

MESSENGER

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Visions of Sugar Plums Danced in our Heads

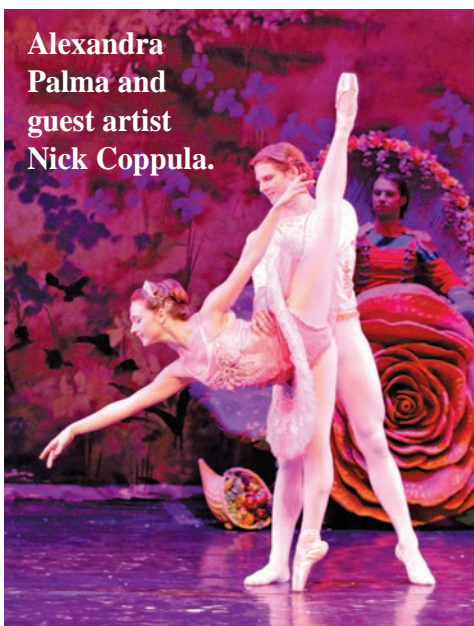
By: Christina Pandolfi

A timeless holiday tradition brought immense joy to the Staller Center for the Performing Arts, as the dancers of Seiskaya Ballet performed Valia Seiskaya's celebrated rendition of The Nutcracker. A ballet with historic Russian roots and festivity to spare, Seiskaya Ballet celebrated twenty years of this seminal classic in a most triumphant way, with solid dancing company-wide against a backdrop of sets that pulsed with vibrancy.

Jewel tones set the stage for this timeless confection, as Act I unveiled a regal dinner party, hosted by the Stahlbaum family. A calm and cool Kristina Diaz portrayed the role of Clara with confident poise, accented with sweeping arm gestures to highlight her tall stature. Her rambunctious little brother, Fritz was expertly danced by Diana Atoian, delighting with dynamic pirouettes so impeccable, you couldn't stay angry at his here-and-there mischiefs for very long.

At the height of celebration, Clara's godfather, Herr Drosselmeyer entered in an eerie black cloud, portrayed with ease by Warren

C a m h i ,
mystifying
a n d
delighting
partygoers
with magic
tricks and
toys that
sprung to
life. A Doll
as lovely as
porcelain
itself, the
l i s s o m e
D a n i e l l e
L o v e t r o



Alexandra Palma and guest artist Nick Coppula.

brought sharp exactitude to the role, stylistically complemented by the explosive split leaps and beats of Jade Donnelly's Chocolate Solider.

As the excitement wound down and all went to sleep, Clara reappeared, this time to search for her most beloved toy – the Nutcracker. Behind her trailed a fleet of revenge-ready mice, led by their evil Mouse King to bring terror to a once peaceful home. At the height of dread, the Nutcracker too came

to life to battle the Mouse King in a manic frenzy. Ultimately, it is Clara who defeats the Mouse King, and with cheeky humor too, thanks to a large wedge of cheese fired from a giant cannon. Serenity is then restored and the ballet continued with a dreamy air.

The passionate, exultant pas de deux between Clara and her Nutcracker Prince, portrayed with enthusiasm by Matthew Dibble, reflected the ebbs and flows of Tchaikovsky's powerful score, showcasing the sweetness that comes from young love. As the pair is whisked away into the snowy night, Lovetro returned as the Snow Queen, dancing as crisply and cleanly as fallen snow itself, closing out Act I with hypnotic beauty.

A c t



Diana Atoian was a marvel as Clara's rambunctious brother, Fritz.



The Chocolate Soldier took flight with Jade Donnelly's explosive leaps.



As the Snow Queen, Danielle Lovetro was riveting.

II began with collective sighs, thanks to heavenly little angels that seemed to float along the clouds, welcoming the audience into the Land of Sweets. Among fiery Spanish dancers, adorable sheep, and sweet-as-candy Polichinelles, the second act lived up to its name, delighting us with a variety of dynamic dancing. The petite Jenna Lee sparkled as the Dew Drop, delivering a humming staccato to the part that helped her shimmer against her cadre of Flowers.

Gorgeous Alexandra Palma returned to her designated post as the Sugar Plum at the height of Act II, making a majestic, yet approachable mark to her solid technique. With each smile and perfectly placed exhale, Palma and her Cavalier, former Pittsburgh Ballet Theater dancer, Nick Coppula, led the practice in "Let's make this look easy." Long limbs were on deck, as the duo wowed with fluid développés, explosive tour jetés and a feat of magic, thanks to a coda of dizzying double fouettés that were executed to perfection by Palma. It was just the exclamation point needed to polish off this show with the sweet nostalgia of past holiday seasons.

Visions of The Nutcracker will lead me into the New Year with delicious anticipation, for this particular production is a Long Island staple, guaranteed to delight for years to come.

Christina Pandolfi is a professional copywriter and editor who has written for several esteemed publications, like SELF. She is also an accomplished dancer who attended NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.