

Ballet

NEBRASKA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 11, 2011

Contact: Erika Overturff, (402) 541-6946

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BALLET NEBRASKA'S *NUTCRACKER* BLENDS FRESH WITH TRADITIONAL

OMAHA -- Ballet Nebraska's *The Nutcracker*, making its Omaha-area premiere next month, will blend traditional charm with a fresh, lively approach, its creator said.

"My top priorities were clear storytelling and exciting, beautiful dancing," said Erika Overturff, Ballet Nebraska's artistic director, who choreographed the production. "*The Nutcracker* is a ballet that families attend together. I wanted to make sure even the youngest viewers could follow Clara, the heroine, on her adventures -- while entertaining older kids and adults with the variety and energy of the choreography."

Ballet Nebraska will stage *The Nutcracker* at 7:30 pm December 2 at the IWCC Arts Center in Council Bluffs, and at 2 pm December 4 at the Omaha Civic Auditorium's Omaha Music Hall.

The performances will feature Ballet Nebraska's company of 14 professional dancers and more than 130 youth and community performers, including a 16-member "North Wind Chorus" of young singers recruited and rehearsed by Opera Omaha for the ballet's *Land of Snow* scene.

Although many newcomers may not realize it, Overturff said, there is no single definitive version of *The Nutcracker*. Ever since it was created in 1892 for Russia's Imperial Ballet, she said, it has been revised countless times; today, ballet companies create their own interpretations, with no two exactly alike.

"Tchaikovsky's music is an incredible source of inspiration," she said. "I wanted to work with the familiar story: a little girl attends an exciting Christmas party, receives an unusual gift, and dreams of colorful characters and places. But of course I'm adding my own unique twists!"

Some of those distinctive features, she said, include a hair-raising Rat Queen who battles the Nutcracker Prince; a saucy French shepherdess whose lambs perform to Tchaikovsky's famous *Dance of the Reed Flutes*; and a visit to the North Pole, where Clara meets inquisitive elves and an unexpectedly athletic Santa Claus.

While such things help make *The Nutcracker* an entertaining family spectacle, Overturff said, the ballet has a deeper message as well.

"Part of the enduring appeal of *The Nutcracker* is that it tells us something important," she said. "It reminds us that imagination is powerful and worth cherishing. Ordinarily a nutcracker might be just a kitchen utensil... but there's something about *this* Nutcracker that captures a little girl's imagination and leads her on a wonderful journey."

Ticket information for Ballet Nebraska's December 2 performance of *The Nutcracker* is available from the IWCC Arts Center box office at (712) 388-7140. Information for the December 4 performance at the Omaha Music Hall is available from TicketMaster, (800) 745-3000, or online at ticketmaster.com. More information about Ballet Nebraska is available from the company's website at balletnebraska.org.

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ABOUT BALLET NEBRASKA:

Ballet Nebraska is the state's professional dance company — the only arts organization of its kind in the region. Performing at home and on tour, its mission is to enrich Nebraska and Iowa communities through programs of the highest quality: professional dance performances, educational programs, and community outreach. Ballet Nebraska's talented professional dancers hail from around the United States abroad, making Omaha their home to share the excitement of dance with others. As expressive artists, powerful athletes, and skilled teachers, Ballet Nebraska's dancers give the company a key role in the cultural vitality of the region.

ABOUT THE NUTCRACKER:

Choreographer Erika Overturff created Ballet Nebraska's version of *The Nutcracker* for performances in December 2010 at the Sami Bedell Center for the Performing Arts in Spirit Lake, Iowa, where it drew the largest crowds ever recorded since the center's opening. This year, Ballet Nebraska will stage the production in three locations: at the IWCC Arts Center in Council Bluffs on December 2; the Omaha Music Hall on December 4; and at the Cozad (Nebraska) High School Auditorium on December 15. Ballet Nebraska also will involve young audiences in the *Nutcracker* experience by presenting condensed daytime performances for schools; offering in-school outreach workshops; and giving more than 200 young community participants the chance to perform onstage alongside the company's professional dancers.

NUTCRACKER HISTORY:

Although there is no single authoritative version of *The Nutcracker*, all the productions performed today are descended from a version first staged in December 1892 by Russia's Imperial Ballet. Its artistic director, Marius Petipa, devised a plot based on a short story by E.T.A. Hoffmann; his assistant, Lev Ivanov, did most of the choreography, to a score composed by Piotr Tchaikovsky.

