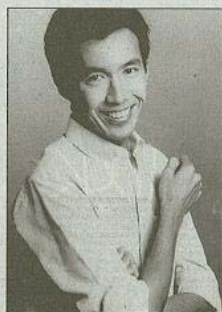




ST PHOTOS: DOMINIC WONG



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TO THE POINTE: Twenty dancers (left) featuring Goh Chan Hon, the niece of Goh Choo San (above), will perform excerpts from his body of work to mark the 20th anniversary of his death at the age of 39.

Moving tribute to Goh

A life that burns twice as bright burns half as long. That is true of the late Goh Choo San whose works are featured in a special performance

June Cheong
ARTS REPORTER

BALLET runs in her blood. Goh Chan Hon (inset), 36, comes from Singapore's undisputed first family of dance, the Gohs.

Her father is Goh Choo Chiat, artistic director of Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver, while her aunt, Goh Soo Khim, is the co-founder and current artistic director of Singapore's largest dance company, the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT).

Her late uncle is Goh Choo San, the acclaimed Singaporean choreographer who shot to worldwide fame in the 1970s and 1980s for the ballets he created for The Washington Ballet.

Now she will dance excerpts from eight of her uncle's ballets, along with the 20 dancers from the SDT in a performance commemorating the 20th anniversary of his death at the age of 39 from Aids.

The two-hour performance, *The Legacy Of Goh Choo San: In Memory And Tribute*, is on tomorrow and Saturday at the Esplanade

Theatre. Goh, a principal dancer with the National Ballet Of Canada, says: "It's so meaningful that we're paying tribute to the tremendous work that my uncle had done and that I can dance them in Singapore, my uncle's homeland.

"The majority of my uncles and aunts live here and they don't get to see me dance very often."

Born in Beijing and raised in Vancouver, she last performed in Singapore in 2003, with the SDT.

It is perhaps fitting that she is the dancer who starts off the tribute performance for Goh. His last ballet, *Ballade*, was created especially for her in 1986.

She recalls wistfully: "I was still training in my parents' studio then, and he was so passionate and animated.

"He somehow took a 15-year-old girl who'd done only classical works and brought her into a world of artistry. He taught me how to speak with my body rather than just make a movement."

Goh created 36 ballets in his lifetime, based on classical ballet movements and characterised by fast, energetic motion, fluid formations and sleek lines.

After graduating with a degree in biochemistry from the then University of Singapore to fulfil his father's wishes that he acquire a proper education, he left Singapore in 1970, dancing with the Dutch National Ballet in Amster-



dam. He then joined The Washington Ballet when it was founded in 1976 and became its resident choreographer and, later, associate artistic director until his death in 1987.

The Washington Post dance critic Alan Kriegsman said in 1985 that he "propelled the Washington Ballet to international status on the jet stream of his talent".

Says Janek Schergen, 55, the production's staging director:

"Most people throw the idea of creating classically based ballets out as they don't want to be compared to the masters like George Balanchine. But Choo San was fearless in that."

Dancer Goh adds: "Now that I'm dancing Uncle Choo San's works so many years later, I try to imagine him in the studio and how he'd have described a movement."

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> *The Legacy Of Goh Choo San: In Memory And Tribute* is at Esplanade Theatre tomorrow and Saturday at 8pm. Tickets for the gala performance tomorrow are from \$100 to \$500 and are available only from Singapore Dance Theatre on 6338-0611 or through ticketing@singaporedance theatre.com. Tickets for Saturday's performance range from \$28 to \$68 and are available from Sistic (www.sistic.com.sg; tel: 6348-5555).