

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Whither the Nuts?

Ann Haskins · Wednesday, December 16th, 2020

The current topic of public discussion is the coronavirus surge following Halloween cavorting and Thanksgiving gatherings, but in the world of ballet the available oxygen has been absorbed by the pandemic-forced cancellation of entire seasons, and especially live *Nutcracker* performances. The almost universal cancellation of this holiday tradition keeps dancers from dancing, audiences from enjoying, and for some ballet companies, financially threatens their very survival. While other countries provide varying levels of government funding for dance companies and other performing arts, government support for the arts in the U.S. can only be described as meager. For all its joy and enjoyability, the *Nutcracker*, along with foundation and donor funding is a main financial lifeline for U.S. ballet companies. The popularity of this holiday ballet and its easy accessibility for all ages draws audiences in numbers that provide revenue to underwrite more adventurous fare and pay for expensive sets, costumes and extra dancers required for full-length ballets. While ballet is not the only arts casualty this holiday season, it has been hard hit, channeling *Nutcracker* offerings to videos of past shows and live-streamed events usually limited to solos and small groups who have shared quarantine. Fortunately for audiences, many professional companies have responded by shifting entire seasons, including the *Nutcracker*, to the internet providing a more limited *Nutcracker* round-up for this year.

Traditionally, this week is when this space is devoted to a round-up of the season's SoCal and visiting *Nutcracker* productions. Last year more than 50 were listed—professional companies like the Los Angeles Ballet, Inland Pacific Ballet, Long Beach Ballet, and American Ballet Theater, as well as training companies like Westside Ballet and Pasadena Dance Theater, plus ballet studio productions some of which hire professionals as guest artists. None can offer live performances this year.

If there is a silver lining, however slight, the companies that have moved their performances to the internet have discovered they gained new audiences. Since few larger U.S. ballet companies can tour, the internet performances offer So Cal audiences new opportunities to become acquainted with excellent companies like San Francisco Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Boston Ballet, Houston Ballet, Ballet West and Ballet Idaho. The boon for the dance audiences doesn't solve ballet companies and other performing arts organizations need to find financial stability if this is a new era that relies on or at least incorporates digital performance until, and perhaps after live performance returns. Hopefully, the financial answers will come, in the meanwhile here are some *Nutcracker* options for this season.

Los Angeles Ballet Since its founding 15 years ago, LA's professional classical ballet company

brought co-artistic directors Thordal Christensen and Colleen Neary's *Nutcracker* to a half dozen venues throughout metropolitan LA, including Hollywood's Dolby Theatre. This year, with venues closed for live performance, LAB is bringing a streamed event with Covid-compliant solo and pas de deux to *Clara's Nutcracker Tea Party*. Sun., Dec. 20, 11 a.m. \$39.99 to view, \$125 to view and receive special box of treats for the event. Info & tickets at [Los Angeles Ballet](#).



Los Angeles Ballet. Photo by Reed Hutchinson

Westside Ballet For the first time in four decades, the respected training company founded by Yvonne Mounsey and Rosemary Valaire will not be offering a live performance of the Mounsey/Valaire *Nutcracker*. A streamed event including performances has been announced for mid-December, but details including dates and ticket prices were not available as of the publication. Excerpts from past performances are at [Vimeo](#).



Westside Ballet. Photo by Todd Lecktik.

Inland Pacific Ballet has cancelled live performances, but has two online ticketed videos at \$39 & \$59. Info and tickets at [Inland Pacific Ballet](#).



American Ballet Theatre. Photo by Gene Schiavone.

American Ballet Theatre With Segerstrom Center for the Arts home to its affiliated ballet school and regular visits with the Alexei Ratmansky's *Nutcracker*, cancellation of this year's performances have been replaced with an online pas de deux with ABT principal dancers Isabella Boylston and James Whitesides, viewable for free at [SCFTA](#). A live, higher priced fundraising tea party will include upper level students from the ABT Gillespie School performing excerpts from the ballet and a string quartet performing the ballet's music. At Segerstrom Center for the Arts, Julianne and George Argyros Plaza, 615 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa; Sat. & Sun., Dec. 12 & 13, 11 & 3 p.m. \$700 (4-person table) & \$1,200 (8-person table). Complete menu and activities at [SCFTA](#).

Debbie Allen Dance Academy Over the years, Debbie Allen's *Hot Chocolate Nutcracker* became a popular staple of the holiday parade of *Nutcracker* ballets. While the live stage production can't go forward this year, *Dance Dreams: The Hot Chocolate Nutcracker*, a documentary following Allen and the students rehearsing the show, can be enjoyed on [Netflix](#).



Debbie Allen's "Hot Chocolate Nutcracker." Photo courtesy of Netflix.

State Street Ballet Santa Barbara's ballet company goes online with a prior performance airing Sat., Dec. 19 to Thurs., Dec. 31 at [State Street Ballet](#).

San Francisco Ballet This major U.S. ballet company was the first to present a full *Nutcracker* back in 1944 with choreography by Lew Christensen. Current artistic director HelgiTomasson's version, set in S.F. during the 1915 exposition, debuted in 2004 to considerable acclaim and a 2008 performance aired on PBS. This year, the company offers that 2008 performance in HD, plus activities that include a virtual tour of the opera house, downloadable holiday snaps to send to friends and family, and a chance to learn steps from the choreography. Info and tickets at

<https://www.sfballet.org/>.



San Francisco Ballet. Photo by Erik Tomasson.

New York City Ballet offers a streamed recording of George Balanchine's *Nutcracker*. A 1954 televised performance is credited with igniting *Nutcracker* productions across the U.S. This recording from the 2019 performances provides a chance to watch one of the country's major ballet companies. Dec. 11-Jan. 3, Details and tickets at <https://www.nycballet.com/>.



Pacific Northwest Ballet. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Pacific Northwest Ballet One of the most adventurous U.S. companies, PNB offered a digital season with six separate programs. The initial programs are hybrid with Covid-compliant live performances and filmed prior work. The *Nutcracker* is an archival performance of George Balanchine's *Nutcracker*. Individual tickets and info at <http://www.pnb.org/nutcracker>

Ballet Idaho is another Northwest company offering a prior *Nutcracker* as part of its digital season. Led by former San Francisco Ballet soloist Garrett Anderson, the company's digital season includes its 2019 *Nutcracker*. <https://balletidaho.org/>



Ballet Idaho. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Ballet Chicago offers two events: a streamed archival performance and a dozen dances re-staged socially distant with current dancers. [Athenaeum Theatre](#).

Moscow Ballet usually stops off at the Wiltern Theater during the annual tour of its *Great Russian Nutcracker*. This year it's a previous performance is streamed. <https://www.nutcracker.com/>



Smuin Ballet. Photo by Keith Sutter.

Smuin Ballet This San Francisco contemporary company offers a streamed performance of its popular *Christmas Ballet* with Covid-compliant small group numbers performed live and several recorded larger group numbers from past years. <https://www.smuinballet.org/>

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