

15 OCT 1985

PRESS RELEASE

PUBLIC PERFORMANCE BY THE NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY

The National Dance Company of the Ministry of Community Development, will present two public performances on 28 and 29 Sep 85 at the Victoria Theatre at 8.00 pm. Tickets priced at \$3, \$5 and \$8 will be available from 6 Sep 85 at the Central Booking Office (Victoria Theatre), Tangs Superstore and Cold Storage (Centrepoint).

2 Preparation for the performance began in Dec 84. Involving more than 60 dancers, the performance will feature eight newly choreographed dances of Chinese, Malay and Indian origin representing the works and creations of some of the best choreographers in Singapore.

3 The highlight of the programme is the dance drama entitled "Hua Mulan" choreographed by Madam Lee Shu Fen. It is a story describing how a filial and courageous girl disguises herself as a man to join the army in place of her ageing father. Other interesting programmes include a romantic modern ballet, "Farewell to a Warrior" choreographed by Shen Zi-Hua, a contemporary Indian dance drama, "Meera's Dream"

choreographed by Madhavi Krishnan and a colourful Javanese dance choreographed by Som Said. Details of the programme and the synopses of each item are attached as Annex A.

4 A dress rehearsal of the performances will be held at the Practice Room of Drama Centre on 10 Sep 85 at 8.00 pm. Members of the press and SBC are invited to cover the occasion.

5 Since its inception in 1970, the National Dance Company has been known for being the pioneer in introducing composite dances reflecting the multi-cultural character of Singapore. The Company has represented the Republic at many overseas cultural festivals and cultural exchange programmes, the most recent being the 4th Asean Festival of Performing Arts in Manila in July. A brief of the Company is attached as Annex B.

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

5 Sep 85

PROGRAMME1 Tarian Variasi Batik (Variations of Batik)

Batik is commonly worn as part of the Malay outfit. In this item, the softness and beauty of the batik adds creativity to the movements and variations of the dance. The sound of porcelain spoons add life to the dance.

Choreographer: Som Said

2 Buruh (Labourers)

The feelings and toil of the labourers are expressed in the symbolic dance movements.

In a conscious effort towards higher productivity, the labourers begin their work from sunrise to sunset with determination, patience and vigour.

Choreographer: Mohd Na'aim Pani

3 Meera's Dream

Meera was born in a royal family of Rattam Singh of Merta. The legend goes that since the age of five, Meera surrendered her complete self to Lord Krishna whom she believed to be her husband. She talked to Him, sang for Him, danced for Him and finally became one with her Lord.

This dance is an excerpt from this legend where Meera whilst dancing with her friends dreams of dancing with Lord Krishna.

Choreographer: Madhavi Krishnan.

4 霸王別姬 (Farewell to a Warrior)

This dance depicts Chu Bawang (楚霸王) bidding farewell to Yu Fei (虞姬) after his troops were routed by the enemy troops. The scenes in the dance are: proposing a toast, comforting, sword dance, merrymaking, suicide by throat-cutting and bidding the last farewell.

Choreographer: Shen Zi Hua

5 Ayoh Berlenggang (Come Lets Swing)

This dance exhibits a combination of the varied techniques and style in Malay dance.

Choreographer: Shakni Hj Jainuri

6 Tillana

A virtuoso dance. The finale of a Bharata Natyam item. The Bharata Natyam is one of the four main divisions of the Indian dance. The dancers go through the various exquisite patterns, movements and features of the dance.

Choreographer: Madhavi Krishnan

7 Putri Ayu (Princess Ayu)

Based on the traditional Javanese Serimpi style, this dance is choreographed to depict the graceful, gentle and beautiful movements of the Javanese maiden.

Choreographer: Som Said

8 花木兰 "Hua Mulan" (Dance Drama)

The story of Hua Mulan is taken from a narrative poem of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-584 A.D.). It describes how a filial girl who is both intelligent and courageous disguises herself as a man to join the army in place of her father. The dance drama is divided into three scenes:

Scene 1: When Mulan is weaving at home, her father is drafted into the army to fight the Tujue invaders. Seeing that her father is old and weak, she decides to join the army in place of her father.

