

Karen Kain
Artistic Director

HELLO! Canada
June 15, 2009



TAKING HER FINAL BOW CANADIAN BALLET STAR CHAN HON GOH

TALKS TO 'HELLO! CANADA' ABOUT HER LIFE AS
A PRIMA BALLERINA AND WHY SHE'S READY TO
MAKE MOTHERHOOD HER 'PRINCIPAL' ROLE

Prancing around in tutus and tiaras, every little girl dreams of becoming a prima ballerina like Canada's own Chan Hon Goh. Whether she's bringing Princess Aurora to life in *The Sleeping Beauty* or making the transition from peasant girl to ethereal spirit in *Giselle*, the acclaimed dancer has enthralled audiences across the globe during her 21-year career. "I feel so fortunate to have created a life as a ballerina," Chan, who immigrated to Vancouver at the age of eight from China, tells *Hello! Canada* on a sunny spring afternoon. As she chats, her three-year-old son, Aveary, bustles about nearby on the leafy grounds close to their home along Toronto's harbour.

Now 40, the stunning dancer recently made one of the toughest decisions of her career, choosing to hang up her pointe shoes indefinitely following an exquisite 15 years as a principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada. "Chan is the epitome of the iron butterfly, incredibly delicate yet incredibly strong," former ballerina and current artistic director of the company Karen Kain has said. Others have referred to Chan as a national treasure, citing her near-flawless technique and a lyrical grace that defies gravity.

On May 31, Chan took her final bow in front of a packed house at Toronto's Four Seasons for the Performing Arts. Fittingly, she chose the celebrated *Giselle* as her retirement performance. While she has danced it countless times before, the romantic

ballet remains a favourite. Watching her lithe figure float across the stage is enough to take you away to another era.

"When I was in my mid-20s, I made a discovery and ballet became even more interesting and addictive to me," Chan recalls. "When I was younger and coming up the ranks, the focus was on technique, precision, cleanliness. But then [later], it became about making it real and creating something for yourself that's believable so you can touch everyone in the audience." She pauses thoughtfully. "That's what differentiates ballet from sport, I think, artists from athletes."

Ballet wasn't something Chan simply stumbled upon. On the contrary, one could say she entered the family business. Her parents were both principal dancers for the National Ballet of China, and upon moving to British Columbia in 1977, opened their own studio, the Goh Ballet Academy, which has become one of the premier ballet schools in North America. "The two people who have always been there for me are my parents. I have always been able to count on them both personally and professionally," says Chan. "People always say, 'How can you have parents who are your teachers?' but the relationship has always been very tight and close."

