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EUGENE BALLET COMPANY
PRESENTS *THE NUTCRACKER*
DEC. 19-21 AT HULT CENTER

PHOTO BY JON CHRISTOPHER MEYERS

Magic and Mayhem

TALES OF MISADVENTURES WITH EUGENE BALLET COMPANY'S
THE NUTCRACKER By Rachael Carnes

The Eugene Ballet Company has steadfastly delivered heartwarming performances of *The Nutcracker* in every one of its 35 seasons. Usually things go off without a hitch, though over the years there have been a few mishaps.

"This is live performance," says Toni Pimble, artistic director for EBC. "And the unexpected is always upon us."

One year, the giantess Mother Ginger had been outfitted with a new rolling cage underneath her crinolines, rendering the dancer vulnerable to gravity — especially when she began to engage in what Pimble calls "overly enthusiastic arm flapping."

Fortunately, Mother Ginger's charges, tiny girls dressed as candy, had already come out from under her skirt when she began to wobble, and were cheerily dancing in a circle when Mother Ginger toppled over. "Remarkably, the little bonbons didn't miss a step," Pimble says.

Then there was the time that the Mouse King became woefully disoriented. "The mouse masks are not easy to work in; they reduce your peripheral vision," Pimble says.

"The Mouse King got turned around and started backing up, and then he just fell into the orchestra pit," Pimble says. "He was knocked out cold."

In *Nutcracker* performances, the Mouse King is traditionally carried away on a stretcher to the wails of his mouse followers.

Here, life imitated art, as EMTs wheeled the Mouse King offstage. "He waved to the audience," Pimble says, "but I think it's just because he was in shock."

Audiences may be too lulled by the magical story to appreciate the perils of puppet and mask work or the rigors of its choreography, but the piece demands a lot from its dancers. "The grand pas de deux, with the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Cavalier, are technically challenging and require a great deal of stamina," Pimble says.

Likewise, "The Polichinelles-Harlequin is a difficult piece, with petit allegro, or fast footwork," Pimble says. "And the 'Russian Dance,' it's like the 4-minute mile. They go out and they go full blast."

But, she adds, "there are a lot of parts, like the 'Waltz of the Flowers,' that can focus on technique."

Whether it's your first viewing or your 35th, Pimble suggests that the ballet has staying power because of its indelible story, and also "because the Tchaikovsky score is beautifully written."

This year, performances will feature live music with Orchestra NEXT.

"We have families who come year after year," Pimble says. "The tradition holds very strong." ♦

The Nutcracker runs Dec. 19-21 at the Hult Center; \$28-43, tickets at 682-5000 or hult-center.org.