On her way to join Marshal He's (贺元帅) troops, she makes the acquaintance of other enlisted men.

Mulan, who is as courageous as a man on the battleground, performs outstanding service repeatedly. For this reason, she is regarded highly by Marshal He.

Scene 2: Mulan is feeling homesick at the camp after 12 years in the army. Li Guang (李广) keeps her company and shows great concern for her. While carrying out a check at the camp, Mulan discovers a sneak attack by the enemy. She informs Marshal He of it. An ambush is then laid, resulting in the Tujue king being killed and his troops wiped out.

Scene 3: Upon the conclusion of the war, Mulan returns to her home-town. When Li Guang and others pay her a visit, they are surprised to find that Mulan is in fact a girl.

Choreographer: Lee Shu Fen

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CHOREOGRAPHERS OF THE NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY

LEE SHU FEN

Lee Shu Fen, began dancing at a very tender age under the influence of her mother, a Chinese dance instructor. Trained in both oriental dance and ballet, Lee Shu Fen has taught and performed in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Since the 1960's, she has nurtured many dance troupes at the National Theatre Trust, People's Association, Ministry of Education, schools, colleges and universities.

Lee Shu Fen was appointed Choreographer of the National Dance Company in 1971 and has led the company on cultural missions to Australia, United States, Belgium, Persia, Japan and many other S.E. Asian countries.

In 1974, she was accorded National Day Honours with the award of a Bintang Bakti Masyarakat (Public Service Star).

Lee Shu Fen has made valuable contributions to the education of dance and the promotion of cultural activities in Singapore. Through her exemplary dedication to the art of dance, hardwork and patience, she has trained many a promising and talented dancer and has also nurtured and assisted local amateur dance troupes in their efforts at cultural promotion.

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SHEN ZI-WAH

Shen Zi-Wah started dancing at the age of 13 with the Shanghai Ballet School of the People's Republic of China. She was a principal dancer and choreographer with The Shanghai Ballet Company since 1966. Works that she was involved with include the two well-known Chinese ballet pieces "The White Hair Girl" and "The Women Red Army" as well as "Swan Lake" and "Giselle". Besides classical ballet, she is also proficient in Chinese folk, classical and provincial dances.

2 Shen Zi-Wah was appointed as a guest choreographer of The National Dance Company early this year.

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MADHAVI KRISHNAN

Madhavi Krishnan, a leading south Indian classical dancer and choreographer in Singapore, started dancing at the age of five. At fourteen, Madhavi Krishnan went to India to train under the renowned Indian Kathakali dance master, Sri Guru Gopinath Thangamani. She then studied with the famous Bharatha Natyam instructor T.V. Soundarajan in south India.

2 Madhavi Krishnan is a founder member of the National Dance Company, in that she has been a Choreographer and Principal Dancer with the Company since 1970. She had made good efforts at carving a new path towards creating a Singaporean dance form. With the help of other Choreographers of the National Dance Company, she has successfully choreographed composite items depicting the multi-racial character of Singapore.

3 For her service to culture, and recognition of her creative talent and artistry in Indian dance, Madhavi Krishnan was awarded the Cultural Medallion by the Minister for Culture in 1980.

SOM BINTE SAID

Som Said began dancing at the age of eight. She joined the National Dance Company in 1970 as Dancer, and became later its Assistant Choreographer. Today, she is an accomplished dancer, dance instructress and Choreographer with the National Dance Company. She has choreographed many traditional Malay dances as well as dances based on traditional themes but incorporating many a contemporary dance movement in her creations. A good example is the item Layang Layang. She was also one of the choreographers of the composite item, Unit in Rhythm, which was well received by local as well as overseas audiences.

Som Said also participated in the South East Asian Youth Programme among the ASEAN countries and Japan as well as studied Javanese dance in Jogjakarta.

For her service to dance which has benefitted the community, Som Said was honoured with the National Youth Service Award to Individuals.

