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Holiday season brings variety of 'Nutcrackers'

Since its world premiere on December 17, 1892, "The Nutcracker" has become a Christmas tradition for millions of people all over the world. The most performed ballet in history tells the tale of one very magical Christmas Eve in the life of a young girl named Clara.

The Boston Ballet takes up residence at the Wang Center for their world-famous rendition of this holiday classic. The big, lavish production is loaded with pageantry and fanfare. The cavernous stage is transformed into a winter wonderland that will put anyone in the holiday spirit (now through Dec. 30; (800) 447-7400).

But what you might not know is that theirs is certainly not the only "Nutcracker" in town.

In Harvard Square, the Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre company offers a very different "Nutcracker." The professional company focuses more on dancing than theatrics. Their intimate space has perfect sightlines for dance and enables you to appreciate their distinctive style and to actually see the faces of the dancers (now through Dec. 29; (617) 354-7467).

At the Strand Theatre in Dorchester, BalletRox presents an entirely different spin on the old classic. Stars of the Dance Theatre of Harlem rely on a funky, modernized Tchaikovsky and a cast of 40 children for their hip, edgy production, "Urban Nutcracker" (Dec. 20-22; (617) 423-NEXT (6398)).

In Medford, the Chevalier Theater hosts the Northeast Youth Ballet's "Nutcracker." Since 1996, the company has received rave reviews for its production, which includes amateur dancers from elementary school through college (Dec. 13-22; (781) 665-2236).

The Northern Ballet Theatre, New Hampshire's only professional



MIKE MERGEN/METRO

Mother Ginger performing with her "children" during a dress rehearsal of "The Nutcracker" at the Wang Center last year. The show runs through December

Behind the scenes, the parents keep it together



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