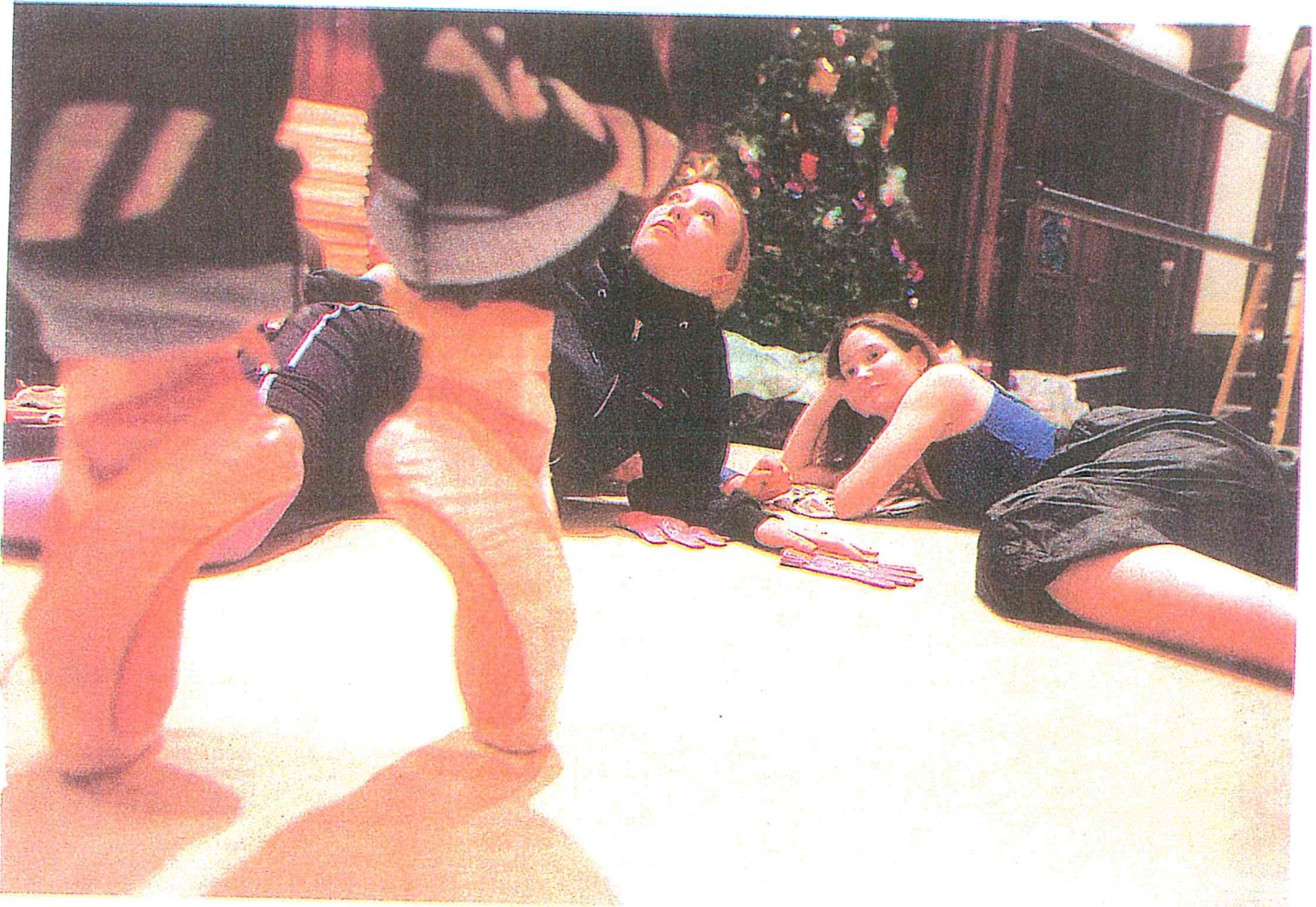


Weekend

Arts & Performance

THE BOSTON GLOBE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2002



dancer from José Mateo's Ballet Theatre tests pointe shoes in preparation for a production of "The Nutcracker," one of many in the area.

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/DINA RUDICK

Secrets of 'The Nutcracker'

While you're still digesting your Thanksgiving repast, dancers around the region are getting ready for their close-ups, putting the finishing touches on myriad productions of "The Nutcracker." Large or small, each troupe has its own spin. Some are true to the original, the tale of a little girl who dreams of a magical Christmas kingdom, replete with dancing sugar plums and a prince. Others jettison plot and score altogether, substituting hip-hop for Tchaikovsky, modern dance for melodrama. But no matter how varied their versions, artistic directors agree (here, in their own words): This ballet is a tough nut to crack. **E20**



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/DINA RUDICK

José Mateo's Ballet Theatre rehearses for "The Nutcracker."

Music

She's no Britney

Unlike the other divas, Shakira (right) says she's more rock than pop — and she writes her own songs. **E14**

Dance

On their toes

Directors of four versions of "The Nutcracker" share their plans for this year's productions. **E17**

Theater

Curtain call?

