

Weekend

READING EAGLE

12.15.2016

A holiday tradition

**Berks Ballet Theatre's
'The Nutcracker' brings
families together**

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THE 'NUTCRACKER' FAMILY

The special bond among participants in Berks Ballet Theatre's "Nutcracker" is reflected in their dedication to the production across the years.

BY SUSAN L. PENA
READING EAGLE CORRESPONDENT

AS BERKS Ballet Theatre prepares for its 40th performance of "The Nutcracker," held Saturday at 1 and 6 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. in the Scottish Rite Cathedral in West Reading, a group of women gathered at the BBT studio in the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts to reminisce about their past and present experiences with this ballet. Now participating as "party parents" in Act 1, Scene 1, the

women all danced roles as children and teens, and Erin Morrissey now has a 5-year-old daughter, Tessa, who will be playing a Mouse in her first "Nutcracker" this weekend.

According to BBT artistic director Kelly Barber, the company has a tradition of involving families in the ballet; there are fathers and brothers who take nondancing roles in the party scene, and parents help with costumes, fundraising and other kinds of support. This year, for example, Robert Beauvais, the father of cast member

Gabrielle Beauvais, and Jon Moyer, the father of cast member Olivia Moyer, will also be playing party parents.

And lifelong friendships form among the dancers who perform together year after year; they tend to stay in touch with each other and with the company.

Marguerite Wegman, known to countless ballet students as "Miss Marguerite," is an alumna of the first BBT "Nutcracker" in 1976 (the company was then called La Petite Ballet), and danced Snow Queen in 1978.

Wegman started studying

dance at age 9 under BBT founder Carol Ennis; she has taught since 1977 at all the Ennis/BBT studios, now the BBT Conservatory of Dance.

She returned to "The Nutcracker" as a party parent in 1998, took a break and returned again, and this year is playing the role of Mrs. Stahlbaum (Clara's mother).

"The year my daughter was Clara, I stopped doing it, so I could sit in the audience and watch," she said.

Now her daughter, Melissa Murphy, a kindergarten teacher



Berks Ballet Theatre alumnae, from left, Melissa Murphy, Marguerite Wegman and Kirsten Bauer discuss their involvement with "The Nutcracker."

If you go

Event: Berks Ballet Theatre presents "The Nutcracker."
Where and when: Saturday at 1 and 6 p.m., and Sunday at 2 p.m. in the Scottish Rite Cathedral, 310 S. Seventh Ave., West Reading.
Tickets: \$20 to \$30. Call 610-373-7577 or visit www.berks-ballettheatre.org. Tickets may also be purchased at the door.

fun," she said.

Kirsten Bauer, a resident of Oley Township who is a national manager for an active-wear company, said this is her fourth year as a party parent. Her 7-year-old daughter, Nina, was a mouse last year and is taking a break this year; her 8-year-old son is into sports, she said.

Bauer, another Penn State graduate, started dancing when she was 4, and came to BBT at 11, when she performed as an angel in 1989 and continued playing various parts through high school.

Morrissey, who has another daughter, 3, and a son, 1, is a dental hygienist and teaches barre and rowing classes at Full Throttle Fitness Factory in Shillington.

After beginning dance lessons at 3, she was cast as a mouse for her first "Nutcracker," but missed the performance when she came down with chickenpox. But after that she worked her way up through the usual roles, finishing with the Dew Drop Fairy as a senior in 2000.

"I think I can speak for all of us that the second that music comes on, you get that feeling in

your stomach: It's 'Nutcracker' time," Morrissey said.

"It's hard when dancers come back to see it and they're no longer in it," Wegman said. "You see tears."

Asked about their best memories of "The Nutcracker," all the women agreed with Murphy, who said, "The friendships. It's a special bond with these other girls."

"My best friends were the girls I danced with," Bauer said. "None of them were girls from school."

"Your friends at school don't understand the dedication and the commitment it takes to dance," Wegman said.

Morrissey said she vividly remembered sharing a dressing room in the Santander Performing Arts Center with two friends throughout all her "Nutcracker" performances. When the theater was renovated, her mother and a friend obtained permission to take their mirrors; she keeps hers as a treasured memento.

"It's all marked up and scratched, but I love it," she said.

She also told how her father, a football coach, faithfully took her to lessons and rehearsals, videotaped her performances (and critiqued them later), and bragged to his football players that "my daughter is stronger than any of you. He was so proud of that."

Barber said this year's "Nutcracker" will feature guest dancers Jake Allison and Nick Peregrino, both returning from last year's production, and, in the role of the Arabian, Jillian Davis from Complexions Contemporary Ballet in New York City.

Clara will be danced by Jessica Nugent (Saturday afternoon), Christina Kopecky (Saturday evening) and Lorelei Obst (Sunday).

Nathan Bland, BBT's dance master and resident choreographer, will dance the Cavalier with Olivia Moyer as the Sugar Plum Fairy. Audra Nemirow will dance the Dew Drop Fairy and Allison Welch will dance the Snow Queen.

"This year the audience will see new choreography for both Snow and Flowers," Barber said, "and some new props."

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READING EAGLE: LAUREN A. LITTLE

Playing the lead role of Clara in the three presentations of "The Nutcracker" this weekend are Lorelei Obst of Oley, Jessica Nugent of Exeter Township and Christina Kopecky of Exeter Township.

who also teaches group exercise classes, is joining her onstage as a party parent.

"For once we can do it together and share the roles," Wegman said.

Murphy said she started dancing at age 3, and four years later she played one of the children hiding under Mother Gigogne's dress as her first "Nutcracker" role. Like most BBT alumnae, she played a

soldier and party girl for a few years, and then Clara, Spanish and, in 1997, her final year, the Dew Drop Fairy.

The Penn State University graduate, now living in Exeter Township, came back to BBT to play a party parent in 2010. She is the mother of two sons, ages 4 and 6, who have both been attending "The Nutcracker" since they were babies.

"Being a party mom is a lot of