Although not a failure, as sometimes claimed, *The Nutcracker* was overshadowed by other Petipa/Ivanov/Tchaikovsky works such as *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. It was not performed outside of Russia until 1934, when the Sadler's Wells Ballet staged a shortened version in London; the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo introduced it to America in 1940.

The San Francisco Ballet helped launch *The Nutcracker* as a Christmas tradition when it staged America's first full-length version in 1944, and productions by the New York City Ballet beginning in 1954 popularized it further. Today it is generally regarded as the world's most widely-performed classical ballet, and its score is among Tchaikovsky's best-known works.

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BALLET NEBRASKA 2011-12 COMPANY BIOS

Erika Overturff

Artistic Director & Founder (Artist Sponsor: [Midlands Choice](#))



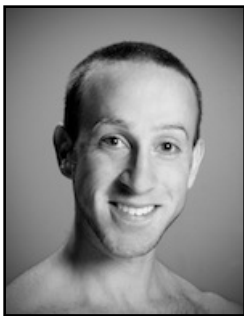
Erika Overturff is the founder and artistic director of Ballet Nebraska. Erika began her training in Iowa at the Academy of Ballet, continuing her studies at summer programs including North Carolina School of the Arts, American Ballet Theater, Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, and the Kirov Academy. Erika earned her BFA in ballet performance and teaching from the University of Utah, which she attended on a full scholarship. She graduated cum laude in just three years and was chosen outstanding senior by the ballet department faculty.

Erika went on to dance with Montgomery Ballet, Alabama Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. She has performed principal and soloist roles in a wide range of classical and contemporary repertoire. Erika has also been a faculty member and guest teacher for schools throughout the United States.

As a choreographer, Erika has received critical praise for her work. She served as répétitrice for Montgomery Ballet and resident choreographer for Omaha Theater Ballet. As part of Ballet Nebraska's collaboration with Joslyn Art Museum for *Momentum*, she recently choreographed the ballet *Connemara* and is creating a new ballet *Cleopatra*. Additionally, Erika created Ballet Nebraska's lively and entertaining new version of the holiday favorite *The Nutcracker*, which will debut to Omaha-area audiences this December.

Matthew Carter

Ballet Master (Artist Sponsor: John & Gayla Thal)



Matthew Carter began his training with Sharon Filone at the Lake Erie Ballet School and Sandra Barnett at Little's Dance Studio. He went on to study on scholarship at North Carolina School of the Arts, Miami City Ballet School, and the Chautauqua Festival Dancers. Matthew has danced professionally with Ohio Ballet, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, Lake Erie Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. He has also performed as a Guest Artist with Hawaii Ballet Theatre, Neglia Ballet Artists, and Ballet Tucson. Matthew has been choreographing since the age of 16 and has premiered works with numerous schools, professional companies, and theaters. He is the co-director of Motion41 Dance in Omaha and continues to serve as a guest teacher for schools throughout the country. Matthew returns for his second season at Ballet Nebraska as ballet master.

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NEBRASKA

Erin Alarcón

Company Dancer



A native of New Jersey, Erin Alarcón received her dance training under Christine Taylor and Luba Gulyaeva of New Jersey Civic Youth Ballet, where she performed a number of classic roles and contemporary works. Erin earned her Bachelor of Arts in dance performance at Mercyhurst College under the direction of Tauna Hunter. During the summers, she studied with Eglevsky Ballet and The Joffrey Ballet. She has worked with a number of guest artists including Laura Alonso, Bruce Marks, Vivi Flindt, and Bill Evans. Erin has also studied abroad with Valerie Valentine of the Dutch National Ballet. Erin previously danced professionally with SoMar Dance Works and Ballet Concerto. She performed leading roles in both *Giselle* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, as well as solo roles in Ballet Nebraska's *Momentum* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Erin is returning for her second season with Ballet Nebraska.

Claire Goodwillie

Company Dancer



Claire Goodwillie began her ballet training at Omaha Theater Ballet School of Dance. She spent summers training with the renowned Pacific Northwest Ballet and Ballet Austin. She has also trained in Banff, Canada. Claire appeared in numerous Omaha Theater Ballet productions as both a student and apprentice, including *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Firebird* and *Coppélia*. Her favorite roles include young Clara in *The Orpheum Nutcracker*, Evil Rat Queen in Erika Overturff's *The Nutcracker*, as well as Helena in Oskar Antunez' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Claire was featured in the role of Sugar Plum Fairy in a Christmas production at Omaha Theater Company. She has also performed with Opera Omaha and Omaha Symphony. Claire is a founding member returning for her second season at Ballet Nebraska.

