



Inland Pacific Ballet offers up Wacky Version of Holiday Classic

REVIEW

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In the zany world of the "Nutty Nutcracker," expect the unexpected. From sweaty handymen to sexy French maids to surprise appearances by familiar fairy tale favorites, anything is possible when Tchaikovsky's classic ballet is turned upside down and inside out.

Inland Pacific Ballet offers up a wacky, holiday guilty pleasure with its first "Nutty Nutcracker" production. Friday's premiere performance at Bridges Auditorium in Claremont was a surprise crowd-pleaser that's sure to become a tradition for the Montclair-based ballet company.

The audience knows they're in for a fun ride from the moment the "Nutty Nutcracker" begins. In Act I, two leggy, French maids (Emily Mistretta and Emma Storey) enter the Stalebum home and help to get the party guests (which include a very pregnant party mother and a motley group of orphans a la Annie) riled up. We are introduced to Clara (Marina Fabila), a bratty, self-centered little diva who rolls her eyes as often as she gives people the hand.

The champagne flows freely, the guests quickly get sloshed and even a few saggy-bottomed handymen make their way through the Stalebum ballroom for some last-minute home renovations. There is a knocking at the door and the audience meets Anita Pryceczek (Daniel Kirk), who has come all the way from Poland for the celebration. Kirk's Anita is priceless. Think masculine man-girl or Joanna Spyri's Heidi on steroids. Perhaps there isn't anything more odd in the ballet world than a man wearing point shoes. Ouch!

Much to Clara's dismay, the wide-eyed and borderline-dumb Anita is becoming the life of the party. The most memorable character in the first act is Drecklemeyer (Eric Shah), the "Nutty Nutcracker's" version of the mysterious father figure who gives Clara her beloved Nutcracker doll in the traditional version.

Drecklemeyer is a tricked out Pimp Daddy who shows up at the party in tight, red-leather pants and a feather boa. He is the wonder and amazement of the party guests, especially Mrs. Stalebum (Franceska Hughes), who gets more tipsy as the night wears on.

Drecklemeyer unveils some gifts for the children, including a yellow boom box. When Michael Jackson's "Thriller" drowns out the party, Anita leads the orphans in a dance with the signature "Thriller" choreography.

But Clara gets fed up with Drecklemeyer and is not impressed with her Nutcracker doll. So Drecklemeyer gives her what every girl really wants -- a brand new pair of Manolo Blahniks and Clara is finally happy.

Anita becomes the heroine during the battle scene when she defeats the Mouse King Karate Kid-style. With a few crazy crane kicks to the Mouse King's head, Anita triumphs and is whisked away to the Land of Sweets by her handsome Nutcracker Prince (Yesid Lopez).

A hilarious pas de deux between the Snow Queen (Kelly Lamoureux) and her pint-sized Snow King (Devon Lux Archer) epitomizes the production's wonderful, ridiculous fun.

Anita arrives in a frothy, winter wonderland in Act II. While she enjoys dances from around the world, a few odd things happen, including a drop-off by a UPS worker and a Chinese food delivery guy. The Mirliton corps show up as a pink sweatshirt-wearing, female, hip-hop posse and everyone from Little Red Riding Hood to Dracula to the Little Mermaid come out of Mother Ginger's hut.

A tenacious weed (Diana Perreira) dances alongside the roses in the Waltz of the Flowers as the Do Drop Fairy (Ashley Mohadjer) tries to keep her flowers nourished using a water bottle, Sparkletts bin and a garden hose.

During the final pas de deux between the Sugar Plum Fairy (Kelly Lamoureux) and the Cavalier (Richard Bradley), the Fairy gets an unexpected cell phone call. Anita saves the day and shows up in a tutu, white tights and a tiara and performs a side-splitting pas de deux with the Cavalier.

Inland Pacific Ballet stages only one more performance of the "Nutty Nutcracker" on Friday. You definitely don't want to miss this unpredictable holiday treat.

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