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DANCE MASTER

Twenty years on, choreographer Goh Choo San is celebrated with a special show

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G OH Chan Hon was 16 when she performed what would be her uncle's last piece, *Ballade*.

"He made it for my parents' school," said the now 30-something principal dancer of The National Ballet of Canada.

This was back in October 1986 at the Goh Ballet Company – now Academy – in Vancouver. And having been dancing professionally for almost 20 years, she says, "I now understand what significance my uncle's works play in the dance world."

Her uncle, of course, is none other than the late choreographer Goh Choo San (picture). This year marks the 20th death anniversary of the Cultural Medalion awardee and to date, Singapore's most prominent figure in the dance community.

On Friday and Saturday, Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT) – whose artistic director Goh Soo Khim is Goh's younger sister – will stage *The Legacy of Goh Choo San*, a show featuring 24 of his short works, plus pieces from choreographers Christopher Wheeldon, Val Caniparoli and Graham Lustig.

All three have been recipients from The Choo San Goh and H Robert Magee Foundation, a group founded post-humously in 1991 to support budding choreographers.

To date, the foundation has given US\$700,000 (\$1.06 million) to 78 choreographers worldwide.

At Friday's morning rehearsals, Chan Hon shared her excitement at performing one of her *shu shu's* – Chinese for "uncle" – pieces, *Momentum*.

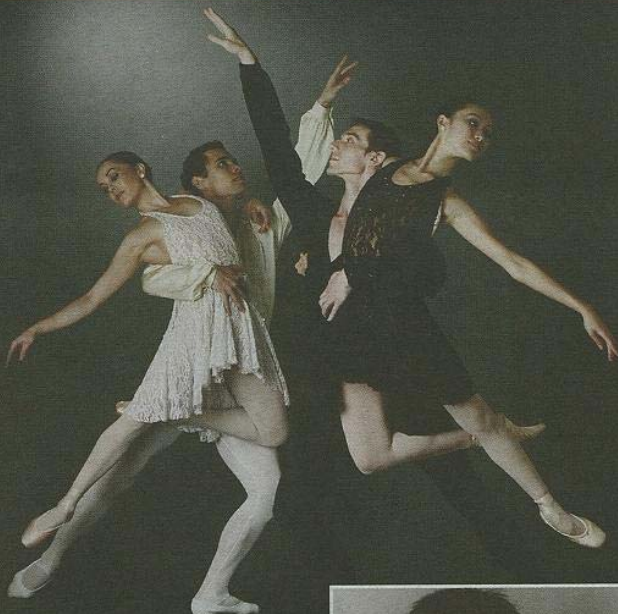
Chan Hon, who remembers his summer visits, described her late uncle as a "very easy-going guy" who was as passionate in the studio as he was "very much a human being" outside it.

It was only during her teenage years when she realised the "magnitude of his genius".

Her praises were echoed by Janek Schergen, 55, SDT's Swedish assistant artistic director and a close friend of the late choreographer.

"Singapore produced the most prestigious Asian ballet choreographer. He has even created a ballet for (Mikhail) Baryshnikov – at Baryshnikov's request!" he said, referring to *Configurations*, a 1981 piece Goh did for the American Ballet Theatre, where the acclaimed Russian was then principal dancer.

The *pas de deux* of the piece will also



be performed at the SDT show.

Given his achievement, is Goh getting enough respect in Singapore?

Schergen is baffled why certain people are determined not to acknowledge this, presumably because the choreographer hit his artistic stride away from Singapore.

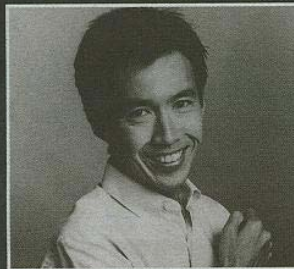
"If someone is that good, you have to let them be international," he said.

"Every single choreographic talent in the world leaves home. The really smart places bring them back."

The Legacy of Goh Choo San intends to do just that. Schergen described Goh as an "enormously intelligent man" whose works were sophisticated and extremely fast-paced.

"They didn't bore you and they weren't eye-candy," he said.

According to Schergen, Goh was an eclectic lover of dance who admired American ballet choreographer George Balanchine just as much as he did Lin Hwai-min, founder of the Taiwanese contemporary dance group Cloud Gate Dance Theatre.



A MASTER'S WORK: The late Goh Choo San (inset) choreographed *Double Contrasts* (top).

"You'd think that when somebody dies, their work dies with them," said Chan Hon of her uncle, who died aged 39 in New York on Nov 28, 1987.

"But his (works) live on through new generations of dancers. He was able to see things that people just couldn't see."

WHAT: THE LEGACY OF GOH CHOO SAN
WHEN: FRIDAY AND SATURDAY AT 8PM
WHERE: ESPLANADE THEATRE,
TICKETS FROM \$28 AT SISTIC