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Entertainment In The Hamptons

review: seiskaya ballet's nutcracker

For the past thirteen years, the Seiskaya Ballet company has really made Christmas sparkle with its professional productions of the legendary *Nutcracker* ballet. Seiskaya ballet was founded by Valia Seiskaya, who was a featured soloist dancer with the National Opera of Greece before moving to the U.S. and founding her school in 1974. The school is based in St. James and is designed to train career oriented dancers and admission criteria are very stringent. Graduates of the school have moved on to many of the top professional dance companies such as American Ballet Theater, New York City Ballet and companies in San Francisco, Houston and many other cities.

The Seiskaya *Nutcracker* is a full-length, beautifully staged, lit and costumed production that would grace any major company or theater, and the dancing keeps pace with these very high standards. The dancers, of all ages, from very young upwards, display work that comes from excellent training in the basics of dance. Dancers are very precise in their placement on stage, especially in ensemble, pas de six and pas de quatre pieces where precision is vital, and it was great credit to all concerned that on the opening performance last Saturday afternoon everything went like clockwork and looked deceptively easy. But it really is not easy and many hours of rehearsal must have gone into this excellent production that totally enthralled us, even though it is a story well known and a ballet seen many times previously, produced by many major companies in the USA and England.

Nutcracker is a fairy tale for all ages and with an audience with a very high percent-



age of children it was incredible how quiet and attentive they all were, except when breaking into applause or when the Christmas tree magical grows before our eyes as Clara falls asleep and her dreams start - this tree really outdoes itself!

Every member of the cast deserves congratulation but room only allows mention of a relative few from this cast, who seemed legion on stage. The demi-character role of Herr Drosselmeyer is integral to the telling of the story and setting of the scene. Guest artist Robert Culpitts did this admirably with a very clearly mimed, expressive interpretation. The young Clara was beautifully portrayed by Victoria Loza who was poised and acted and danced with precision and grace. She has great lines, elegant arms and feet and could be a name to look out for in the years ahead. Similarly, Ashton Hsu, in the role of Fritz, Clara's bossy elder brother, danced with commendable maturity. He too is a dancer with very good stage presence. He carries himself well, dances cleanly, has good elevation and also looks to be a dancer

with a good future. Maybe it won't be too long before we see him dance the Cavalier's role.

The finale of the ballet is probably best known, when the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier dance the classic, soaring, romantic pas de deux before Clara awakens and returns to the real world. The role of the Sugar Plum this year is shared by some of the senior members of the company, Kiersten Engel, Christina Pandolfi, Karissa Kralik, Stephanie Scutari and at this performance, Amy Ruggiero, a graduate of Seiskaya who is now with Ballet Austin. Amy Ruggiero was partnered by Evgueni Tourdiev, a graduate of the Moscow Ballet, who has danced with several major regional ballet companies here in recent years. The couple danced extremely well together and in their solos. The ballet ended on this happy note as the company took very well deserved bows for bringing the true spirit of Christmas alive. If ever parents wanted confirmation that ballet is a wonderful way in which to develop a child's physical and mental capabilities in a truly enjoyable fashion, they should just look at the members of the Seiskaya company. Probably many will not go on to become full-time professional dancers, but whatever they do in life, the skills and disciplines of their ballet training under Valia Seiskaya and her dedicated team will be with them forever.

This is an outstanding production and deserves to be sold out. There are only four remaining shows on Saturday December 22 at 2 and 7 p.m. and on Sunday December 23 at 1 and 6 p.m. Tickets are available from the Staller Center at 631-632-ARTS.

- Roy Bradbrook