

Seiskaya Ballet

REVIEW

THE NUTCRACKER. Music by Tchaikovsky; choreography, Valia Seiskaya. With Sophie Vanier, Petter Jacobsson, Elizabeth McGrath, Meghan Baker, Andrea Bergeman, and others. Set and Scenery, Margaret Piotrowska; costumes, Kathy Baker; lighting, Elizabeth Silver. At the Staller Center through Sunday. Seen Saturday

By Steve Parks

STAFF WRITER

ENCHANTING" IS certainly overused — especially when describing a child's Christmas fantasy. Jaded critics might opt for "precious" instead. But enchantment is precisely what the Seiskaya Ballet's "Nutcracker" is about.

As "Nutcrackers" go, this one is disarmingly child-friendly — a storyteller's "Nutcracker" that leaves much to the imagination even as it mimes and dances the narrative with such visual clarity.

Set and scenery designer Margaret Piotrowska creates the painterly backdrops that frame this "Nutcracker" as in a living, illustrated children's book, one that promises to become tattered with endless re-reading. These visions are enhanced by Kathy Baker's fairy-tale costumes.

As for the dance, choreographer Valia Seiskaya — whose company, as with many Long Island ensembles, consists of students (in this case, from her St. James ballet school) — knows her dancers' strengths and limitations. And "The Nutcracker" allows her to show each student off to best advantage. Toddlers in the company do what they do best — look cute — as they mime and move about in precise baby steps, irresistibly charming.

But there's also the grace and athleticism of legitimate ballet — perfectly lined extension of long,

graceful legs punctuated with confident landings and exquisitely timed partnering lifts and twirls.

Sophie Vanier returns this year as Clara. Two seasons is a long career in this role and it's a bit of a stretch for the willowy 15-year-old, who's such a pleasure to behold that we can forgive the advanced adolescence of her Clara. Guest artist Petter Jacobsson helps her pull it off with his debonair presence as the Nutcracker-turned-prince.

Elizabeth McGrath's Sugar Plum Fairy preserves the ethereal quality of Clara's dream with elegance, as do the other principals: Meghan Baker (Snow Queen) and Andrea Bergeman (Dew Drop).

All the Seiskaya needs for a truly classic "Nutcracker" is a live orchestra.



Seiskaya Ballet's Sophie Vanier as Clara in "Nutcracker."