The Modern Theatre may get a reprieve from demolition, thanks to the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Levin Family Trust. **E22**



PHOTO/JENNIFER LESTER

Boston Ballet's "The Nutcracker," large in size and scope, aims to appeal to both children and adults.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/DAVID KAMERMAN

Beverly Canteen gestures during a rehearsal of the Jeannette Neill Dance Studio's "Not the Nutcracker," which blends jazz, hip-hop, and modern-dance elements.

They work hard to make 'Nutcracker' sweet

► "THE NUTCRACKER"
Continued from Page B17

Boston Ballet
Mikko Nissinen,
artistic director

"Boston Ballet's annual production of 'The Nutcracker' goes beyond any other ballet in scope and size. Its appeal is simple to understand. It works for 5-year-olds, 12-year-olds, and adults. We can all relate to growing up, family holidays, and dreams.

"The challenge in staging 'The Nutcracker' lies in making sure the dancing and music are fresh and vital in each performance. For the company dancers, who have probably danced hundreds of 'Nutcrackers, I demand that they not only dance well, but that they dance as well as possible. They are trained by our ballet masters, some of the finest dancers in the world. With these four extraordinary teachers — my artistic associate Trinidad Vives and ballet masters Eva Evdokimova, Anthony Randazzo, and Raymond Lukens — the casts all get the attention and expertise they need.

"I have also created new pairings for a long time, certainly their dancing is smooth, but by coupling different dancers together, new chemistry is created. It's sort of like a hockey team. They may be good, but if the team doesn't make it to the playoffs, the coach has to alter the lineup in order to stimulate new chemistry.



ABOVE, INSTRUCTOR SYBIL HIGGINS (FAR LEFT) WATCHES A REHEARSAL FOR "THE NUTCRACKER" AT THE JEANNETTE NEILL DANCE STUDIO. BELOW, KIM BORDEN APPLIES MAKEUP TO A GIRL AT A REHEARSAL FOR "THE NUTCRACKER" WITH JOSÉ MATEO'S BALLET THEATRE.



that they imbue each presentation with genuine spirit and heart.

"Ultimately, the audience experiences a splendorous, exciting artistic adventure that is in keeping with the universal notion of the holiday spirit. In our new Sanctuary Theatre, it is up-close, intimate, warm, and giving."

Massachusetts Youth Ballet
Jacqueline Cronsberg,
artistic director

"When I founded Massachusetts Youth Ballet eight years ago, I had no plans for staging an annual 'Nutcracker.' My mission was, and still is, to provide extended training and professional-level performing opportunities to talented young middle- and secondary school-age dancers. But I found that success also created a desire for performing opportunities by my younger talented students who may not have been ready for the public challenges of the adult classical ballet repertoire.

"In 1999, I was asked to provide the artistic and technical direction, as well as the choreography and principal role casting, for another suburban organization for its 'Nutcracker.' My mind flew back many years to the time when I was first introduced to this holiday classic by Virginia Williams, founder of Boston Ballet, whose inspiration and artistic adviser was the great George Balanchine.

"These memories made me realize that it was important for me to produce my own 'Nutcracker' and to expand the opportunities — and fun — for my own students as well as other talented young people in the community. Balanchine and Williams must have been looking on, because it was at that point that I was approached by the wonderful people at the Regis College Fine Arts Center (our performance venue for other MYB productions) and asked if we would consider partnering with them to present 'The Nutcracker' as part of their annual performance season series.

"I see 'The Nutcracker' not only as a traditional holiday performance for children and families, but as a metaphor for training a dancer. The youngest children start out as angels and little mice; some of these children are still in second grade and still believe in Santa Claus. They learn simple steps from the classical vocabulary and how to be onstage, take directions, and perform. They share the stage with and look up to the more advanced dancers. They grow into the next roles of soldiers, party children, Mother Ginger's Pochinchelles and peppermint candy canes. 'The Nutcracker' becomes the ABCs of ballet for them.

"The Nutcracker" is an American holiday tradition, and that tradition is spreading to other parts of the world. It reflects on family relationships, both onstage and in the audience."

José Mateo's Ballet Theatre
José Mateo,
artistic director

"In a world of hundreds of productions of 'The Nutcracker,' it is understandable that so many producers scramble to create something distinctive that will attract a new audience and keep old audiences coming back. The challenge is daunting.

"Our production of 'The Nutcracker' is not an isolated attempt to outdo other 'Nutcrackers.' It is a natural result of our organization's unique character and our mission to create an entirely new model for a different kind of ballet company and school.

"I continually look to dispense with anything old that no longer stimulates the engagement of today's diverse audiences, and replace it with imaginative surprises. I look to retain everything that contributes to the sense of beauty and awe that are intrinsic to ballet itself and work to find a fresh way of presenting it. After 15 seasons (over 500 performances; that's a lot of Dr. Drosselmeyer, a role I play in the ballet) of fine-tuning our ever-evolving production, we continue to get closer to perfect balance between the old and the new, the traditional (what would 'The Nutcracker' be without that?) and the innovative.

