

Live Review: Joffrey Ballet's 'The Nutcracker' is a magical holiday tradition

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This past weekend, the Joffrey Ballet opened its annual production of “[The Nutcracker](#)” much to the delight of Chicagoans seeking the holiday spirit. The Dec. 6 evening show provided ballet-goers everything they could have wanted in the performance, from elaborate set designs to sweeping music to, of course, impeccable dancing.

Part of the appeal of “The Nutcracker” is that audiences know what they are going to get. The Joffrey's production is based on the original conception and choreography of Robert Joffrey and Gerald Arpino, who first presented their production in 1987. Under Artistic Director Ashley Wheater, this performance is an inspired rendition of the classic show rich with tradition and imagination. The Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Music Director Scott Speck, performed Tchaikovsky's original composition masterfully with sweeping strings, bright flutes and haunting oboes and bassoons.

Fabrice Calmels, as Godfather Drosselmeyer, commanded the production from the moment he stepped onto the stage in Act One. He found the perfect balance of confidence and mystery, gently pulling the strings to provide everyone with an enchanting evening. Cara Marie Gary was utterly charming as Clara, gracefully encountering mischievous mice, magical royalty and her trouble-making brother Fritz, who was played to comedic perfection by Elivelton Tomazi. Later, as the Snow Prince, Tomazi showcased his strength and talent with an impressive solo.

The sets provided the perfect backdrop throughout the two-hour-long performance. The scenes seamlessly transitioned from one to the next, most notably when the Magical Battleground transformed into the breathtaking Land of Snow.

Whereas the first act set the tone for a magical adventure, the second act offered a stripped down scene, which truly allowed the dancers to shine. Anastacia Holden was the epitome of a ballerina as the Sugar Plum Fairy. She hit near impossible angles with a gentle ease and transfixed the audience at the [Auditorium Theatre](#) as she glided across the stage en pointe. As the Nutcracker Prince, John Mark Giragosian proved to be a worthy counterpart to Holden with his grand leaps and great strength. The entire company was nothing short of flawless, but Arabian dancers Dylan Gutierrez and Jeraldine Mendoza had the effect of snake charmers on the crowd. Artur Babajanyan, Edson Barbosa, Erica Lynette Edwards and Aaron Smyth, as the Russian dancers, evoked clapping, foot stomping and cheers from the audience.

In our cynical, fast-paced society, Joffrey Ballet's production of “The Nutcracker” is the perfect way to inject some holiday cheer back into our lives. The production runs through Dec. 28 and tickets are available at [Joffrey.org](#).

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