

# Arts & Entertainment

REVIEW

## Joy and passion in Nutcracker production

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Arts & Entertainment Writer

The fifth annual production of *The Nutcracker* that opened at the Raven's Cry Theatre last weekend was fabulous, under the artistic direction of Kathleen Holmes. Among the highlights were the local young dancers performing at their best – these are students of dance who have worked very hard on their art, auditioned for the part and rose to the occasion to make a polished performance. The professional guest dancers were great role models for the students.

There were two casts alternating for the six performances with many of the same dancers in principal roles. The opening night performance on Dec. 17 was given by Cast A with Jade Reid dancing the major role of Clara, the little girl with the nutcracker doll who is swept away on a fantastic journey to the lands of Snow and Sweets. There were a few slip-ups, literally, with a slippery stage needing to be cleaned more thoroughly before the second act. Perhaps that's why the Sugar Plum Fairy looked a little tense when dancing her pas de deux.

Nonetheless the show was magical, bringing the light of joy and passion to the faces of the dancers and a tear to the eye of many in the audience. OK, it's not the Bolshoi Ballet, but this local *Nutcracker* compares favourably with any professional, lavish production and it draws huge support from the community.

With so many in the cast it's difficult to single out any one performer for special praise – but I have to mention that Jaime Butler as the Dew Drop Fairy (and a maid) gets my vote as an outstanding Coast dancer. Guest performer Eric Burrough as the nutcracker and the Russian dancer was riveting, and Miguel Nguyen, now a familiar guest at these performances, dazzled the audience



The Christmas party at the Stahlbaum household is the opening scene of *The Nutcracker*. The Stahlbaum hosts performed by Julian Alphilbert and Chelsea Minatsis are front and centre.

with his leaps. The eight snowflakes were delightfully promising dancers and the Spanish dancers (Hana-Lulu Shinkai and Halle Holmes in Cast A) who pranced on stage with guest Diego Ramalho were exceptional. How does Pan Willson as Mother Ginger in a pink gown manage to do ballet steps on stilts? And who didn't like Trey Ingram in his head-over-heels display of athletics? (Certainly the screamers behind me, who seemed to think they were yelling at a wrestling match rather than the ballet, loved him.)

The set by Cody Chancellor was spectacular. It's always fun to see how the set artist makes the Christmas tree grow on stage. Costumes were designed by the talented Conchita Harding who worked with a huge team of volunteers. William Maysey took care of lighting. Even the souvenir programmes were elegant and useful – check the last pages of your programme to find a recipe for sugar plums!

If you missed *The Nutcracker* this year then mark your calendars for next year's six shows starting Dec. 16. See more at: [www.coastingalongtheatre.org](http://www.coastingalongtheatre.org).



The mysterious Herr Drosselmeyer (Graham McMonagle) shows his magical live dolls at the Christmas party.



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