

# VANCOUVER SUN

## In Goh's holiday Nutcracker, young dancers face the challenge of not getting distracted by magic

*"One of the real heartwarming things is the mentorship experience that happens between these young and up-and-coming performers with our visiting guest stars." — Chan Hon Goh*

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The party scene in The Nutcracker is a favourite of Theepika Sivananthan, the 11-year-old dancer alternating the role with Poppie Jenke in Goh Ballet's The Nutcracker at Queen Elizabeth Theatre Dec. 15-18. PHOTO BY LOUIS LI

## **Goh Ballet Nutcracker**

**When:** Dec. 15-18

**Where:** Queen Elizabeth Theatre, 630 Hamilton St., Vancouver

**Tickets:** From \$28 at [gohnutcracker.com](http://gohnutcracker.com)

Visiting guest artists, returning cast members and crew, and two burgeoning young dancers unite for this year's edition of Goh Ballet's The Nutcracker.

Now in its 12th season, the Vancouver tradition features choreography by Anna-Marie Holmes, musical accompaniment by Vancouver Opera Orchestra, and performances by more than 200 dancers aged six to 73. Special guests include Ashley Boudier of New York City Ballet as the Sugar Plum Fairy, Sterling Baca of Philadelphia Ballet as the Prince Cavalier, and Cecilia Iliesiu and Dammiel Cruz-Garido of Pacific Northwest Ballet as the Snow Queen and King.

Alternating the role of Clara, the heroine of the story, are 11-year-old Theepika Sivananthan and 12-year-old Poppie Jenke. We talked to Sivananthan and Goh Ballet director/Nutcracker executive producer Chan Hon Goh about the holiday show.

**Q: Theepika, you've been in previous Goh Nutcrackers, but this is your first starring role. Are you nervous?**

**Sivananthan:** I am nervous because it's a big role. But I feel like the more I practise the more confident I'll feel. I practise at home. We don't have a lot of space so it's kind of hard to practise but my mom's really helpful. She moves couches and all that stuff.

**Q: Chan, do you want to say anything about the guest dancers?**

Goh: I'm just smiling when I hear Theepika talk about her practise and excitement. We've had a chance to work with her and the cast of performers here since the middle of September. There's such a beautiful energy every time. But we only get to do this on weekends. So there's a lot of in-between time that cast members put toward practising on their own or taking additional coaching sessions. I know that Theepika had some additional coaching because of the acting that's involved, and the storytelling. The reason that it's such a wonderful way to develop young dancers is that they get not only to be challenged by the technical difficulties of the steps but they have to bring this story

to life. The success of the Nutcracker comes from being so relatable to different generations.

**Q: Theepika, can you recall any mishaps in your past Nutcracker performances?**

**Sivananthan:** When I was playing a black lamb, the day before I had a really bad stomach ache at school and had to go to emergency. I had a really high fever. The next day I had to perform and I performed with a high fever.

**Q: Do you have a favourite part of the ballet?**

**Sivananthan:** It has to be the party scene. Special guests come, there are all these decorations and everybody dances in costume. It's very exciting to see. And there are magic tricks.

**Goh:** Sometimes the young dancers are onstage and the magician is performing and I have to remind them, OK, you're still performing, you're not just watching, you still have to perform.

**Q: Chan, what is new in this year's production?**

**Goh:** We've revitalized some of the scenes. In the party scene, Theepika has a beautiful solo that we've made a little more challenging because of the higher standard of the dancers this year. The magician is performing different tricks. Then we have brand new reindeer costumes for The Land of Snow, and a new sleigh. Clara gets to take a beautiful sleigh ride and she's pulled by these glistening white reindeers across the stage.

And in the lobby we'll have an amazing interactive activation. If you can, come early to enjoy our photo booth and dance with the Nutcracker characters and make it a real event, even before going into the auditorium.

**Q: Theepika, will you have any questions for the guest ballerinas when they're here?**

**Sivananthan:** I want to know how they got into ballet and how they train. I want to train like them. And hopefully become a principal dancer.

**Goh:** Theepika, I'm just so proud of everything you're doing to get ready for this part. She's won several awards at international and local competitions. I have full confidence in her performance coming up. One of the real heartwarming things about putting the show together is the mentorship experience that happens between these young and up-and-coming performers with our visiting guest stars. There's a lot of relationship building behind the scenes.