

## Bolshoi creates magic in Christmas dream



Driver Kevin Plunkett chauffeurs Charles Dillingham and Yuri Grigorovich (center) away from Rudder Auditorium after the Bolshoi Ballet-Grigorovich Company made its world premiere Friday night. Grigorovich is the artistic director of the company that bears his name. Dillingham is president and chief executive officer of the Entertainment Corporation, USA, the company that represents and produces the Bolshoi Ballet in the United States.

**I** first saw "The Nutcracker" when I was in the fourth grade.

It was right after we discussed it in music class; the teacher spent two days showing slides of the different instruments and what sounds they made. I thought that the ballet was magic and that one day I could be the Sugar Plum Fairy.

The Bolshoi Ballet-Grigorovich Company performs a version of "The Nutcracker" that proves ballet is still magical, even without a fairy princess.

At their world premiere in Rudder Auditorium Friday night, the company's dancers tempted more than 2,300 spectators into a Christmas dream complete with toy soldiers and dancing dolls.

The dream, as the Bolshoi presents it, is a love story between a little girl Marie and the Nutcracker Prince. Marie's parents host a Christmas party for family and friends. One friend, Drosselmeyer, is the mysterious godfather to Marie and her brother.

Drosselmeyer fascinates everyone at the party with his gift of a toy nutcracker and other dolls that dance on their own. Marie's brother accidentally breaks the doll, but Drosselmeyer comforts her and promises to fix it.

After the guests leave, Marie glides down the stairs to sit with the broken nutcracker. A band of mice led by the Mouse King attacks the gifts; the Nutcracker and his troop of soldiers fend them off only with Marie's intervention.

To show his gratitude, the Nutcracker, who has become a live prince, takes her to a fairy land. Amidst the fairies and dolls, the two fall in love.

I won't give away the Bolshoi ending, but 13 years after I first saw "The Nutcracker," the dancers' tenderness overwhelmed me. Their tenderness escaped the stage and seeped into the audience, who later gave the company a 10 minute standing ovation.

Yuri Grigorovich, artistic director of the company and its namesake, debuted his 60 dancers at Texas A&M less than two months after he had chosen A&M for the premiere site. The dancers, however, showed no signs of being ill-prepared.

Oksana Konobeyeva personified the innocence of Marie and her love for the prince danced by Dmitry Tuboltsev. Both performed not as dancers in character roles but as the characters themselves.

She skipped and clapped when Drosselmeyer, Oleg Dedogriuk, handed her the nutcracker. She winced and sobbed when her brother broke it. Later, in the land of the fairies, she celebrated her

love with twirls and tender glances.

Tuboltsev charged to life after Marie chased the Mouse King away. He leapt across the stage to profess his love. Together they delighted in the dances of the Spanish, Indian, Chinese, Russian and French dolls who offered their thanks to Marie for stopping the mice.

While Konobeyeva and Tuboltsev danced their love on stage, the supporting cast kept the audience entranced with their acrobatics and grace. Known for their athleticism, certain Bolshoi dancers stood out. Elena Gushchina as the witch, Tatiana Ledovskikh as the Spanish maiden, Pavel Eliseyev as the Chinese doll, Andrei Shishkin as the Russian peasant and Tatiana Kutina and Vitaly Malko as the French dolls each embodied technically precise grace.

And Maria Mosina captured the audience's admiration as the mechanical Nutcracker Doll. She stole the ovation when flowers were presented to the soloist female dancers in the company. There appeared to be an extra bouquet until the presenter gave the flowers to the petite dancer, delighting the audience.

Also delighting the audience was the performance by the Brazos Valley Symphony Orchestra. Soviet conductor Alexander Lavrenyuk ignited the

orchestra's playing with a life beyond the pit. The dancers used the music to accentuate their movements and their expressions. Listening to the BVSO, I could anticipate the until-now-hidden nuances of the ballet before seeing them.

Opening night was not without some distractions, the most noticeable coming in the second act when a fairy collapsed on stage.

Elena Kurilko left the ground with the other dancers but ended in a heap on the floor. She clutched her leg and waited for an opportunity for her partner to help her off stage. The ballet continued as the Bolshoi maintained its professionalism. Kurilko's partner scooped her up carefully as soon as he could make a graceful exit from an ungraceful injury. She will undergo more tests today; cast officials say it appears she suffered a knee injury.

Far less serious distractions included a stage-hand that could be seen during a scene change and some feedback from the microphone in the orchestra pit.

The kinks were easily overcome, and the rest of the premiere weekend performances, like the one on opening night, hypnotized the audiences.

"The Nutcracker" is a magical ballet. The Bolshoi Ballet-Grigorovich Company's version surpasses magical.

Story by LISA ANN ROBERTSON

Photo by JAY JANNER

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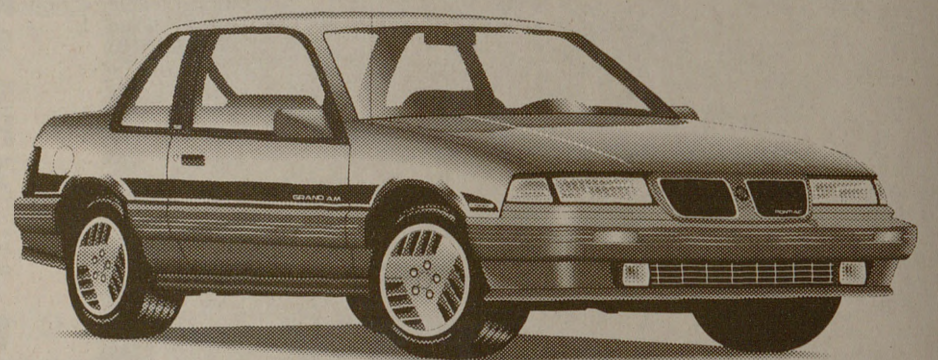
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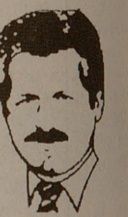
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