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Brian Morton – Vancouver Sun

Vancouver Dancers Strike Gold, Silver in Vienna

Two 15-year-old dancers with Vancouver's Goh Ballet have won the top two prizes in the Wien Welt Wettbewerb Ballet Competition in Vienna, the first time two Canadian dancers won both prizes in the international competition's seven-year history.

"I'm so proud of them winning the gold and silver medal at the same time," said Goh Ballet founder Choo Chiat Goh in an interview Wednesday. The winners were Michelle Khoo, who won gold, and Chihiro Abe, who won silver.

"I'm so proud of my city and I'm so proud of my country. They are very beautiful dancers for the future."

According to the Goh Ballet, which says the wins will raise awareness of the strength of arts and arts education in Canada, both dancers were required to pass a demanding video audition to compete on stage in Vienna with more than 200 dancers from 20 countries.

For her first-round performance, Khoo chose the Flames of Paris variation, receiving top marks in her category before moving onto the second and final round to dance a variation from the ballet Coppelia.

She was awarded the first prize in Ballet as well as the Most Talented Young Performer award in Contemporary.

Abe performed the Bluebird variation from Sleeping Beauty in the first round and the solo from La Fille Mal Gardée in the finals, earning her second prize.

Both dancers, who are still overseas, have been training with the Goh Ballet for more than a decade and it was the first time either of them participated in an international competition.

All 200 competitors performed for a panel of 12 international judges headed by ballet superstar Vladimir Malakhov, Goh Ballet said in a release.

Chan Hon Goh represented Canada as the only North American judge, later saying: "I was extremely proud of the Canadian representation here in Vienna as their love of dance radiated across to the audience. Vienna is a recognizable centre for the arts that is well-respected and admired for its cultural history. It brought such joy to my heart to be able to see Goh Ballet dancers prove their accomplishments on this international stage."

Khoo and Abe are part of the Senior Professional Program at the Goh Ballet and their next performance will be Goh Ballet's The Nutcracker December 18th — 22nd at the Centre in Vancouver for Performing Arts, where they will share the stage with the American Ballet Theatre's prima ballerina Paloma Herrera.

The Goh Ballet has been part of the dance and arts communities in Vancouver for more than 35 years.

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