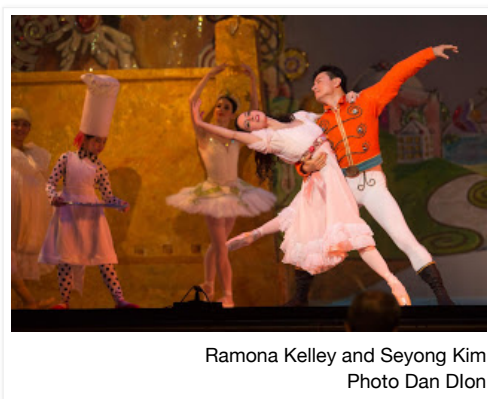


SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2018

Oakland Ballet Company

Oakland Ballet Company
Graham Lustig's *The Nutcracker*
Paramount Theatre, Oakland
December 22nd, 2018 (matinee)

Live orchestral accompaniment makes such a difference when it comes to dance performance! The last time I was at the Paramount Theatre for an Oakland Ballet Company program, I commented that at times, the recorded mix was so clippy and loud that it distracted from what was happening on stage. Not so yesterday for the opening of Graham Lustig's *The Nutcracker*. As has been the tradition in past years, the Oakland Symphony, under the direction of Michael Morgan, and the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir joined the troupe for their annual pre-Christmas run of the story ballet. Live music combined with a festive narrative and splendid dancing made for a simply magical afternoon at the theater.



Ramona Kelley and Seyong Kim
Photo Dan Dlon

Artistic Director Lustig's version of *The Nutcracker* is a classic one, told through the eyes of Marie, the ever-riveting Ramona Kelley, and her Nutcracker Prince, the confident, poised Seyong Kim. But classic should not be confused with standard or stale. To the contrary, this *Nutcracker* has innovation and creativity to spare. This Christmas Eve party is filled to the brim with energy. Many different characters arrive to celebrate the season, including Marie's Cousin Vera (Jackie McConnell) and her suitor (Thom Panto). Marie seems completely taken with them both, so what a perfect plotpoint that is they who later transform into the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Cavalier. In this adaptation, Uncle Drosselmeyer is a much dancier role, handily portrayed by Vincent Chavez. He is wonderful addition to the fête, which is awash with intricate and

SEARCH

BLOG ARCHIVE

- ▼ 2018 (44)
 - ▼ December (5)
 - Oakland Ballet Company**
 - Smuin - "The Christmas Ballet"
 - San Francisco Ballet - "Nutcracker"
 - San Francisco Movement Arts Festival - for change ...
 - "Custodians of Beauty"
 - ▶ November (4)
 - ▶ October (4)
 - ▶ September (2)
 - ▶ August (1)
 - ▶ July (3)
 - ▶ June (2)
 - ▶ May (4)
 - ▶ April (5)
 - ▶ March (5)
 - ▶ February (6)
 - ▶ January (3)

interesting choreographic episodes. And with dancers! So, so many dancers! The cast's spatial awareness was absolutely second to none – I didn't notice a single collision during the party's many dances. It's only too bad that a lot of the choreography was hidden. With the presents arranged in a large pile, front and center, much of the footwork and pointe phrases were obscured from view.

Lustig keeps the battle scene moving along (which suits this viewer just fine), with winning choreography for the Nutcracker. Until he removes his mask, the steps are appropriately stiff and mechanical, framed by flexed feet and angular arms. Then he transforms into a real being and the choreography similarly shifts. Gone are the mechanized steps, having been replaced by swirling lifts, dipping turns and jeté entrelaces. The Nutcracker's first pas de deux with Marie had such joy and levity, flowing effortlessly into the wintry snow scene swirling with snowmaidens and snowballs.



Jackie McConnell and Thomas Panto
Photo Stephen Teixeira

The charm continued as Act II's divertissements took over the stage – Spanish, Arabian, Chinese Nightingale, Russian and German (often French in other renditions). With its changements en pointe and Russian pas de chats, Nina Pearlman's nightingale variation was a stand out amongst the group. And though it might have been a little finicky from time to time, I also quite enjoyed the choreography for the German pas de quartre. But the internal bows from all these soloists and small groups - to the audience and then to Marie and the Prince – definitely needed to be sped up. The breaks created a rather halted stop and start feel. That is until the waltz of the flowers got underway and the action picked up again with pulsing, billowy choreography lead by Marie and the Prince. And McConnell and Panto were probably the best Sugar Plum Fairy/Cavalier duo that I've ever seen at the Oakland Ballet. He with sky-high extensions and impressive fouettés; she with enviable pointework, serpentine rond versés and impenetrable balances. They were truly a regal pair, ideal monarchs to reign over the land of the sweets.

Posted by Heather Desaulniers at [3:53 PM](#)

No comments:

[Post a Comment](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

- ▶ [2017 \(40\)](#)
- ▶ [2016 \(48\)](#)
- ▶ [2015 \(52\)](#)
- ▶ [2014 \(50\)](#)
- ▶ [2013 \(49\)](#)
- ▶ [2012 \(40\)](#)
- ▶ [2011 \(48\)](#)
- ▶ [2010 \(45\)](#)
- ▶ [2009 \(20\)](#)
- ▶ [2008 \(10\)](#)
- ▶ [2007 \(10\)](#)
- ▶ [2006 \(6\)](#)

MY BLOG LIST

Ballet NEWS | Straight from the stage - bringing you ballet insights
Strictly Come Dancing 2018 | Christmas Special
1 week ago

LINKS

- [Bourgeon](#)
- [Critical Dance](#)
- [Dance Advantage](#)
- [Dancer's Group](#)
- [SF Arts Online](#)

Powered by [Blogger](#).