

Return of the Nutcracker

Written by Editor

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Deemed as “close to perfect as you can get” by *The State*, the USC Beaufort Center for the Arts presents the Columbia City Ballet’s 52

nd

anniversary production of Beaufort’s holiday family tradition, *The Nutcracker*, on Tuesday, Dec. 18 at 7 p.m. This award-winning spectacle is South Carolina’s largest single performing arts event, with more performances in more cities reaching more audience members than any other South Carolina arts event!

Artistic Director William Starrett’s award-winning choreography combines with a cast of local and professional dancers, new costumes and magical special effects. The company’s 30 professional dancers will share the stage with over 20 talented local children, ages 4 to 18. “Our ballet mistress and I have really been working on bringing out the lyricism of our female dancers complimenting the magnificent Tchaikovsky score, paying even greater attention to the quality of the movements particularly during our new Snow Sequence from the Land of Snow. I’ve also created a new Candy Cane divertissement from the Land of the Sweets during Act II inspired by the recent Summer Olympic Games”

Columbia’s own Kathryn Smoake takes the lead role of Clara, the young girl who travels through the enchanted winter wonderland accompanied by the Nutcracker Prince, played by Soloist Philip Ingrassia. Principal Dancer Regina Willoughby will be returning to the stage for the first time in three years as the famed Sugar Plum Fairy, partnered by Soloist Journy

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Wilkes-Davis dancing the role of the Sugar Plum Cavalier for the first time. Local dancers include: Cartwheel Mice - Emma Jo Dykeman, Amara Phillips, Caylin Gecy, Abigail Davidson, Cecilia McAlhaney, Krisen Reinhart; Land of Sweets Attendants – Annie Grace Wells, Lucy Thayer, Madison McDougall, Madison Bennett, Leyla Batson, Caroline Campbell; Mouse Captain – Cape McAlhaney; Gingerbread Girls – Piper Beasley, Payton Miller, Emily Ann Hiers, Gracie Gecy, Abi Wiley, Josie Lee Maldonis, Julia Williams, Mary Hiers.

The Nutcracker, which tells the story of a young girl named Clara who is taken on a magical journey as a reward for saving the life of her beloved Nutcracker Prince, was first performed in St. Petersburg in 1892. The American version began in 1940 when the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo suddenly took refuge and was based in America due to the Second World War and presented its production in New York City. George Balanchine, the famed founder and choreographer of our current New York City Ballet, was the company's ballet master. Alexandra Danilova was the reigning prima ballerina and a soloist of the company, while Merriam Lanova, Danilova's understudy and look-alike alternate, danced many of her performances for years. Upon Lanova's retirement in the late 1960's, she started a regional company in the San Francisco area called Ballet Celeste. There, a young William Starrett learned the original Ballet Russe production from Lanova herself playing the famed role of the Nutcracker Prince, at age 14.

"After having won the highest American medal in the first international ballet competition held in the United States, doors opened for me to tour more than 29 countries and ultimately be a part of 40 different Nutcrackers," says Starrett. "Named the ultimate Nutcracker prince by Dance Magazine in 1983, I brought all of my favorite moments to our current Nutcracker production that I experienced with all of those terrific productions. Now with 45 years of Nutcracker experience, fully enriched and charmed by the Deep South, I've tailored a production that has a southern charm."

The USC Beaufort Center for the Arts presents the Columbia City Ballet's Nutcracker for one performance only on Tuesday, Dec. 18 at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$35, \$30, \$25 and \$15 for students. Tickets can be purchased by calling (843) 521-4145 or visit the USCB Center for the Arts on 810 Carteret St. For more information about USCB Center for the Arts visit www.uscbc-enterforthearts.com

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