

AMERICAN MIDWEST *Ballet*

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Contact: Jim Williams, Marketing Director

(402) 577-0336

jim@amballet.org

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AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET'S "THE NUTCRACKER": MORE THAN A BALLET

American Midwest Ballet's production of the beloved holiday ballet *The Nutcracker* will take the stage November 19 and 20 at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center in Council Bluffs, and December 3 and 4 at Omaha's Orpheum Theater.

It's a cherished tradition for many families, said Erika Overturff, AMB's artistic director and the show's choreographer. And, she said, its impact goes far beyond those two hours that audiences enjoy in the theater.

"*The Nutcracker* is a beloved classical ballet in its own right, and a chance for people to put aside their busy schedules and immerse themselves in beauty," she said. "Beyond that, it's the focus of months of preparations and the centerpiece for related events that touch thousands of lives."

***The Nutcracker* onstage**

“At its heart, *The Nutcracker* is a simple story,” Overturff said. “A young girl, Clara, receives a special gift that sparks her imagination and takes her on a wonderful journey through her dreams.”

AMB’s international roster of 21 professional dancers brings the story to life, she said, performing a variety of dances through a series of iconic scenes. These include a lavish holiday party, a battle between toy soldiers and mischievous mice, and a visit to the Land of Snow, highlighted by Overturff’s personal favorite moment: a spectacular conclusion in which the performers dance amid a blizzard of swirling flakes.

In its second act, she said, the ballet continues with a visit to the Kingdom of Sweets, where Clara meets a variety of characters. An AMB innovation that continues this year, she said, is an Indian classical dance performed by students from Omaha’s Viswanatya Niketan school, directed by Ushasree Devaraju.

The ballet reaches its climax with the famous Waltz of the Flowers and the *grand pas de deux* [dance for a couple] featuring the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier – a sequence, Overturff said, that represents the peak of the 19th-century classical style.

Bringing *The Nutcracker* to the stage is a production in itself, Overturff said. The ballet uses 250 specially-made costumes, all of which must be fitted and organized – a process that begins months in advance, she said – while the scenery, set pieces, and props require four large trucks, loaded according to a meticulous plan, to move them to the theater.

“It is an opulent production, and bringing all the pieces together is a giant task,” she said. “But it’s worth all the effort when the curtain goes up and you hear how much the audience is enjoying the show.”

Public performances of American Midwest Ballet’s *The Nutcracker* will be at 2 and 7:30 pm Saturday, November 19, and 2pm Sunday, November 20, at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center in Council Bluffs; and at 2 and 7:30 pm Saturday, December 3, and 2 pm Sunday, December 4, at the Orpheum Theater in Omaha. Tickets start at \$25 at the Hoff Center and \$27 at the Orpheum. Ticket information is available at amballet.org/tickets/.

***The Nutcracker* beyond the stage**

Overturff summarized some of the other ways *The Nutcracker* influences the community:

- Participation by community performers is part of the *Nutcracker* tradition, and many professional dancers were introduced to the stage through childhood appearances in the ballet. More than 45 performers comprise this year's community cast: young dancers ages 9 and up, chosen from city-wide auditions; performers from AMB's ballet classes at Girls Inc.; members of AMB's Junior Company, a group of high-school-age dancers who participate in a year-round program to help prepare them for careers in dance; performers from the Viswanatya Niketan school; and adults.
- Following up on an initiative begun last season, AMB will stage a special November 20 performance at the Hoff Center that is sensory-friendly, tailored to **enhance accessibility for individuals on the autism spectrum**. Features include a downloadable "social narrative" document to help patrons get ready to attend; subtle adjustments to sound and light levels during the performance; and availability of a quiet room for those who want to take a break during the show. AMB is offering the sensory-friendly performance in cooperation with Autism Action Partnership.
- Approximately 6,000 students from schools throughout the area will attend special **student matinee performances** on December 1 and 2 at the Orpheum Theater. Organized in partnership with Omaha Performing Arts, the student matinees offer a shorter version of the performance designed with students in mind, and include a study guide to help tie in the production with classroom topics.
- **The Nutcracker Gala**, a biennial fundraising event, will return on December 2 with a "Waltz of the Flowers" theme. Guests will mingle on the stage of the Orpheum Theater, see a short selection from *The Nutcracker*, and dine in the Orpheum lobby. Funds raised by the event will help support AMB's community engagement programs that bring dance to families who might otherwise not be able to participate.
- After wrapping up the Orpheum performances, AMB will take *The Nutcracker* **on tour to Spirit Lake, Iowa**, for performances December 9 and 10 at the Sami Bedell Center. The tour production will blend AMB's professional dancers with student and community performers from the Spirit Lake area.

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ABOUT AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

American Midwest Ballet [AMB] is your resident professional dance company, bringing work beyond words to audiences in Nebraska, Iowa, and beyond. Performing at home and on tour, our mission is to inspire people through dance programs of the highest quality: breathtaking performances, enriching education, and uplifting community engagement.

AMB's Season 13 is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Fred and Eve Simon Charitable Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, and Douglas County; season sponsors Omaha Steaks and Cindy & Scott Heider; and major supporters the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Sherwood Foundation.

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