

# UKRAINIAN УКРАЇНСЬКІ ВІСТІ NEWS

Edmonton, January 17 - 30, 2013, Vol. LXXXVI №2 Price \$1.75



PHOTO - MARCO LEVYTSKY

## Ukrainian Nutcracker

*Virsky* — The Ukrainian State Folk Dance Company and the Kyiv Ballet joined forces with Canada's Ukrainian Shumka Dancers for the World Premiere of Clara's Dream: A Ukrainian Folk Ballet, at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton, January 11 and 12. Clara's Dream is a new version of Peter Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker, which incorporates a Ukrainian Christmas carol, a grand orchestral version of Shchedryk (Carol of the Bells) arranged by renowned Ukrainian composer Yuri Shevchenko and weaves Ukrainian Christmas traditions and symbols into the lavish sets and costumes of this ground breaking production, performed in celebration of Ukrainian Christmas. Pictured above: Clara (performed by Natalia Lazebnikova of the Kyiv Ballet) is lifted by members of Edmonton's Shumka. For more see page 8 of this issue.



Ukrainian Carollers.

## Ukrainian for

(UCC National)—  
ian Christmas season  
ary 7 to February  
composed of mem  
ian community per  
ian Christmas carol  
of the Leader of the  
For Ukrainian Ca  
a simple singing of

# Shumka's Ukrainian Nutcracker is magical

By Cheryl Balay

Shumka proudly unveiled the world premiere of "Clara's Dream", a Ukrainian Folk Ballet based on Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" on January 11 and 12 in their hometown of Edmonton. The well-publicized premiere had the city buzzing over how to spend their Malanka weekend. Those who chose to include Shumka's offering saw magic unfold before their very eyes. The dancing was superb, the set was opulent, the costumes, over the top, and it was an historic collaboration between Canada's Shumka dancers, Ukraine's State Folk Dance Company Virsky and the Kyiv Ballet of the National Opera of Ukraine.

The storyline remained strongly based on the 1816 children's tale "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" written by Germany's Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann. The more familiar one was with that story and any version of Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky's 1892 Nutcracker Suite ballet, the easier it was to understand the story of the ballet and more particularly, each character in the ballet. The more knowledgeable one was about Ukrainian folk culture and traditions, the more instantaneous and deeper the understanding of events such as the carollers seen holding a star.

Natalia Lazebnikova from the Kyiv Ballet of the National Opera of Ukraine was a wonderful Clara, always beautiful to behold. The mysterious Drosselmeir, played by her colleague Dmytro Kliavin who was often dressed in a wonderful dark cape with a shimmering pattern was the dancer who constantly drew my attention. Simply with his physical height and lithe body lines he commanded presence every time he was on stage, almost always casting a spell-like en-

trancement with his sweeping Toller Cranston-esque arm movements. I think he could own this character!

I'm not sure why the Nutcracker itself was first represented by a rag doll as it made a rather limp and lifeless character, which had to be turned into a handsome, dashing Prince, proving to be a tall order for ballet dancer Oleksandr Shapoval, even without the clumsy replacement of the doll with a person which the dancers were unable to disguise due to the rippling waves in the backdrop.

The true wonder to behold was the seamless work performed by the world's two best Ukrainian folk dance troupes: Virsky and Shumka. No matter which group was on stage, and in any combination, both were equally impressive. The Hopak performance was breathtaking, with an amazing array of solos, set to a classical score rather than the traditional folk melodies, but the leaps and turns from the girls and the guys were superbly timed and a perfect blend of breathtaking heights and precision of movements, even when performed in multiples.

