AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

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*Dancer Katerina Schweitzer leads students in a classical ballet position during a* Nutcracker *workshop at Fremont Middle School. Photo: Whitney Woods. More photos...*

## SCHOOL WORKSHOPS KICK OFF *NUTCRACKER* SEASON

*Nutcracker* season got its official kickoff Thursday as 24 dancers from American Midwest Ballet [AMB], the region's professional dance company, fanned out to grade schools across the metro to lead workshops based on the famous holiday ballet. **More than 700 students** took part in the workshops, organized in partnership with Omaha Performing Arts.

"*The Nutcracker* is more than a ballet, it's a community event," said Erika Overturff, AMB's artistic director and CEO. "Workshops such as these, along with our Orpheum school matinees and the participation of more than 70 young dancers from throughout the community in our performances, help people feel a part of the *Nutcracker* experience."

At each school a group of dancers gave workshop participants an introduction to the *Nutcracker* story and its history, demonstrated ballet steps seen in the production, and **led participants in movement activities** based on the ballet. Participating elementary schools were Willa Cather, Joslyn, Bancroft, Jefferson, Forest Station, Druid Hill, and Rose Hill, along with Fremont Middle School.

"The kids had been studying *The Nutcracker* and were prepared with lots of good questions for us," said dancer Erica Lohman, who helped lead a workshop for third-graders at Willa Cather. "They were interested in how our costumes are made and how we are able to change them so quickly during a performance. I showed them my *pointe* shoes and asked them to guess what they were made of, which produced a lot of interesting answers! And we taught them the frogs' dance from Waltz of the Flowers, which was a huge hit."

Dancers also visited the Omaha Public Library's Florence branch for a "**Nutcracker Story Time**" scaled for younger fans. Future Story Time sites include Ralston's Bright Public Library on Monday, November 17, at 10:30 am, and the Council Bluffs Public Library on Thursday, November 29, at 10 am.

*The Nutcracker* will open Saturday, November 22, with performances at the Hoff Family Arts and Culture Center in Council Bluffs, plus a sensory-friendly performance on Sunday, November 23, tailored for families with a member on the autism spectrum. Performances at the Orpheum Theater in Omaha will be Thursday, December 4 through Sunday, December 7. More information is available at amballet.org.

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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 16 is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, the Heider Family Foundation, and Douglas County; 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.*