

A Dance, Perchance to Dream

Poise, pageantry and the polish of artistic director Ashley Wheater make the Joffrey Ballet's *The Nutcracker* a holiday hit of the highest caliber.

HOLIDAY CHEER is contagious across Chicago as streets light up, stores get festive, days turn colder and beloved traditions such as the Joffrey Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* get underway: A soaring spectacle for 22 years, Robert Joffrey's take on Tchaikovsky's masterpiece is the cornerstone of the company's season and has become one of our city's most highly anticipated annual events. This year, the production hits new heights as artistic director Ashley Wheater—an alumnus of the Joffrey, at the helm since 2007—inspires some of the most heartfelt and dynamic dancing we've seen in years. "The Joffrey is an all-star company," says Wheater. "You always have to raise the level of expectation, and it makes for every part in *The Nutcracker* being done at the highest level."

With scenic design by Oliver Smith, lighting by Thomas Skelton and an enormous puppet designed by Kermit Love, the show features the entire Joffrey company joined by local children's choruses and 120 young dancers from the Chicago area. The Chicago Sinfonietta, conducted by David Commanday, accompanies the grace and athleticism on stage.

Wheater—every bit as charming as his dancing is sublime—is a huge fan of Chicago, and thrilled to be part of the city at the holidays once more. "There is a magic here," he says. "I have gotten to know all the other cultural organizations—the Shakespeare Theater, Steppenwolf, the Lyric, the Symphony.... There is just so much going on. And when I step out of a performance of *The Nutcracker* and walk down Michigan Avenue, and see people ice skating to Frank Sinatra, that is an extraordinary, special feeling." —ANDREW C. STONE

The Nutcracker runs from December 11 to 27 at the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University, 50 E. Congress Plaza. For tickets, visit ticketmaster.com or the Auditorium Theatre's box office.

Megan Gueroz and
Thomas Nicholas
in *The Nutcracker*