

Check into these 'Nutcracker' suites

Major ballet companies throughout the Northwest are ready for their annual staging of the holiday classic

By **BOB HICKS**
THE OREGONIAN

"Nutcrackers" are here, there and everywhere at this time of year. Here's where to dance your holidays away:

Oregon Ballet Theatre

It's Round Two for "George Balanchine's 'The Nutcracker,'" the only Balanchine version on the West Coast. Artistic director Christopher Stowell installed it last season, his first at OBT, as part of his strategy to reshape the onetime multi-styled company along neo-classical lines, and the dancers responded with buoyant performances.

Balanchine's "Nutcracker" has a dreamy, sweetly comic quality and an intriguingly antique air: Balanchine created it 50 years ago, but he was consciously harking back to the versions he remembered from his childhood in Russia, a nostalgia that links it directly to the original Petipa/Ivanov version of 1892. At this one, you get a little history lesson with your sugar plums. One regret: the loss of Campbell Baird's stunning, Fabergé-inspired sets and costumes, which have been replaced by Peter Farmer's merely serviceable designs.

Opens 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 10; continues 2 and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 11, 1 and 5 p.m. Dec. 12, 7:30 p.m. Dec. 14-17, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 18, 1 and 5 p.m. Dec. 19, 7:30 p.m. Dec. 20-23, and 2 p.m. Dec. 24, live orchestra most performances; Keller Auditorium, 222 S.W. Clay St.; www.obt.org; \$12-\$92; Ticketmaster.



BLAINE COVERT/2003

Dewdrop with her Flower Court will fill the stage in OBT's "The Nutcracker."

Eugene Ballet Company

Artistic director Toni Pimble's bright, whimsical version is accompanied by the Eugene Opera Orchestra for four of its five performances; the 7 p.m. Dec. 19 performance is to recorded music. Eugene Ballet's twin, Idaho Ballet, performs it in Boise Dec. 11-12 (208-343-0556).

8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 17; 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 18; 2:30 and 7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 19 (recorded music at 7 p.m. Dec. 19); Silva Concert Hall, Hult Center for the Performing Arts, 1 Eugene Center, Eugene; \$12-\$42; 541-682-5000; www.tickets.com.

Pacific Northwest Ballet

And a big, happy "boo!" to you. For the 21st season, Seattle's ballet company presents its "Nutcracker" as designed by the great children's illustrator Maurice Sendak ("Where the Wild Things Are"). Sendak and choreographer Kent Stowell (father of OBT's Christopher Stowell) looked back to E.T.A. Hoffman's 1816 story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," which has a slightly darker, more Brothers Grimm-ish feel to it than most danced "Nutcrackers" — but not too dark, of course.

Opens today and continues through Dec. 28 (call or go online for performance times), Marion Oliver McCaw Hall, 301 Mercer St., Seattle; \$17-\$96; 206-441-2424.

Pacific Artists Ballet Theatre

Although it often seems that way, "The Nutcracker" isn't the only holiday ballet, or the only one worth seeing. This company, the student performing arm of the rigorous school at Pacific Artists Dance Center, brings back its charming updating of "La Boutique Fantasque" ("The Enchanted Toyshop"), Leonide Massine's 1919 toy ballet for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. John Clifford, a leading Balanchine protégé, has reset the piece, and the sets and costumes are based on Andre Derain's 1919 originals. Rossini's lively music sparks a tale about a pair of kids in an enchanted toyshop on the French Riviera, where Pinocchio, a half-dozen matrushkas and a lot of other dolls come to life. Pirouetting poodles, too.

7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 17; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 18; 1 and 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 19; Performing Arts Center, Portland Community College/Sylvania, 12000 S.W. 49th St.; \$10-\$15; 503-452-8448, www.pacificartistsdancecenter.com.

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