



Moved by Discipline

'I think ballet is more passionate than drama or opera because there is physical suffering behind ballet,' says Ms Walsh, seen here with Robert Mills and Madoka Toguchi of the SDT.

Ballet patron

SDT supporter Miranda Bien-Lim Walsh admits she's got pointe envy. **By Amanda de Guzman**

WEEKEND WITH
MIRANDA BIEN-LIM WALSH
 DOCTOR AND CO-FOUNDER OF RENEWABLE ENERGY AND CARBON FINANCE COMPANY, BIOSPHERE CAPITAL

MIRANDA Bien-Lim Walsh has a *thing* about feet. "For some people, it's about the body and the way it moves," says the 36-year-old. "For me, it's about good feet, the way they curve."

While it may seem like it, the doctor and co-founder of renewable energy and carbon finance company, Biosphere Capital, doesn't have a foot fetish. In the traditional sense, anyway.

"I have got pointe envy," says the ballet

enthusiast, referring to the advanced ballet level of en pointe, which sees dancers on their toes. "I never got to that level."

However, Ms Walsh did study ballet for a number of years, starting at the tender age of five.

"You don't really go past your mid-teens unless you are really good," she says. She stopped dancing when she was 15, but still retains a fluidity in her movements, evidence of a childhood painstakingly spent at the ballet barre. "I love the steps I never could do."

While she never became a professional dancer, her recognition of the physical mortification required to be a ballerina is total. In fact, it is one of the things she admires most about the art form. "It must be agonising for the girls, but it's so pleasurable for the audience. I admire people with discipline; discipline is something that moves me," she says.

"I think ballet is more passionate than drama or opera because there is physical suffering behind ballet. It is physically torturing for the dancers to give you these movements onstage. It is really tough, and it is like, wow, you are doing it for us."

This love with ballet led Ms Walsh to support local ballet companies as soon as she could. After completing her medical studies in Australia, she started her first internship in Sydney in 2002 and began

what is now her eighth year as a patron of ballet. "As soon as I had a little bit of money to spend, I started to donate to the Sydney ballet," she says. "Every country, every city, should have their own dance and theatre company."

When Ms Walsh moved to Singapore three years ago, she wanted to continue supporting her favourite performing art, and made a donation to the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT).

"The Sydney Ballet is a very young company – about 40 years old – in comparison to other companies. SDT is even younger," she says. She recognises how important it is to support a company in its nascent stages of development, stressing the necessity of a ballet company in the cultural landscape and how difficult it is for one to "mature and become part of public's psyche."

The SDT also realised the exigency of the situation. In an effort to aid the development of the company, it began the Ambassador's Circle, a social network of donors who will be privy to the inner workings of ballet productions, involving the group in the process of the acquisition of new works for the company's repertoire. Ms Walsh is one of its first members.

"It's exciting and I would really like to see where it goes and where it grows," she says, adding that the donors were treated

to a private show of *Concerto Barocco*, one of the three dances for the SDT's upcoming triple bill, *Season of Brilliance*. "It would be great if it eventually had a fund-raising aspect to it, and a more developed social aspect to it. In Sydney, you would do a lot of things with other donors like going on tours and cruises, and I hope that this explores things like that."

While she is willing to offer insight from her past experience with the Sydney Ballet, Ms Walsh is loathe to compare companies with each other in terms of their performance level, stating that she dislikes the snobbery that pervades the art form.

"I think ballet is not about the cult of the dancer. I think it should be about the company and the team," she says. "When the Royal London Ballet came to Sydney, people kept on saying they were so much better. I think it is irrelevant that the visiting company is better. You don't commit to a company because they are the best but because of something else, but because you should support your local performing arts. If I lived in New York, I would support the ballet there."

However, she does recognise a few unique perks about being a patron to SDT. "It is a thrill to see Asian dancers onstage," she says with a smile. "It's kind of a novelty for a change."

amandadg@sph.com.sg

A triple bill of dance appreciation



Unknown Territories: Traces the journey of a couple as they go through a wedding ceremony with ritual after ritual being played out on stage

By **UMA SHANKARI**

UNDER its new artistic director Janek Schergen, the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT) has taken on the task of educating local audiences about dance appreciation.

And one way to do this, of course, is to bring previously unseen renowned works here. With its latest triple bill, *A Season Of Brilliance*, SDT will be doing just that.

The programme will kick off with famed Russian choreographer George Balanchine's *Concerto Barocco*. The 21-minute piece – which first premiered in 1941 and has since become a classic in the New York City Ballet's repertory – is noted for how difficult and technically demanding it is. Set to Johann Sebastian Bach's *Concerto in D Minor For Two Violins*, the work explores the development of classical dancing as a counterpart to music.

Schergen says that *Concerto Barocco* was a classic that deserved to be staged here: "If audiences in London, New York and Hong Kong have been able to witness it, why not the audience in Singapore?"

And while the piece is difficult, Schergen has no doubts that the SDT dancers are more than capable of putting on a good show.

Concerto Barocco will be followed by Finnish choreographer Jorma Elo's *Glow-Stop*, which SDT first staged at the Singapore Arts Festival last year, where it was enthusiastically received. SDT decided to re-stage it as it anticipates a different audience this time round. The triple bill will be staged at the University Cultural Centre as part of its dance festival, *Dance Reflections 2009*.

While *Concerto Barocco* is a classic, *Glow-Stop* is an evolving work that comes across as youthful and energetic, says Schergen, adding: "Everyone loves seeing *Glow-Stop*."

The evening will conclude with late Singaporean choreographer Goh Choo San's *Unknown Territories*. The dance traces the journey of a couple as they go through a wedding ceremony with ritual after ritual being played out on stage. "It is about heritage," explains Schergen.

And while *Glow-Stop* starts fast and slows down towards the end, *Unknown Territories* starts off slow and builds up to an eventual frenzy of movement. This means that the evening will end on a high note for the audience.



TAN NGAP HENG

Glow-Stop: Is an evolving work that comes across as youthful and energetic

The Singapore Dance Theatre's 'A Season Of Brilliance' will be performed tonight and tomorrow night at 8pm at the University Cultural Centre Hall. Tickets from \$30 to \$50 available from Sistic