



How this drag performer ended up in an iconic ballet role — and stayed there for 13 years

Goh Ballet's The Nutcracker returns to Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre Dec. 15-18

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Christopher Hunte is pictured at Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver. Hunte will be performing in drag as Mother Ginger for their annual ballet show, The Nutcracker, at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre from Dec. 15-18. (Ben Nelms/CBC)

Drag meets ballet: that is the life of Christopher Hunte, who has been playing the role of Mother Ginger in Goh Ballet Academy's *The Nutcracker* for the past 13 years.

Before landing the role, Hunte, now in his 50s, was a well-established drag performer in B.C. known as Symone Says.

His foray into ballet came after a serendipitous encounter while performing at a dinner theatre at Delilah's Restaurant in Vancouver.

Several members of Goh's production staff attended the show. Afterward, they asked Hunte if he would be willing to play Mother Ginger.

"And the rest is l'histoire, as they say."

Now, Hunte will take the stage this month in Vancouver as Mother Ginger, once again.

Commitment to diversity

Chan Hon Goh, executive producer of the show, said there are more than 200 young performers involved, plus guest artists from international companies. They rehearse year-round.

"As soon as we wrap our show, we start thinking about ... the following year."

Goh's parents, Choo Chiat and Lin Yee Goh — principal dancers with the National Ballet of China — established Goh Ballet in Vancouver in 1978. Multiculturalism and inclusion were important to them, Goh said.

Now, 45 years later, Goh continues their legacy of ensuring representation in their productions.

"When we talk about ballet, a lot of people think that you need to have a lot of money to have ballet. Yes, it helps, but if you're talented, the Goh fosters you. I don't know any other ballet house in Vancouver that fosters diversity in that respect," Hunte said.

"You don't get much more diverse than a black man in his 50s, who's gay, playing Mother Ginger," he added, saying diversity is so important particularly for the children who watch their performances.

"It's wonderful for them to be able to see people who look like them, whether it be their colour, or their size, or their backgrounds."



Christopher Hunte is pictured as Mother Ginger in Goh Ballet's The Nutcracker. (Louis Li)

Watching young dancers grow and develop is one of the reasons Hunte continues to take on the role.

"So, some of the kids [were] going from ... flowers to leads in this production," he said.

"I've got to see it, because I've gotten to watch these kids for the last 13 years grow up into beautiful dancers."

The Nutcracker runs from Dec. 15 to 18 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

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