



SARAH DAVIDSON/For the Connection

Pacific Artists Ballet Theatre's John Clifford (left) puts dancers Kelsey Trif and Skye Stouber through their paces in preparation for the upcoming production of "La Boutique Fantasque" at Lincoln in downtown Portland.

## 'La Boutique Fantasque' offers a unique alternative to Nutcracker

By SARAH DAVIDSON

For The Connection

This holiday season, the Pacific Artists Ballet Theatre will perform "La Boutique Fantasque" at Lincoln Hall in downtown Portland.

A unique alternative to the often over-danced Nutcracker, "La Boutique Fantasque" ("The Enchanted Toy Shop") offers both a shorter, family-friendly performance and an opportunity for young dancers to participate in a pre-professional ballet.

Adapted for the PABT by John Clifford, former artistic director of Los Angeles Ballet, "La Boutique Fantasque" tells the story of two American children accidentally forgotten by their parents in an enchanted toy shop on the banks of the French Riviera.

The toys that fill the shop — poodles, can-can girls, Russian nesting dolls and more — come to life, entertaining the children in a fantasy set to a light, melodic score until their parents return to take them home.

The dancers featured in the performance regularly practice at the Pacific Artists Dance Center in

Hillsdale. The center provides a learning environment that prepares young dancers for professional careers.

"From what I've seen nationally of schools at this level, this is one of the best," Clifford said. "The quality here is one of the best in the country."

Clifford flew in several times from Los Angeles to help prepare and choreograph the PABT for its upcoming performance.

Nancy Davis, the artistic director and co-founder of the center, has put on "La Boutique Fantasque" during the holidays for the past five years. Davis said this particular ballet works well for her because it is shorter than the Nutcracker, making it easy to perform several times in one day, and has no religious context.

"This ballet gives a lot of young dancers an opportunity to grow artistically and to be more challenged technically," Davis said. "They have larger roles at a younger age."

"They will have the experience of being in a professional production. It's not a recital."

The PABT is also excited about

its move from Portland Community College to Portland State University. Performing downtown, Davis hopes, will give the dancers even more experience with a professional environment.

Many of the dancers in PABT have been in previous performances of "La Boutique Fantasque" and have been able to work their way up from small roles to lead ones. Two of the lead roles this year, Kelsey Trif and Henry Cotton, started small as a can-can girl and lost child, respectively, and are now playing the lead Tarentella. Trif began at PABT in fourth grade, starting small, then worked her way up to the lead.

"If you want to move forward, you have to keep working, especially in ballet," Trif said.

Cotton agreed: "If you are given an opportunity, you have to take it if you love what you're doing."

The Pacific Artists Ballet Theatre will perform "La Boutique Fantasque" at Lincoln Performance Hall, 1620 S.W. Park Ave. Performances will be Dec. 21 at 7:30 p.m.; Dec. 22 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; and Dec. 23 at 1 and 4 p.m.