

## Festive classic

BY CAITLIN DOWLING, NORTH SHORE NEWS DECEMBER 3, 2010



North Vancouver's Danielle Gould is one of the dancers featured in the Goh Ballet's production of The Nutcracker Dec. 16-19 at the Centre in Vancouver for Performing Arts.

**Photograph by:** Cindy Goodman, NEWS photo

Goh Ballet Academy performs The Nutcracker at the Centre in Vancouver for Performing Arts, Dec. 16-19. Tickets available through Ticketmaster.

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AS Christmas approaches the Goh Ballet Academy prepares for its second annual production of The Nutcracker.

The festive classic, combining both local and international talent, is being put together under the watchful eye of new director Chan Hon Goh.

"What's important to me is to create this experience where local dancers have the opportunity to be on a really wonderful stage," Goh says, "to work with a live orchestra, and to dance to live music, which is a different experience."

Goh is the daughter of Choo Chiat Goh and Lin Yee Goh, both principal ballet dancers themselves, who founded the academy in 1978. Goh has had aspirations to dance all her life. One of her first childhood recollections is of her mother's pointe shoes.

"It was just so tempting that I snuck in her bag and took them out," she says. I was five years old and I hung onto the curtains by the window and pulled myself up and stood en pointe."

Goh's father took a photograph of his little daughter, a picture she still has and treasures today.

Goh's career has taken her around the globe as a prima ballerina. She became the Principal dancer for the National Ballet of Canada in 1994, and has toured with many other companies, including the New York City Ballet.

During the 1990s, Goh's career was severely compromised by stress fractures in her feet, and for a while, she was advised not to dance. During this time, she consulted with her sports medicine doctors and her husband to find a way to keep her on stage. She started to consider the design of the pointe shoe, the rigid footwear used to make ballet dancers seem weightless in motion.

"I started to think of different areas where we could support the feet better, given that the pointe shoe is still very traditional and it's got to be so well fitted," she says. "Really each person's foot would be demanding different things."

They discussed the weight distribution and started making prototypes. It began with Goh redesigning a new pointe shoe for herself and it just "springboarded into a business."

Her designs become a flourishing company in 1996, Principal Shoes by Chan Hon Goh, with four different varieties of pointe shoe to cater for different dancers.

Goh puts the same energy into her work as the director of the Goh Ballet Academy. Just like with her personal injuries, she doesn't let barriers stop her students. One of the newest additions she has made as director is the ChanHon Goh Scholarship fund which this year donates \$100,000 to students with promise who need financial assistance.

"This is what we are here for," she says, "to provide this amazing training and accessibility and not deny the talents."

This year's production of The Nutcracker will see students from the Academy dancing alongside established performers from across North America, a combination which Goh finds enormously helpful to her students, by "creating some kind of mentorship and inspiration" for them.

"That's the key," says Goh. "To ensure that the artistic quality keeps rising and that you always provide wonderful challenges and new things for dancers.

Alongside the ballet dancers, the show will see ballroom dancing, gymnastics and magicians, many performers hailing from B.C. themselves.

"It is a huge, huge endeavor. We did that last year with our world premiere (and we were) overwhelmed and encouraged by the community response."

As a lifelong West Vancouver resident, Goh took pride in the number of dancers who come from the North Shore.

"And to do something where it's of this scale and of this calibre for the local community is very important to me."

One such performer is Danielle Gould, a young dancer from North Vancouver. At just 17 years old, she has completed her exams at the Goh Academy, has been awarded her Solo Seal, and has just represented Canada in the prestigious Genée International Ballet Competition, which she calls "a huge honour."

"I just love to show what I've worked so hard for to tell the story to the audience and just use all my emotion and perform. It's just an amazing feeling being on stage."

Gould has studied ballet since she was three years old and never tires of her work. She continues her schooling through an online program that gives her the chance to dance for hours every day. The Genée competition requires that entrants have completed their Advanced 2 exam or the Solo Seal award with distinction. Gould achieved both beforehand.

The competition was held in London, England this year, which offered her the chance to see a city as devoted to the art of ballet as she is. Despite not placing in the final ten, she relished the chance to compete.

"My favourite thing about the experience was probably getting to be there and dancing with so many other ballerinas who love ballet as much as I do."

Once The Nutcracker finishes Gould will not be resting her pointe shoes for long. In February she will be representing Canada again at the Canada Winter Games, dancing in gala performances to support the athletes.

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Dancers from Goh Ballet will be performing segments of The Nutcracker at Park Royal Shopping Centre South (Level 2 near Future Shop above the Food Court) tomorrow from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. During breaks, the vocal group Aliqua will be performing.

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