

# Prima of Her Life

National Ballet of Canada principal dancer Chan Hon Goh keeps her energy flowing.

By Kenny Florent

Chan Hon Goh acknowledges that ballerinas tend to adhere to stereotype: skinny divas of tempestuous temper. But Goh, whose graceful stage presence belies her steely discipline as an athlete, says only healthy dancers can go the distance. "My concern is maintaining my stamina," she says, "when I am dancing the lead in a two-and-a-half hour ballet. I love to eat, and I eat well. I'm definitely a meat eater—I need all the strength I can get—and I supplement with protein bars, nuts and fruits to hold me up between those three square meals." Junk food is a no-no, she says, but not a never: "chips and candy make you feel bad," she says, "but chocolate every once in a while is a pleasurable way to splurge."

Goh has been on her toes most of her 35 years, growing up with parents who were both stars of the National Ballet of China. When Goh was eight, the family immigrated to Vancouver and founded the Goh Ballet Academy. On graduation, Goh joined the National Ballet in 1988, and was named a principal dancer herself seven years ago. Her many starring roles include Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*, Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty* and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Chun Che, Goh's husband, was also a dancer; he is now a teacher and choreographer. Husband and wife have launched a line of pointe shoes for dancers—called Principals—ergonomically engineered to reduce stress and help prevent injury for professionals who give their feet a daily lashing.

"It has been very interesting for both of us to pursue other interests, specifically to learn about business and design. We were very motivated by the injuries we have both experienced over the years. Ballet dancers are in pain much of the time, with fractures, strains, sprains and shin splints. We thought, people don't have to suffer; science is making leaps forward in ergonomic construction."

Her skin also takes a beating on the job, and she is very careful to cleanse meticulously to wash away all the sweat and tears. Frequent tours mean frequent plane trips, and Goh is now much more aggressive in her regime. "I used to just use whatever products were in hotels," she says. Her best tips are the simplest ones and cheapest ones, though: "You simply have to drink enough water," Goh says, "to look and feel good. And sleep, sleep, sleep. I know my performance ideal is eight-and-a-half hours a night, but I seldom get all that."

As she learns more about keeping her body in balance, she is trying to keep her life in perspective as well. As much as her family is into ballet, and as comfortable as she is in her own professional ballet family, Goh and her husband make an effort to see friends outside the dance world, "because sometimes you want to talk about something else," she says. "You want to just go see a movie, like a normal person."

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