

AND ENTERTAINMENT

arts

First year in Canada inspired ballerina to strive for top

CHAN HON GOH leads master class in ballet to teach younger generation what she learned in dance.

BY NICHOLAS PESCOD
THE NEWS BULLETIN

When Chan Hon Goh walked off an airplane and entered the terminal at Vancouver International Airport she found herself in a world so vastly different from anything she had ever known.

"I came to Canada without speaking a word of English," Goh said. "I just got dropped into a whole new environment where the language was new, the food was new, everybody was new and everything was new. It was a huge culture shock and a huge growing experience. I think I grew up fast."

Goh was only eight years old when she arrived from China with her family in 1976. At the time, her parents, Choo Chiat Goh and Lin-yee Goh, were both principal dancers in the National Ballet of China when political unrest caused them to relocate to British Columbia.

"We happened to rent a house in a primarily white neighbourhood and

I was the only Chinese child in my grade," Goh said. "What I brought to school for lunch was new for them."

Goh's parents settled in Vancouver's Dunbar neighbourhood, where they established the Goh Ballet Academy. When Goh was nine years old she began dancing and quickly embraced the art form.

"That was an area where I could really feel the freedom to express myself without any hindrance at all," she said. "I just found the concentration and the ability to move to the music was something so beautiful and was something that I just couldn't get enough of."

Since then, Goh went on to have an illustrious dance career that lasted for more than 20 years. During that time, she became a principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto, where she danced in prominent roles in *Giselle*, *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Goh is also the first Cana-



SIAN RICHARDS PHOTO

Chan Hon Goh, a former principal ballerina with the National Ballet of Canada, leads a master class at Nanaimo's Kirkwood Academy of Performing Arts on Sunday (April 13).

dian to win a silver medal at the Genée International Ballet Competition in England.

"I think my entire dance career was full and I enjoyed every season

that I was able to work on something and be involved and perform," said Goh, who retired in from professional dancing in 2009.

The Queen Elizabeth II

Diamond Jubilee medal recipient became the director at the Goh Ballet Academy in 2010. Goh will be at Kirkwood Academy in Nanaimo on Sunday (April 13) at 10 a.m. to mentor young dancers as part of a nationwide master class series.

"I have now retired from the stage for five years and my primary duty is mentoring our younger generation of dancers," Goh said. "So, I am really looking to being in the classroom with these young aspiring dancers and passing on some of the artistic nuances and artistic experiences that have really shaped my career."

Goh is hoping her students at Kirkwood Academy will walk away from the master class with an uninhibited approach to their dancing.

"It is a short segment and I am sure there is going to be a lot to talk about and a lot to get through, I am hoping they will ... take it a step further than just the steps. To start thinking what is behind and what is the purpose of the step and how it could be put into a ballet that they may dance in the future. How the steps they are doing today can play such a big

role and how they are doing it today into their future," Goh said.

Goh said that while she dreamed of pursuing a career in dance she never felt pressured by her parents.

"I think they felt like that because they were both so involved in dance that they wanted to make sure that my world wasn't always about dance. They really made an effort for me to learn about different things. They started me in piano lessons and singing lessons and after-school activities," she said.

Goh recalled how she felt that she had to grow up quickly during her first couple of years in Canada, adding that she knew she wanted to make the most out of her life.

"I say I grew up quickly because I quickly learned how important it was to stay afloat and fight remarks of racism," she said. "It was very important to be somebody in this world and not be looked down upon. That first year was a huge adjustment."

To register for the class or for more information, please visit www.gohballet.com/CanadianMasterClassSeries/.

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