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## FINE FEATHERS

Costume designer Virginia Chu set to make fine birds of Swan Lake dancers

one of her biggest gigs in 2004, working as the senior costumer for the launch of Disneyland the following year.

"We did the whole park and it was non-stop crazy!" she said. So, how different is it dressing up a guy in a mouse suit compared to ballerinas in tutus?

Before she could dress Mickey up in a red beanie with matching Chinese silk shirt and Minnie in a red *cheongsam*, Chu said they had to get approval from the main office "before we could change even a button".

But in terms of creativity, ballet productions are more difficult and involves a bit of ... maths?

"Dancers move a lot so you'll need to calculate the movement. The 'swans' may do 20 pirouettes, so you can't make the skirt too big or too long," she said.

When Chu was a student, her dream, she said, was to do Broadway shows. Now that she has done practically all the Broadway and ballet productions that have passed through the region — this could possibly include an Asian tour of *Cinderella* next year — her next goal is to set up a *haute couture* fashion label.

But what we'd really like to know from this costume expert is: Does she secretly wear her own designs when no one's watching?

"Never! I like to make people look good, but I'm always wearing jeans and T-shirts. I'm the messy one," she said with a laugh.

MAYO MARTIN  
mayo@mediacorp.com.sg

THEY say clothes maketh the man. In Virginia Chu's case, she knows it can also maketh — or breakth — a show.

The veteran Hong Kong costume designer (picture) has seen her fair share of wardrobe malfunctions: From a woman's dress catching on a guy's jacket, to a skirt coming undone, and even a Janet Jackson moment.

But after 17 years of dressing up everyone from touring Broadway shows such as *Cats* to Hong Kong Disneyland's Mickey Mouse and co, the 36-year-old is prepared for just about any scenario. This time around, she's in charge of a flock of "swans".

For Singapore Dance Theatre's production of the ballet classic, *Swan Lake*, which opens tomorrow at the Esplanade Theatre, Chu created about 90 handcrafted costumes and numerous headpieces, wigs and jewellery.

But don't expect fluffy feathers — the dancers won't look like birds, Chu promised. Instead, "every girl will sparkle when they go onstage" — thanks to the use of lots of Swarovski crystals.

A hands-on designer who's "a bit crazy", Chu said that when she designs costumes, she does everything herself, right down to dyeing the fabrics.

After a decade-long stint at the Hong Kong Ballet, she landed

WHAT: SWAN LAKE  
WHEN: DEC 20-23, 8PM  
WHERE: ESPLANADE THEATRE  
TICKETS: \$38 TO \$28 FROM ONLINE

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