

These excerpts are from the Wednesday September 1, 2004 issue of Canada's National Post Newspaper.

BALLERINA PUTS HER FOOT DOWN FOR QUALITY SHOES National Ballet dancer and husband find profits in pointes

Column: The Culture Business, by Gord McLaughlin

When ballet star Chan Hon Goh applies her experience as a dancer to the world of capitalism, she really sticks her foot in it. Then she puts her name on it. The result is a thriving business called Principal by Chan Hon Goh™. In the eight years since she and husband Chun Che determined to build a better ballet slipper, their annual shipments have leapt from 500 pairs to 8,000 pairs.

"He's very good about drawings and putting things on paper, and I'm really good with the hands-on physical aspect," says Goh, a principal dancer with The National Ballet of Canada, describing the division of labour in this marital enterprise.

The couple's latest product, the Diamond Pointe shoe, is its most sophisticated, designed with medical consultation to reduce the pain and injury associated with ballerinas going *en pointe* or up on their toes. Che is a former National Ballet of China dancer who teaches extensively in Toronto, so he's no stranger to the foot...

For the first five years, the company sold mostly by word of mouth and just within professional circles, with requests from Dallas-Fort Worth to Stuttgart. When James Kudelka created a new National Ballet production, Principal Shoes made some of the boots.

The company has been profitable for about three years, says Goh, but they're reinvesting in order to expand in China. They're currently in partnership but have taken steps to open their own small factory. Proper training is the biggest priority in this expansion...

(Goh's) name in the dance world certainly helps to bring in business. She'd be performing at the Kennedy Center with The Suzanne Farrell Ballet and on her day off, visiting three dance stores in the Virginia-Washington area. "They all ordered right there and then," says Goh. "I think my appearance does get me in the door, and what I do does add to the credibility, but if it's not a good product, they're not going to reorder..."

We're sticklers for tradition," says Goh. While the Diamond Pointe, for example is built to achieve optimal alignment of the ballerina's foot, she hasn't introduced any materials like fiberglass or plastic that would actually do the work. Still, there are skeptics. "You'll always have teachers who will say 'Don't wear that shoe. I never wore it,' " says Goh. "The ones that have an open mind will actually want to see for themselves if the shoe is doing better for a particular dancer."

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