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Mateo's classic show satisfies

By VICKI SANDERS

Watching Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre perform "The Nutcracker" is like being inside a snow globe.

The intimate Sanctuary Theatre helps create the illusion that the audience itself is part of the fantasy and is suddenly face

Dance Review

to face with the Snow Queen and Nutcracker Prince and Mother Ginger and the whole magical cast of the Tchaikovsky-scored Christmas classic.

The composed Amanda Kostreva, a leggy 14-year-old, set the tone on opening night with an assured performance as Clara, the little girl whose nutcracker becomes a handsome prince who whisks her off to a kingdom filled with dancing sweets and flowers.

The rest of the company fol-

Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre, "The Nutcracker," at the Sanctuary Theatre in Cambridge last night. Performances continue through Dec. 29.

lowed suit, dancing with an earnestness that made the characters seem at once vulnerable and bigger than life.

Alexander Lavsky, for one, danced the Nutcracker Prince with boyish chivalry, first as he fought off the Rat King and his army of offending Mice, then as he took Clara's hand and led her into a dream-come-true world of snow queens and dew drops.

Elizabeth Scherban Shinzawa as the Sugar Plum Fairy was the production's stand-out. She was poised and radiant, and she handled Mateo's choreography as though she were born doing it.

Among the other strong performances were Sybil Watkins in the role of Coffee, which she danced with exotic athleticism. Kimberly

Swihart was full of vim as the Dew Drop Fairy.

Temple Carroll as Columbine and Cosmin Marculetiu as Harlequin were delightful as the toys-come-to-life in Act I.

Despite such star turns, the company is at its best in the ensemble numbers, when Mateo's lovely patterning and lyricism is able to fully express its interpretive power.

His dances err on the side of simplicity, sometimes playing things too safe, but this adherence to unembellished classic form is also Mateo's strength. This is not a "Nutcracker" full of technical pyrotechnics so much as it a story ballet with a great big human heart.

The costumes are lovely, the lighting is exact and the set includes the requisite growing Christmas tree. This is an entertainment so real you can practically feel those snowflakes falling on your head.