

**Surprise and delight follow one after another in
outstanding, innovative
Production of the classic**

Goh Ballet delivers entertaining Nutcracker



By Kevin Griffin, Vancouver Sun December 19, 2009

Vancouver has an entertaining new version of The Nutcracker that combines innovative elements within a traditional framework. It's the kind of winning formula that should make the production a Christmas tradition for years to come.

After having the unheard of luxury of some 60 days of rehearsals following months of planning, The Nutcracker premiered Thursday at the Centre for the Performing Arts. Right from the curtain rising through the following two hours of the outstanding production, surprise and delight followed one after another.

A narrative ballet, The Nutcracker starts with a big Christmas party where young Clara is given a nutcracker that breaks in a tussle with her brother Fritz. When Clara falls asleep with the nutcracker in her arms, a magical world opens up to include a Mouse King and a journey to the Kingdom of Sweets, where they're greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy and the inhabitants perform for them.

Children have been a part of The Nutcracker since it was first performed in 1892 in the Mariinsky Theatre in St.Petersburg, Russia. In the Goh Ballet's version, children have an even greater presence on stage. The production features almost 200 cast members, many of them from the Goh Ballet Academy and Metro Vancouver ballet schools.

But don't think this version of The Nutcracker is a student production. It isn't. Brought to the stage at a cost of \$700,000, The Nutcracker has the kind of sets and amazing costumes you'd expect to see in a touring Broadway show. While some of the dancers may not yet be at a professional level, they all bring an enthusiasm and youthful exuberance that's perfectly suited to the production. Many, however, are such good dancers that professional careers are clearly options for them.

The evening was full of innovations by choreographer Anna-Marie Holmes. In an unusual move, she's made Dr. Drosselmeyer into an actual magician who performs several tricks that had the audience oohing and ahing. He looked suitably mysterious with a black patch on his right eye and a long flowing cape that's silver on the outside and shimmering black and red on the inside.

Holmes brought the Christmas Eve party scene alive with young student gymnasts performing backflips, a pair of professional ballroom dancers gliding around the stage and a dancing bear. The magical Christmas tree that grows and expands before our very eyes was another big crowd pleaser.

In the Kingdom of the Sweets, two agile adult gymnasts in the Arabian set combine dancing with the kind of flexibility usually seen by circus performers. In the Chinese tea section, dancers spun coloured sun umbrellas and twirled bright red ribbons of the kind seen in rhythmic gymnastics.



Tyler Carver as the Nutcracker; Photo Credit: David Cooper

was the entire cast of the Flowers and Cavaliers in the Waltz of the Flowers as they crisscrossed and wove their way around the stage.

Loaned from the National Ballet, Sonia Rodriguez and Piotr Stanczyk danced as the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Cavalier Prince. Stanczyk combined both strength and softness that matched Rodriguez's lightness and precision.

Several of the young dancers' performances stood out during the opening. At the end of Act 1, Danielle Gould danced with poise and confidence as the Snow Queen.

So did Yoshiko Kamikusa as Dew Drop in the Waltz of the Flowers. A standout in the dancing