

Ballet and ethnic dances under the stars

June Cheong

THERE will be more than ballet under the stars at Fort Canning this weekend.

The annual outdoor event staged by Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT), now in its 12th year, will showcase traditional ethnic dance for the first time.

The contemporary and classical ballet company has invited three other dance groups to perform a segment titled *Roots Of Asia's Rhythm at Ballet Under The Stars*.

Indian performing arts company Bhaskar's Arts Academy will present a Bharatanatyam dance; Malay performance troupe Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts will perform six traditional Malay dances; and Chinese dance troupe Dance Ensemble Singapore will entertain audiences with a traditional Chinese dance.

SDT's general manager Alvan Loo, 35, says: "We hope to remind people that dance extends beyond ballet and also to connect with people who are primarily interested in these traditional dance forms."

The three groups will perform at 7.30 each night before SDT's main performance. The main bill comprises premieres of three new works by SDT resident choreographer Jeffrey Tan, SDT ballet master Paul De Masson and former SDT ballet master and renowned choreographer Edmund Stripe.

While Tan created a 20-minute piece exploring the irrepressible Spanish spirit, inspired by his attachment with renowned Madrid-based dance company Compañia Nacional De Danza last year, De Masson came up with an eight-minute dance extolling the virtues and beauty of the rose and Stripe crafted a 20-minute piece "saluting Goh Choo San".

The late Goh Choo San was a prominent dance choreographer with more than 30 ballets to his name. He was also the brother of Goh Soo Khim, the co-founder and current artistic director of SDT.

SDT's assistant artistic director Janek Schergen, 55, says: "When you put a programme together, you think of it as a meal with an appetiser, a main course and dessert."



SF PHOTO: LIM WUI UANG

MAIN COURSE: Singapore Dance Theatre dancers will present a feast of three new ballet works at Fort Canning.

"Edmund's piece is very fast and bright. Jeffrey's piece is slower and has a real earthiness to it while Paul's piece is a short one to introduce the audience to the rest of the evening."

Last year's Ballet Under The Stars also featured a triple-bill of contemporary ballet works and drew 6,000 people over two weekends. Loo hopes to attract the same number this year.

Asked why the performance dates have been trimmed to one weekend, he says:

"Singapore's arts calendar has such a wide scope and there'll definitely be some level of cannibalisation if we stretch it to two weekends."

Despite fewer performances, he promises that the event will be bigger and more inclusive than last year's.

The budget for the outdoor extravaganza remains the same, hovering between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

Schools have been roped in for the second time running, with 24 school dance groups performing onstage before the main performance on all three nights.

SDT has also partnered with Hotel Rendezvous to create special picnic baskets which audiences can pre-order and pick up at the door.

➤ Ballet Under The Stars performs at the Fort Canning Green from tomorrow until Sunday. Gates open at 5pm and tickets cost \$16 (with concession) and \$20, available from Sistic (www.sistic.com.sg; tel: 6348-5555).

➤ To place orders for picnic baskets, log on to www.singaporedance theatre.com or call Yvonne Ang on 6335-1810.

'When you put a programme together, you think of it as a meal with an appetiser, a main course and dessert'

Janek Schergen, SDT's assistant artistic director