



Moment photo/DAN PEARCE

Chan Han Goh, principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada, stops to smell the flowers at a local shop on Yonge Street.

# Ballerina's life goes beyond dance

By SCOTT PETERSON  
Special to The Moment

By many accounts, Chan Han Goh appears to be an average Rosedale resident.

Her face looks impeccably fresh, her dark eyes large and expressive and her clothes elegant and demure at the same time.

## A MOMENT WITH...

CHAN HAN GOH

But Goh is not an average resident.

Her job is to perform in front of thousands of people as a principal

dancer with the National Ballet of Canada.

"If I don't dance for three or four days I feel my muscles get itchy and my joints ache," she said over an Americano coffee at Patachou Patisserie on Yonge Street.

"I can't imagine going for more than two weeks without dancing."

Rosedale has been home for her

and her husband, Che, for the last eight years. They have lived in Toronto since she first joined the National Ballet of Canada 16 years ago.

"We were in a condo in St. Lawrence Market for eight years," she said.

"It took us two years to find the

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## PEOPLE

# Dance runs in ballerina's family

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home where we are now. We saw the residential area here as being private and then this house came along. We haven't done much to it. We added a new fence. We laid stones in the backyard. We installed new kitchen counters.

"We were really fortunate. The neighbours on both sides were families that were there for over 20 years. We were in good hands. When we took off we could say, 'Look after our mail,' and they were very caring."

### PARENTS WERE FIRST TEACHERS

Goh has lived and danced in many cities around the world.

Born in Beijing, China, she moved to Vancouver as a girl and received her early dance training with the Goh Ballet Academy, run by her mother and father, both dancers and teachers.

She joined the National Ballet in Toronto as a member of the corps de ballet in 1988, was promoted to second soloist in 1990, to first soloist in 1992 and to principal dancer in 1994.

She said it's tough for a dancer to get recognized through the regular dancing corps of a company because, while trying to shine above the others, dancing is about being uniform and fitting in.

"To be picked from the corps is a big stepping stone. How do you achieve individuality when you're trying to be unified? Such is the instinct thing."

She said that a dancer has to have an almost innate understanding of an audience to draw them in.

"As an audience, where do people look? Who draws the eye? Don't underestimate your observations."

### AUDIENCE ALLURE

She said that while respect for an audience is important, an artist's job is to draw the audience to a "higher" place and to not surrender to it.

"When I started out it was my desire for them to like me," she said. "My job is to bring them into my world. It's about having an allure and to come to be a part of that world."

Off stage, Goh said it's important to keep things in perspective, whether it's talk of dance, shopping, walking her dog or maintaining her home.

"I think who you are on stage is who you are as a whole. It's important to me, out of respect for my neighbours and neighbourhood, to have grass that's cut, garbage that's picked up and snow that's shoveled so people can walk by."

Like many people in the arts, Goh flirted with going to New York to dance, but said she has no regrets.

"I'm curious, but not regretful," she said.

### NATIVE LAND OPPRESSIVE

She also said she can't imagine a dancing career at all if she had remained in Beijing. She said that while ordinary people attended the ballet, the oppressive nature of China at the time would have prevented her from fully expressing herself.

"The historical aspect is almost overwhelming," she said.

"Regular workers went to the ballets. It might have been a revolutionary ballet, but they went. I don't think I would have had a career there at all. We still have ties there but I don't think I would have been a dancer."

She said that while she travels extensively to other countries and cities, Toronto has a lot going for it.

"Toronto is a young city. I look at it



Moment photo/DAN PEARCE

Chan Han Goh is a principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada. She and her husband call Rosedale their home.

now and I think it's going through a renaissance. The AGO (Art Gallery of Ontario), the COC (Canadian Opera Company), the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The bloom and blossoming of the city — the newness and potential — the safety, the quality of life, the people. I've been so fortunate to come across such wonderful people here."

As a Rosedale resident, Goh said she likes to go for walks, to go to the movies or to eat out in the neighbourhood.

"I don't think I should say where," she laughed, "but I do go to the business store Staples an awful lot."

She said she has a good DVD selection of her and her husband's feet like staying in or having friends over for dinner.

"I like to cook," she said. "I have a pretty heavy protein diet. I'll make steak or roasted chicken. I also like grilled asparagus."

### PASSIONATE ABOUT SHOES

In addition to an autobiographical book *Beyond the Dance*, published in 2002, she and her husband created a company called Principal Shoes, which designs and manufactures shoes for dancers.

"That's something I'm passionate about as well. We're trying to develop a product that's better for the health of the dancers."

While ballet can be hard on a dancer's body, it can be hard on the psyche as well.

Goh advised younger dancers to believe in



Moment photo/CYLLA VON TEDEMAN  
National Ballet of Canada

Chan Han Goh performs in a scene from *Swan Lake*.

themselves.

"Be confident. Every day I'm in the studio and it's the coach's job, and the choreographer's, to judge me. I'm being judged. That can be hard. I would advise for anyone to believe in yourself, no matter what, and make yourself happy."

But whether Goh is working with other dancers, is out on the town, or relaxing in her home, she said dance is the main thing she thinks about, and the riveting moments when she is on stage in front of an audience.

### MOMENTS TO LIVE FOR

"Those moments are the moments you live for," she said. "You wish they could last a little longer."

She said there is no feeling like the one that comes from dancing on stage and being lost, completely in the moment of doing what she has been trained to do.

"It's best when it lasts for the whole show — when you step on the stage until you take the final bow. You're in a daze for days after. When I get up in the morning I'm stiff, but as soon as the music starts again you forget."

"There's always some little apprehension in the wings before going on. There are nerves that are bound to be there, but when you step on stage and you know there are thousands of people watching you, you don't have butterflies anymore."

"You know it's where you belong."