



A Nutcracker to call our own

Mass Production: Goh Ballet, National Ballet, VMO, 200 Local Talents on Centre stage

By Dana Gee, The Province, December 17, 2009

For Chan Hon Goh visions of sugar plum fairies have literally been dancing in her head. As director of the Goh Ballet, the former National Ballet of Canada principal dancer has for about three years now been living and breathing the Goh's very ambitious production of *The Nutcracker* ballet.

"I have been keeping a notepad by my bed for when I wake up in the middle of the night with ideas," said Goh recently.

Choreographed here by the internationally renowned Mission native Anna-Marie Holmes, the ballet by Russian composer Tchaikovsky tells the story of a German girl named Clara who embarks on a fantastical journey that leads to the Land of Snow and the Land of Sweets. But all isn't fun and candy as Clara and her beloved nutcracker must face off against the evil Mouse King and his legion of whiskered warriors.

The Goh Ballet's production promises to be a grand one with spectacular scenery, costumes, the Vancouver Metropolitan Orchestra and close to 200 performers bringing the timeless tale to life on the Centre in Vancouver for Performing Arts stage.

"It's the biggest production this company has done in all of its 32 years," says Goh, who added the company, which was founded by her parents, Choo Chiat Goh and Lin Yee Goh, has only done excerpts from the ballet in the past.

Headlining the large cast of Lower Mainland dancers are Sonia Rodriguez and Piotr Stanczyk, principal dancers on loan from the National Ballet of Canada.

"We feel it's so important to host this type of collaboration; to bring in renowned dancers to share the stage with young preprofessional dancers," says Goh, who during her storied career danced in numerous productions of *The Nutcracker* around the globe.

For Rodriguez the guest dancer role is one she is always eager to leap at. "It's so nice to perform with other companies and dancers," she says. "It's invigorating, refreshing. You get to see other dancers. I enjoy escapes like this and it's always great to have the opportunity to be on stage."

Since first talking about a full version of *The Nutcracker*, Goh's plan has been for the production to be much more than a footnote in the company's history.

“The entire vision we are hoping to create is something that is lasting for the city,” says Goh. “Vancouver deserves its own full scale professional production. As far as I know Vancouver *Nutcrackers* have always been imported.”



Like many people the annual *Nutcracker* outing was a tradition for Goh and her family, but the love and connection with this particular ballet goes even deeper as it represents an important signpost in her illustrious dance career.

“It was actually my first principal role, when I was 19,” says Goh, about dancing the part of the Sugar Plum Fairy in a Celia Franca production.

These days Goh is thrilled to share the ballet with her own three-year old son and, of course, the legions of dancers who may be dancing a snowflake or a mouse for the very first time.

“I don’t know if it is an age thing and I am becoming more and more sentimental, but I get emotional watching them rehearse,” says Goh.

Chan Hon Goh, Director of Goh Ballet; Photo Credit: Cylla von Tiedemann

Rodriguez, who didn’t discover *The Nutcracker* holiday tradition until she moved to Canada 20 years ago, sees this ballet as an important entrance into her world for her children.

“I didn’t grow up with it,” says the Toronto resident, who’s a mother of two small children. “But since I’ve been here it has become a big tradition and now that I have children it is even more special for me.”