

# Intimate 'Nutcracker' pleases in Cambridge

*Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre, "The Nutcracker," at the Sanctuary Theatre, Cambridge, last night. Continues through Dec. 30.*

By THEODORE BALE

Now you can see a formidable "Nutcracker" performance on both sides of the Charles river.

**Dance Review** And even though it felt like summer outdoors last night in Harvard Square, inside the Sanctuary Theatre it was unmistakably a frosty Christmas filled with splendid dancing.

In previous years, Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre gave its annual production of "Nutcracker" at Boston's Emerson Majestic Theatre, which is currently closed for renovations. That's ac-

tually a blessing for Cambridge audiences. Mateo's dancers have settled comfortably into their new home at Old Cambridge Baptist Church, and they've built an impressive proscenium and installed 250 steeply graded seats that offer a comfortable, intimate view.

Casting for this year's production is quite similar to last year's, and the sparkling Elizabeth Scherban was once again the star of the show. As Snow Queen, she approached every passage of Mateo's dense pointe work with strength and artistry. With four cavaliers to deal with, that's no small job.

In the ballet's second act, Scherban was smoky and expressive in the Coffee pas de deux, a role requiring entirely different attributes than Snow Queen.

In most productions, "Coffee" is either awkward or boring, and

the music usually feels too long. Last night, though, sparks flew between Scherban and partner Alejandro Gomez, making Mateo's version distinctly sensual.

Kimberly Carnevale was a stellar Sugar Plum Fairy. Like Scherban, her performance was characterized by confident pointe work and sincere joy.

Nathan Cottam partnered her with exacting precision and elegance. It was strange, however, that his solo variation was deleted from their Grand pas de deux, since he didn't appear to be sustaining any injuries.

Mateo's original choreography remains focused on the illusory aspects of the story, though he should take a fresh look at certain scenes.

Meg Flaherty-Griffith looked forlorn without a cavalier in the Waltz of the Flowers.