

Ballet Theatre's 'Nutcracker' lets the dancing shine

By Diane C. Grant
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

Jose Mateo's chamber-sized Ballet Theatre of Boston has once again mounted a sophisticated and well-

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crafted "Nutcracker" that comes alive the way a ballet should — through the dancing. Mateo's skilled choreography and his exuberant dancers bring the Nutcracker's characters and events to life ably and with panache.

Act I's party scene implies a small, comfortable gathering. Dr. Drosselmeyer, family friend and magician, enters from the back of the theater and makes his way to the stage through the audience. Mateo's Drosslemeyer is warm and gentle, with time and attention for all the children at the party, even though his favorite is Clara.

Clara is danced by 10-year-old Melissa Gelfand (sister of Boston Ballet principal Jennifer Gelfand) with realistically 10-year-old expressions and gestures. Her technique, on the other hand, is startlingly advanced — she dances confidently and fluidly *en pointe* — and her coordination and control of her exceptional extension are truly precocious.

Mateo's treatment of the Act II *divertissements* is traditional but without shtick. He concentrates on the choreography and the music rather than the various gimmicks that have become associated with these short variations. The Spanish dance, led by the appealing and talented Marisa Soltis, is full of swirling arms and flicking feet. The Russian dance is all fleet and spirited



PHOTO / IAN BULL

Elena Martinson and Andrei Ustinov in Ballet Theatre of Boston's "The Nutcracker."

footwork, with a folk dance flourish. And the Marzipan dance is dainty without mincing.

"Mother Ginger," the number in which a dozen small children emerge from Ginger's enormous, Little Bo

Peep style skirt, is Mateo's one (allowable) concession to cuteness.

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THE NUTCRACKER Ballet Theatre of Boston.

At: the Emerson Majestic Theatre, last night. Performances continue through Dec. 26.

at once. This allows the dancers some room to really move. Bettina van Wijk Indaco is appropriately supple and spritely as the Dew Drop Fairy.

The climax of the ballet, the Grand Pas de Deux of the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier, is performed by Andrei Ustinov and Elena Martinson, former Kirov Ballet principals. They are both tall and very lean, and their style is almost showy, with exaggerated wrist flicks and head tilts. They perform the difficult choreography with aplomb (though they are better dancing together than they are apart), whipping through multiple turns with disconcerting speed. Unfortunately, their regal calm seems almost dour at times. If this Sugar Plum Fairy could show a bit more sweetness the effect would be irresistible.