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Arts and Entertainment

The Nutcracker Arrives at Stony Brook

By Melissa R. Mendelson

For over 40 years, the Nutcracker remains one of the most fascinating tales ever performed.

In the month of December, the Nutcracker was performed by the Seiskaya Ballet at Stony Brook's Staller Center. The theater echoed with the sound of the Nutcracker soundtrack playing through the speakers as a brightly lit stage portrayed a scene of the town painted onto a large screen, and it lifted up to reveal Drosselmeyer's toyshop, the ballroom, and many other well crafted, beautifully designed sets. Performers walked or danced out onto the stage in bright costumes made out of velvet and silk.

The Nutcracker amazed me the first time I saw it in 1985, and as I watched it again, I felt the same excitement and interest grow in me as the performance continued. Out of all of the versions of the Nutcracker that I've seen, the Seiskaya Ballet's Nutcracker was the best and made my original favorite, the 'Nutcracker on Ice', fall into second place.

The children were entranced by the way a variety of characters moved and danced across the stage. Some watched in

anticipation as the toys battled the mice, and some gasped and huddled next to their parents when the mouse king almost defeated the Nutcracker. One little girl's eyes sparkled as she watched the Nutcracker lead Clara into a nutshell boat that took them into the world of the toys.

The audience enjoyed the many dances that were performed before them on the stage, but we were blown away by the pas de deux performed by Julie Miller and Mikhail Nikitine as the Sugar-Plum Fairy and her Cavalier. Seiskaya's version of the pas de deux matched the talents of Seiskaya Ballet principal Julie Miller and guest artist Mikhail Nikitine's skills as they hypnotized the audience with their unbelievable abilities. Miller and Nikitine were definitely a great duo as they guided each other throughout the dance,



and the audience exploded into applause as soon as they were finished. The Seiskaya Ballet definitely did save the best dance for last.

Many of the other dancers were truly incredible and not all of them were adults but children portrayed many charac-

ters like Clara, the Nutcracker, Little Bo Peep and her sheep, and other characters including little snowflakes. Each one had their own dance, and they all moved with grace. Some even astounded the audience with back flips and somersaults, which were performed by three, little clowns in colorful costumes who flipped across the stage.

The classic tale of the Nutcracker is about a girl named Clara who was given the Nutcracker by her godfather Drosselmeyer during a Christmas party.

She returns later to the ballroom to check on the Nutcracker and falls asleep with it on the couch. She dreams about a battle between the toys and mice while she magically shrinks, and the Nutcracker comes alive as a prince who fights the Mouse King. Clara helps the Nutcracker defeat the Mouse King, and she is led into the world of toys by the Nutcracker. At the end, she wakes up and believes it was all dream.

Valia Seiskaya was the choreographer and regisseur for the Nutcracker. Some of her choreographic works include Street People and MASK. She was also nominated as "Best Teacher and Coach" at a 1994 International Ballet Competition in Bulgaria.

The Nutcracker performed by the Seiskaya Ballet will always be remembered as the best performance that I have seen and it wasn't a performance that anyone should have missed. The performance was for all ages, and it included all the best features: fighting, dancing, villains, magic, and love. It is a dazzling story performed by talented people who put their hearts and soul into it, and the Seiskaya Ballet truly captured the spirit of the Nutcracker.