

# *A Vision of Dance:* SDT's 20/20 *Celebrations*

*What does it take to create and sustain a professional dance company? A healthy portion of gumption, two dozen lithe and limber bodies – ever-ready to take the stage by storm – and most importantly, a vision of dance that has never wavered since the day it was articulated*



THE VISION: "TO BE AN ESTABLISHED PROFESSIONAL dance company that is internationally recognised for its strength in both classical and contemporary repertoire and that showcases choreography that crosses boundaries."

If you have not yet had the pleasure of acquainting yourself with the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT), here are 20 things you may like to learn of as you join SDT in a year of celebrations:

SDT's **1**st-ever performance was for the Singapore Festival of Arts in June 1988, where a programme consisting Goh Choo San's Beginnings and Graeme Murphy's Sequenza VII was presented by its then-stable of just seven dancers.

The **2** co-founders of SDT are the current Artistic Director, Goh Soo Khim, and the late Anthony Then. Both were co-artistic directors of the Ballet Group of Singapore's National Dance Company, which was formed in 1984.

Participation at international dance competitions like the highly-prestigious Asia Pacific Ballet Competition has yielded excellent results for **3** of SDT's dancers, including Xia Haiying's Grand Prix Prize at the 7th Asia Pacific Ballet Competition in 1999, Zhang Jun's 2nd Prize at the same event in 2001, and Fu Liang's win of the 1st Prize at the competition in 2005.

Under the Adult Dance Classes, you can choose from **4** different genres of instruction: Ballet, Jazz Ballet, Contemporary Dance, and Pilates. Sessions take place in the evenings and weekends to cater to working adults who are keen to be exposed to dance and exercise techniques for both health and enrichment purposes.

SDT has developed **5** Arts Education Programmes that are delivered throughout the year at schools through innovative and engaging 'show-and-tell' formats. "Introduction to Ballet" and "Dance Spectrum" allow students to learn about ballet basics and the central teachings behind contemporary dance, while "Behind The Scenes", "Body Moves", and "Stepping Out" go one step further to avail students with an opportunity to pick up pointers about dance improvisation and even to perform in front of a small audience.

Upon the successful staging of Swan Lake in December 2007, SDT has now performed **6** of the seven perennial classical ballets: "Swan Lake", "Giselle", "Sleeping Beauty", "Romeo and Juliet", "The Nutcracker", and "Cinderella". The odd one out is "Don Quixote", which the company has



done excerpts from but not as a full-length ballet.

The original **7** dancers of the SDT were: Jamaludin Jalil, Chantal Pestana, Elizabeth Thng, Ricardo Culalic, Donato Ferrer, Mario Esperanza, and Ellie Lai. Even then as it is now, the SDT was a veritable melting pot of cultures and diverse backgrounds with one unifying commonality: an unyielding passion for dance.

As with many other international dance companies, SDT has a make-up of dancers that extends across different nationalities. In the existing cohort, a total of **8** countries are represented, including Australia, Belgium, China, France, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore.

**9** years ago, the very first staging of Giselle by Singapore Dance Theatre, in December 1999, was hailed by Dance Magazine as “a triumph” for its beautiful sets and costumes. This March, a special edition of Giselle, set in Fort Canning Park, will be the curtain-raiser for SDT’s 20th Anniversary Celebrations.

Touches, a commemorative book, was produced to mark SDT’s **10**th Anniversary in 1998. In his congratulatory foreword for this publication, SDT’s then Patron, the late President Ong Teng Cheong, said, “The SDT has enriched the nation’s cultural development and contributed immensely to Singapore’s strive for cultural excellence. Its performances unfailingly guarantee high technical accomplishment and its works reflect the best of choreographers from around the world.”

There are currently **11** female dancers in the company. As full-time dancers with SDT, all artists have to attend daily classes in the morning, followed by rehearsals for upcoming shows in the afternoons. This ritual happens six days a week, and it is what keeps the dancers supple and prepared to face the challenges of tackling both the classical and contemporary works within SDT’s range of repertoire.

