

# The Patriot Ledger

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## Review: Boston Ballet's 'Nutcracker' returns with its spell intact

### Monday

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By Keith Powers For The Patriot Ledger

Full of subtlety and color, the Boston Ballet opened Mikko Nissinen's "The Nutcracker" on Friday evening at the Opera House. The annual artistic summoning of the holiday mood comes at a perfect time to raise spirits, and this fifth edition of Nissinen's re-imagining of the winter classic drew a sold-out mix of family and friends to enjoy the spectacle.

Nissinen's carefully reworked staging, fulfilled by Robert Perdziola's sets and costumes, and Mikki Kunttu's lighting design makes every second and sight-line count.

Divert attention, and you might miss a servant tossing back a half-finished sherry. Or members of the mice brigade giving hand gestures – like Mr. Spock's "live long and prosper," or signing "I love you" – or was that the heavy-metal sign of the horns?

No matter. You could miss a lot, and still see and hear a lot as well. Perdziola has developed two color palettes, one for each act.

Before intermission, when the action is largely confined to the Silberhaus family drawing room, earth tones and muted hues dominate. As we move to Act 2, while Clara's imaginary world unfolds, rose pastels and silvery sparkles take over, and the magic deepens.

Creating deep distinctions between the "real" world – enhanced by invoking the impoverished downside of the Industrial Revolution during the overture – and Clara's dream world is yet another delicate and winning touch Nissinen has added.

The dancing, always precise with this company, reflected the depth of Boston Ballet's artistry. Of course the Nutcracker (Patrick Yocum, lifting with easy grace) and Sugar Plum Fairy (danced with facility and power by Misa Kuranaga) stood out. But careful observers would notice how beautifully the student artists and children of the company brought Nissinen's symmetries to life.

Clara, danced on opening night by Lexington's Delia Wada-Gill, is much more than a sleepy-headed observer, and engages in lively ensembles and duets throughout the ballet.

Principal guest conductor Beatrice Jona Affron was in the pit for this performance, and the orchestra sounded superb. Someone has put a stopwatch to Tchaikovsky's exhilarating score, though, and in an effort to make the run time more friendly to younger bedtimes, the pacing was decidedly rushed at some points.

Eris Nezha's Drosselmeyer was raised above the level of supernumerary, and danced to great effect – even comically sweeping Mother Ginger off her feet, if that were possible. Ashley Ellis' fouettés as Dew Drop stopped the momentum for generous applause. The Grand Pas de Deux is indeed a climax in this production, with Kuranaga unleashing effortless pirouettes, and Yocum giving almost undetectable muscular support.

Of the exotic showpieces that fill Clara's imagination in Act 2, Lia Cirio and Lasha Khozashvili's Arabian delved the deepest into their portrayal. The scene always has PG-stretching sensuality, but this pairing invested mystery and strength into the gymnastic pas-de-deux.

Nissinen has added a bunny, a dancing bear (Lawrence Rines – bravo for his furry-splendored jetés) and a gingerbread man to the already complicated combat scene. With all these animals, and the mice and the soldiers also clamoring for visual attention, Clara's heroic shoe-toss almost gets lost in the commotion.

But there is much to see, and very much to enjoy, in this production of Boston Ballet's "The Nutcracker."

*Ballet review THE NUTCRACKER Performed by the Boston Ballet through Dec. 31 at the Boston Opera House, 539 Washington St. \$35-\$250; 617-695-6955, [bostonballet.org](http://bostonballet.org).*

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