

Newsday

THE LONG ISLAND NEWSPAPER

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MONDAY, DEC. 11, 2000 • SUFFOLK

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A Delicious Holiday Confection for Young and Old

DANCE REVIEW

THE NUTCRACKER. Seiskaya Ballet. Music by Tchaikovsky; choreography, Valia Seiskaya; set design, Margaret Piotrowska; costumes, Loretta Woods, lighting Elizabeth Silver. Guest artist, Rasta Thomas; with Lisa Woods, Rachel Weiss, Steve Marsh, Marlena Bono, Julie Miller, Tracy Carlinsky, Cory Stearns, Kristan Brodie, Lauren Menger, Amy Ruggiero and a large cast cast of cuties. Continues at Staller Center, SUNY-Stony Brook, Dec 16, 1 and 7 p.m., and Dec. 17, 1 and 6 p.m. Seen at Saturday's matinee.

By Judith H. Bernstein
STAFF WRITER

IT'S A DIGITAL WORLD, where cell phones often go off during theatrical performances. In this new world, Long Island's Seiskaya Ballet had the savvy to snap up the Internet domain "nutcrackerballet.com" to showcase its annual presentation of the holiday classic.

And while no cell phones disturbed the season premiere of "The Nutcracker" on Saturday afternoon, you couldn't miss the old-fashioned feeling of excitement as the lights dimmed and nearby, a child's voice said, "Oooooo-it's starting!"

You also couldn't miss the intermittent, but persistent crying of a child too young to appreciate the splendors of this richly visual confection. Parents, be aware- Seiskaya's "Nutcracker" is a delight for old and young, but please leave your very littlest ones at home.

Humor infused this production, as the large cast cavorted in lusciously colored velvet and satin costumes. From the opening scene, when



Marlena Bono dances the Doll in Seiskaya Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker" at Staller Center.

Drosselmeyer (Steve Marsh) is in his workshop, and the Mechanical Doll (Marlena Bono) gave him a swift toe shoe to the rear, to the second act's gliding angels, cart wheeling clowns and tail-wagging sheep, there's plenty to incite giggles.

There's also fine dancing to applaud, starting with guest artist Rasta Thomas, whose

partnering with Sugar Plum Fairy Amy Ruggiero and solo work were equally adept.

Thomas cut a dashing figure in white, leaping high into the air with no apparent effort, but with plenty of muscular grace.

In her star turn as Sugar Plum, Ruggiero was both technically on the mark and regal in her bearing.

During the first act party scene, Julie Miller's Chocolate Soldier was a study in sugar and caffeine-emerging from behind a giant, silver-wrapped chocolate kiss, her buzzy performance lit up the stage. And Bono's windup Doll was, by turns, both robot-like and graceful, with leg extensions that defied gravity.

Lisa Woods, as Clara, was splendid in a role that requires her to portray a girl on the cusp of womanhood, and demands as much talent as an actor as it does a dancer. She was ably partnered by Cory Stearns as the Nutcracker, and portrayed sibling rivalry with gusto in the party scenes with her brother Fritz, danced ably by Rachel Weiss.

The ensemble numbers for Snow Flakes, Flowers and Mother Ginger's Polichinelles were delightful, ambitious and carried off with assurance, a tricky operation with so many dancers on a relatively small stage.

If there was any sense that this was the season's opening show, it was only that some of the performers seemed to be concentrating a bit too hard and not enjoying themselves enough.

Our hope is, that as the Seiskaya's season warms up, so will the cast.