

Karen Kain
Artistic Director

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NATIONAL BALLET OF CANADA

Goh's glorious goodbye Giselle

Giselle

★★★★ (out of 4)

Choreography by Peter Wright after Jean Coralli, Jules Perrot and Marius Petipa. Until May 31 at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, 145 Queen St. W. 416-345-9595

SUSAN WALKER

SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Sir Peter Wright has staged 15 productions of *Giselle*, a ballet he initially didn't like, possibly because of its silliness. He made *Giselle* into a dance anyone could love by giving it a believable dramatic through-line. Celia Franca commissioned a Wright version with designs by Desmond Heeley for the National Ballet of Canada that premiered in 1970.

Giselle, first performed in Paris in 1841, is full of the big ballet tricks, for mortals and Wilis alike, that thrill the balletomane. Wright's staging anchors in real emotions the tale of a peasant girl whose love

for a disguised nobleman leads to her downfall, madness and suicide.

Chan Hon Goh and her Albrecht, Zdenek Konvalina, gave greater dramatic intensity to the than one would have thought possible.

The retiring ballerina, who will give her last performance of *Giselle* on Sunday afternoon, achieves a wondrous transformation, from the giddy girl in a pinafore at the opening of Act I, thrilled by the attentions of the villager Loys (the disguised Count Albrecht), to the poised woman in the afterlife, a Wili without the vengeful drive of the spirits of jilted young women.

What will remain in the memory of last night's performance is not just Goh's lighter-than-air completion of the steps from girlhood to wraith, but the agonizing mad scene. She depicts *Giselle* as a woman gone out of her wits with the realization that she has been humiliatingly wronged. In a few gestures she relives, almost self-mockingly,



DARREN CALABRESE FOR THE TORONTO STAR

In her farewell run as a ballerina, Chan Hon Goh plays the peasant girl *Giselle* to Zdenek Konvalina's Albrecht.

the moments with Loys/Albrecht when she was captivated.

Konvalina dances Albrecht as if he'd invented the part. We can't forget, until the very last moment of Act I that he has played a cruel trick on an innocent girl. By his grief at *Giselle*'s death, he demonstrates

that a flirtation has turned to deep love.

In the land of the Wilis — a name that derives from a word for female vampires — Heather Ogden reigned as Queen Myrtha, giving a suitably chilling dance of death. Piotr Stanczyk manfully performed

the part of Hilarion, the woodsman whose love for *Giselle* is unrequited.

But it is most of all Goh and Konvalina who give a contemporary audience a reason to believe in the redeeming power of love through their stirring performance.