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MOHD NA'AIM PANI

Mohd Na'aim Pani, a teacher of the Anglo-Chinese Junior School, is a versatile and accomplished dancer and choreographer of the National Dance Company. As also one of the Company's pioneer members, he had toured with the Company to Australia, Brussels, Hongkong and the ASEAN countries. On overseas tours by the Company, he had assisted with the lighting, as well as sets-designing and stage management, for performances by the Company.

Na'aim Pani has successfully choreographed a dance drama Uda dan Dara which was performed by the Company in 1979. He was also one of the choreographers of the composite item Fisherfolk Suite which depicts the peaceful and harmonious life in a fishing village in Singapore in the 1950s.

NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY

The National Dance Company was formed at the end of 1970 by the Ministry of Culture in response to an invitation for a cultural troupe to participate in the Adelaide Festival of Arts which was held in Adelaide, South Australia, in March, 1972. The Company won success and acclaim at the Festival and has not looked back ever since.

The aim of the National Dance Company has always been to bring together a group of people with the interest, enthusiasm, dedication, flair and expertise in the art of the traditional ethnic dance forms practised and performed in Singapore.

The Company has at present over 80 part-time members, comprising 5 choreographers, 5 assistant choreographers, 72 dancers, and 4 musicians. Always conscious of its reputation for high standards of performance, its members have relentlessly adhered to a regular schedule of rehearsals. Most of its members have a good foundation either in ballet, Chinese, Malay or Indian dance. Some have performed with professional ballet companies in England and Australia, and others have won a reputation for themselves in India, Malaysia and elsewhere.

Many began dancing from their childhood days, and had previously performed in shows organised by cultural bodies.

The dancers and musicians serving the National Dance Company are by profession teachers, accountants, clerks, receptionists, draughtsmen and students. They have, however, one thing in common. They are dedicated to their art and have been specially selected to perform as members of the National Dance Company after a series of competitive auditions.

Recruitment exercises were held once every 2 to 3 years. So far, six recruitment exercises were conducted, the first in 1972, and subsequently in 1976, 1978, 1980, 1982 and in 1985.

The Company has represented Singapore at overseas cultural festivals and cultural exchange-cum-promotional programmes. It has performed for Very Important Guests of the Republic and, from time to time it appears before local audiences on important occasions such as National Day celebrations, and for distinguished delegates from other countries attending international conferences. To date, the National Dance Company has presented numerous public performances both locally and abroad. Among the most creditable are performances such as a dance drama depicting Singapore's history, A Century in Dance which was specially choreographed and performed by the National Dance Company in connection with the 1980 National Day celebrations.

Overseas Performances by the National Dance Company

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| March 1977 | Adelaide Festival of Arts in Adelaide, South Australia |
| May/June 1975 | Cultural Mission to the Soviet Union |
| September 1974 | Cultural Programme of the Seventh Asian Games, held in Teheran, Iran |
| October 1974 | Cultural and Goodwill Mission, sponsored by the Chambers of Commerce to Jakarta, Jogjakarta and Bali, Indonesia. |
| September 1985 | Asian and Pacific Nations Folk Art Festival in Seoul, Republic of Korea |
| January 1976 | Southeast Asian Music and Dance Festival in Bangkok, Thailand |
| November 1977 | Ninth SEA Games Cultural Festival in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia |
| August 1978 | Cultural performance in San Francisco and Los Angeles, United States of America |
| March/April 1979 | Cultural performance in Brussels, Belgium |
| October 1979 | Fourth Festival of Asian Arts in Hong Kong |
| February 1980 | Cultural performance in Bangkok, Thailand |
| February 1981 | First ASEAN Festival of Performing Arts in Jakarta, Indonesia |
| April 1981 | Cultural exchange with Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur |
| January/ February 1983 | Second ASEAN Festival of Performing Arts in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia |
| March 1983 | Singapore Promotion in London |
| June/July 1983 | Third ASEAN Festival of Performing Arts in Bangkok, Thailand |
| February/ March 1984 | Brunei Independence Celebrations, Brunei |
| August 1984 | Fourth ASEAN Festival of Performing Arts in Manila, The Philippines |