Natasha Grimm

Company Dancer (Artist Sponsor: John Ritland & Greta Vaught)



Natasha Grimm began her ballet training at Omaha Theater Ballet School of Dance. She also received a scholarship to Kansas City Ballet, and toured with Manhattan Dance. Additionally, Natasha danced in productions with Omaha Symphony and Opera Omaha. Natasha began her professional career at Omaha Theater Ballet where she danced first as an apprentice, and later as a company member for three seasons. She was dubbed by Examiner.com as "one of the most lithe and physically appealing dancers to grace the stage" in her role of Coral Snake in Omaha Theater Ballet's final production, *The Rainforest*. A founding member of Ballet Nebraska, Natasha has performed lead roles, including Sugar Plum Fairy in Erika Overturff's *The Nutcracker* and Titania in Oskar Antunez' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Natasha returns for her second season with Ballet Nebraska. [More about Natasha...](#)

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NEBRASKA

Alberto Liberatoscioli

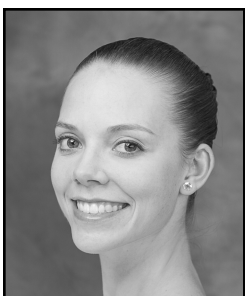
Company Dancer (Artist Sponsor: Clyde & Deborah Overturff)



Originally from Italy, Alberto Liberatoscioli received his ballet training in the Vaganova and Balanchine styles, also studying modern dance. He was a member of National Theater in Brno, Czech Republic and Slovak National Ballet where he performed in classical repertory including *Le Corsaire*, *La Bayadère* and *Swan Lake*, as well as neoclassical works and opera premieres. Alberto also danced with Columbia Classical Ballet in South Carolina, and later Omaha Theater Ballet. He appeared as a guest artist at Boulder Ballet, Ballet Fantastique and Lincoln Midwest Ballet dancing lead roles in *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and as Lando in *As You Like It*. Alberto received his teaching certification from American Ballet Theater in New York City and has taught master classes in Rome. He has also taught dance to students in Omaha and Lincoln. Alberto holds a law degree and a masters in Human Resources. He recently won first prize in the 2010 Una Manciatà di Lettere literature contest in Taranto, Italy for his book *Ombre alla Ribalta*. Most recently, Alberto performed solo roles in *Momentum*, *The Nutcracker* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Ballet Nebraska, where he is a founding member returning for his second season.

Bret Samson

Company Dancer (Artist Sponsor: Dr. James Liu & Rebecca Liu-Huang)



Bret Samson began her dance training at Lake Shore Dance with Amy Aichele and Gwen Agee in Saukville, Wisconsin. She continued training with Melissa Anderson and Rafael Delgado in Milwaukee, where she later became a founding member of their performance group. Bret continued to complete her training at Steps on Broadway in New York City. Bret has performed in numerous ballets by accomplished choreographers, dancing roles in Harrison McEldowney's *Swing*, *Swing*, *Swing!* and Oskar Antunez' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as works by Kenneth Oberly and Jean-Paul Commin. Bret has performed with Milwaukee Ballet II, Madison Ballet and Omaha Theater Ballet. A founding member of Ballet Nebraska, Bret returns for her second season.

Kelsey Schwenker

Company Dancer



Boulder, Colorado native Kelsey Schwenker began her classical ballet training with Ballet Nouveau Colorado, where she was a five-year member of its student company directed by Julia Wilkinson Manley. She has attended summer intensives with Kansas City Ballet, Brooklyn Ballet Theatre, Boulder Jazz Dance Workshop and Paul Taylor Dance Company. Kelsey received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in ballet performance, graduating summa cum laude from the University of Oklahoma, where she trained with Mary Margaret Holt, Donn Edwards, Steve Brule and Jeremy Lindberg. Kelsey has performed in notable works including *Rodeo*, *Divertimento No. 5*, *The Firebird*, *Afternoon of a Faun* and *Les Biches*. Kelsey returns for her second season with Ballet Nebraska. [More about Kelsey...](#)

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Denis Vezetiu

Company Dancer



Born in Moldova in Eastern Europe, Denis Vezetiu received his professional training at the Academy of Ballet of Moldova. He went on to dance with a number of prestigious companies. He danced as a soloist with the National Opera of Bucharest and the National Theatre of Moldova. As a dancer with Chisinau National Theatre, Denis toured extensively in Europe and the United States. His varied repertoire includes *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Coppélia*, *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *Le Corsaire* and *La Bayadère*. Since 2008, Denis served as a principal dancer with Manassas Ballet in Virginia, performing leading roles in a variety of classical and original ballets. This is his first season with Ballet Nebraska.