Jeffrey Tan, who was appointed as Resident Choreographer of SDT in 2005, has produced a to-date tally of **12** works for the company, including, “Tribal Rhythm”, “Trio”, “Duet”, “Façade”, “Elan”,

“Memoire”, “The Little Mermaid”, “The Nutcracker”, “Last Watch”, “F.U.S.E.”, “Negro Y Blanco”, and “Breath Of Love”.

What began in 1995 as a groundbreaking and bold attempt to bring ballet to the masses – Ballet Under The Stars (BUTS) – has today become one of the most popular outdoor shows in Singapore’s busy calendar of arts activities. This year, the **13**th edition of BUTS will feature significant pieces within SDT’s 20-year repertoire of both classical and contemporary works. Visit the SDT website to vote for your favourite dance and play a part in programming this very special event.

Since 1988, SDT has been involved in a total of **14** special showcases at the Singapore Festival of Arts (now known as Singapore Arts Festival) and the Singapore Festival of Dance. In 2008, SDT will present Continuum, a contemporary triple bill of works by David Dawson, Jorma Elo, and Graham Lustig at the Esplanade Theatre as part of this year’s Artsfest.

The Choo-San Goh Choreographic Awards will be entering the **15**th year in 2008, and over this period of time, 85 works have received support amounting to an overall total of more the US\$725,000. Truly, this ongoing benefit to the world of dance is a testament of the legacy of Goh Choo San, one of Singapore’s most famous and prolific exports in the field of arts.

It has been **16** long years since SDT first staged Company Founder and Co-Artistic Director, Anthony Then’s version of “The Nutcracker” in 1992. In December this year, Jeffrey Tan’s revised update of the full-length crowd-and-child-pleaser will grace the stage to set the mood for Christmas. Don’t miss it!

As a company that proudly flies the Singapore flag when it tours overseas, SDT has had a prolific track record of visiting over 20 cities in a series of **17** tours. These touring stops include Shanghai, Beijing, Melbourne, Mexico, London, Manila, Houston, Jakarta, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur.

The **18**th Century was the Golden Age of Ballet, with many of the most-loved classical works being produced during that era. Of these, SDT will be

performing “Giselle”, “The Nutcracker”, and “Cinderella” in March and December 2008, and March 2009 respectively.

A total of **19** ghostly creatures called “wilis” will appear in “Giselle In The Park”. “Wilis” are vengeful spirits of women whose hearts have been broken by their lovers before the day of matrimony. A turning point for the ballet is reached when Giselle, the lead character, decides to save the life of the man who caused her death instead of exacting revenge, thereby highlighting the romantic theme of ‘love beyond the grave’.

While life is full of changes and people come and go as a norm in any company, some of SDT’s dancers have stayed long enough to deserve a special mention as a long-serving member of the company. Of these, Mohamed Noor Sarman, the Assistant Ballet Master and Senior Artiste with SDT, has reached his **20**th year mark, Jeffrey Tan has hit 17 years, and Xia Haiying, who joined SDT as an apprentice in 1993, has clocked 15 years with the company. ♦

Giselle In The Park will be performed by Singapore Dance Theatre from 27 to 30 March 2008, 7.30pm, at Fort Canning Park. Tickets are priced \$26 (free entrance for children under 6 years-old), and are available from SISTIC (all SISTIC outlets, website: [www.sistic.com.sg](http://www.sistic.com.sg), and hotline: +65 6348 5555) and SDT. For more information on the Singapore Dance Theatre’s 20th Anniversary programmes, please visit [www.singaporedance theatre.com](http://www.singaporedance theatre.com).

Readers of Affluent can win 3 pairs of tickets to Giselle In The Park. Just tell us what anniversary SDT is celebrating in 2008 and email your responses with your name, contact number and identity card or passport numbers to [paul@affluent-media.com](mailto:paul@affluent-media.com). To receive a direct 20% discount on tickets, please email your request to [ticketing@singaporedance theatre.com](mailto:ticketing@singaporedance theatre.com).