

Karen Kain
Artistic Director



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Chan Hon Goh bids adieu with Giselle

Esteemed principal dancer retiring
after 20 years with National Ballet

When Chan Hon Goh takes to the stage next month in the title role of *Giselle* at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, it will be a poignant moment for her, for audiences and for the world of classical ballet.

The esteemed principal dancer is retiring at the end of the current season after 20 years with the National Ballet of Canada. Born in Beijing, Goh moved to Vancouver at the age of 8 with her parents, who had been dancers themselves and under whom she had trained. She joined the National Ballet in 1988, became principal dancer in 1994 and is well-known for her delicate lyricism and emotional depth.

"Every step of my career has just been so wonderful," she says. "I can't imagine my life without dance."

Giselle is particularly near to her heart, Goh says. She first played the role one year after she became principal dancer and says it added a

"new dimension" to her repertoire.

The ballet, which runs from May 27 to 31, is the story of lovers separated by the artificial barriers of society, much like the tale of *Romeo and Juliet*. The role of *Giselle* is unique in its complexity, the character going through a

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transformation from light-hearted peasant girl to crazed woman and, finally, to a ghostly vision. Ballerinas in the part must combine dramatic ability and technical brilliance to bring about a convincing performance.

"I'm very happy to be saying goodbye with *Giselle*," says Goh, 40. "I don't think I would have found as much pleasure in dancing had I not found the substance behind the character it brought."

She says the decision to retire is "quite overwhelming to face....Dancing is such a big part of my life." However, she suffers from pain in her neck and upper spine from an injury sustained in a car accident in 2006, from which she has never fully recovered. She's looking forward to spending more time with her three-year-old son and hopes to remain involved in dance.

One of the many noteworthy points about *Giselle* is that at

the time of its creation in 1841, it was one of the first ballets to introduce the female dancer in pointe shoes, which allowed for wider movement and made her seem light, ethereal and other-worldly. Goh, together with her husband, Chun Che, also a dancer, founded a company 12 years ago that designs, makes and markets ballet footwear, especially pointe shoes that provide greater support and cushioning.

The final performances of

the 2008-2009 National Ballet season include *Carmen*, a groundbreaking re-conceptualization of the Bizet opera by the provocative Italian choreographer Davide Bombana, and *Skin Divers*, a new work by Canadian choreographer Dominique Dumais inspired by Anne Michaels' book of poetry.

Carmen & *Skin Divers* will be presented from June 6 to 14 as part of the Luminato Festival. The last performance of the season - Goh's final appearance on stage - will be *White Hot*, the National Ballet's annual fundraising gala on June 18. The evening will include a one-hour performance of short works selected by artistic director Karen Kain, including a special performance by Goh. The event is expected to raise more than \$1-million.

Essential information

Tickets to the National Ballet can be purchased at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts at 145 Queen Street West, by calling 416-345-5955 or by visiting www.nationalballet.ca.



Chan Hon Goh in *Giselle*: 'I don't think I would have found as much pleasure in dancing had I not found the substance behind the character it brought.'