

dancing around her and she faints.

When she wakes she is caught up in the toy soldiers who have come to life. The now life-size Nutcracker leads the soldiers.

The Nutcracker and the Mouse King duel and both are mortally wounded. However, the Nutcracker, saved by Clara's belief in him, is transformed into a real-life prince.

Dr. Drosselmeyer and the Nutcracker Prince escort Clara to the Kingdom of Snow. After viewing special dances in the Kingdom, Clara and the Nutcracker Prince move on to the Kingdom of Sweets, where the Kingdom Princess, the Dream Fairies and little angels greet them.

After her enchanting adventures, Clara's dream fades to a memory.

### Keeping it fresh

The theater has performed "The Nutcracker" annually for more than four decades. So what keeps the production fresh?

For one thing, veteran cast members make the show better while serving as role models for the new and younger dancers to look up to.

"There are new kids in the production each year, and also the choreography changes," said Dan Sutherland, who has played Dr. Drosselmeyer for more than 20 years.

"The Nutcracker" is a show for family audiences, and many of the dancers are family — literally and theatrically.

The Barbic family, for example, has a long history of performing in "The Nutcracker."

The eldest Barbic daughter, Eliza, danced the role of Clara.

At age 11, Sabrina Barbic was one of the youngest dancers to play the part in 2003. She danced as Clara with her brother Thomas as the Snow Prince, marking the first time in the theater's history that a brother and sister have danced together in the production.

When she was just 4 years old, Anita Barbic told a reporter she was going to be the next Clara. She didn't dance the role the following year, but she did in 2016.

Now her little sister Sophia is dancing. The girls' mother, Debbie Barbic, sews costumes and makes alterations.

This year, among the brother and sister combos are Milly and Oscar Gustafson, Marisabel and Nathaniel



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

Dancers rehearse a scene from "The Nutcracker" at Astoria High School. More photos online at [CoastWeekend.com](http://CoastWeekend.com)

Condit, Abigail and Logan Mossman, and Lillian and Max Bigby. The siblings are dancing with each other in the Prologue's party scene.

### Dancing and acting

Tchaikovsky's score is performed by the Little Ballet Theatre Orchestra, directed by Cory Pedersen

"It's amazing that we have a full orchestra in this small area," Ann Brown, stage manager of Little Ballet Theatre, said. "I have seen other 'Nutcracker' performances at Oregon Ballet Theater and Pacific Northwest Ballet, but I think ours is one of the best."

Sure, audiences will see dancing, but acting is also a major element.

"The dancers who are the young ladies in 'The Nutcracker' must look surprised all the time," Peterson said. "And the dancer who is Clara must act as if she is a little girl."

This year, Nara Van De Grift, an Astoria High School junior, plays Clara. "It means a lot to me to be dancing a role that brings joy to others," she said.

Many hands bring the magic of this production alive.

There are the dancers, of course, that audiences see as polished performers. But there is much work done by volunteers.

Special nonskid floors must be installed to ensure the dancers' safety, and sets need to be taken out of storage and brought to the high school. On performance nights, backstage volunteers help dancers with quick costume changes. They also help keep dancers waiting in the wings calm and quiet.

"What I really appreciate about this is how it has built my children's confidence," said Elly Condit, of Astoria, whose children Marisabel and Nathaniel have been dancing for about six years.

Parents of the dancers participate in many ways. Some dance onstage while others work behind the scenes, creating and repairing props and costumes. (One of the most popular props is the giant turkey leg carried by the mice in Act I, Scene 2.)

### Mayoral cameo

Astoria Mayor Arline LaMear, recovering from torn rotator cuff surgery, is anxiously awaiting the removal of the brace from her left arm. She has a part in the opening scene, which originally called for her to dance.

Instead, LaMear, playing a mayor, will walk across the stage, waving at the audience. "The Nutcracker has always been part of the Christmas season for me," she said. The brace comes off the day before the show opens.

After both the Saturday and Sunday matinees, children are invited onstage to meet the cast and receive a candy cane from the Sugar Plum Fairy. After the Saturday evening performance, the audience is invited to a cookie party in the commons area of Astoria High School.

The Saturday matinee is a military-appreciation performance. Active-duty military members, with valid military ID, will receive a dollar off the ticket price. 