

吴 振 红

Chan Hon Goh

Is the Quintessential Ballerina

By Patricia E. Binns

Pale as a meissen porcelain, her delicate features are animated with intelligence. Her every movement is filled with grace. She embodies the romantic spirit of a bygone age. Chan Hon Goh is the quintessential ballerina. A principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada, Goh is one of the company's classicists.

To see her perform is to understand the essence of flight. To experience her purity of musical expression is to know something about the way poetry makes movement into metaphor. She moves in such an ethereal, spiritual way, you are tugged instantly inside her world. Where dance is held exquisitely at the still point, where music, choreography and drama blaze in the undisputed realm of art. This essentially is the magic that permeates all her dancing.

Born in Beijing, China Goh immigrated to Vancouver with her parents in 1976. Choo Chiat Goh her father and mother Lin Yee Goh were seeking greater artistic freedom. Both parents were principal dancers with the National Ballet of China and founded the Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver in 1978.

Chan Hon Goh started dance lessons at 8 years old and got serious about it at 11. It was legendary British dancer/choreographer, Anton Dolin who knew her parents and single out Goh as having the best potential in the class. At 16 she entered into the Prix de Lausanne, the most important competition in the world for dancers under 18 and was a prize recipient. It was James Kudelka who suggested to Goh about the National Ballet of Canada.

In 1988, Goh is invited to join the National Ballet of Canada and became a principal dancer in 1994.



Above: Chan Hon Goh dancing the White Swan Pas de Deux. **Right:** To see her perform is to understand the essence of flight. She moves in such an ethereal, spiritual way, you are tugged instantly inside her world.



She dances the lead roles in Romeo and Juliet, Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty and Giselle among others. Here is what Chan Hon Goh told City Living in her interview:

PB: Tell me about your ballet shoe company.

CHG: My husband designs the point shoes, ballet slippers and dance boots working with a production partner in China. He supervises the day to day activities of the company while I handle the marketing and communications. Principal Shoes retail price is \$70 which makes them very competitive. Our philosophy is to develop a longer-lasting hand-made shoes, that provides maximum balance and support for a dancer's needs in both training and performance. Dancers are always complaining about shoes and we felt we could come up with something better based on our own experience.

PB: Do you ever feel at times you might be driving yourself too hard?

CHG: When I clear my to do list, I feel the need to refill it. In the back of my mind I might enjoy being a housewife. I can't iron but I can cook.

PB: Have you had any dance injuries?

CHG: I have had my fair share of injuries. I have had three punishing stress fractures and a painful bout of Achilles Tendonitis. I am aware I shouldn't dance in pain but I feel incomplete if I do not. It's like the end of the world if I cannot dance. No dancer wants to pass up engagements. I seldom ever feel the pain when I am on stage because of the rush that comes from performing.

PB: When you danced with White Swan Pas de Deux, how did you find the music?

CHG: I will myself immediately

inside the music. Those first notes for instance of the White Swan Pas de Deux become amazingly important. They transport me where I want to go. I believe the music holds a great inner sadness and I'm drawn to the way Tchaikovsky suggested a world of entrapment. These lovers understand almost from the beginning they can't really be together. They know they are fighting a great evil. And all that is there in the music as well as the beautiful choreography.

PB: How does a character come alive for you?

CHG: My initial goals were to be a clear, technically excellent dancer. But now I'm going more deeply into the very essence of dance and I'm falling more in love with dance itself. I'm discovering more personalities that can exist for me, finding ways of creating flesh and blood beings from the raw material of

character. After all the repetition and rehearsal our vocabulary remains basically the same. But what makes ballet more than a sport is the way we develop a character. That's what makes dance live and breathe. One's own personality adds to what occurs on stage, the dancer and the character become one.


PB: Do you dance with any other ballet company?

CHG: For the last three years I have danced with Suzanne Farrell Ballet, a project of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, throughout the United States as well as companies in Europe, Asia and Australia. Its not that I am searching for outside work. It just seems to find me. It's a wonderful opportunity to be seen on world dance stages beyond those where the National Ballet regularly performs. I need to dance now - before time runs out. A career doesn't last forever.

PB: Does the dancing profession runs in your family or is it genetic?

CHG: I believe it is both. My parents were both principal dancers with Beijing's prestigious National Ballet of China. I am the niece of the late, great American choreographer Choo San Goh. In fact, out of my father's family of ten siblings, four have had careers in dance.

PB: are you married?

CHG: I got married in 1998 to Chun Che who was former principal dancer with the National Ballet of China. He had been a student of my fathers in Beijing. In Che I have found nothing but support. We are both in sync with each other and the passion we both share for ballet. My husband is now Principal Teacher of ballet at George Brown College's dance department. In fact he is my partner in Principal by Chan Hon Goh Incorporated a project we both share together. www.principalshoes.com. A sense of happiness, trust and joy creates harmony for me. I have been married for 8 years and have a supportive family. My life is very full. Personal happiness has a way of feeding creative energy, building maturity, allowing you to truly live life. www.chan-hongoh.com 



Above: Chan Hon Goh company Principal Shoes philosophy is to develop a longer-lasting hand-made shoes, that provides maximum balance and support for a dancer's needs. www.principalshoes.com **Below:** Goh said "What makes ballet more than a sport is the way we develop a character. That's what makes dance live and breathe. One's own personality adds to what occurs on stage, the dancer and the character become one."

