



A Window into the Dance Scene: Reflections with Chan Hon Goh | By Shrida Sahadevan

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On February 11-12th, young artists (aged 10-18) from the Edmonton ballet community were treated to a workshop series hosted by former Prima Ballerina of the National Ballet of Canada, Mrs. Chan Hon Goh. Now the Director of Goh Ballet Academy, Goh visited Edmonton as her fourth stop on a two week tour, providing young dancers a unique and unforgettable opportunity of working with one of Canada's most prolific and gifted artists.

As a young girl, Chan Hon Goh explored her passions in dance through her training at the Goh Ballet Academy, which was co-founded by her parents. She launched her career with the National Ballet of Canada in 1988, ultimately becoming a Principal Dancer. Goh also joined major ballet companies in Europe, Australia, North America, and Asia during her fruitful twenty year career. Vibrancy and elegance were a staple of Goh's various roles until her farewell performance in 2009 as Giselle. Currently, she is the Director of the Goh Ballet Academy and Youth Company in Vancouver, BC.

The Wanderer already had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Goh in February of last year.

On February 18, I was fortunate enough to speak with her again, exploring her insights into the Masterclass series as well as the changing scope of the Canadian dance scene.



"First, I would like to say congratulations on bringing your Masterclass series for another year!"

"Yes, thank you. I am always happy to make Edmonton one of my regular stops. It's a city that I look forward going to now that I've built this relationship with some of the students who've attended since 2014. It's great to see their progress and advances."

"That's really great! Since last year's series, did you change your approach to how you structured your classes, or were there any aspects that you changed from last year?"

"I think with each time that I conduct a class, and even learning the various candidate levels in each city, I'm able to walk away with some kind of insight into what could possibly benefit them more. From last year, I remember that there was a combination of steps, with musical phrasing that was unusual and different from what they are used to, that was a challenge for them and one that they had a little bit more difficulty picking up. This year, from what I realized last year in other cities, I was able to spend a little more time on developing that aspect of learning about musical phrasing and choreography — the combination of steps that is newer to them and how to process that a little quicker for them."



"As the dance world is constantly evolving with new knowledge and choreography and music, what is the biggest challenge for you as an instructor to address these changes?"

"I think my aim is to always provide students with the knowledge and measurable ways of improving themselves. The dance scene is evolving, but I think in terms of training, I want to still be able to equip them with solid technical foundation that then, they are able to adapt to the changing needs of the dance scene."

"You have travelled to many cities in the past few weeks and in the past year, and you have worked closely with many young dancers. You've told us before that you wanted to learn new insights into the Canadian ballet world. Did you gain new insights throughout your tour this year?"

"I did, you know, I found each year that dancers are becoming more advanced for their age, which is wonderful. They are progressing at a level that is quite fast. I would continue to encourage them to get more exposure and input into how they can dance and artistically project. I feel that people are advancing and training, even in smaller cities, at a good rate."

"What challenges do you believe young dancers are facing in Canada today?"

"I think that the biggest challenge is when they are ready and at a stage of maturity, age level, and dance level to want to look for a job when they are graduated. I think the biggest challenge is to find a company that is sponsoring contracts. I think there are no readily available contracts. Also, I find the challenge to be two fold — one, you have to be really good at the base core of what you are doing, be it ballet, jazz or musical theatre, but you also have to be very versatile. You can't be just a classical dancer; you have to know how to do contemporary, how to pick up things and be more open to other genres of dancing."

"Do you find these challenges are different from when you were younger and you were a ballerina?"

It's probably progressed more and the demands are a little bit higher for dancers to be more capable and more ready to assimilate to various styles.

"As a dancer who has flourished in the Canadian Ballet world, what would you say was your biggest lesson as a performer?"

"Biggest lesson, probably, is to never stop learning. I think as a true artist it is never enough to rest on one's goals. So, that spirit of always constantly wanting information, and input of how to better oneself is really important."

"Do you think the transition of being a performer to an instructor has enabled you to constantly learn and better yourself as an artist?"

"Yes, the difference is now I'm on the other side of the studio. I am now the one giving the information. Giving the information and finding different ways of delivering information is very important. How to get it through to students, how to be motivating, encouraging, how to be honest, sharing your opinions and experiences. How to get that through to students is what's different for me."



"As we wrap, I would like to ask what your vision is moving forward with the Masterclass series in the upcoming years."

"That's a great question. I'm thrilled that you asked that. One of my goals is to discover talent, Canadian talent. To see the next generation of dancers and find these talents in different communities really means a lot to me. To provide this artistic access to them and sharing some of my experiences continues to be a driving force. Also, I'm hoping to increase the amount of scholarships that we are able to provide. As you know, along with the Masterclass series, any participant is eligible to receive a scholarship. Myself and an associate of mine, we assess these students during the class and we end up giving 15-20 scholarships out each year, so that students can continue to further their training, develop, and use it to better their careers."

You can learn more about Chan Hon Goh here and more about the Masterclass series here.

Photography courtesy of Goh Ballet, Kharen Hill and David Cooper.

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Shrida Sahadevan is a MSc Student in Rehabilitation and a recent BSc Honors Neuroscience graduate. She loves exploring her creative side through writing, dancing, reading and appreciating the arts.

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