"The keys to the integrity of our 'Nutcracker' as a cohesive work of art are ultimately in the music, the choreography, and the dancing. Our 'Nutcracker' has the inherent advantage of being one of the few to benefit from its singular authorship. At every step and with every choreographic decision I make, I consider the probable intentions of the composer (Tchaikovsky was a genius, and his suite from 'The Nutcracker' is one of the most popular pieces on the planet.)

"Behind the scenes, one would discover that the dancers truly enjoy this ballet, and it is inevitable

"My standards for my dancers remain extremely high. All the young students must pass an audition that lasts an hour and a half. We begin our rehearsals for the principal roles in August, four months before the performances — a demanding schedule, but one I believe ensures our commitment to a high level of professionalism. All the roles, with the exception of the Cavalier, Drosselmeyer, and the adult party guests, are students. This year, as in previous years, the roles of Drosselmeyer and the Cavalier are danced by seasoned professionals. We are privileged to have Ilya Kozadavov, a member of Boston Ballet, as the Cavalier for our four performances at Regis College Eleanor Casey Theatre."

Jeannette Neill Dance Studio
Allen Collier, director

"If I hear one more 'Waltz of the Flowers' or see one more Sugar Plum Fairy, I'll scream! So some dancers, especially those in the ballet world, bemoan their 'Nutcracker' experience, one that begins somewhere around Thanksgiving and doesn't end until they wake up, often well after the New Year.

"For most ballet companies, annual productions of 'The Nutcracker' help meet the budgetary need that will sustain them throughout the year. For those of us in the jazz- and theater-dance worlds, we have to think outside the box, mostly in order to compete. Seven years ago, that was precisely the genesis of 'Not the Nutcracker,' the annual holiday concert produced by the Jeannette Neill Dance Studio.

"This concert of jazz, theater, modern, and hip-hop dance is loosely tied to a holiday theme, ranging from the nightmares of suicide shopping to folk dances that celebrate Hanukkah. But what makes this concert unique is the dancers who make it happen.

"My cast is a group of almost 100 adults who generously share their talent and passion for dance. 'Not the Nutcracker' includes dancers who spend most of their lives as doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, students, computer technicians, housewives, nannies, waiters, bartenders, salesmen, and almost any other profession one can name. Add in a production schedule that includes 10 weeks of rehearsals, additional meetings for lighting design and blocking, plus three shows in one weekend, and you've created a logistical nightmare different than 'The Nutcracker,' but on every bit as frightening and overwhelming.

"Though we are able to avoid the monotony of performing a single work during a run, we are faced with a very different challenge: creating anew a well-planned, innovative, and entertaining dance program.

"The work comes with its own rewards, however. I'm fortunate to present the happy collaborative result of a group of relative strangers bonded together by their love for and appreciation of dance. After weeks of preparation, the dancers are ready with their well-polished pieces of choreography eager to share their performance with a devoted sold-out audience — even if it is only for one weekend. It is my good fortune to witness the joyous expressions and feel the palpable exuberance of the dancers as they exit the stage into the blinding lights of the wings."

Sugar plum express

Some of the "Nutcracker" and "Nutcracker"-related performances in the region this season. All companies offer matinee and evening shows.

BalletRox "The Nutcracker" Strand Theatre 453 Columbia Road Dec. 20-22 Tickets: \$10-\$25, call Ned Tickling, 617-423-6398, or go to notickletix.com/nutcracker.html	Dec. 13-14, 8 p.m. Jordan Hall 30 Gainsborough St. Dec. 15, 3 p.m. Tickets: \$12-\$42, call 617-424-8900 or visit bmc.org	Mass. Youth Ballet Casey Theatre, Regis College, 235 Walsley St., Weston Dec. 13-15 Tickets: \$15-\$25, call 781-768-7070 or go to MassYouthBallet.org
Boston Ballet Vyng Theatre, 270 Tremont St. Performances continue through Dec. 30 Tickets: \$15-\$70, call 800-447-7400 or go to telecharge.com	Festival Ballet Providence Providence Performing Arts Center, 220 Veybossett St., Providence Dec. 13-15 Tickets: \$15-\$50, call 401-421-7787 or go to pbart.org	José Mateo's Ballet Theatre The Sanctuary Theatre, 400 Harvard St., Harvard Square, Cambridge Nov. 29-Dec. 29 Tickets: \$15-\$32, call 617-354-7457 or go to tbl.org
Boston Gay Men's Chorus "The Nutcracker: Men in Tights" Buckman Auditorium, El Student Building, Northeastern University, 360 Huntington Ave.	Island Moving Company Rossett, 548 Bellevue Ave., Newport, R.I. Performances continue through Thursday Tickets: \$45-\$90, but the show is sold out, and a waiting list exists	Jeannette Neill Dance Studio "Not the Nutcracker" 15th Performance District, 665 Commonwealth Ave., Fenway and Saturday Tickets: \$15-\$20, call 617-353-8725

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