

# Mateo's 'Nutcracker' intimate and magical

In its second season in the Sanctuary Theatre, the Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre company seems to have hit its stride with a flawless production of "The Nutcracker."

**DANCE REVIEW** Finally, Mateo and company have found a venue that showcases everything that's great about his choreography.

The 250-seat space is perfect for a "Nutcracker" that is all about dancing. Dispensing with a lot of the spectacle and pageantry of a larger production, Mateo creates an intimacy with the audience that enables the company to tell the story without rehashing every detail of the most-performed ballet in history.

With perfect sightlines and few distracting special effects, it is easy to get caught up in the magic of the dance. The 19th century classic has been beautifully choreographed with a contemporary flair. Swift, fluid movements and long, reaching steps highlight a program that brings new life to Tchaikovsky's timeless score.

In Act One, Temple Carroll and Cosmin Marculetiu are delightfully



Dancers perform in the Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre production of "The Nutcracker" on Friday in Cambridge. The show continues through Dec. 29.

animated as Columbine and Harlequin. The rather abbreviated version of the toys coming alive is cheerful

and playful, loaded with humor and high energy movement.

The Nutcracker Prince, Alexan-

der Lavsky, is both charming and gallant as he leads Clara to the Magical Kingdom of Sweets. His agility and athleticism are especially impressive during his fierce battles with the Rat King and the Mice.

Graceful Snow Queen Meg Flaherty followed by a troupe of snow fairies paint easily the most beautiful dance picture of the production, ethereal amid falling snowflakes.

And Amanda Kostreva, as Clara, delivers a performance that belies her 14 years. Mature and poised on pointe, Kostreva still manages to capture the refreshingly youthful essence of a young girl on a magic journey.

She is not, however, the only one experiencing the magic. The faces of the tiny young dancers darting across stage as Mice, Cherubs and Angels tell an entirely different, yet equally magical holiday story. Even in the last row of the theater you can experience their enthusiasm firsthand.

Aside from the hilarious antics of the Polichenelles and their Mother Ginger, Act Two gets more serious about the business at hand — dance.

With virtually no backdrop, The Divertissements use every inch of

the performance space to do some of the show's finest dancing. Dressed in the costumes of foreign lands, the couples dazzle the audience with their exotic grace. As Coffee, Sybil Watkins and Nathan Cottam were especially good, bringing an edgy, seductive quality to their work.

The real piece de resistance, however, is the Grand Pax de Deux. As the Sugar Plum Fairy, Elizabeth Scherban Shinzawa owns the stage. Strong and poised, the beaming dancer gracefully works Mateo's magic like no other.

As Cavalier, Florain Eckhardt confidently delivers an inspired performance. His physicality is the perfect complement to Scherban Shinzawa's beauty and grace. Together, they have a chemistry that will leave you with that perfect blend of excitement, warmth and holiday cheer.

Though lacking some of the pizzazz of the bigger "Nutcracker" productions, this one has heart, something you cannot create with special effects.

Nick Dussault

**Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre, "The Nutcracker."** Through Dec. 29. Thursday - Friday 7-30 p.m.; Saturday 2 p.m. & 7-30 p.m.; Sunday 2 p.m. & 6 p.m. No performances Dec. 23-25.