

Goh Ballet Breathes New Life into Nutcracker

The new version of the Christmas classic showcases Anna-Marie Holmes's warm-hearted, witty choreography.

By Kaija Pepper, Globe and Mail, December 18, 2009



The World may not need another *Nutcracker*, but Vancouver can thank its Sugar Plum Fairy for this one. Goh Ballet's new production of the Christmas family classic showcases Anna-Marie Holmes's warm-hearted, witty choreography, which gave new life to many of the familiar roles.

There's "gender illusionist" Symone (Christopher Hunte) as Mother Ginger, a horde of child gymnasts as her Bon Bons, and ballroom dancers Don and Marian Adair as party guests. Stanislav Galimkhanov was dashing in the Russian trio, and rhythmic gymnast Katerena Goston made weird and wonderful shapes in the Arabian dance. A real Magician (Damien Carriere) brought fun and games to the central role of the mysterious Drosselmeyer.

Holmes, a dancer born in Mission, B.C., made headlines when she and her then-husband, David Holmes, performed in Russian in 1963, the first North Americans to dance with the legendary Kirov.

She now mounts the great classical ballets, including *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake* and *Le Corsaire*, internationally.

Although the production created by Chan Hon Goh, who recently retired from the National Ballet of Canada, highlights talent from in and around the city, there were also visitors from the east. National Ballet of Canada principal dancers Sonia Rodriguez and Piotr Stanczyk provided regal calm as the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier.

The rest of the dancing was performed by local ballet students, who nailed their jetès and arabesques with appealing gusto.

Casting could probably have remained within the renowned Goh Ballet Youth Company, but artistic directors Choo Chiat Goh and Lin Yee Goh (Chan Hon Goh's parents) wanted broader participation and help open auditions at Scotiabank Dance Centre.

Tchaikovsky's beloved score was played live with precision and power by Ken Hsieh and his Vancouver Metropolitan Orchestra of aspiring young professionals.

Hsieh, only 29, enjoys a growing reputation, guest conducting earlier this month with L'Orchestre Lamoureux in Paris.

The costumes were sometimes garish, with shiny, synthetic fabrics that lacked texture, and the set just serviceable.



For now, the Gohs have a friendly show in the spirit of a good pantomime, and a satisfying amount of gilt-edged classical dance from the National Ballet guests.

Yoshiko Kamikusa as a Dew Drop; Photo Credit: David Cooper

Negotiations to include Ballet BC fell through this year, but if they're smart they'll join the fun in 2010.