

AMERICAN MIDWEST *Ballet*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 15, 2024

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American Midwest Ballet's *The Nutcracker* has been bringing magic to area stages since its premiere in 2010. [Click to download photos.](#)

IN ITS 15TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON, AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET'S *THE NUTCRACKER* CELEBRATES ITS TRADITIONS

Dancers in white swirl, Tchaikovsky's music swells, and a blizzard of fluttering snowflakes begins to fall. The audience, almost in unison, emits a rapturous "Aahhhh." It's a moment that's celebrating its 15th anniversary this season – and for its creator, American Midwest Ballet's Erika Overturff, it's as magical as ever.

"The snow scene has always been a personal favorite of mine," she said. "When people attend *The Nutcracker*, they take an opportunity to set aside their busy schedules and immerse themselves in beauty."

Bringing a new *Nutcracker* to the stage in 2010 during the company's first season, Overturff recalled, was nearly a magical feat in itself. "Here we are fifteen years later, and so many wonderful memories and traditions have been created for both audiences and dancers alike."

Classical, but always fresh

The Nutcracker is a source of continuing fascination for choreographers because it blends tradition and creative freedom, Overturff said.

"There is no single definitive version of *The Nutcracker*," she said. "Ever since it was created in 1892, it has been revised countless times. Today, ballet companies create their own interpretations, with no two exactly alike. *The Nutcracker* resonates with audiences because it captures both the joyfulness of the holiday season and the wonder of childhood."

A production within a production

Bringing *The Nutcracker* to the stage is a production in itself, Overturff said.

"It's like putting on the biggest Christmas party you've ever imagined," she said. "As one example, the ballet uses 250 specially-made costumes, and every one of the costumes has multiple parts. They all have to be on the right dancer in the right place at the right time."

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

American Midwest Ballet's *The Nutcracker* will open with performances at 2 and 7:30 pm on Saturday, November 23, at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center in Council Bluffs.

Also at the Hoff, on Sunday, November 24, will be a special sensory-friendly performance, tailored to enhance accessibility for individuals on the autism spectrum and held in cooperation with the Autism Action Partnership.

Performances at Omaha's Orpheum Theater will be at 7:30 pm Friday, December 13; 2 and 7:30 pm Saturday, December 14; and 2 pm Sunday, December 15.

Tickets start at \$29. Ticket information is available at amballet.org/tickets/.

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ABOUT AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

American Midwest Ballet [AMB] is the region's 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 15 is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Fred and Eve Simon Charitable Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, Douglas County, and the Heider Family Foundation; season sponsor Omaha Steaks; production sponsors Polina and Bob Schlott; and major supporters the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Sherwood Foundation.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS: DANCERS SHARE *NUTCRACKER* THOUGHTS

For our fifteenth anniversary production, we asked some of the AMB dancers who have been with the company the longest to look back over their *Nutcracker* experiences and share significant, surprising, or meaningful moments from their relationship with this beloved ballet.

Anna Swenson

A favorite *Nutcracker* memory for me is remembering the first time my dad saw me perform the Land of Snow *pas de deux* [dance for a couple] at the Orpheum. After the performance he told me he was holding his breath for the entire dance. He was so nervous watching me up in the press lift, with my partner holding me high over his head, hoping I wouldn't fall. Since my mom's passing he has been in the audience for every *Nutcracker*. My grandma, my aunt and my dad have seen countless *Nutcrackers* and every year they come to see me perform. Their support means the world to me.

Claire Goodwillie

The partnering in the battle scene involving the Rat Queen and *Nutcracker* is very athletic and dramatic. One of the more daring moments requires the dancer playing the Rat Queen to run from offstage and hurl herself onto the dancer playing the *Nutcracker*, who is standing still in the center of the stage. The last time I portrayed the role of Rat Queen, which was my tenth year in the role, I decided to be extra daring and jumped at my partner (the always charming Casey Kelley) from VERY far away. Unfortunately, that meant the spacing between us was a bit different than normal, and I somehow accidentally punched him in the face! (To his credit, he handled it very well and continued as normal.) Perhaps there is such a thing as getting too comfortable in a role!

Alexandra Hoffman

Quick costume changes can be incredibly stressful, but we all work together to make the show look seamless and effortless. I was performing the French Cake for the first time and needed to make a quick change afterward for "Waltz of the Flowers." Claire Goodwillie and Erin Alarcón were assigned to help me with the costume change, and we had practiced until we had it down perfectly – but when the French wig came off, all my hairpins came out with it and suddenly my hair was a complete mess! It was a moment of panic, but I've never seen someone fix hair so fast – thanks, Claire!

Whitney Woods

I love and look forward to *The Nutcracker* every year for many reasons, one of which is all the tradition that goes into it. We have many traditions among the dancers. One of my favorites is for the Spanish dance: in the wings, just before we go onstage, we all touch our fans together and dedicate our performance to someone in the audience. It can be someone we love, or a fellow dancer who's watching, or a stranger – but every time we dedicate it to someone new, and that's very special.

I honestly don't have any *Nutcracker* pet peeves. I love the music, I love the choreography, and I love the feeling of all of us being on stage together and creating holiday magic for the audience.

Kogan Murphy

I grew up doing *The Nutcracker* with my three older sisters. This will be my 28th year doing *The Nutcracker*, and my 10th year performing it here at American Midwest Ballet. I think it's really special that I get to share these performances with my sister Kelanie, a fellow AMB dancer. It makes me feel ready for the holidays and excited to see my family.

I'm especially excited this year because I'll be doing two new roles for the first time: Snow Queen and Rat Queen. Both are very different – both thrilling, in different ways. I'd say it's all about mindset, and each rehearsal I head into with a different headspace. With Rat Queen, Erika [Overturff] allows you to play around with your own sense of style. And Nora Carr, who will be dancing Clara when I'm dancing Rat Queen, is one of my best friends, so I think that adds an extra element of goofiness. It feels very playful and wild – but fun!

Erin Alarcón

In all my years doing Sugar Plum, my favorite part of the show is standing backstage with all our darling Candies, the youngest cast members, before the opening of Act 2. Waiting there all together, I hear them whisper about their nerves, their excitement, and the people in the audience there to support them. All those same thoughts are running through my mind, and it always makes me remember how unified we all are as a cast. It brings me calm to be reminded that we're all human beings giving our best in the pursuit of sharing one of our greatest joys with others in the hopes of bringing them joy in return.