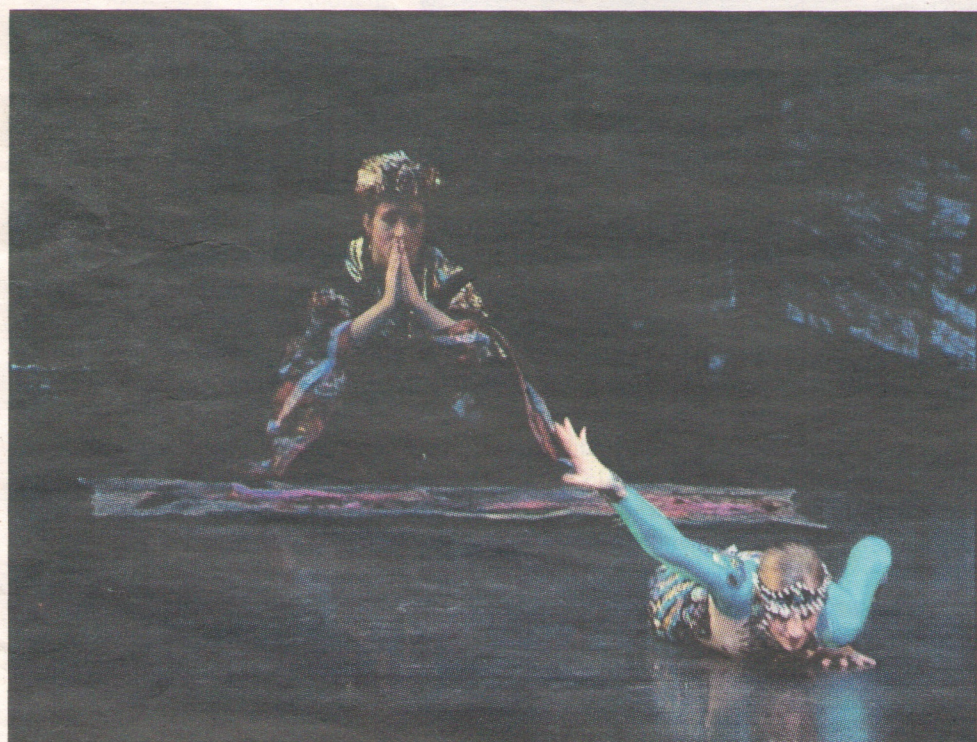
The pace of the second half of the program was such that it kept the audience on the edge of our seats, applauding for multiple-staged bows and spurring the dancers along with spontaneous clapping. How often does one get to hear that in a ballet! The snippets of international dances performed to entertain Clara and her Nutcracker Prince were each outstanding. The snake charmer (performed by producer Michael Sulyma's daughter Larissa) was my personal favourite, with the humour of her handlers well-received.

There are so many pieces that go into a production of this magnitude. The music included a phenomenal symphonic ar-

Cont. on P. 9







ALL PHOTOS — MARCO LEVYTSKY

*Counter-clockwise from top: Clara and the prince set out for his kingdom; the snake charmer; Clara and the prince have the last dance; Spanish number.*

---

# Shumka's Ukrainian Nutcracker

**Cont. from P. 8**

rangement by Honoured Artist of Ukraine Yuri Shevchenko of Mykola Leontovich's *Shchedryk*. There were certainly some opening nights technical glitches in a lighting cue or two, in the quality of sound recording particularly where choral voices were imposed, in the integrity of prop costuming and such, but all of these minor points can be addressed in future performances.

A special nod should certainly go to Set and Costume Designer Maria Levitska, National Artist of Ukraine for creating such a lavish set and flowing costumes that took us back in time and forward to fantasies. The mice choreographed movements and costumes were a successful match, the background of sparkling balls was memorable and magic, the changing of backdrops by constantly raising them up to lift an unrolled and different scene was clever. The best prop was the smooth boat that floated on a mystical fog to whisk away our

principal couple to their magical kingdom.

The guest who stole the show for his popularity as a hometown success from television's *So You Think You Can Dance* was Jeffrey Mortensen as Clara's playful brother Fritz and as the Chinese dance ambassador and as one of the many memorable Ukrainian folk dancers.

The artistic team involved is deep in talent, expertise and creativity and has formed an effective working relationship over years and across continents, including Viktor Lytvynov, John Pichlyk and Dave Ganert at the helm.

Producer Sulyma noted the great pride taken for this to be the first and only Ukrainian Nutcracker. It is a work whose time has come and one hopes that it will become a staple in worldwide repertoire. The audience was calling 'bravos' by the conclusion of the world premiere of "Clara's Dream" leaving one uplifted and very satisfied. Congratulations again, Shumka and friends!