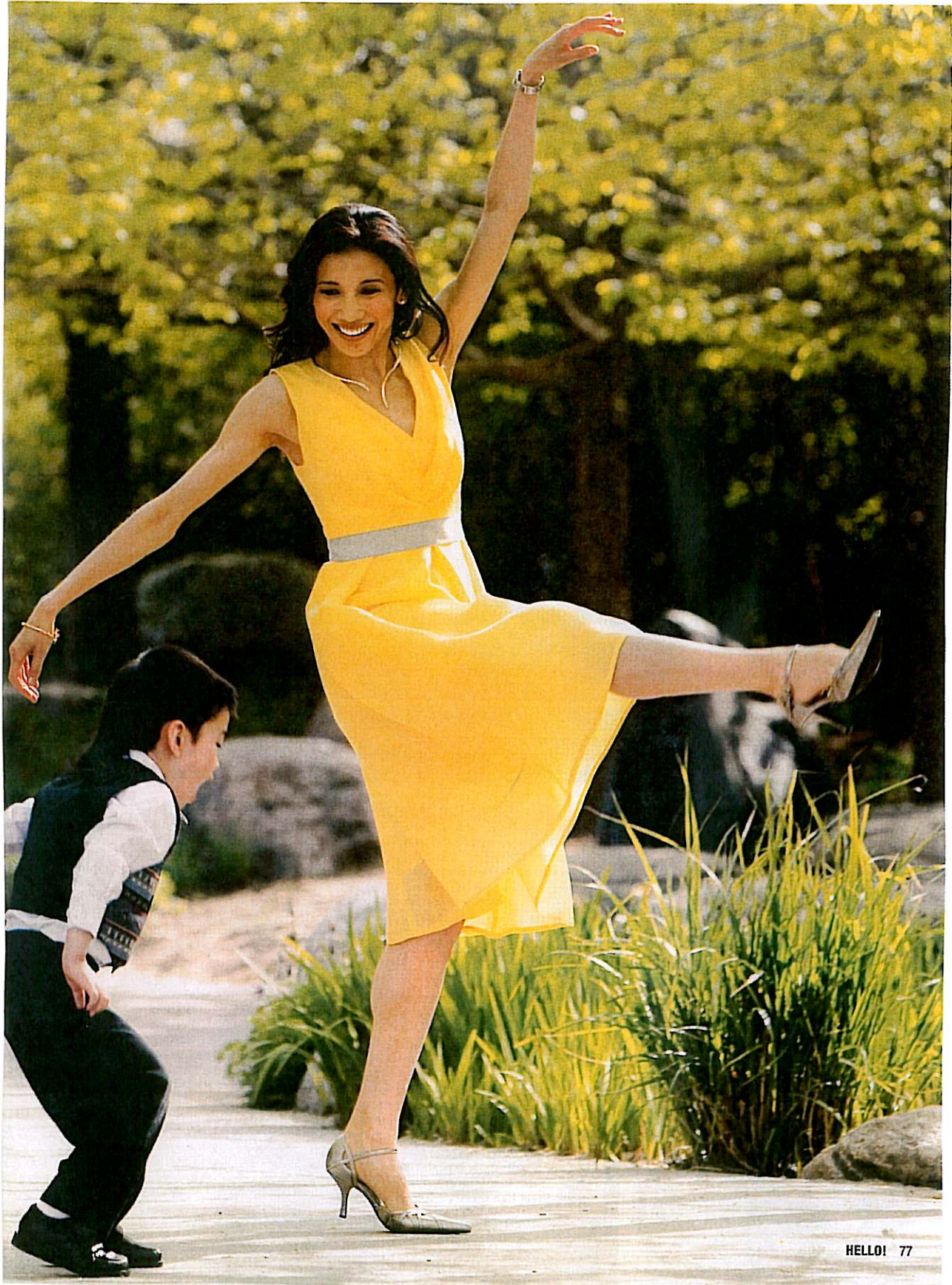
Returning to Beijing to dance with the National Ballet of China for its 30th anniversary celebration was a particularly meaningful career highlight. ▶

On the eve of her final performance with the National Ballet of Canada, principal dancer Chan Hon Goh shares an impromptu duet with her son, Aveary, 3. The delicate artist, who has performed all over the world, is retiring after an illustrious career spanning more than two decades.

