

Q & A

Dec 10, 2013



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Sebastopol Ballet owners talk about “The Nutcracker”

Sebastopol Ballet has been a triple partnership for 21 years, co-owned by Sue Borgeson, Paula Martens and Lois Hart-man. Sue is the artistic director for The Nutcracker, and she is assisted by Paula and Lois in all aspects of the production,

a family tradition since 1991.

Where do The Nutcracker’s dancers come from and how are they chosen?

Most dancers are students of the Sebastopol Ballet. The cast is completed by parents in the party scene, alumni dancers and, of course, our stellar guest artists. We cast all who audition and re-define and sometimes create parts to accommodate changes from year to year.

Who designs the costumes? What’s involved? What are some of the most unusual costumes?

The costumes are designed and executed by Sue, Lois and Sue's cousin, Cindy Durkee. Costuming involves hours of design, locating fabrics and trims, construction and meticulous handwork, such as beading, trimming and general blinging. Our most unique costumes include a peppermint pink unicorn with a Parisian doll, a Carmen Mirandaaesque-dancing lobster and a sparkling, eight-legged sea monster in our Arabian underwater scene, and a Mommy Ginger that's off the charts.

Describe your favorite scene and why.

It's hard to say because each production takes on a life of its own. We love the humor and energy in our party scene. Even though the kids are a little younger this year, their enthusiasm and acting abilities will truly engage the audience.

How do the dancers remain calm before the show?

We have a warm-up class before every show taught by guest artist and alumnus Nolan Kabota, formally of Les Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo. He dances the role of the hilarious Mouse Queen and one of our dynamic Russian dancers. Also, on the matinees, a large percentage of the cast in costume hosts a meet-and-greet during pre-performance Sugar Plum parties.

Why has "The Nutcracker" enjoyed such a long life—not only with Sebastopol Ballet (since 1991) but since it was first produced in 1892 in St. Petersburg, Russia?

Everyone loves the music, whether a balletomane or not, and it's a wonderful holiday tradition for many families and dancers.

What can audiences expect when they see the production, including some of your favorite set decorations?

Every year, new audience members express their amazement that such a glittering, exuberant, fun-filled production can be found in Sebastopol. We have the best guest artists we have ever had in our 22-year run, notably Janica Smith and John Speed, both formally of Smuin Ballet. A very special note is that Janica, our Sugar Plum Fairy, is a former student of Sue's.

Who or what inspires you and why?

Every year we are inspired and humbled by the incredible energy, support and creativity of our cast and their parents. This show wouldn't exist without the super human efforts our loyal volunteers. They put in tireless hours of fund-raising, hauling and refurbishing sets, cleaning, organizing backstage and lobby, program design and many other tasks too numerous to list. In addition, we are extremely fortunate to have such talent in the departments of web and graphic design and advertising.

The 22nd annual Sebastopol Nutcracker takes place on Dec. 20, 7 p.m., and Dec. 21, 2 p.m. and

7 p.m., and Dec. 22, 2 p.m., at Analy High School in Sebastopol. For more information and tickets,

go to www.sebastopolballet.com or see the Holiday Gift Guide in this week's paper.