

Goh's Nutcracker ballet is making a grand jeté back to the Vancouver stage

This year's performance features top dancers from New York and Pacific Northwest companies, alongside a diverse cast of local performers.



[Nick Laba](#)

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Jerome Tisserand and Elizabeth Murphy in Goh Ballet's 2017 production, dancing the roles of the Cavalier Prince and Sugar Plum Fairy. | Louis Li / Goh Ballet

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Despite directing the performance for 12 years, and dancing in it years before that, Chan Hon Goh still gets nerves when she hears the tune of the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy.

“I don’t think that will ever disappear,” she said, remarking on the difficulty of the steps and the strict physical regimen she maintained while in performance season as former principal dancer for The National Ballet of Canada.

Now that she produces the show, Goh said it’s incredibly rewarding to see the dedication of her cast – who are currently putting in 14-16 hour days, seven days a week – to make the final product shine on stage.

“The number of audience members that come up to say that they’ve made it their family tradition, or that it’s something that creates this warm, little bit of a departure in a world where so many things are beyond our control,” she said. “That there is such goodness in the *Nutcracker*, speaks tenfold to me.”

From Dec. 15 to 18, Goh Ballet’s *The Nutcracker* is returning for five live performances at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, for the first time in three years. And the classic show is coming back in a big way, with a diverse cast of star dancers from international companies, a strong showing of local performers and a lobby packed with interactive experiences.

Hailing from New York City Ballet is principal dancer Ashley Boudier, who plays the Sugar Plum Fairy. Pacific Northwest Ballet’s newly named principal Cecilia Iliesiu takes the part of the Snow Queen. Sterling Baca, principal dancer with the Philadelphia Ballet plays The Cavalier.

Locally, Vancouver drag performer Symone (Christopher Hunte) is coming back as the larger-than-life Mother Ginger.

The role of Clara will be shared – as all children’s roles are – by Theepika Sivananthan of Surrey and Poppie Jenke of West Vancouver. Poppie, 12, attends Mulgrave School, and will be joined by her younger brother Oscar, 6, who plays one of the little mice.

The cast is being highlighted as one of Canada’s most diverse group of *Nutcracker* performers to date. This year’s show features dancers from more than seven countries, speaking eight languages and spanning ages six to 73. The artform of ballet is about showing your best work, Goh said. “This means that dancers of all backgrounds and preferences should have equal opportunity.

“The ballet world has recognized that sometimes this has not been the case,” she continues. “Speaking on our part, we feel like from the premiere of our *Nutcracker*,

we have featured dancers from diverse racial backgrounds, as well as people from the LGBTQ community.”

Goh explained that while her version of the Nutcracker is a traditional version, it does get updated every year, often inspired by the dancers who come in. The peppermint dance in act two features more male dancers this year, and unicorns have been added to the snow scene.

Also, her team has put in a lot of effort to expand the audience experience beyond the performance itself. Sections of the Queen E lobby will be set up as large-scale photo areas, decorated as replicas of some of the stage sets. A choir will sing Christmas carols inside.

VIP guests can get a get a guided backstage tour after the show. Goh tells ticket holders to come early, especially those with young children, as kids aged four to seven can come an hour before the show to meet some of the characters and even learn some dance steps.

“When a family has gone all out to enjoy a performance I want to make sure that they just really live it to its fullest, and be able to take something home that will last” Goh said.

Goh Ballet’s The Nutcracker

When: Dec. 15-18

Where: Queen Elizabeth Theatre

Tickets: Available through [Goh Ballet’s website](#)