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One 'Nutcracker,' but Many Interpretations

By KARIN LIPSON NOV. 26, 2010

WITH its annual profusion of year-end performances across Long Island, “The Nutcracker” is one of the sure signposts of the season. Yet even a dependable chestnut like this one undergoes change — as shown, for example, by recent developments at the Eglevsky Ballet.

First, some continuity: the Eglevsky will present “The Nutcracker” on Dec. 18 and 19 at the Tilles Center for the Performing Arts in Brookville (albeit with three performances, rather than the four it gave last year). And, of course, the Tchaikovsky score will still drive the story-ballet of a young girl’s dream of a magical realm where toys and a nutcracker spring to life, and into dance.

But as part of what the company is calling a “yearlong retransformation,” the choreography is all new: the first full-length ballet by Laszlo Berdo, a former principal dancer with the Boston Ballet and now a faculty member at the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet.

The new guest artists Lia Cirio (as the Sugar Plum Fairy) and James Whiteside (the Cavalier) — both principal dancers with the Boston Ballet —

lead the 27 professional dancers. And the more than 45 student dancers have undergone a stepped-up training program, said Bryan Matluk, who is both the ballet master and a consultant to the company. "It's very rigorous," Mr. Matluk said.

Change can be invigorating, but for Leggz Ltd. of Rockville Centre, a live orchestral accompaniment by the South Shore Symphony has been a valued "Nutcracker" tradition since 1997. "The orchestra is responsive to the timing of the dancers — it's like custom-made," said Joan Hope MacNaughton, the company's founder and artistic director.

Presented under the auspices of the Rockville Centre Guild for the Arts, the Leggz "Nutcracker," with more than 120 dancers, will be held Dec. 3 through 5 at South Side High School in Rockville Centre. The village's mayor and deputy mayor and a county judge have small roles, making this a community affair.

There's tradition, and then there's history. On the East End, the Conservatory of Ballet and Dance Arts, which performs Dec. 3 to 5 at Southampton High School, has based its revamped "Nutcracker" in part on the ballet's original 1892 choreography. The first act has been rechoreographed by the conservatory's director, Megan Cancellieri (she is also the Sugar Plum Fairy, with the guest artist Royce Zackery as the Cavalier); the second act — which is where the original 1892 source kicks in — is by Betteanne Terrell, a conservatory teacher.

Ovations Dance Repertory Company goes far east of the East End in its multicultural approach to "The Nutcracker." Performances at the Patchogue Theater for the Performing Arts, including a one-hour version on Dec. 9 and the full-length ballet on Dec. 11 and 12, will include a segment of Indian bhangra music and dance.

"It exposes our audiences to other styles of music and culture, as well as hopefully bringing in some of the Indian community," said Ronnie Doucette, a

board member. So expect a dash of “Indian spice” along with dance interludes like “Chinese tea” and “chocolate from Spain.” Less exotic are the dancing candy canes, which need no nationality.

There are no candy canes in the Seiskaya Ballet’s six performances, from Dec. 17 to 20, at Stony Brook University’s Staller Center for the Arts. But the lavish production features an eight-foot-long “toy train,” a giant dragon’s head that puffs smoke through its nostrils and clouds (thanks to several dry-ice machines) enveloping some second-act angels.

“There has to be a continuing ‘wow’ factor, because it’s a visual art form,” said Dimitri Papadakos, the company’s administrative director (and the husband of its artistic director, Valia Seiskaya). This year’s guest Cavalier is Alexandar Alexandrov, a featured soloist with the Sofia National Ballet in Bulgaria.

Frank Ohman, the founder and artistic director of the New York Dance Theater, danced under George Balanchine at the New York City Ballet for more than 20 years; he brings the Balanchine tradition, with modifications, to his company’s “Nutcracker.”

“The staging is basically the same,” Mr. Ohman said, but “the kids do more dancing themselves.”

Performances at Hofstra University’s John Cranford Adams Playhouse take place Dec. 17 to 19; Arch Higgins, a former New York City Ballet soloist who now teaches at Mr. Ohman’s school, will be the Cavalier, with current and former members of Momix, Dance Theater of Harlem and Suzanne Farrell Ballet in other key roles.

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A sampling of “Nutcracker” performances on Long Island, listed chronologically.

LEGGZ LTD. Dec. 3 to 5, South Side High School, 140 Shepherd Street, Rockville Centre. Tickets: \$24; seniors and children, \$22. (516) 766-7171.

CONSERVATORY OF BALLET AND DANSE ARTS Dec. 3 to 5, Southampton High School, 141 Narrow Lane, Southampton. \$12 to \$15; seniors and children, \$8 to \$12. dansearts.com; (631) 537-1684.

BALLET LONG ISLAND Three versions, 10 performances and an international crew of 10 professional dancers, along with students. Dec. 8: "The Nutcracker Act II," at the company studio, 1863 Pond Road, Ronkonkoma. Dec. 15 and 16: "The Nutcracker in a Nutshell," excerpts following the story line of the ballet, Islip Town Hall West, 401 Main Street, Islip. Dec. 17 to 19: A full-length production with new laser effects, also at Islip Town Hall West. All performances: \$22; seniors and children, \$12. (631) 737-1964; theballetcenter.org.

OVATIONS DANCE REPERTORY COMPANY Dec. 9, one-hour abbreviated performance, \$10; information, (631) 218-0315. Dec. 11 and 12, full-length ballet, \$12 to \$28. patchoguetheatre.com; (877) 772-5425. All performances at Patchogue Theater for the Performing Arts, 71 Main Street, Patchogue.

LEGGZ LTD. "The Nutcracker, Land of the Sweets," a shortened version, with taped music, presented twice on Dec. 11, Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor. \$45; children, \$25. Tickets include tap ensemble and museum admission. (516) 484-9338, ext. 16; nassaumuseum.org.

SEISKAYA BALLET Dec. 17 to 20, Staller Center for the Arts, Stony Brook University. \$40; children and seniors, \$34. (\$5 off before Dec. 1.) (631) 632-2787; stallercenter.com.

EGLEVSKY BALLET Dec. 18 and 19, Tilles Center for the Performing Arts, C. W. Post Campus, Long Island University, Brookville. \$35 and up. (516) 299-3100; tillescenter.org.

NEW YORK DANCE THEATER Dec. 17 to 19, John Cranford Adams Playhouse, Hofstra University, Hempstead. \$18 for Dec. 17 morning performance; otherwise, \$35; seniors and children, \$28. (888) 695-0888; ohmanballet.org.

LYNCH BALLET COMPANY Dec. 18 and 19, Huntington High School auditorium, 188 Oakwood Road, Huntington. With 120 dancers, including Alberto Velázquez of American Ballet Theater II. \$25; children, \$15. (631) 553-7392; lynchballet.com.

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