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Intimate setting: This re-staging of *Giselle* will benefit from a single artistic vision, as it is the first time Schergen, the artistic director, will set both Act I and II on SDT. The arrangement of the theatre's seats will allow the audience to get 'up close and personal' as the tragedy unfolds

Giselle, an apt farewell for Victoria Theatre

This may be the last time we see the SDT perform there, reports **MELISSA QUEK**

BEFORE the Victoria Theatre as we know it goes dark for the last time, she will be given a royal send-off by Singapore Dance Theatre's (SDT) performance of *Giselle*.

A fitting tribute, as SDT's history is wrapped up in the theatre. For a long time their earliest performances were presented at Victoria Theatre.

Even artistic director Janek Schergen remembers his first performance there 28 years ago with the Washington Ballet and notes how its personality has stood the test of time and brutal renovations.

In his choice of productions, Schergen, a member of the steering committee for the reconstruction project, displays his familiarity

with the theatre. While other ballets might require a large cast and massive sets, *Giselle* is the ideal piece to capitalise on the intimate and historic setting of Victoria Theatre. Not only does the drama of *Giselle*'s haunting love story translate well to a small stage but the arrangement of the seats allows the audience to get "up close and personal" as the tragedy unfolds and the characters unravel.

This re-staging of *Giselle* will benefit from a single artistic vision, as it is the first time Schergen will set both Act I and II on the company. Initially invited to set this ballet in 1999, Schergen declined. When he was next asked he chose to set only Act I. Now he will finally be providing the production with a consistent thread running through the entire piece.

With this, Schergen will defy the

stereotype that Asians are unable to be emotional. He knows that his company members are equal to the task, having put forth what he describes as "tremendously emotional performances" in the past, therefore he hopes that this production will succeed not only on its technical merits but on the dramatic strengths of its cast. As he says: "If you can watch *Giselle* and not feel anything, it has failed." Such a performance would truly make a moving farewell. And this may very well be the last time we see SDT performing at the Victoria Theatre.

Under the present renovation plans the stage would be smaller than it is at present, making it too small for either a full-scale ballet or contemporary ballet production. The facade of the buildings will be retained and some of the original 1905 features will be restored, but

given the constraints of the original shell of the building, which was designed to be a memorial hall and not a theatre, the seating capacity and width of the stage is limited. This makes the new stage better suited for intimate theatrical performances.

So for those who have fond memories of experiencing vertigo in the "nose bleed" sections of the auditorium, this may be your last chance, because the 149-year-old grand lady of neoclassical architecture is updating her auditorium with better site lines, acoustics and staging resources. When the doors finally re-open in 2013, audience members will arrive at a theatre with a sense of grandeur and anticipation that reflects her namesake.

'Giselle' will be staged from Mar 11 to 14 at the Victoria Theatre. Tickets from \$48 to \$88 are available from www.sixty.com