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Section: In the world of beauty

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PANDEMIC NUTCRACKER

A year has passed since I met one of the leading soloists of the Cleveland Ballet working as a cloakroom attendant at the LifeTime Fitness center. "Everything is shut down," he said contritely, "I'm just trying to survive."

Many lost their jobs, companies were going bankrupt. It was difficult to imagine how would our very young and tender ballet survive.

But here comes the great, unexpected news flash: Cleveland Ballet has been reborn. I could not believe my eyes - the ballet announced five Christmas performances at Connor Palace – with its 2800 seats being one of the largest theater halls in the world! It seemed like madness, but " To the madness of the brave, we sing this glory!..."



And come they did. Old and new fans of the Cleveland ballet have come after a year and a half of ominous pandemic silence. And they filled the immense, vast hall. Yes, everyone presented their certificates of vaccination, everyone wore masks. But the delight of applause accompanied every virtuoso variation of the dancers, every interesting plot twist of this good old fairy tale. There was plenty to be surprised about.

I happened to see the new "Nutcracker" with one of the four announced performer rosters. The first thing that struck me were the costumes of the characters. The new, dazzling costumes, designed by Irina Mochalova, Tanya Grinberg, Barbara Bettis and other designers, turned the ballet into an extravaganza of colors that harmonized with the many-hued music of Tchaikovsky, with the grandiose scenery and the luxurious murals by Alexandra Brin.



The second is the radically updated list of performers of the Cleveland Ballet. Now, the international troupe is replete with the names of dancers representing a variety of countries and schools. This makes it interesting but has its pitfalls. It is primarily the difference between the ballet schools of Moscow and St. Petersburg, not to mention the American, Cuban and Japanese schools. These are characterized by differences in positioning of the hands and the head and in the technique of performing certain elements. Thus, the efforts of the Artistic Director and choreographer Gladisa Guadalupe, who solves the difficult problem of coordinating the entire ensemble into a seamless single entity, should be highly appreciated.

The performance of the three new soloists deserves special mention. Cleveland's Armenian diaspora immediately noticed and welcomed on Facebook the appearance in Cleveland Ballet of three graduates of the Yerevan State Choreography School, New Jersey Ballet soloists Albina Gazaryan, Emmanuel Martirosyan and Narek Martirosyan. The school they belong to can be described by a single fact: Maxim Martirosyan, the honored People's Artist of Russia was the

artistic director of the Moscow Academic Choreography School for 16 years. He also directed the Yerevan Choreography School. All in all, if the performance of the entire Cleveland Ballet troupe can be rated as excellent, then the famous Grand Pas de Deux of the King and Queen performed by Albina Gazaryan and Narek Martirosyan looked head and shoulders above that. A real Russian classical ballet, technically impeccable and inspired. Bravo!



The male composition in any ballet company, even in the most eminent one, is a big headache. The positions are hard to fill. Their work is hard. Suffice it to say that during one ballet performance a dancer lifts and carries about two tons of weight. Fortunately, the strengthening of the Cleveland Ballet male line-up somehow compensated for the loss of the outstanding, brilliant Rainer Diaz with his fantastic leaps. It has been reported that he enlisted in military service after the start of the pandemic.

The part of Drosselmeyer, the mysterious magician-like figure, was performed by Eduardo Permy, a most experienced artist with a great biography. During his 16-year career, the Cuban born artist managed to work with the most famous ballet companies: Joffrey Ballet, Miami City Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, American Ballet Theater and, finally, has joined the Cleveland Ballet as a ballet dancer and Director of Repertoire. I had never before seen actors of such a heavy stature in the role of Drosselmeyer. Traditionally, they are thin, with refined demonic plasticity. However, my doubts dissipated from the very first bars of Eduardo's dance. His virtuoso technique and artistry made me believe in the correctness of this choice. Light, agile Eduardo flew around the stage as if weaving lace, as if conducting a choir of noisy extras: reasoning with playful children, inviting adults to dance, managing to even flirt a little with the house nanny.



The performance included quite a few such humorous mini scenes: children's

pranks, toy soldiers fighting with an army of mice, over-the-top Russian dancing, a whimsical Chinese dance with a real rod-puppet Dragon. All of them enriched the well-known plot, made it even more exciting.

Overall, the performance turned out to be very dynamic and polyphonic. Especially the first act, when the stage was perceived as a huge panorama with many groups of characters harmoniously complementing each other. The second act was a pageant of fantasy, talent and skill with a stunning Waltz of the Flowers. The grand curtain call of all participants in the performance demonstrated the artistic power of the huge Cleveland ballet troupe.

And back to the pandemic again. Hoffmann's tale as retold by Alexander Dumas has always been considered mystical, with unspoken secrets, hidden meanings. The miraculous revival of The Nutcracker in the midst of the Covid invasion appears like an omen: the evil spirits will be destroyed.

We congratulate the Artistic Director of Cleveland Ballet, GLADISA GUADALUPE and the CEO of Cleveland Ballet, Dr. MICHAEL KRASNIANSKY with the well-deserved PHENOMENAL success!



Photos courtesy of Cleveland Ballet by Susan Bestul Photography