



Youth movement powers the (new) Nutcracker

At only 16, Danielle Gould is a veteran of the ballet, having first danced as a mouse.

By Kevin Griffin, Vancouver Sun, December 17, 2009

This evening, when Danielle Gould steps onto the stage at The Centre for the Performing Arts, she'll be dancing a role most teenage ballerinas can only dream of performing: the Snow Queen in *The Nutcracker*.

She'll perform an elegant pas de deux for about three minutes with her partner Vlademir Pereira. After the couple's initial duet, the corps of snowflakes float into the scene. The young couple dance together again before they make a grand exit from the snow scene on the very sleigh that Clara and the Nutcracker have entered on. Altogether, Gould will be on stage for about 10 minutes.

"It's probably my favorite part because it's when the snow falls," Gould said. "It's magical. I love being able to leave to the sleigh. That's very special."

Gould is only 16 years old but she's already a *Nutcracker* veteran. Gould, who started taking ballet lessons in North Vancouver when she was three years old, first danced as a mouse and then as Clara when Alberta Ballet and Ballet BC used to join forces to present their version of *The Nutcracker*. When she was at the National Ballet School in Toronto for Grade 8, she danced as Party Girl and Unicorn in the company's celebrated *Nutcracker* by James Kudelka.

As the Snow Queen in the Goh Ballet's version, she'll be dancing in the premiere as well as on Saturday night and the Sunday Matinee. For the other two performances, she'll be dancing as the lead flower in the Waltz of the Flowers and Mirliton in the Land of the Sweets.

Gould said she remembers being impressed during her stint at the National Ballet by the dancing of Chan Hon Goh, the artistic coordinator of *The Nutcracker*, when she was the company's principal ballerina. Gould said the experience of being at the National and seeing older dancers convinced her to follow her dream of becoming a professional ballet dancer.

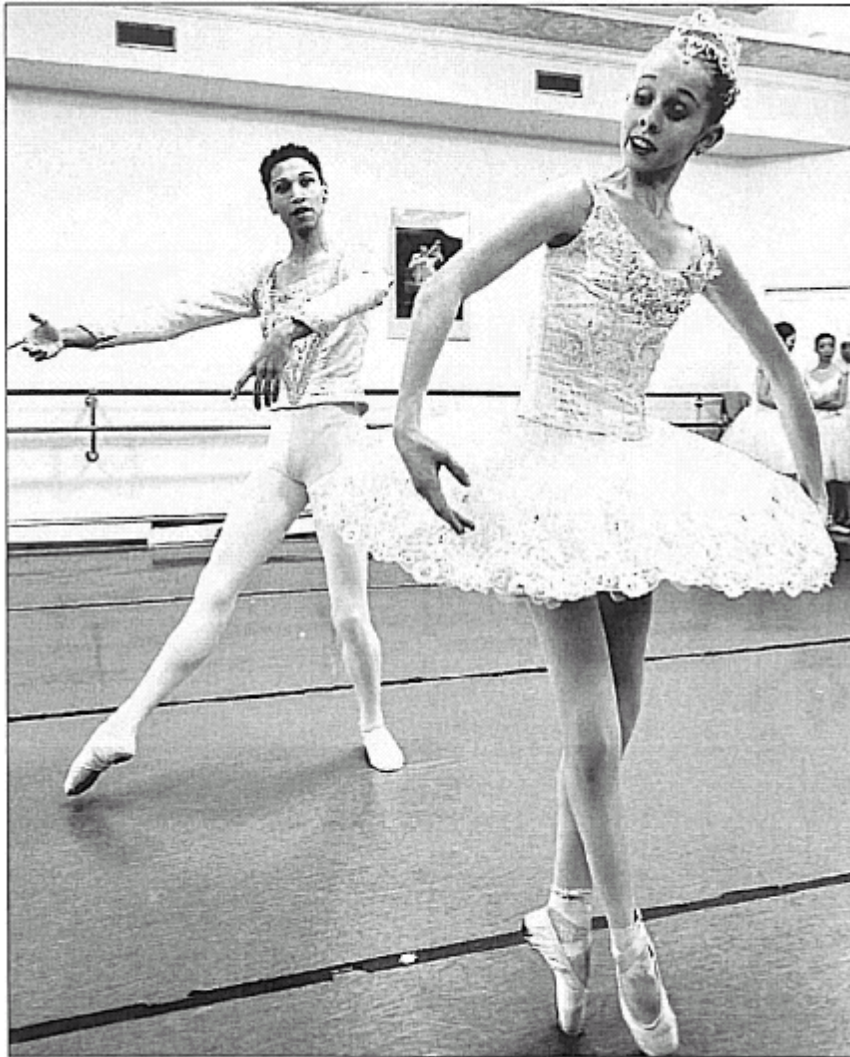
During an interview at the Goh Ballet Academy on Main Street, Gould beamed as she talked about both her roles in *The Nutcracker* and the importance of the ballet to the local dance scene.

"Me and my mom were talking last night," Gould said. "This is very special to be a part of. I think it will be a great thing for Vancouver. I think the arts need to be bigger in

Vancouver. It's a great thing for communities and especially for young people to see that they can be dancers."

Gould will be one of about 200 young male and female ballet dancers from several Lower Mainland ballet schools dancing in the five performances of *The Nutcracker*, choreographed by Anna-Marie Holmes. Divided into two casts of 95 acrobats, performers and ballroom and ballet dancers, they'll be joined by two dancers from the National Ballet, two choirs and musicians from the Vancouver Metropolitan Orchestra.

Although young student dancers have been incorporated into *Nutcracker* performances since the ballet premiered in the Maryinski Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1892, ballet purists have regularly panned the idea of children sharing the stage with professionals.



Danielle Gould and Vladimir Pereira perform Land of the Snow during dress rehearsal for *The Nutcracker*, at Vancouver's Goh Ballet on Main Street. WARD PERRIN / VANCOUVER SUN

It was George Balanchine, the great choreographer with the New York City Ballet, who linked children and *Nutcracker* in the popular imagination. In 1954, he staged a new *Nutcracker* that focused on family, tradition and togetherness on Christmas Eve that gave children a much more prominent role. Balanchine's version, which was subsequently televised and then released on DVD, was instrumental in turning the Russian classical ballet into the most successful ballet in North America – and a major money – maker for most professional ballet companies.

From New York, *Nutcracker* spread throughout North America, according to *Nutcracker Nation: How an Old World*

Ballet Became a Christmas Tradition in the New World. Author Jennifer Fisher compared *Nutcracker* to an underdog immigrant to North America which has had to adapt to its new home.

Over the years, as *Nutcracker* has been changed and updated, it has included street hockey in Royal Winnipeg Ballet productions, the substitution of a Brown Sugar Fairy for the Sugar Plum Fairy in an African-American version and even one in California where the costumes and dancing were done in the style of bharata natyam, the classical dance of India.

“As an immigrant to North America, *The Nutcracker* expanded its horizons and, no matter how many different incarnations resulted, become more and more the solid citizen,” Fisher says.

“The ballet world can be forgiven for not immediately recognizing the potential of *The Nutcracker* to serve as a new kind of ritual in a fast-changing world groping for just this kind of thing. *The Nutcracker* isn’t just another esthetic performance, although it certainly can be that.

“It’s also a wonderful flexible, ritual-like, resonant phenomenon. And with rituals, repetition doesn’t equal boredom – it equals power.”