

# The Ever-Evolving Nutcracker

Orchestra NEXT joins Eugene Ballet Company for a holiday tradition  
BY LAUREN MESSMAN

**L**ike fragrant pines, candy canes and twinkle lights, *The Nutcracker* is a perennial symbol of the holiday season. Toni Pimble, artistic director for the Eugene Ballet Company, agrees. Most people tell her that without the ballet company's annual performance, Christmas just wouldn't be complete. This December, audiences in Eugene, Corvallis, Salem and across the Northwest are invited to join the dancers of EBC as they journey to the Land of Sweets with Clara (the young, nightgown-clad heroine), the Sugar Plum Fairy and, of course, the Nutcracker Prince for the 32nd consecutive year.

But after three decades of the same story — a mischievous Christmas Eve tale filled with magic, a mouse king and a snow queen — Pimble admits, "Sometimes you just want to pull your hair out!" To keep things fresh, Pimble and the EBC have taken some creative liberties over the years because, like Christmas gifts, you wouldn't want to receive the same present year after year.

For example, Pimble, an award-winning choreographer, explains that this is actually the third version of *The Nutcracker* that the company has performed. She was able to expand her artistic options by swapping a child dancer for a company dancer in the role of Clara. "That obviously gave me much more opportunity choreographically with a professional dancer to create a totally different story line and so then the idea of creating a little love story for Clara



seemed like a great idea," she says. In the story, Clara, a young girl, falls asleep after checking on a toy nutcracker, a gift from the toymaker Drosselmeyer. The nutcracker jolts to life in Clara's dreams as a prince, and in this version, as Drosselmeyer's nephew, Hanes. This year, principal dancer Yoshie Oshima will switch off with Beth Maslinoff, a new addition to the company, in the role of Clara.

Another exciting change is the recent addition of Orchestra NEXT, a training orchestra led by trumpet virtuoso Brian McWhorter. NEXT, which places leading professionals alongside aspiring musicians, will be performing the iconic Tchaikovsky score. "To have young people in the show on stage and then to have young people in the pit," Pimble says, "it just gives a wonderful feel, a community feel, to the performance."

After 32 years, and touring up to 15 different cities, the classic ballet still leaves a lasting impression on audiences. Pimble recalls a touching time when a single mother and her daughter approached her backstage. "She said, 'You know her grandmother sends her money every Christmas and usually we'll buy shoes, we'll buy this or we'll buy that, but this year we said no. We're going to spend that money on tickets to *The Nutcracker*.'" ■

Eugene Ballet Company presents *The Nutcracker* Friday, Dec. 21, through Sunday, Dec. 23, at the Hult's Silva Concert Hall; \$22-\$48, student and youth discounts available.

**EBC DANCERS BETH MUSLINOFF AND REED SOUTHER**  
PHOTO JON CHRISTOPHER MEYERS

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