Sasha York

Company Dancer (Artist Sponsor: [OrthoWest](#))



Originally from Chelyabinsk, Russia, Sasha York trained at Paavola School of Dance in Flint, Michigan. He later returned to Russia, where he trained with Urey Urivich. Sasha was accepted into the pre-professional program at Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, where he performed in company productions of *Don Quixote*, *The Nutcracker*, *Peter Pan*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. He has worked with many well-known choreographers such as Harrison McEldowney, Viktor Plotnikov and Septime Webre. Sasha performed the lead role in McEldowney's *Swing, Swing, Swing!*, Snow King in Erika Overturff's *The Nutcracker*, and Oberon in Oskar Antunez' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He previously danced for two seasons at Omaha Theater Ballet. Sasha joined Ballet Nebraska in 2010 as a founding member and returns for his second season. [More about Sasha...](#)

Angela Zolczynski

Company Dancer (Artist Sponsor: J. Michael Hemmer)



A native of Rapid City, South Dakota, Angela Zolczynski is a graduate of the prestigious Walnut Hill School for the Arts in Natick, Massachusetts. She received her ballet training from Michael Owen of American Ballet Theater. Angela performed with Omaha Theater Ballet for six seasons, dancing in numerous works including *The Firebird*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Coppélia*. Angela has performed many soloist roles, including her recent portrayal of Hermia in Oskar Antunez' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A dedicated instructor, Angela has taught ballet, jazz, and tap in Omaha for seven years, and she also currently leads youth rehearsals for Repertory Ensemble. Angela is a founding member of Ballet Nebraska returning for her second season.

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NEBRASKA

Teresa Coulter

Apprentice



Teresa began her dance training at Mary Lorraine's Dance Center in Omaha. She also trained at Omaha Academy of Ballet and Motion41 Dance. Teresa spent summers training with Kansas City Ballet, the prestigious North Carolina School of the Arts, and Kaatsbaan International Dance in Tivoli, New York. Teresa was a founding member of Ballet Nebraska II in the Company's debut season. She has danced company roles as Miss May in the Calendar Girls scene in Harrison McElDowney's *Swing, Swing, Swing!* and in the flower corps during Waltz of the Flowers in Erika Overturff's *The Nutcracker*. Teresa joins Ballet Nebraska this season as a first-year apprentice.

Mandy Lock

Apprentice



Mandy is a recent graduate of the University of Utah where she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in ballet performance. She began her training in classical ballet and acro-gymnastics in her home state of Missouri. She was a member of resident performing companies Utah Ballet and Character Dance Ensemble. Mandy also appeared professionally as a guest artist with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet in 2008. Mandy has toured internationally in Japan and Costa Rica, as well as extensively throughout the state of Utah. She has performed in a range of classical repertory including, *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella*, *La Bayadère*, *Giselle* and *The Firebird*, as well as numerous contemporary works. Mandy joins Ballet Nebraska this season as an apprentice.

Andrea Mason

Apprentice



Chesterfield, Missouri native Andrea received her classical ballet training at St. Louis Ballet School with Gen Horiuchi and Ellen Costanza. She performed as a student apprentice in numerous roles in *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker* with St. Louis Ballet. Andrea received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance, with a dual emphasis in ballet and modern from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance in May 2011. Andrea appeared in Anthony Tudor's *Dark Elegies*, Bernard Gaddis's *Deitas* as a principal, as well as *Les Petits Riens* by Gen Horiuchi, *Shostakovich Jazz Suite* by Ron Tice, and *Untitled* by Thaddeus Davis. During summers, she studied with Nashville Ballet, Carolina Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Ballet Chicago and St. Louis Ballet. Andrea appeared professionally in 2010 as guest artist for Dimensions Dance Theater as Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*. She also taught advanced classical ballet for two years at Creative Arts Academy. This is Andrea's first year as an apprentice with Ballet Nebraska.