

convoy north of Baghdad when his Humvee ran over a roadside bomb. The sole survivor of the blast, Henline — who grew up in Santa Clara — suffered acute burns over 38 percent of his body; his head was burned to the skull and left hand damaged beyond repair. He spent six months in the hospital fighting for his life and had 45 surgeries just to rebuild his face.

Yet, incredibly, Henline, 42, now takes the stage almost every week at comedy clubs and open-mikes to share the unlikeliest humor — and hopefully diminish some of the emotional pain — buried inside these traumatic experiences. He likes to start his act with a long, uncomfortable silence, letting the audience take in the extent of his disfigurement before finally blurting out: “You should see the other guy.”

Henline is one of five severely wounded veterans — four men and a woman —



Vision Films

**Comedy Warriors:** documentary. Aired on Showtime repeatedly through Jan. 14. Check listings. Not rated. For more information, visit [www.comedywarriors.com](http://www.comedywarriors.com).

who are featured in the inspiring film “Comedy Warriors: Healing Through Humor,” which airs on Showtime through Jan. 14.

The moving and surprisingly upbeat documentary follows the veterans as they embark on a kind of comedy crash course with well-known comedians —

including Lewis Black, Zach Galifianakis and Bob Saget — and successful comedy writers to help plumb their lives and losses for jokes. Each soldier crafts a stand-up act and performs at the Improv and the Laugh Factory in Los Angeles.

Among the professionals coaching and encouraging the soldiers is El Cerrito comedian Bernadette Lockett, who is seen in the film mentoring wounded helicopter pilot Darisse Smith.

A former sitcom writer (“The Tracy Morgan Show,” “Girlfriends”), Lockett calls her work on the film “a slap-in-the-  
**Comedy continues on E2**

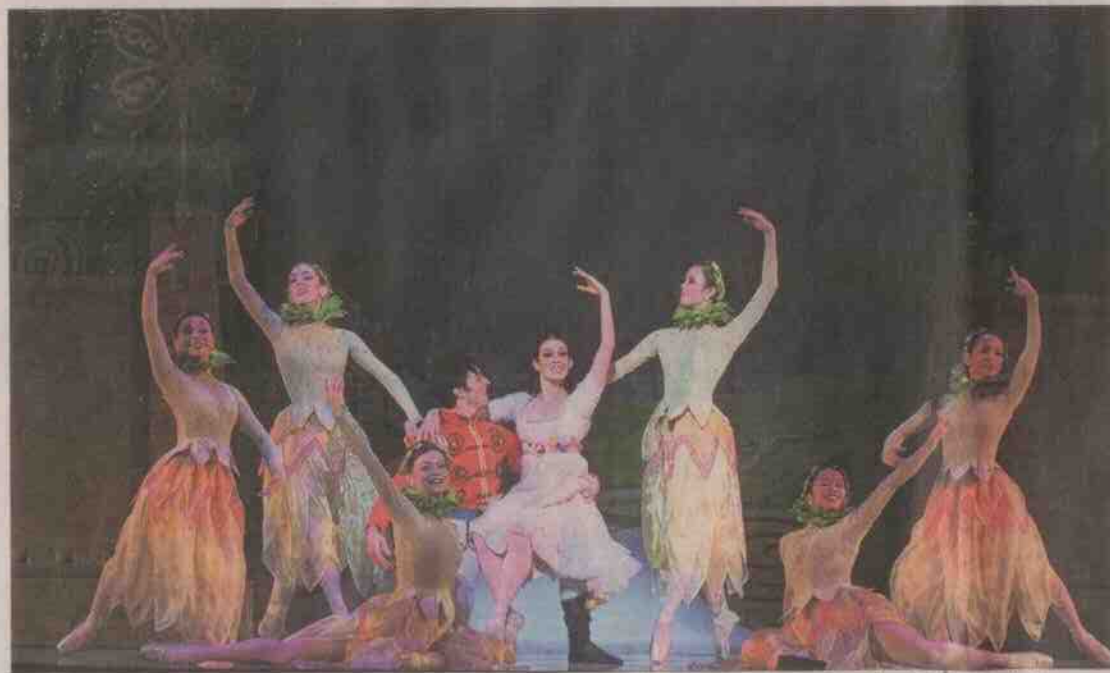
the big wave of people selling off their entire collection of CDs because it is all on com-

