

Grace, beauty and work

Young dancers soak up star ballerina's lessons:
'You watch her and you think, I want to do that'

ALLYSON JEFFS
Journal Staff Writer
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A dozen young dancers watch Chan Hon Goh's perfectly executed movements, striving to emulate her fluid grace and, perhaps, follow in her footsteps.

Goh, an international prima ballerina, is living the dream that fuels the passion of many ballet students. This week, she's sharing her skill, insight and energy with young dancers from across Alberta and Saskatchewan in master classes at the Citie Ballet summer school.

"She's such an inspiration," 19-year-old Crystal Hartford says. "You watch her and you think, 'I want to do that.' She's beautiful."

Hartford, who began dancing at the age of three, is on the brink of realizing her dream of one day dancing in a company. Raised in Edmonton, she spent the past year at the Goh Ballet Academy, the Vancouver studio run by Goh's parents.

Goh welcomes the opportunity to work with young students who might otherwise glimpse her only at a stage door or speak to her briefly during an autograph-signing session.

"They are like sponges, they want to absorb everything," she says.

As principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada and the Suzanne Farrell Ballet in the United States, she knows the physical strength and mental energy needed to produce a stage-worthy performance.

"The better you do, the more effortless and easy it looks, but in the wings you feel so exhausted that you may feel you want to throw up," she says.

During the classes, she studies her students' movements, corrects them and

beams her encouragement as they improve.

"Everything has a purpose," she says. Fine performances begin with close attention to detail and the basics of fine dance.

Good habits instil "muscle memory" in the body. Incorrect technique develops the wrong memory and can take many hours of training to correct.

"She inspires us to be better," Sarah Wright, 15, says after a demanding 90-minute class. "She's a role model."

Sixteen-year-old Jody Clark says it's an "awesome opportunity" to dance in Goh's classes. During the sessions she tries to think positively, concentrating on the dance, the music and watching for Goh's reaction to her efforts.

Goh taught master classes and performed in a Citie Ballet gala in 2002. This summer, she has also been teaching classes in Calgary, Vancouver and London, Ont.

Born in Beijing, Goh was eight when she came to Canada with her parents, both of whom had been principal dancers with the National Ballet of China. She joined the National Ballet in 1988 and became principal dancer in 1994.

She co-wrote her autobiography, *Beyond the Dance: A Ballerina's Life*, with Cary Fagan.

Published in 2002, the book was nominated for the 2005 Rocky Mountain Book Award and the 2003 Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children's Non-Fiction.

Citie Ballet is a pre-professional company that provides young dancers from a number of Edmonton schools the opportunity to perfect their artistry, says artistic director William Thompson. The company is working on a production of *The Nutcracker* for December.

ajeffer@thejournal.canwest.com

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Chan Hon Goh,
prima ballerina



SHAUGHN BUTTS, THE JOURNAL

Beijing-born Chan Hon Goh, centre, inspires ballet students from across the Prairies at the Citie Ballet summer school.