

VANCOUVER SUN

Goh Ballet Nutcracker adapts for pandemic, makes (virtual) silver-screen debut



“The film project has brought a ray of sunshine and hope to our community. We hope it brings good cheer (to viewers) who are used to celebrating through our Nutcracker in December.”

Author of the article: **Gordon McIntyre**

Publishing date: Dec 13, 2020

Like other formerly live performances, the Goh Ballet Nutcracker will not be held this Christmas, breaking a run since its inception in 2009 of a delightful tradition for thousands of fans and dozens of young dancers in Metro Vancouver.

But Chan Hon Goh has reimagined the magic virtually with a short (25 minutes or so) film called The Nutcracker: Beyond the Stage. It's an original story, not a filmed

performance of the Nutcracker, but it does take the viewer backstage to show the dedication, hard work and mental fortitude it takes for the show to go on.

“It’s such a trying time for everybody, but especially I’ve been feeling it among our young artists,” Goh said over the phone about her students who are now learning dance steps via Zoom and missing out on auditioning opportunities.

It is a challenge for them to keep up their motivation and emotional resilience, she said.

“The film project has brought a ray of sunshine and hope to our community. We hope it brings good cheer (to viewers) who are used to celebrating through our Nutcracker in December.”

In pre-pandemic times, the Nutcracker would have featured guest dancers from renowned companies from around the world such as Seattle’s Pacific Northwest Ballet and the National Ballet of China. There are no foreigners in the film, but Goh has come out of an 11-year retirement to perform a cameo as the Sugar Plum Fairy.



Chan Hon Goh, centre in white as the Sugar Plum Fairy, in the Goh Ballet’s short film The Nutcracker: Beyond the Stage, which opens on the Goh Ballet Academy’s website on Dec. 18 and runs until Jan. 2.

Her father, Choo Chiat Goh — who arrived (with an eight-year-old Chan in tow) in Canada penniless from China, not knowing anyone and with only rudimentary English in 1977 — also makes a cameo. Choo and Chan’s mother Lin Yee Goh began teaching

ballet a year after their arrival in their Kitsilano basement, a studio with a ceiling so low dancers weren't able to jump.



Choo Chiat Goh and daughter Chan Hon Goh at Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver in 2017. PHOTO BY ARLEN REDEKOP

The Gohs moved their school to its current location on Main Street, a refurbished bank that still has a huge vault downstairs (handy for storing costumes), in 1985.

In the film, Alex Stonehouse (a student in Goh Ballet's Senior Professional School) is the principal character. Aside from some guest adult dancers in the party scene, this year's cast is made up of students from Goh Ballet Academy.

"We tried to show what these young dancers are going through now and the impact of the pandemic, to them missing out on performing the Nutcracker when the Nutcracker is such a significant part of their lives," Goh said.

The message is uplifting, she said, showing hope for the future.

She and director Lukas Dong, a Canadian based in L.A., sketched out a story, then Kate Orsini (Kate Fordham on the TV series Nashville) wrote a screenplay. Filming took just five days and was shot at Goh Ballet's studio and the Centre on Homer Street.

Chan, who for 20 years was principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada, got the final cut on Thursday. To watch it yourself, you need to sign up at GohNutcracker.com. Shows run from Dec. 18 to Jan. 2.

"We've been so fortunate to have sponsorship from RBC, it enables us to offer it free of charge," Goh said.

With a little hope, the show will be back live at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, delighting the 12,000 to 14,000 fans that usually attend in a typical year.

“We’ve already reserved the Queen E for next December,” Chan said.

gordmcintyre@postmedia.com

twitter.com/gordmcintyre