

## Goh goes to film for special Nutcracker story

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Director Ryan Mac works with young ballet dancer Nathaniel Craig during the filming of the new documentary *The Reality of a Dream*. The film follows dancers from the Goh Ballet as they ready for a performance of *The Nutcracker*. The film is online and free to view until Jan. 10.

## Article content

Going to see a live production of The Nutcracker ballet is a holiday tradition that goes hand-in-hand with trimmed trees and baked treats for many people.

However, once again our norm has been hijacked by COVID-19 as Vancouver's Goh Ballet Academy's annual holiday production has gone dark. This year, as it pivoted away from the usual big Sugar Plum-soaked show, the Goh leaned into a new documentary with the Nutcracker at its centre.

The 25-minute film The Reality of a Dream: A Nutcracker Documentary, online and free to view until Jan. 10, is not a record of an actual Nutcracker production, which the Goh has been mounting since 2009, but rather a behind the scenes look at what goes into preparing dancers for the annual marquee event.

"We wanted to provide audiences with a different lens to see how the Nutcracker is produced," said Ryan Mah of Black Rhino Creative, the film's director.

Seeing the dancers sweat their life's dreams feels like you have snuck a peak at a process.

"I really wanted the audience to know more than just the lights and the glamour of what they see on the stage," said the company's director Chan Hon Goh, a former principal dancer for the National Ballet of Canada.



Goh Ballet Academy's director Chan Hon Goh said the making of the new documentary *The Reality of a Dream* came about after pandemic shut downs sidelined live performances. The film is online now until Jan. 10.

For the Goh Ballet Academy, a Vancouver staple since 1977, the film was a chance to put the dancers to work and to give them an audience, albeit cameras, to face.

"This whole thing came about because we were feeling with the pandemic that art, with no live performances, has kind of been forgotten if you will," said Goh. "It has been such a challenge for our dancers and dancers everywhere to stay motivated, stay inspired because we haven't had the outlets of live performances."

*The Reality of a Dream* focuses on five Goh Ballet Academy dancers and Goh as they go through auditions then rehearsal for the *Nutcracker*.

"There is one line that Chan says in the film that is something like you buy your ticket but you don't really know the amount of work that goes behind that ticket, so we wanted to pull back the curtains," said Mah.

And what is behind the curtains is a lot of personality.

"For me, for any good documentary or film, you need good characters," said Mah. "There's a universal message everyone has a dream to achieve something to be the ultimate ballet dancer but everyone's circumstances to get there is going to be different and for me as a filmmaker that's what I'm interested in."

Enter Natalie May Dixon, 19, (Spanish lead, Flower Soloist, Snowflake); Douglas Oliveira de Souza, 25, (Icicles debut, Russian Soloist); Nathaniel Craig, 22, (Icicles debut, Russian soloist); Theepika Sivananthan, 10, (Lead dragonfly) and Shino Liu, 15, (Reindeer, Spanish Lady).



Goh ballet dancer Nathaniel Craig is one of five dancers profiled in the new documentary *The Reality of a Dream*. The film follows dancers as they prep for a performance of *The Nutcracker*. The film is online and free to view until Jan. 10.

“It was difficult. I see stories behind each one of our dancers here. Each one of them is so individual, but I guess when it came to choosing it was about really finding specific challenges that went beyond those of being the dancer,” said Goh.

Shot here and in Goh’s Toronto location, the film let’s you in on what drives these dancers. From a refugee wanting a life away from gangs to a little girl with big dreams and even a dancer that didn’t even dance until six years ago the stories are diverse and modern.

“I think that they can take away just how dedicated we are. How strong and resilient you have to be to be a ballet dancer,” said Craig, who is the late bloomer and also shares in the film his own gender journey. “You see how much joy we find even with the hardships that might come along. It really is a peak into our world.”