THE BOSTON GLOBE SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7,

A dreamy treat

José Mateo crafts a different 'Nutcracker' that soars from a dreamscape beginning to transform Cambridge's Sanctuary Theatre into a sumptuous Kingdom of Sweets. Dance Review, D4

Mateo's sweet choreography transforms dreamy 'Nutcracker'

By Thea Singer GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The Sanctuary Theatre, in the Old Cambridge Baptist Church in Harvard Square, seems designed

Dance Review

for José Mateo's "Nutcracker." It's spacious in a vertical kind of way, with its soaring,

vaulted ceiling and its steep risers for seating. The audience, comprising 250 at most, seems to hover over the 39-by-49-foot stage. The space, like Mateo's version of the holiday tale, builds volume out of layers, the way a wedding cake does, rather than through adornments, as most versions of "The Nutcracker" are wont to do.

Here the story of young Clara and her Nutcracker Prince unfolds through the dancing. And the dancing, in true classical form, springs from the music (Tchaikovsky's famous score) and is concerned first and foremost with structure, dynamics, and propor-

You know this "Nuteracker" is different from the start: The curtain rises not on a mime-driven tree-decorating scene but on a dreamscape shaped by 12 "Fairies" en pointe. Clara, danced by the adroit Amanda Kostreva, 14, is in toe shoes, too, and Mateo

The Nutcracker

Presented by: José Mateo's **Ballet Theatre** At: The Sanctuary Theatre,

Cambridge, Thursday night (repeats, with changing casts, through Dec. 29)

has given her plenty to do, including long stretchy arabesques, airy tours jete, and even a little jig. Mateo, as Dr. Drosselmeyer, has only gotten more vibrant over the 14 years he's been playing the role. Up close in the Sanctuary Theatre.

even his eyes dance.

Columbine (Temple Carroll) is articulate and strong. She manages to maintain the robotic quality of form, springs the role without being at all stiff. Her from the music flexed-foot leg lifts and neatly prepared pirouettes are as crisp as the creases slacks. Harlequin (Cosmin Marculetiu) his core: He carries you with him, kines- **proportion**. thetically, when he jumps or leaps, both

here and in the second act's Trepak, and is so lifted in his gut that, even at close range, you can't hear him touch down. The Nutcracker Prince (Alexander Lavsky) has the kind of sharp, clean lines that etch shapes in space.

The only snag in the first act, really, is the Snow Queen (Meg Flaherty), whose movement appears stodgy compared with that of her fluid colleagues.

Because Mateo has worked so

hard to break the typical "Nutcracker" mold (wherein the first act is play-acted and the second is danced), the transition to the Kingdom of the Sweets comes naturally. The Divertissements whet your appetite: Marcos Medina, in Chocolate, executes jumps that stun like a jolt of electricity. And Sybil Watkins and Nathan Cottam in Coffee provide some of the best dancing of the evening. She's as languorous as smoke, whether turning in attitude or arcing back while in passé. He's the perfect partner, doing whatever's neces-

sary to let her shine.

The Dew Drop Fairy (Kimberly Swihart) and the Sugar Plum Fairy (Elizabeth Scherban Shinzawa) emit a light of their own. Swihart embodies the essence of spring: She's at once windblown and technicalon target. Shinzawa's physical parts are knit together so intricately that everything she does - from arabesque penché to fouettes seems to emanate

from a single source and flow outward.

The corps, too, is worthy of note. Mateo excels in crafting geometric patterns for groups, whether for the Soldiers marching in unison or for the Snowflakes thinning and thickening the space as they crisscross. At their best, his permutations recall the crystalline structure of snowflakes themselves: They're complex and incapable of duplication.

The dancing, in true classical

and is concerned first just-starched and foremost with structure.

dances straight from dynamics, and