

A dazzling tribute to an influential artiste

By CHEAH UI-HOON

IT'S easy to forget home-grown talent, especially if the artiste in question died 20 years ago, and if his career found a platform overseas rather than in Singapore.

The Singapore Dance Theatre's (SDT) tribute to Goh Choo San last week then was timely, and one of the group's best performances here – not just technically or from the point of choreography, but because it was a production which really flowed from the heart.

Amidst the excerpts of critical reviews and accolades about Goh's works and fresh tributes that were projected on to the screens on stage, the SDT dancers brought to life the choreography and movements that were quintessentially Goh, who was resident choreographer of the Washington Ballet from 1976 to 1987.

The first part of the night's three-part programme saw excerpts from Goh's early works – their neo-classical formations



Fluid performance: Kuik Swee Boon and Goh Chan Hon in the 2nd movement *pas de deux* from Goh Choo San's 'Momentum'

and lines quite evident. *Momentum* (1979), *Configurations* (1981), and *Schubert Symphony* (1985) each gave us a glimpse of Goh's choreographic style and stamp – arched hands and thrust hips, fast and fluid movements coupled with tender *pas de deus*.

The second part saw two works by choreographers Graham Lustig (artistic director of The American Ballet) and Jeffrey Tan (resident choreographer of the SDT), alongside two more excerpts from Goh's *In the Glow of the Night* (1982) and *Double Contrasts* (1978).

Lustig's *Fanfare* was a special tribute to Goh, and made its world premiere here. It was a lovely piece, full of energy and grace, the intricate but symmetrical patterns created on stage echoing Goh's flair for visually interesting formations as well.

Tan's piece, *Facade*

(1999), stood out for its elaborate, evocative duet; its intimate tone created by the lighting. Tan and co-dancer Xia Hai Ying were stunning in this piece, which saw the two dancers in balletic acrobatic pairing whether they were wrapped up around or leaning on each other. And the guest stars for the night – Goh's niece, Goh Chan Hon, the principal dancer of the National Ballet of Canada, and former SDT dancer Kuik Swee Boon (now with Compania Nacional de Danza) – further lit up the stage with their duets.

The final part of the evening saw the more "exotic" dances – Goh's *Birds of*

Paradise (1979), *Unknown Territory* (1986), and a piece by Val Caniparoli, choreographer of the San Francisco Ballet. The night ended with *Fives* (1978) – which, although created 29 years ago, was still incredibly fresh and iconic, its mathematical premise brought forth by the geometrical interweaving of a corp of dancers on stage.

The Legacy of Goh Choo San: In Memory and Tribute was a two-hour celebration of Goh's works and the creations that he inspired in other choreographers. It was only a window to his repertoire of 36 works he created in his lifetime, but an effective one.