very young, but unfortunately, I stopped. Thankfully, I was later struck by epiphany one day when I was fourteen and decided then that I was born to dance.' Since then, the talented ballet dancer has evolved to passionate ballet master and now, a driven leader.

To date, Janek has staged more than 120 productions worldwide and has taught in countries like Sweden, America and Norway. Now, his love for the art has brought him full-time to Singapore, where his bold new vision promises only a better and brighter future for the island's biggest dance troupe. In fact, Janek is already bringing about change just months into the job. 'I want the Singapore Dance Theatre to be seen. This means becoming more acceptable and open to the Singapore audience.' To achieve this, Janek says that the SDT has started a series of community-based programmes such as open rehearsals for the public as well as children-outreach shows in various schools.

When asked about his ultimate vision for the SDT, Janek gamely reveals, 'Part of why the Singapore Symphony Orchestra is so successful is because they have a home and regular seasons. I would like to see our new home in the Victoria Theatre which is currently under development and I would love for us to have regular seasons.'

Despite his single-minded dedication to the development of the dance troupe, Janek also focuses on the bigger picture — he would like to see the Singapore arts scene blossom. According to Janek, there is greater appreciation for the arts in other Asian cities such as Tokyo and Hong Kong where they have specific schools to train artists of their own nationality. Aside from these Asian countries, European countries also emphasise on a balanced lifestyle, where culture is just as important as work.

For this committed and tenacious man, it is a dream that he hopes will come to pass for Singapore. 'I would love to see a better-rounded lifestyle — with equal time dedicated to work and culture — so that people lead more fulfilling lives.'

What do you love most about your job? I love the constant progress, and the way the art is constantly evolving. It's satisfying to see the young people you train become professional and wonderful dancers later on in their lifetime.

How would you sum up your years of dancing experience? My dancing years provided very good training for me to become a ballet master, and my ballet master years were good training for me to become a leader. One step has always led me to the next.

What is most rewarding about dancing? The reward lies in the hard work during each rehearsal, the months of preparation and the joy of movement. It pays off during the end performance, when your art is appreciated.


At what age did you stop performing? I stopped at the age of 30 because I was already very successful at being a ballet master. Dancers are made through training, but ballet masters are created through evolution. I didn't like teaching, but I had to learn to like it because they needed me more in that role.

Tell us about your most challenging ballet. As a dancer, I did about 500 performances in my life. However, I think the most difficult was when I became a ballet master and put on my first full-length ballet, *Sleeping Beauty*. There were 181 roles to teach, and I taught them all single-handedly over five weeks.

What would you say is essential to your form of dance? I would say, aside from other things, ballet is about manners. It's an art-form that comes from the courts of Louis XIV, so it's all based on a courteous behaviour. For example, I look after my partner. That means lifting her and setting her down with care. Ideally, it is to be gender specific and understand the boundaries.

What is your favourite cuisine? Italian, definitely. I absolutely love pasta. Indian is next because I'm vegetarian.

... and your comfort food? Definitely cheese and toast — simple and comforting!

As an artistic director, what is the first thing you notice when you are out? I take note of how well put-together things are. 



PREGO

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