

Former National Ballet of Canada principal dancer Chan Hon Goh mounts a comeback in *The Nutcracker*

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Chan Hon Goh put on her pointe shoes for Goh Ballet's 12th edition of *The Nutcracker*, which will be available to a national audience.

Chan Hon Goh has accomplished a great deal in her life. A former principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada, she performed on-stage for more than 20 years before hanging up her slippers in 2009.

Since then, as the director of the Goh Ballet Academy and Youth Company Canada, she has won numerous honours, including being admitted into the Order of Canada, winning a YWCA Women of Distinction Award, and capturing an award as the best teacher at the World Ballet Competition.

Goh Ballet has been based in Vancouver since 1978. And it's best known to Vancouverites for staging *The Nutcracker* every year since 2009. But this year, **Chan Hon Goh** is doing something

different and, to her fans, unexpected.

For the first time in more than a decade, she is dancing again as part of this year's edition of *The Nutcracker*. She is performing the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" in a filmed version that will be available for free across Canada from Friday (December 18) until January 2.

"I enjoyed it very much, but it was not an easy process," Goh revealed to the *Straight* in a phone interview. "I actually pulled my calf muscle a week before the filming and was very scared that I was not going to be able to get my pointe shoes on."

Goh hadn't been doing any training since stepping back from her dancing career many years ago. She only began preparing for this performance six weeks before *The Nutcracker* was conceived as a film project, which she codirected with Los Angeles-based Lucas Dong.

For Goh, one of the challenges was ensuring that the camera was properly positioned while she was dancing.

"I would be shouting out to one of my rehearsal assistants, 'Okay, did it cut off my hand? Are you sure I'm in frame?'" Goh said with a chuckle. "I would be worrying about that and then getting the music started, and I'd start to dance—and not think about that and just dance my best."



One of Chan Hon Goh's challenges was codirecting *The Nutcracker* at the same time as she was a performer.

All the dancers were cast from the Goh Ballet, with 20-year-old Alex Stonehouse playing the lead character. The story revolves around a young male dancer who grew up watching *The Nutcracker*. But as a young adult, he's tormented over whether the pandemic will prevent him

from actually having a career in ballet.

Through his flashbacks, the audience gets a glimpse into what happens inside a dance company, including how auditions and rehearsals take place. In one of those recollections, Goh performs her dance.

“He is so enamoured by the beauty and the allure of dance,” she relates. “Really, we wanted to say we all find these inspirational moments that make us decide on something that becomes our life—or a big part of our life.”

Although Goh is missing not staging *The Nutcracker* in front of a live audience this year, she takes comfort in being able to present it to people across Canada, thanks to funding from **RBC Royal Bank**. And she realizes that as a result of this performance going straight to video, it will undoubtedly attract a larger audience than any of her previous 11 editions of *The Nutcracker*.

“That’s so exciting for us,” Goh says. “You know, everybody is inevitably so much more online and on their screens. And to participate in this way and to you know offer this to them, uh is great, it’s a great way of creating more awareness for the arts.”

The Nutcracker’s score was written by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and it was launched in 1892 as a two-act fairy ballet. The libretto was adapted from an 1816 story, “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King”, written by Prussian author E. T. A. Hoffman.



Chan Hon Goh retired as a dancer in 2009.

The script for the Goh Ballet's filmed version was written by L.A.-based writer Kate Orsini.

According to Goh, the turmoil and uncertainty of the lead character reflects what many people around the world are experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

"For me, I wanted something that would be a reflection of what young dancers and performing artists are going through," Goh says. "So it's very much about the COVID journey for a young dancer."

Goh adds that her dance company learned a great deal through this experience. And she's hoping that it can continue hosting virtual workshops for young dancers in the future.

"We have plans to enter this short film in many international film festivals," she notes. "You know, part of what I truly believe and advocate for is just the telling of a dancer's story, what this art form means, and what it can do to people who enjoy it."

**Watch *The Nutcracker* by Goh Ballet for free from
Friday (December 18) to January 2
at GohNutcracker.com.**