

# Spirit of holiday classic triumphs in 'Nutcracker'

*"The Nutcracker," presented by Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre at the Emerson Majestic Theatre, Boston, through Dec. 30.*

By T.J. MEDREK

Clara's getting older. Sure, she's still young enough to play with dolls. But she's also starting to realize that there's a big, adult world out there that's exciting and scary — and awfully tempting. When her Uncle Drosselmeyer gives her a nutcracker soldier doll, Clara dreams of it fighting a battle in her honor and then carrying her off to magical lands of snow and sweets where visions of sugarplums really do dance in her head — and of course onstage.

That's what the classic ballet "The Nutcracker" is all about. But there are few versions of it that

convey the spirit of the story as well as the one by Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre that officially opened at the Emerson Majestic Theatre last night and runs through Dec. 30.

Yes, this version, choreographed and directed by Mateo, has its eccentricities. Chief among them is a prologue featuring Dream Fairies spinning around a white Christmas tree and a visit to Drosselmeyer's toyshop where the first half of the Christmas party scene should be. But once that party finally gets going, the rest comes together with an honesty and directness that you can only marvel at.

The production and technical effects — the growing Christmas tree, the snowstorm — are modest. But they're surprisingly effective and entirely appropriate to the small Majestic stage. More imaginative lighting, though — and of course a live orchestra instead of a recorded performance of Tcha-

kovsky's sublime music — would do a lot to boost the level of the entire show.

Oh, yes, "The Nutcracker" is also about the dancing. Here, the dancing overall was more solid — clean, well-schooled, softly expressive — than overtly spectacular. But there were exceptions.

A problematic shoulder lift aside, Mara Vivas and Daniel Hohagen did some splendid work as the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier. Elizabeth Scherban excelled in Mateo's skating-like solos for the Snow Queen. Leticia Guerrero de Rosario and Alejandro Gomez revelled in the sensuality of the Arabian Coffee duet. And if it's big, bold, beautiful jumps you wanted, Mishelle Sloan and Carl Adams had 'em for you in the Russian Trepak dance.

Alexandera Adomaitis was an adorable Clara. And Mateo's the best Drosselmeyer you're ever likely to encounter.

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