

Final curtain for noted ballerina: Vancouver's Goh retiring after dancing Giselle with National
By: Gary Smith

Need to know

Who: Chan Hon Goh

What: *Giselle*

Where: National Ballet of Canada, Four Seasons Centre, 145 Queen St. W., Toronto

When: May 27 at 7:30 p.m., and May 31 at 2 p.m.

Tickets: 1-866-345-9595

Chan Hon Goh is late. She's been stuck in a specialist's office for two hours, fuming away. She's called twice to say she's on her way.

When she arrives at our meeting point her face is moist and she looks distressed. After a few minutes, though, she finds serenity. And there it is, that beautiful porcelain face that has radiated warmth from so many ballet stages.

Goh is retiring next week. It's something she has contemplated for the last couple of years. After having a child she suffered a terrible auto accident that left her with consistent pain. Battling her way back, she regained top form, but she's decided enough is enough.

"The agony is just too much," she shrugs with a slight tilt of her head. "I was always going to therapy. My feelings were torn. Yes, I loved to dance. But I felt it was better to plan the final moment rather than have it suddenly come, catching me unawares."

Goh will dance her final full-length ballet performances May 27 and 31 in the romantic ballet *Giselle*. "I confess I'm emotionally overwhelmed," Goh says. "I've always been passionate about dance. And it's much harder to let go than I thought. There's a part of me that will die, of course. You forget how much it becomes a part of who you are."

"It's comforting to know no matter who you are this ending is inevitable. Fortunately I've been happy with all the things I've done in dance. There's no way I can part from it completely, but I'm not going to be one of those dancers who allows my career to dwindle away. I won't perform, but I do hope to teach at my dad's academy of dance in Vancouver. I also hope to coach here at The National Ballet. I always want to have a connection with the arts."

Goh often said throughout her career she had more in her life than ballet. "Now I ask myself what can I do for the arts in my community, in Canada. I want to introduce more people to the art form."



Goh admits what she'll miss most is the opportunity to inhabit other lives and other worlds. Over the years she learned to act characters from the inside out. Applying her own understanding to roles such as Giselle, Aurora and Juliet, Goh developed an emotional reality that went beyond the execution of steps.

"I love choreographers who have allowed me to speak through dance. And yes, I'll miss the chance to personify music, to speak through the steps. Words just don't express as much to me. They're so specific. Dance allows you to interpret so much more."

Goh believes her early dance years were naive.

"Eventually I learned to take the focus off mastering steps, allowing myself the freedom to find the essence of each role. Even in abstract ballet you can create an atmosphere. That's more lasting than perfect steps.

"I'm almost afraid to imagine what it will be like when the curtain comes down. The buildup, I think, is almost harder than the experience will be itself."

When Goh danced her last Juliet in March she had an out-of-body experience.

"I remember every second of it. It was as if I was in the moment, but also standing outside myself. It was very surreal. I expect it will be the same when I dance Giselle."

Goh has the support of her family as she enters a new phase of her life. She doesn't think that will make the pain any less.

"The impact is the same," she says, almond eyes looking at slender hands. "I expect to be torn. I don't think I'll walk away free. Something of my soul will always remain in dance."

Gary Smith has written on theatre and dance for The Hamilton Spectator for more than 25 years.