

The Nutcracker

Ballet de Santiago, Teatro Municipal, Santiago – December 17, 2021

TO SEE THE BALLET DE SANTIAGO in full again – with a complete cast, delicate scenery and beautiful costumes – performing to a live orchestra and chorus after almost two years of absence due to the coronavirus pandemic, was an enthralling experience. The emotion of the spectacle was accentuated by the chosen work: nothing less than a new production of *The Nutcracker*, an emblematic classical ballet that has become a symbol of Christmas. After 15 years of presenting the daring and disturbing version of the ballet by the Chilean choreographer Jaime Pinto, Luis Ortigoza, the company's new artistic director (see *Dancing Times*, January 2022), offers a version that returns the work to its original source, paying tribute to the musical genius of Tchaikovsky and also the original choreography by Lev Ivanov.

This luminous *Nutcracker* aims at innocence and shows us magnificence in the realm of fantasy. The first act, set in the Stahlbaum family home, recreates a typical house in rural Russia at the end of the 19th century, with a salamander depicted on the backdrop amidst a palette of earthy colours. The second act – the Land of Sweets – reinforces the enchantment by locating the action within a kind of ancient tiara surmounted by immense and striking Fabergé-style eggs, which gives the set a stately presence and takes it away from the ordinary. Chilean theatre designer Jorge Gallardo, who has worked previously with Ballet

Théâtre Français de Nancy, American Ballet Theatre, Alvin Ailey and Malandain Ballet Biarritz, among others, was responsible for the sets.

The production casts three dancers in the role of the Nutcracker/Prince (Emmanuel Vázquez, Christopher Montenegro and Rodrigo Guzmán), three as the Sugar Plum Fairy (Katherine Rodríguez, Romina Contreras and María Lovero), two as Clara (Mariselba Silva and Lorena Borja) and two as Drosselmeyer (Lucas Alarcón and Miroslav Peric).

In his new conception, Ortigoza dispenses with some characters, such as Mother Gigogne, the Snow Queen and the Flower Queen, but they are not missed here because of the fluidity of the drama. Clara is the protagonist of her fantastical journey, with Drosselmeyer as her guide. The two dance together with theatrical force in Act I. After the battle with the mice, Clara and the Nutcracker Prince commence their trip to an enchanted kingdom and perform a pas de deux that is sweet and undulating, with lifts that take advantage of Clara's lightness.

The act concludes with the Kingdom of Snow scene, designed for the corps de ballet, in which dancers fill the stage in magical and crystalline evolutions. Here, Ortigoza shows excellent choreographic

groupings that allow everyone to shine. The movements flow continually throughout the stage, and the dancers' arms and legs swirl in an endless stream that is captivating to watch.

Clara and the Nutcracker Prince then depart in a beautiful deer-shaped sleigh, gorgeously realised by Gallardo. They land in a new kingdom, where they are received by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The corps de ballet perform the Waltz of the Flowers dressed as charming and colourful blossoms, in which the choreographer once again shows his mastery

Below: Katherine Rodríguez as the Sugar Plum Fairy and Emmanuel Vázquez as the Nutcracker Prince in Act II of Ballet de Santiago's new production of *The Nutcracker*.

at handling large groups of dancers. The character dances that follow (Spanish, Chinese, Shepherdesses, Arabian and Russian), all assertive and precise, allow the soloists to shine.

The Grand Pas de deux for the Sugar Plum and Prince is of enormous technical difficulty, and is truly brilliant, with demanding lifts that require precision and clean execution, body control and interpretation. Their fouettés, sautés and pirouettes represent a true challenge inherited from the Russian canon.

Ortigoza's *Nutcracker* pays proper homage to tradition, but at the same time updates the classical language and the particulars of the story, allowing Clara's dream to become everyone's. ■

MARIETTA SANTI

