

Ballet Theatre
of Boston
finds new ways
to sharpen the
focus on dance



AN EVOLUTIONARY, NUTCRACKER'

While the Wang Center is ushering in the opulent new production of Boston Ballet's "The Nutcracker," a smaller-scaled, intimate version of the ballet is in the works up Tremont Street at the Emerson Majestic. This year marks the eighth season of the Ballet Theatre of Boston's "The Nutcracker" choreographed by company founder and artistic director Jose Mateo, and it is a production that offers a very different perspective of the famous work.

"For dance lovers, 'The Nutcracker' usually begins at the snow scene (at the end of Act 1)," said Mateo. "We've tried to make it an engaging piece of dance from beginning to end."

Mateo takes some liberties with the original E.T.A. Hoffmann story and Marius Petipa choreography.

"We focus on telling the story through dancing rather than an excessive amount of mime," said Mateo. "so I'm always thinking of new ways of listening to the score to see what parts of it might allow us to tell more of the story through actual dancing. I've played with various narrative aspects to simplify the story and expanded possibilities for introducing new dancing. It's always evolving and never looks the same from year to year."

For example, this year's production features a new pas de deux for the Columbine and Harlequin dolls that takes place in a newly designed (by Roger LaVoie) apartment for Drosselmeyer. "It helps define who Drosselmeyer is and introduces the whole fantasy aspect of the ballet as well,

helping explain the nar-

rative without having to go to more belabored mime."

The dancing itself also is updated. "Our divertissements are all balletized with contemporary aesthetics in mind," Mateo said. "The

Chinese dance, for example, is not a parody or mimicry of someone's concept of Chinese dancing, but hopefully reminiscent of some essence of Chinese traditional dancing. It's a subtle difference. The idea is modeled after Tchaikovsky's music—it's in the European classical tradition but imbued with character that conjures up a host of foreign lands."

The production involves 200 children from Massachusetts and New Hampshire, an aspect that Mateo feels is crucial to the ballet and to the Ballet Theatre of Boston School. "The kids' dancing is important," Mateo said, "and they do a lot of it. They're not there to decorate the stage but to dance to parts of the score which lend itself to that."

The company opened its production last weekend in Springfield and has performances scheduled in Lowell and Keene, N.H. Mateo claims sales for the Emerson Majestic run, which opens Wednesday, are the best they've ever been, "significantly better than this time last year. I'm also pleased that

the company is conspicuously larger and stronger this year and we have three very strong sets of Sugar Plums and Cavaliers, so I've had no need to invite guest artists."

Mateo asserts that his version of "The Nutcracker" will feel familiar to those brought up on the original. "I've retained the traditional character of the story and the classicism of the vocabulary. That tradition is an important part of the seasonal celebration.

People come into 'The Nutcracker' with preconceptions of what it is. I'm trying to retain that traditional flavor but make it appealing to contemporary tastes." Call 824-8000.

Emerson College's Films From the Margin series will screen several prize-winning films from the 1994

Dance on Camera Festival tonight at 7:30 at Zero Marlborough Street. Created by the Dance Film Association Inc. in 1971, the Dance on Camera Festival is the oldest annual competitive dance film and video festival in the world. This evening's presentation includes films featuring the choreography of Victoria Marks, Wendy Houston, Pooh Kaye, Judith Marcuse, Jennifer C. Mann and Merce Cunningham. Call 578-8855.

Boston University's Dance Theatre Group this afternoon presents a master class in Afro-Caribbean jazz dance by Patric Lacroix, founder of the Boston-based Haitian American Dance Theatre. Lacroix has been a guest performer for the Dance Theatre of Harlem and recently accepted a position as guest teacher, dancer and choreographer with Boston Ballet. The free class will be held from 4-6 p.m. at the Sargent Dance Studio/Theatre. Call 353-2748.

DANCE



SNOW FLAKES:

Todd Hall fronts the Snow Flakes in the Enchanted Forest in the Ballet Theatre of Boston's production of "The Nutcracker," playing at the Emerson Majestic Theatre Wednesday through Christmas Eve.