

Following the Stars — Josephine Cheung (2010)

The Maryknoll spirit is a willingness to try new things – to risk, to be creative, daring to venture into the unknown not fearing of making mistakes or losing face.

In 2010, Form 5 graduate Josephine Cheung was one of two students from Hong Kong first ever to be admitted to a three-year full-time diploma programme at the Moscow Bolshoi Ballet Academy.

Founded in 1733, the Bolshoi Ballet Academy is the world's most prestigious ballet training school, many of its graduates are world-class dancers and choreographers.

"I am in the Stars' Class - a master class taught by Marina Leonova, the principal herself – a desire of all Bolshoi students. There are only eight students in the class, me, a Japanese, a French, and all the rest are from Russia."

To the ballet community in Hong Kong, it is no doubt a remarkable accomplishment. Josephine's ballet school, Jean M Wong School of Ballet, publicized the news widely. But Josephine's alma mater, true to the Maryknoll spirit of humility and modesty, maintained a very low profile amidst all the media attention.

"It isn't that the school didn't care. When I told Sister Jeanne that I shall be attending Bolshoi, she was overjoyed and celebrated with my mom and me. The few teachers that knew I was going to Moscow have backed me with great support and encouragement. It is just that bragging about successes has never been a Maryknoll practice."

Despite being widely acclaimed in Hong Kong, such as winning the bronze prize at the 2007 Hong Kong Young Ballet Stars Award, Josephine had to go through an exhaustive audition and application process. After 3 month's of long wait, she and her ballet classmate Shirley Pu were informed of their admission.

Tough disciplined training awaited Josephine at Bolshi. She spends at least nine hours a day to study ballet as well as Russian language and culture. "Classes begin at eight in the morning and finish at six. After dinner, I study the Russian language and do stretching exercises before going to bed."

Josephine started ballet dancing at the age of 3. "In the beginning, I was merely enchanted by the pretty dresses and elegant poses. It was until Form 3 that I was inspired by my ballet

teacher to pursue a career in ballet."

The teacher was Tang Min, a former principal dancer of the National Ballet of China. "She shared with me her experiences and sparked my interest in becoming a principal dancer. I started to plan and explore the avenues, and soon decided that Russia is the best place to start a ballet career and Bolshoi is the best training school."

"The path will be long and winding. I shall have to start as a group dancer before becoming a soloist. To stand out as a principal dancer, I must prove to everyone that I am capable and worthy." Her body is ready and more importantly her heart too – behind the graceful glides and the sprightly poses is an iron will to forge ahead.

Josephine received the Dame Margot Fonteyn Award that paid for the first year of her tuition and accommodation at the Bolshoi, costing about HK\$123,500. The award was donated by the Tsinforn C. Wong Memorial Scholarship, set up by Jean Wong, principal of the ballet school that bears her name. "I am much indebted to Ms. Wong for her ongoing guardianship. She is one of my most ardent supporters as I follow my star."

Josephine is also very grateful to MCS teachers who helped her to research on ballet schools and advised on studying abroad.

The English language training at MCS had benefited Josephine immensely when settling in Russia. "My command of English is so good that some foreign friends thought I was a native English speaker. Thanks to the English training I had in Maryknoll, I communicate well with and befriend people from many countries."

Josephine had offers from other schools for primary education but her mother Heidi, a MCS graduate, insisted on her attending Maryknoll. "I love my school dearly – every Maryknoller is brought up as a unique person, each standing tall for her own virtues and talents. Josephine will get the best education at Maryknoll."