



## Principal Moves

Chan Hon Goh and her company Principal Shoes are changing the way ballerinas dance with its unique brand of ballet shoes

writer Lisa An

Watch a rendition of the *Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake* and you can't help but admire the performer's graceful and sinuous movements. Even if you aren't a fan of ballet, you likely appreciate the aesthetic beauty of the dancers: prima ballerinas in their elegant poses, looking like petite princesses in their frothy tutus and satin shoes. The irony, of course, is that those same shoes that help form a ballerina's beautiful poise is also responsible for mauling, and ultimately ruining, her feet.

That's one of the reasons why Chan Hon Goh, a prima ballerina with the National Ballet of Canada, formed Principal Shoes, a company devoted to creating high quality ballet shoes for dancers. "A dancer's career is a short one. Since this is a physical art form, your body is your instrument. When your body goes, so does your job," says Chan.

"My ultimate goal with Principal Shoes is to help prevent improper use and fit of [a dancer's] shoes."

Ironically given the company's success, Chan didn't initially start

Principal Shoes as a full fledged business. It started when other dancers began to covet the lovely, ergonomically designed ballet shoes Chan created for herself and other professional dancers. Soon, retailers heard the buzz and became interested in featuring Principal Shoes in their stores. That's when Chan realized her professionally specified shoes could become a viable business.

In 1996, Chan launched Principal Shoes in Toronto, along with her husband, Chun Che, who is also a ballet dancer and choreographer. Together, they consulted with the professional dance community,

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physiotherapy experts and sports medicine doctors to develop ballet shoes that would better align a dancer's feet and satisfy the grueling needs during training and performance. At first, the shoes were distributed to only professional dancers, but by the

images courtesy of Principal Shoes



end of the company's first year of business, Principal Shoes were sold at various retailers in four Canadian cities.

Almost 10 years later, the company is taking its next big steps by opening another office in Vancouver and expanding its line of shoes. It exports products across North America and to countries such as Japan. The number of retailers and clients grow every year: visit the Principal Shoes website and you'll find testimonials from dancers who've claimed that the shoes have literally changed their lives and how they dance. Principal Shoes even won a Chinese Canadian Entrepreneur Award in 2005 for most innovative business.

When asked what Principal Shoes offers over its competitors, Chan says that her background and expertise is what makes

her company unique. "My main passion, of course, is the performing and dancing aspect of my career," says Chan. "Out of this passion is the will to create this business."

This passion for dancing is the reason why Chan and her husband believe strongly in giving back to the dance community, responsible for cultivating their talents. They regularly donate a portion of the company's proceeds to dance competitions and festivals and established the Principal Shoe Scholarship. "We try to seek out dancers with enormous potential and talent, who really love the art form and need financial assistance. We try, in our own way, to support them through our shoes by giving them the scholarship," says Chan.

Although being a prima ballerina is Chan's first love, Principal Shoes brings her "unexpected rewards."

"It really does pay off when you're working until one to two [o'clock] in the morning and hearing the feedback about Principal Shoes from wearers who say that it's changed their way of dancing," says Chan.

"It's enough to keep us going." ■

