

Review: SDT's 25th Anniversary Gala

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How does one celebrate 25 years of achievement? It must have been a difficult choice to choose works that represent a company that has performed such a variety of works over the years. While the performances are a chequered success, Singapore Dance Theatre still deserves to be proud for treating the audience to a wonderful night of ballet.

The show opened with Balanchine's *Serenade*, a neo-classical work that consists of really beautiful stage pictures. While the company performed it with grace and elegance, more polish is needed as the intention of the choreography was a little murky halfway through. Next, when the curtain was raised to reveal Rosa Park and Chen Peng performing the *Sleeping Beauty* pas de deux, I was struck by how beautiful the costumes were. Coupled with the precision of the first few steps, one certainly cannot deny that ballet is magical and where fairy tales truly come to life. What unfolded was a display of impeccable technique that was unfortunately marred by moments of self-consciousness. Even during Chen's solo, while his leaps are timed perfectly, his energy seems to be found wanting despite the music's trajectory was on a crescendo. What is meant to be a joyous wedding between the couple appears to be a cordial meeting between acquaintances. This is certainly a shame for it robs them of the well deserved applause for effort, technique and timing.

Things certainly began to look up with Goh Choo San's *Beginnings* as the chemistry between both couples were palpable from the get-go. As with the other dancers, their display of technique left the audience with nothing but praises. The first half of the programme was brought to a close by the zany *Zin!* choreographed by Nils Christie. While I may not appreciate the slightly campy choreography, the team work and skill needed is certainly commendable. What is most prized is the sheer exuberance and energy that the dancers gave to the audience that made us want to jump up and dance with them. A great way to end the first half with such a high.

With the audience was still buzzing from *Zin!*, the company really show what they are made of with the premier of Edwaard Liang's *Opus 25*. As drama derives from tension, Liang's dramatic work is gripping and will put any dance company to the test as they have to interweave movements of fluidity and pointedness into the wider tapestry of the choreography. Additionally, feats of flexibility are needed with the lifts as well as other manoeuvres. The company really stepped up to the plate and proved that they can handle this demanding choreography with much aplomb. As the red cloth flushes the stage and the dancers are recalled back to the wings, what followed is a brilliant showcase of strength, intensity, chemistry and showmanship – Lana Jones and Daniel Gaudiello, from The Australian Ballet, performing a pas de deux from *Don Quixote*. The pair was simply enthralling as the audience were at the edge of their seat absorbing every single move. With the flick of the wrist and Gaudiello striking the final pose, I was tempted to let out an "Ole!" to commend the pair's first class performance.

Last but certainly not the least, the evening was brought to a close by the third movement of Goh Choo San's Fives. This beautiful work that relies on the dancers' musicality and awareness of one's body. As the programme booklet describes the dance as creating sculptural pictures, what I saw before me was 15 gleaming elements that shift and move to create really brilliant sculptures. A strong end to a night of enchantment.

Despite starting on shaky ground, the Singapore Dance Theatre truly puts the audience in a celebratory and congratulatory mood as we cheer them on for how far they have come. I wish them a very happy anniversary and may they leap to greater heights in years to come.