

Chan Hon Goh gives back to Canada's dance community

Former National Ballet of Canada star gives master classes in her old Toronto stomping ground.



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Former National Ballet of Canada star Chan Hon Goh is giving master classes across the country, including one in Toronto on Feb. 5.

By: [Michael Crabb](#) Dance, Published on Fri Jan 30 2015

Talent, it's said, is innate.

Even with talent, success can only be achieved through hard work. But there's also such a thing as craft, the tricks of the trade. That's what, from her rich experience, former National Ballet of Canada [star](#) Chan Hon Goh hopes to share with aspiring young dancers as she embarks on a whirlwind cross-Canada tour, giving master classes in Toronto and nine other cities.

“I see this as my opportunity to give back to the Canadian dance community,” says Goh, now based in Vancouver. “My goal is to inspire as well as mentor up-and-coming talent to achieve their dance dreams.”

It’s not simply how-to technical tips Goh will be offering.

“It’s important for young dancers to consider what’s behind and beyond the steps themselves,” Goh explains. “I want to emphasize the importance of what you’re actually saying with steps.”

Goh says part of her mission is to give students a sense of self-confidence and the emotional resolve to succeed in a notoriously competitive career and constantly evolving art form.

In each city, Goh will give two hour-long master classes, geared for different age groups.

Class size will be restricted to no more than 20 so that Goh has a chance to offer individual attention. The classes will be followed by discussions with students and parents.

Although the sessions follow the form of a routine ballet class — exercises at the barre and then unsupported work using combinations of steps — Goh’s intention is to focus on the final objective: performance.

“It’s a matter of translating what you learn in class to the stage; things like phrasing, musicality and subtle dynamics. I want to leave them with lots to think about.”

As a bonus, thanks to a sponsoring donor, students who show exceptional potential may receive cash awards to help further their education.

“We don’t have lots to give in scholarships, only \$5,000 in total, but even small amounts can help,” says Goh,

Goh was born in Beijing to Lin Yee and Choo Chiat Goh, dancer parents who resettled in Vancouver in 1977. As she explained in her 2002 autobiography, the family lived humbly in a rented basement apartment as Chan’s parents struggled to establish themselves as teachers in Canada. Today, the Goh Ballet Academy they founded, where Chan herself trained, is among Canada’s most respected private ballet schools.

In 1988, Goh won a silver medal at the prestigious Adeline Genée Competition in England and joined the National Ballet later that year. Apart from international guest engagements, notably with the Suzanne Farrell Ballet of Washington, D.C., Toronto and the National Ballet became her home.

Rising through the ranks, she spent 15 years as a principal ballerina, delighting fans with a delicately poised and charming stage persona. Offstage she was known for her steely discipline and focus. National Ballet artistic director Karen Kain once described Goh as “the epitome of the iron butterfly.”

When, in 2009, the lingering effect of an injury convinced then 40-year-old Goh it was time to retire she and her ballet teacher and choreographer husband and their son returned to Vancouver. She began working with her parents at their academy and assumed its direction in 2010.

Among her achievements has been the [production](#) of a spectacular annual holiday season *Nutcracker* involving invited guest stars in the leading roles alongside students from the Goh Academy and other area studios.

Meanwhile, Goh and husband Chun Che had already launched a company that manufactures and markets a line of pointe shoes designed by the ballerina herself. The company remains active.

Goh says her master class tour is not planned as a money-maker. Students only pay \$25. Even with sponsorship, Goh says she'll be lucky to break even. Nor, she says, is it intended as a recruitment campaign for her academy.

"I'm not trying to poach anyone's students," she insists.

Goh says she launched her master class series last year because she felt a need to connect herself with what's going on across Canada.

"Vancouver is rather secluded from the rest of the country. So this tour is as much a learning experience for me, to give me a perception of standards elsewhere and to be more in tune generally."

Her Toronto [master class](#) on Feb. 5 will be tinged with nostalgia because it's being held at her old professional home, National Ballet headquarters at King's Landing on the waterfront. (There were still spots available as of late last week.)

"It's going to be wonderful to catch up with old friends from my own time with the company and hopefully see some of the new dancers too."