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## Seiskaya's Nutcracker *A Magical Ride*

by Carol Goldberg

If, by some chance, you missed Seiskaya Ballet's performance of the Nutcracker at SUNY Stony Brook's Staller Center during the weekends of December 15-16 and 22-23, you missed a joyride on a magic sled headed nonstop for holiday fun buoyed by Tchaikovsky's immortal music.

You'd have been invited to the Christmas party at the Stahlbaums where you would have seen a star in her ascendancy, as Maria Fechter superbly danced her way into all our hearts as the lovely young Clara. Fechter's virtuosity and poise were accentuated by her extraordinary stage presence. As an interesting counterpoint to Clara's sweetness, Phillip Camhi imbued her pesky brother Fritz with, well... attitude. Lots of it. (Hrumph!) And surely there's no lack of talent in the Camhi household, for Warren Camhi was a most charismatic Herr Drosselmeyer, dazzling the children both on stage and off with accomplished flair. The Doll and the Chocolate Soldier brought by Drosselmeyer to the holiday fete were splendidly brought to life by an engaging Sara Dowd and an exuberant Chrissy Fennimore, respectively.

As Clara dreamed of her special gift from Drosselmeyer, a hand-

some doll in the form of a Nutcracker Prince, the audience witnessed an extraordinary battle between the mighty toy soldiers and the mischievous mice, a battle complete with horsemen and swords and a working cannon. Here, Lucio Costanzo as the Mouse King and guest artist Gene Connor as the Nutcracker, convincingly dueled to the death. The Prince emerged the victor (whew!) and, as Act I drew to a close, a bevy of elegant Snowflakes took center stage led by a graceful and technically excellent Marlena Bono as the Snow Queen.

The curtain opened on Act II revealing breathtaking scenery when Clara and her Prince arrived in the exotic garden of the Kingdom of the Sweets, the oohs and ahs were unanimous. The array of talent that followed was equally impressive. All were introduced by the Sugar Plum Fairy, portrayed perfectly by Julie Miller, a uniquely talented young lady. You'd have fallen in love with the little Angels who floated across the stage. You'd have been dazzled by vivacious Spanish dancers (Leslie Lyon and Agatha Wasilewska), precision Chinese dancers (Marlena Bono and Emily Portoghese) and exotic, precise Arabian dancers. The lively Russian Trepak would have stirred you; sweet Bo-Peep (Bonnie Ip)



**Julie Miller and guest artist Hagop Kharatian lit up the stage in the 2001 Nutcracker at the Staller Center**

and her adorable lost sheep would have tugged at your heartstrings, and 12-foot-tall Mother Ginger would have made you laugh. From beneath her skirts emerged a cast of little Polichinelles and acrobatic clowns you'd have wanted to take home.

Ah, but not before the Waltz of the Flowers, so ably led by perky and accomplished Jennifer Olesuk as Dewdrop. And certainly not before the Grande Pas de Deux, exquisitely performed by Sugar Plum and her Cavalier. Miller and guest artist Hagop Kharatian lit up the

stage with a seamless and exemplary interpretation of this favorite ballet moment. The performance described here was the first in the series. Other performances may have had alternating casts. Kudos to teacher and choreographer Valia Seiskaya, whose tireless efforts are deeply appreciated by the Long Island cultural community.

*Carol Goldberg, Senior Editor of FitnessRx magazine, writes about and reviews ballet for a variety of publications on a freelance basis.*