

Guangzhou Ballet Troupe: East and West get in step

By Kevin Griffin, Vancouver Sun October 19, 2011



One of China's largest ballet companies is coming to the west coast for a performance Friday night at the Centre for the Performing Arts in Vancouver.

The Guangzhou Ballet Troupe was started in 1994 by Zhang Dandan, a former dancer with the National Ballet of China. In the company's inaugural performance in Vancouver, the troupe will be performing a selection of excerpts from their extensive repertoire of western ballets such as *Le Corsaire*, *Swan Lake* and *Don Quixote* and Chinese contemporary and classical ballets such as *That Day, This Moment* and *Butterfly Lovers*.

Also sharing the stage with the professional dancers will be the Goh Ballet Academy, which will be performing the snow scene from its version of *The Nutcracker* choreographed by Anna Marie Holmes.

Chan Hon Goh, director of the Goh Ballet, said when she was younger she met Zhang who was in Vancouver for about three months working on a recreating a scene from *Dream of the Red Chamber*, an original ballet choreographed on the National Ballet of China.

"I got to know her quite well," Goh said. "A few years after that she retired and started the Guangzhou Ballet in her hometown."

Goh said the ballet *Butterfly Lovers* is about star-crossed lovers who couldn't be together in this life. Not until they die and are reincarnated as butterflies are they reunited. It's performed to music that's as recognizable in China as Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* is in Canada.

Because Russians from the former U.S.S.R. introduced ballet into China after the Communist revolution, the country's ballet dancers still perform with a strong Russian influence. In particular, that means the dancers been trained in the Vaganova method in use at the Imperial Russian ballet in St. Petersburg. It's a method designed to produce dancers that are both strong and precise in their movements without being stiff or robotic. Prominent Vaganova-trained dancers include Anna Pavlova and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Vancouver is the third stop on the Guangzhou company's tour of the country. In previous performances in Ottawa and Toronto, the company performed the four-act *Return on a Snowy Night*. It's a work choreographed by Xing Bang Fu who was born in China but now lives in Toronto.

The Guangzhou Ballet's performance is part of the third Vancouver Chinese Cultural Festival.

A Chinese painting and calligraphy exhibition starts Saturday and continues to Oct. 28 at Aberdeen Centre in Richmond.