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A Holiday Tradition: The Nutcracker Enchants Downtown Boston Again

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The Nutcracker dances with Clara during her dream. Photo credit Gene Schiavone

Sweeter than Aunt Edna's fruitcake and not as tacky as a reindeer sweater, some Bostonians consider *The Nutcracker* ballet the floodgate for all things Christmas. Once the Boston Ballet's performances are announced, the city knows it's heading full steam into the holiday season. That time has come.

I'll never forget the first time I saw this classic story that takes young Clara through a whirlwind Christmas dream of dancing fairies, come-to-life candies, imposing soldiers, a giant Mouse King

and, of course, her Nutcracker Prince. I was seven years old and my parents dressed me in head-to-toe little girl garb—tartan plaid dress, velvet hair bow, and patent leather Mary Janes. The lights dimmed, the curtain rose and, when the music began, I was hooked on every dainty spin, every sure step, every striking note. I might have snoozed on my dad’s shoulder somewhere around the soothing Waltz of the Snowflakes, but I always awakened by the riveting Spanish Hot Chocolate dancers. It was magical. How could it not be? Everyone can hum along to the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, just one of the songs from the familiar score created in 1892 by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

“Music and dance have long been one of the purest ways for humankind to express joy. What could be more natural than including this ballet as a family tradition?” says Deborah Moe, director of public relations and social media with the Boston Ballet.

Last year 98,000 of your closest friends bought tickets to see this beloved production at the Boston Opera House. This year, you can join them for 28 performances from November 29 to December 29.

A New Version of the Old Favorite

The very first Boston Ballet performance of *The Nutcracker* was in 1963, when the company was founded. Just when you thought you couldn’t mess with tradition, Boston Ballet Artistic Director Mikko Nissinen went ahead and did. Before your hand goes to your forehead and you gasp before passing out, this was a good thing. Last year the entire production was new and even more dazzling.

In 2012, the Boston Ballet brilliantly executed the first changes to design and dance in 17 years. Changes were made to sets, costumes, choreography, and even some storyline elements. Renowned costume designer Robert Perdziola helped bring Nissinen’s new vision to life. Kind of a big deal in his industry’s circles (his dossier boasts designs for the Metropolitan Opera, Opera Boston, and Glimmerglass Opera), Perdziola brought the ballet alive, and his designs remain in place for this upcoming season.

Inspired Costumes



Snowflakes dazzle on stage. Photo Credit: Rosalie O'Connor

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With more costume changes than a Lady Gaga show, every scene is a new set of stunning visuals. But these are not your grandma's tutus. When the new costumes were first announced, I was lucky enough to be among the first to see these works of fine artisanship up close and in person. I have nothing to report other than this is ballet bling to the fullest extent. There are hundreds of thousands of jewels (more than 242,000 to be exact) and thousands of yards of fabrics. The Dew Drop costume alone has more than 3,600 handbeaded gems between bodice and tutu, and 1,400 yards of handpainted net were pleated for the Waltz of the Flowers. The sparkle factor alone is breathtaking.

When to Go

With matinee and weekend performances full of families (you might even see some tartan plaid), there are still plenty of attendees without kids in tow. On Friday and Saturday nights, groups of friends and couples settle in for the show, while the Christmas Eve crowd earns see-and-be-seen status with everyone dressing to the nines in their holiday best.

Regardless of when you indulge in a little yuletide cheer and *chassé*, the Boston Ballet promises a show that just might become your new—old—favorite holiday tradition. The company is clearly on *pointe* with this true holiday experience.

My own *Nutcracker* experience has changed throughout the years. Yesteryear's fluffy, plaid dress has metamorphosed into today's sleekly tailored shift dress. And I don't think my stylist would allow velvet bows in my hair. My adult questions are focused around gravity-defying leaps and "how do they do that" stamina versus my childhood queries about how a toy dances and why the Mouse King was so mean. And now, next to me, where I used to sit as a little girl, sits my own daughter. But one thing has remained: my appreciation for the seasonal performance. I always revert back to little-girl mode the moment the first notes hit the air and the curtain rises. The excitement in the audience is electric and it doesn't go unnoticed at any age.

"I think that *The Nutcracker* captures the joy of the holiday season through sight, sound, and movement," says Moe. "When the beloved strains of the score start to play, it incites a holiday nostalgia that we all crave at this time of year."

Tickets start at \$35. Showtimes are Tuesday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m., Sunday at 5:30 p.m., and 1 p.m. matinees.

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