**What I Do continues on E2**



Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

**David James stocks jazz tapes at Amoeba Records in S.F.**



David DeSilva / Oakland Ballet Company

**The Waltz of the Flowers, as re-envisioned by the Oakland Ballet Company's “Nutcracker,” which stages the story within an art movement of early 20th century Austria.**

## DANCE REVIEW

# Oakland's ‘Nutcracker’ in an engaging setting

By Allan Ulrich

“Nutcracker” is surely the most adaptable of standard ballets. Any version that hopes to hold the stage requires at least two ingredients: a dreaming protagonist named either Marie or Clara and the presence of and an implicit belief in the Tchaikovsky score. Graham Lustig's “Nutcracker,” revived by the Oakland Ballet Company on Saturday afternoon at the Paramount Theatre, certainly possesses the first requirement and does reasonably well by the second.

Lustig, who brought this

**Oakland Ballet Company:** Graham Lustig's “Nutcracker.” Through 11 a.m. Tuesday. Paramount Theatre, 2025 Broadway, Oakland. \$20-\$59.50. (800) 745-3000. [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)

2000 version of the work with him when he signed on as Oakland's artistic director, is a savvy choreographer who knows when to hew to “Nutcracker” tradition and when to depart from it.

As with other versions in this community, he sets this produc-  
**‘Nutcracker’ continues on E3**

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

# Engaging version of a tradition

'Nutcracker' from page E1

tion in a place that has nothing to do with the original libretto. Girls also dreamed of princes in the Austria of the early 20th century when the art movement known as the Sezession was in its heyday.

Designer Zack Brown's decor reflects that movement in its cool colors, straight lines, huge window and attractive proscenium arch with its inlaid patterns. The voluptuously cut gowns Brown contributed sustain the period feeling.

We transition from the elegant soiree to the showdown with the rats who arrive for battle bearing huge replicas of silverware; Marie slays their king by impaling him on a steak knife. Later, she affirms her basic humanity by sparing a trio of contrite rodents.

Lustig's land of the sweets, backed by Brown's glittering palace, is a high-calorie country. Marie and her prince watch the national divertissements while seated in what looks a hollowed-out charlotte russe. This is a more mature Marie than one finds in most "Nutcrackers," and her dream of a Nutcracker Prince seems more sensuous in context.

Lustig judges the ballet as something between professional entertainment and community ritual. He introduces children as snowballs in the forest scene, dancing along with the women's corps, and they return to cavort as sweetmeats in the second act.

On this fourth annual showing of "Nutcracker," the company had the piece well in hand, though the quality of the



David DeSilva / Oakland Ballet Company

**A balloon airship out of Jules Verne adds a new twist to the snow scene in the Oakland Ballet Company's "Nutcracker."**

dancing varied considerably. You can't blame Lustig for the fact that his house party looks a bit cramped on the Paramount stage. But you can wonder about his reasons for omitting a growing Christmas tree, when Tchaikovsky almost demands it.

But when Marie, the Prince and Uncle Drosselmeyer arrive at the kingdom of the sweets, they descend in a balloon airship out of Jules Verne, and criticism is disarmed.

On Saturday, Megan Terry introduced a feisty Marie, equipped with a reliable

technique (assured pointe work) and sharp theatrical instincts. Gregory DeSantis brought careful partnering skills to the Nutcracker Prince (and the pair get the opportunity to test their classical chops in this staging). Chantelle Pianetta reprised her Sugar Plum Fairy and radiated a soft graciousness. Her cavalier, Connolly Strombeck, brought uncommon styles to his assignment.

Taurean Green played Drosselmeyer as a suave, mysterious, basically benign presence. He appeared on stilts during Lustig's inventive deployment of the

Mother Ginger music, here an episode for adorable pulchinelles.

Thank Michael Morgan for leading 42 members of the Oakland East Bay Symphony in an affectionate, silky reading of the Tchaikovsky score.

Members of the Oakland Youth Chorus lent their talents to the frozen forest scene, and they were much appreciated by at least one "Nutcracker" fan.

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