

# Following in her parents' dance steps

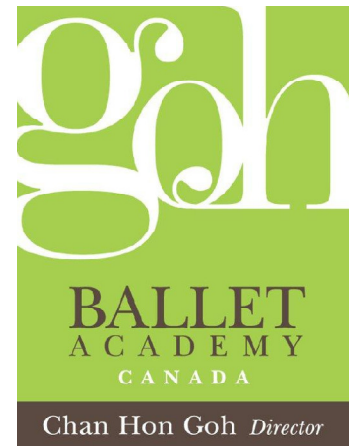
## Chan Hon Goh takes over the reins of the prestigious Goh Ballet Academy

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN, VANCOUVER SUN AUGUST 27, 2010

Chan Hon Goh says it is only because her classes were free as a young dancer that she was able to pursue her ballet career.

As one of Canada's best-known ballet dancers, Chan Hon Goh owes much of her success to her parents, Choo Chiat Goh and Lin Yee Goh.

Over and above the usual support parents provide, they gave her something that shaped their daughter's life: free ballet lessons.



How that happened was anything but usual. In the 1970s, the senior Gohs found themselves in China, a country still reeling from the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Both were dancers with what is now called the National Ballet of China, but Choo Chiat Goh was a principal dancer and ballet star who found himself artistically stifled under the Communist regime.

By 1976, he moved to Vancouver with his family. Two years later, he established the Goh Ballet Academy, whose first home was in a basement studio where the ceiling was so low students couldn't jump. Since then, the school has moved into its home on Main Street and established an international reputation for the quality of its ballet students. Its most illustrious graduate is their own daughter, Chan Hon Goh.

Thanks to her training, Goh joined the corps of the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto in 1988. With the company, she became a principal dancer in 1994 and danced lead roles in Giselle, Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty, among others. She became an international guest artist performing in companies around the world, co-wrote her autobiography (*Beyond the Dance: A Ballerina's Life*, with Cary Fagan) and created a line of pointe shoes called "Principal by Chan Hon Goh" with her husband, Chun Che.

But without free lessons from her parents, Goh doubts she would have had a ballet career at all.

"My parents were first-generation immigrants and it was just lucky for me that they were in the field of dance," she said.

"I really don't think that we could have done it. I don't think I could have become a dancer if we didn't get my classes for free because we were just getting established."

Goh knows that there are many young girls and boys who face similar financial constraints. They may have lots of talent and passion but come from families that can't afford expensive ballet lessons. Although tuition varies depending on age and level of expertise, it can cost as much as \$4,000 to \$6,000 a year for a talented 14-year-old in the professional program - and that doesn't include the cost of ballet shoes and costumes and travelling to international competitions.

"It is a huge commitment for any family, but especially when you want to be on the road to becoming a professional," she said in an interview in a second-floor studio at the Goh academy.

In a continuation of the school's history of financial support for students, the support program has been formally named the Chan Hon Goh Scholarship Fund. For the coming year, Goh Ballet Academy will be giving out 31 scholarships totalling more than \$100,000 in tuition.

Goh, who has contributed part of her salary to the fund, says she has singled out increasing the size of the scholarship fund as one of her goals as the director of both the Goh Ballet Academy and the Goh Ballet Company.

Goh has effectively been running the two organizations in all but name for almost a year, but the recent announcement makes the changeover from her parents official as of Sept. 1. Before, Goh knew she had a fallback position by saying, "Ask Mr. and Mrs. Goh." As of Wednesday, the ballet shoe stops with her.

Also starting in September, she'll be teaching three days a week in the senior professional division.

Last year, Goh was focused for five months on bringing *The Nutcracker* to the stage. The ballet, choreographed by Anna Marie Holmes, was a hit with Vancouver dance fans: All five performances of the \$700,000 production at The Centre for the Performing Arts are sold out.

"That was so absolutely necessary because we were taking such a risk - an emotional risk for sure, but also a financial risk," she said. "We still have a huge debt to pay off. It means the community of Vancouver came out to see us."

Goh Ballet's The Nutcracker will be back for the second of what Goh hopes is many seasons to come. The company will first be travelling to Victoria for four shows at the Royal Theatre from Friday, Nov. 26 to Sunday, Nov. 28. Appearing in the production will be two dancers from the Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle.

The two PNB dancers will return in December to open The Nutcracker in Vancouver for its second season at The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts. After opening night, Sonia Rodriguez and Piotr Stanczyk will be dancing the lead roles.

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### **At a Glance**

#### **The Nutcracker**

**When: Thursday, Dec. 16 to Sunday, Dec. 19; two matinees at 2 p.m.; four performances at 7:30 p.m.**

**Where: The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts**

**Tickets: \$35.50 - \$90.75 at [ticketmaster.ca](http://ticketmaster.ca) or 604-280-3311**

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