THE
NATIONAL
Ballet
OF CANADA

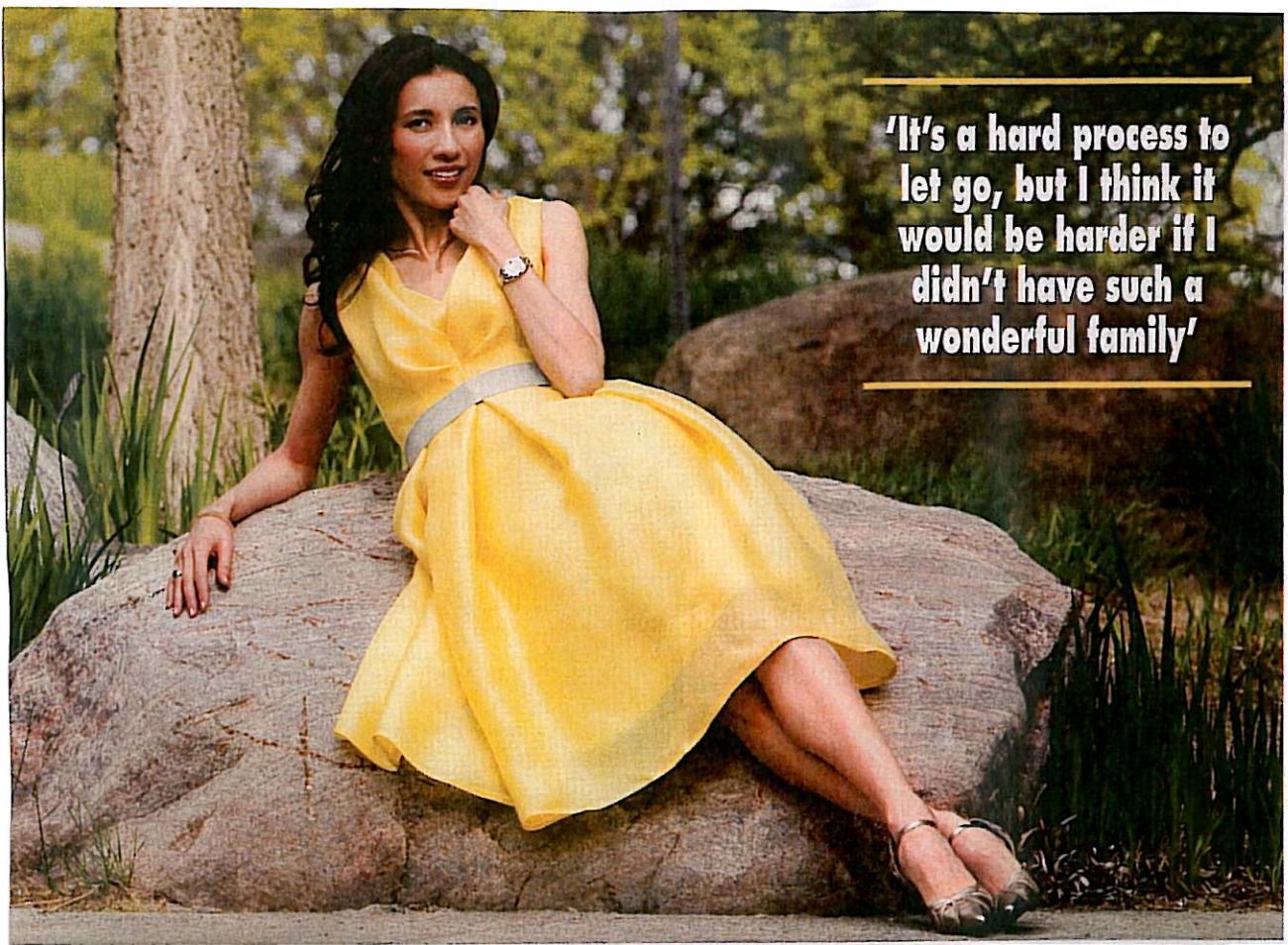
Karen Kain
Artistic Director

HELLO! Canada
June 15, 2009



Karen Kain
Artistic Director

HELLO! Canada
June 15, 2009



'It's a hard process to let go, but I think it would be harder if I didn't have such a wonderful family'

After her retirement, Chan (above) plans to concentrate on motherhood, teaching and her business ventures, which include a line of pointe shoes she designed with her husband. Below: Chan is pictured with her husband of 11 years, Chun Che, and their three-year-old son, Aveary. Opposite: Chun and Aveary play amid the flowers. 'He's tremendously sweet so it makes it hard to say no to him!' she says.



"There were people on the company and in the production crew who knew me as a baby," she smiles. "It was a very special moment."

Another "principal" source of support in Chan's life is her husband, Chun Che, a dancer she met at her parent's school when she was just a teenager. "What I love most about him is that he loves me unconditionally, particularly because I come from a world where it's all about your performance," says Chan of her husband of 11 years, adding: "That I have this unconditional love, it empowers me to do what I have to do."

Sharing a common language of artistry – and an entrepreneurial streak – the pair have designed and launched a pointe shoe company called Principal by Chan Hon Goh. After experiencing three stress fractures in her career, Chan, who penned an autobiography in 2002, felt compelled to design a supportive line of footwear that works to prevent injuries.

Seeing Chan play with her adorable son, it's clear that motherhood has had a profound effect on the soft-spoken performer. "I was a little naive in the beginning, I think. Now, being a mom, I feel like there's a lot more forgiveness

in me and in the way I perceive things," says the dancer. "I'm still working on the patience," she adds, laughing, "but it definitely has changed me for the better." The tight-knit family has an active and full life together, something that will ease Chan's transition from the stage.

"It really feels like part of me will die because I'm so used to expressing [myself] in a certain way," she admits of her decision to retire. "It's a hard process to let go, but I think it would be harder if I didn't have such a wonderful family." A big reason for her decision, she admits, is so she can concentrate more on being a mom.

After leaving on a high note, Chan will continue solidifying her legacy for years to come. "I'm looking forward to passing on the experiences I've learned to young dancers," she says, adding that the family will spend time in Vancouver, where she will play a role in her parent's academy. "I'm happy with my decision and I look forward to the future," she says with a smile. **H**

REPORT: JAYME POISSON
PHOTOS: PETER BREGG/HELLO! CANADA
STYLING: WENDY NATALE
HAIR AND MAKEUP: GIANLUCA ORIENTI FOR FLUTINO GROUP

Karen Kain
Artistic Director

HELLO! Canada
June 15, 2009

