BALLET REVIEW

José Mateo's *Nutcracker*

An intimate and warm performance of the famous holiday story

KAREN WONG

The Snow Flake Queen in *The Nutcracker* by José Mateo Ballet Theatre.

By Denis Bozic
STAFF WRITER

With the grand production of Mikko Nissinen's *The Nutcracker* embracing the winter season in Boston, many ballet goers might be unaware of another production that happened in the secluded Sanctuary Theatre, located at Harvard Square. While the José Mateo Ballet may be somewhat less familiar than the Boston Ballet Company, this ballet company has been putting out shows for decades. This winter, they returned with their 26th annual production of *The Nutcracker* — a small-scale and intimate show that delivers the best of the Christmas magic.

Founded in 1986, the José Mateo Ballet Theatre is one of New England's leading ballet schools, and its production of *The Nutcracker* is the only professional production in the area to hold open auditions for students outside of its own school. Many characters of the ballet are therefore performed by local dancers — some of the show's professional performers started their careers as children in the productions of the José Mateo Ballet Theatre. For those accustomed to seeing large-scale shows with performers of exotic and versatile backgrounds, this production of *The Nutcracker* might sound like it lacks the same grandeur and wonder, but don't be fooled — this production is still captivating.

With a stage just big enough to allow room to move for all of the dancers, this show brings out the essence of *The Nutcracker*: Christmas spirit and warm family atmosphere. This is further emphasized by the cleverly adjusted choreography, flow of the story, and the vivacious colors of the dancers' costumes. The intimate setting of the show allows one additional feature to the audience — seeing all of the dancers' facial expressions and gestures up close. Just when it seems that the young dancers couldn't make the show more entertaining, their acting skills add another dimension to the story and turn this ballet into a funny and mesmerizing fairy tale. With the hilarious depiction of Mother Ginger and lovable portrait of the menacing mice, it is impossible not to smile and enjoy the spirit of this production.

José Mateo Ballet Theatre's production of *The Nutcracker* ended on Dec. 22, but be sure to catch the show in the upcoming seasons when the holiday spirit surrounds Boston again.

The Nutcracker
José Mateo Ballet Theatre
7:30 p.m. Dec. 12, 2013
The Sanctuary Theatre, Cambridge

RESTAURANT REVIEW