

Ballet Under The Stars

Yasuko Yeung

It was an alluring poster of Ballet Under The Stars that introduced me to Singapore Dance Theatre. I saw it in Chinatown, and remembered my happy days in England where there are many open-air concerts in summer. So I invited a friend of mine who had just moved to Singapore to see if it would be as enjoyable.

Little did I know that we could have a picnic on the equator. The key is to start in the early evening. Fort Canning Green turned into a beautiful natural theatre as the sun set. Embraced by lush tropical green, we thoroughly enjoyed the outdoor performance just as the title Ballet Under the Stars promised we would. My friend was in tears and was astonished she could watch something so beautiful in this country.

Ballet Under The Stars (affectionately known as BUTS) started out 25 years ago when SDT was still based in Fort Canning Centre. According to Janek, SDT's Artistic Director, "the idea was to do something that was casual and artistically enriching to share with friends". It was the first open-air performance in Singapore and eventually orchestras like SSO, MFO or NUS followed SDT's lead. Now BUTS has probably become the most familiar production of all 6 seasons. I have heard quite a few friends say "Ballet Under The Stars was my first ballet experience". This year it will be generously sponsored by JCCI Fund (Japan Chamber of Commerce) and I hope we will welcome many more Japanese audience members.

Ballet Under the Stars offers a fantastic opportunity to enjoy the various forms of ballet from contemporary to classical ballet. It is very reasonably priced and the age limit is eased so that families with small children can also enjoy ballet together. The programme is carefully chosen so that even first timers can enjoy something familiar. The ballet festival is held over two weekends, one for classical ballet and the other for contemporary. There is always an enjoyable but brief introduction by Janek, which I always find helpful to appreciate what we are about to watch.

On the special stage which is assembled from scratch, dancers wear their normal performance costumes. High temperature, humidity and sometimes unpredictable weather can be a challenge but many of them told me that it is their favourite production. One of them told me that it is liberating to dance in the park, another told me that she loves to see the relaxed audience enjoying ballet. Sometimes after the show, you bump into the dancers and have a chance to have a chat. Such an intimate setting is another reason why Ballet Under The Stars is so special.

And who doesn't love a picnic! I love to spend the entire afternoon cooking but there are many people who buy food and wine at their favourite shops to bring along. I suggest you should go early because this is a rare opportunity to watch the dancers warm up on the stage before the performance. Admiring their graceful physique, letting your children run around, or even better dance with the dancers, you can enjoy your special picnic.

Writing this column, my heart is already beating fast but unfortunately, as of 25th August, I am not sure whether this year's performance can take place or not. The pandemic is such a challenge for all.

Looking back, all stage arts including ballet survived through tough times of human history. It has strength to live through the darkest days of plagues and wars. I read that even in the time of Romeo and Juliet, people suffered plague and that is a reason why Romeo failed to receive a letter from Father Francis.

I hope and pray that after this pandemic, we can go back to stage art which wonderfully can bridge our past and present.

Photos by Singapore Dance Theatre, Takeaki Miura

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Performance information



Ballet Under The Stars (2019). Picnic before sunset.



Ballet Under The Stars (2019) The show begins!



Studio rehearsal



Swan Lake Divertissement by Kana Minegishi and Kenya Nakamura (SDT 2019)



FIVE by Choo San Goh (SDT 2018)



Linea Adora by Timothy Harbour (SDT 2019)