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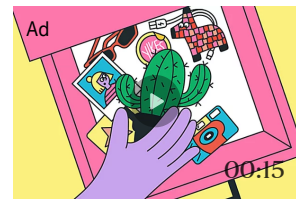
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Sifa 2021: A landmark symphony of local dance and orchestra



This is the first time the decades-old companies are performing together on stage for a commissioned project. PHOTO: SCREENGAB FROM SIFA.SG

**Toh Wen Li**

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SINGAPORE - A landmark collaboration between the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) and Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT) has been one of the happy upshots of the global pandemic.

The Rhythm Of Us, a three-part production at the Esplanade Theatre, is the first time the decades-old companies are performing together on stage for a commissioned project - and it all began with an invitation from the Singapore International Festival of Arts earlier this year.

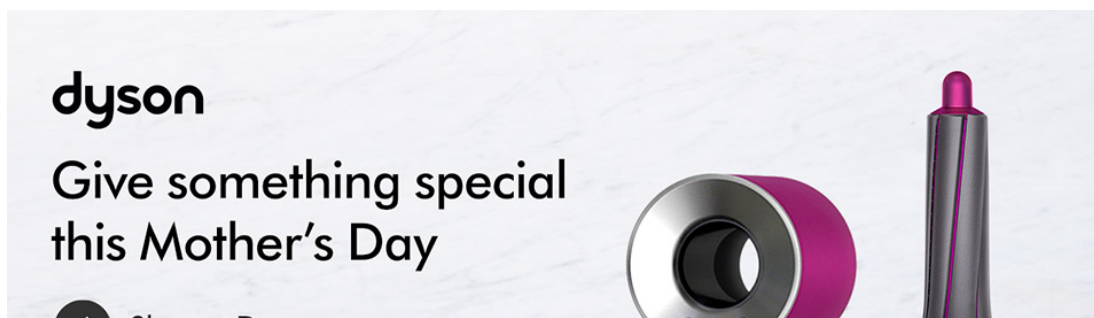
"Covid brought it all together. So, you know, good things (can still) happen," says SDT's artistic director Janek Schergen, 68.

The concert will begin on a meditative note with William Walton's Passacaglia for solo cello. Choreographed by Schergen, the piece features SSO principal cellist Ng Pei Sian and SDT principal dancer Chihiro Uchida.

Henry Cowell's Variations on Thirds, the second part of the production, involves a string ensemble and six dancers, choreographed by acclaimed American dancer Pam Tanowitz over Zoom.

It is "coming out very creatively, very inventively", says Schergen of the long-distance choreography by Tanowitz, who is now in New York. "She is taking a dancer on her side, modelling (the movements), and having us copy it on our side."

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In the finale, an ensemble of musicians and dancers will perform to a new piece composed by jazz musician Chok Kerong and choreographed by Christina Chan.

SSO's director of artistic planning Hans Sorensen, 58, says it has been a challenge planning the show with a three-month timeline. Something like this would typically take one to two years, he says.

The orchestra was supposed to perform Tan Dun's Buddha Passion at Sifa last year, together with the International Choral Academy Lubeck, but the pandemic put paid to those plans.

After a year of closures, Zoom meetings and digital concerts, The Rhythm Of Us will be "a celebration of live music and live performance", Sorensen says.

SDT's Schergen chimes in: "The only thing we've been able to do is showings in the studio to 30 people at a time. To be back on stage again, after more than a year, is the most exciting thing."

- **In-venue tickets are sold out. Available as video-on-demand from the Singapore International Festival of Arts' website**

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