

# A ballet legend remembered

> dance

THE LEGACY OF GOH CHOO SAN  
Singapore Dance Theatre  
Esplanade Theatre, Last Friday

THE legacy of Goh Choo San is manifold. Consider the number of lives the ballet legend has touched, even posthumously through his foundation's choreographic grants.

Then there is his body of work – 36 ballets – which has inspired and enthralled a few generations of dancers and ballet buffs.

This was most apparent in his 1978 piece *Fives* which concluded the Singapore Dance Theatre's (SDT) tribute performance for him, *The Legacy Of Goh Choo San*.

*Fives* possessed the distinctive traits of Goh's style – lively group work, quick steps and intricate pas de deux – and the SDT dancers delivered his choreography with sprightly glee.

As they wove in and out of the labyrinthine formations, one got the sense that the dancers had morphed into musical notes and were sparkling off the page into a thrilling harmony.

Although some of the eight excerpts presented appeared a trifle dated, the occasion itself seems to have brought out the best in the dancers.

Dancers Xia Haiying, Sakura Shimizu and Natalie Clarke merit particular mention.

In a bright, energetic piece created by American Repertory Ballet's artistic director Graham Lustig earlier this year in tribute to Goh, Shimizu and Clarke as well as four other dancers skipped and rolled their way into conviviality, luxuriating in the bouncy movements and upbeat rhythms.

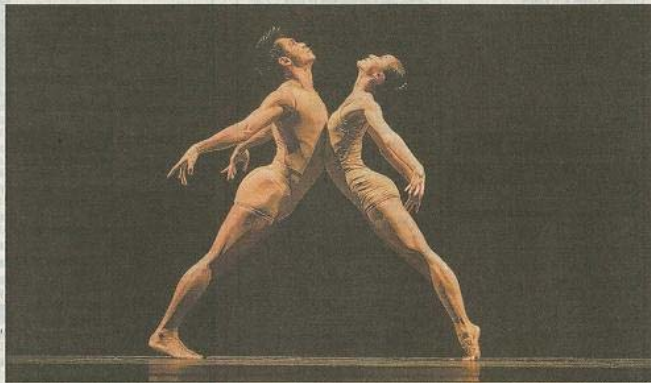


PHOTO: TAN NGIAP HENG

Later, Xia and SDT resident choreographer Jeffrey Tan enthralled the audience with an intense, sensual pas de deux in *Facade*.

Choreographed by Tan in 1999, the passionate affair reminded one of his latent choreographic talent.

Showing that his dancing days are far from over, Tan twirled Xia around his taut, muscular frame with graceful ease, even seating her lithe self on his shoulder blades at one point.

As they slid up and down each other in a melee of leaps and dives, melting into the crevices of the other's body, they formed a curious creature consumed by divergent directions but salvaged by identical passions.

But the star of the evening was Goh's niece, Goh Chan Hon. The principal dancer of the National Ballet of Canada graced the solemn night with only two pas de deux but her appearance was magical.

In the second movement of Goh's 1979 piece *Momentum*, she and dancer Kuik Swee Boon tore through the dynamic movements with a focused clarity of gesture and mood.

Later, as an ailing courtesan Marguerite, Chan Hon was the emblem of love and fear, trembling with expectation and the cold, clammy fear of death and, thus, eternal separation from her lover.

A strong, precise dancer, she appeared as light as a feather in Kuik's ready arms and her delicate swoops through the air revealed a lofty elegance inherent in her composure.

The performance was an illuminating study of Goh's balletic signatures, from his fondness for big arm movements to his fluid configurations of dancers (in imitation of nature).

His mastery of the intricacies of pas de deux was accentuated by the dancers' well-honed chemistry and technical prowess.

Overheard among the audience that night were whispers that the eight pieces showcased brought back many fond memories for long-time ballet aficionados. No doubt, new ones were made then too.

**TOUCH OF CLASS:**  
The dancers delivered Goh Choo San's choreography with sprightly glee.

June Cheong