

Goh's Nutcracker sparkles

Audience treated to fine dancing, sublime music

BY GRANIA LITWIN, TIMES COLONIST NOVEMBER 28, 2010



Goh Ballet of Vancouver includes 140 dancers. Also in the show are 74 girls and one boy from Victoria-area dance schools

Photograph by: David Cooper, Courtesy

REVIEW

What: Goh Ballet's The Nutcracker

Where: Royal Theatre

When: 2 p.m. today

Tickets: \$59.75 to \$89.75, \$15 discount for children

Rating: 4 (out of five)

A spectacular new version of *The Nutcracker*, playing at the Royal Theatre this afternoon, appears to be just as lavish and luscious as the original, performed for the imperial court in St. Petersburg more than a century ago.

Goh Ballet of Vancouver has brought its sparkling entertainment to the stage, with 140 dancers, the full Victoria Symphony under the baton of Kenneth Hsieh, and new choreography created by renowned Canadian Anna-Marie Holmes.

Holmes, who performed with the Kirov in Russia for five years before launching her career as an expert in re-staging classical ballets, has used all her brilliant resources, classic technique and noble style to create this delightful and innovative work.

And it's all original except for the choreography of one duet -- the final pas de deux.

Opening night Friday, it was a delight from start to finish, a stunning holiday confection with all the trimmings: fine dancing, sublime music, hand-painted scenes and elaborate costumes -- all made in Beijing -- professional ballroom dancers and hilarious gags.

A gingerbread cookie, complete with smartie buttons, has her arm torn off while a drag queen opens her huge hooped skirt to spill a stagefull of children.

Settings are pure Christmas heaven, ranging from romantic old buildings dripping with snow, to an elegant drawing room with marbled columns and gilded garlands. Later we see a mountain-top castle, surrounded in snow-dipped, ice-sculpted trees, and the finalé has an oriental flavour with distant stairway and pagoda.

Most gorgeous is the snow scene with a blizzard of swirling snowflakes, and a challenging pas de deux by the well-paired Vlademir Pereira and Yoshiko Kamikusa, as snow king and queen.

Although the choreography is original, the ballet follows the familiar storyline -- including a visit to the Kingdom of Sweets with entertaining turns by Spanish, Arabian, Chinese and three marvellous young marzipan performers. A few leftover snowflakes cause a few slips, but the Russians are standouts with their complicated leaps.

Guest artists include award-winning Canadian magician Damien Carriere, as Drosselmyer, who creates illusions with Christmas lights, showers of snow, and conjures characters out of thin air.

The final duet features guest artist and Sugar Plum Fairy Mara Vinson, who studied at the Kirov Academy in New York before joining Pacific Northwest Ballet.

Her consort Karel Cruz, also a principal dancer with PNB, is a former member of the National Ballet of Cuba.

Their nerve-tingling pas de deux reveals beautiful upper bodies, arms, heads, eyes and lines full of grace and control.

Also in the show are 74 girls and one local boy from 15 Victoria-area dance studios. Marvellously rehearsed by ballet mistress Wendy Vernon for two months, they take on the roles of mice, soldiers, party girls and boys, angels and bonbons.

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