

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

FOR RELEASE ON
NOVEMBER 24, 2008

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HOUSTON BALLET LIGHTS UP THE HOLIDAY SEASON WITH *THE NUTCRACKER*

Soloist Tyann Clement Gives Final Performances with Company

Christopher Coomer Dances the Prince for the First Time

“Chance to Dance” Graduates Featured in Several Performances

Houston, TX – From November 28 – December 28, 2008, Houston Ballet brings Texas its most joyous holiday gift, Ben Stevenson’s production of **The Nutcracker**, seen by over 1,000,000 people since its premiere twenty-one years ago. The ballet tells the story of a little girl named Clara who is given a magical nutcracker doll on Christmas Eve. She encounters the frightful Rat King before embarking on a journey through the Land of Snow and the Kingdom of Sweets. Young and old alike will be dazzled by the production’s many special effects, including the Christmas tree, that “grows” to forty feet, 200 pounds of “snow” falling during the snow scene, and the firing of cannon on stage. Houston Ballet will give 32 performances of **The Nutcracker** in the Brown Theater at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713-227-2787 or visiting www.houstonballet.org.

Houston Ballet’s production of **The Nutcracker** has been hailed by the *Houston Chronicle* as “the crown jewel of holiday entertainment.” Lee Williams of the *Houston Press* called Houston Ballet’s production of **The Nutcracker**, “Gorgeous . . . Desmond Heeley’s set and costumes are reason enough to see this show . . . **The Nutcracker** reminds us that the holidays have always been a time of dreams, and with productions as yummy as this, sleeping never seemed so sweet.” A wonderful ballet for the entire family, **The Nutcracker** is the perfect way to ring in the holiday season and to introduce young children to the power and beauty of classical dance.

For over one hundred years, the story of the ballet has proven irresistible to both children and adults alike. Set in nineteenth-century Germany, the ballet opens at a Christmas party at which the mysterious Dr. Drosselmeyer gives his little niece Clara a magical toy that takes her on an unforgettable journey. From the battle scene between the Rat King and the Nutcracker in the first act to the cooks who fly magically through the air in the second act, **The Nutcracker** is sure to enchant audiences of all ages.

Tickets are available at a discount for select performances of **The Nutcracker**: patrons can save up to \$7 off the regular price when purchasing tickets for these shows, including evening performances on Friday, November 28 and Saturday, November 29; Sunday, December 7; Sunday, December 14; Tuesday, December 16; Wednesday, December 17; Thursday, December 18; and Sunday, December 28. Matinee performances will also offer the discounted tickets on the following dates: Saturday, November 29 and Sunday, November 30.

Houston Ballet's performances of **The Nutcracker** are generously underwritten by Continental Airlines, Shell Oil Company Foundation, Baker Botts L.L.P., and Devon Energy Corporation.

Soloist Tyann Clement Gives Final Performances with Company

Soloist Tyann Clement, a company veteran for 17 years, will make her final appearances with Houston Ballet, dancing the role of the Snow Queen and lead flower at select performances. Throughout her career, Ms. Clement has demonstrated an admirable versatility, performing featured roles in the great ballet classics while also excelling in the more contemporary repertoire of choreographers such as Christopher Bruce, Jiri Kylian, Trey McIntyre and Paul Taylor. Ms. Clement began her studies in New Orleans with Kathryn Gamble and Harvey Hysell, and then studied at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy before joining Houston Ballet in 1991. In 2001, Ms. Clement was promoted to soloist. Ms. Clement has a special connection to **The Nutcracker**, achieving one of the defining moments in the ballet early in her career. "In my first featured moment as the lead flower in **The Nutcracker**, I truly felt like I was flying, body and soul," she remembers.

Capping her 17-year career with Houston Ballet dancing the role of the Snow Queen, she will be partnered by Ian Casady. “He’s my prince on stage who’s also my prince in real life. It’s amazing to share the thing that you love the most with the person you love the most,” commented Ms. Clement.

In January 2009, she will enter the University of Houston. She has a leg up on her business degree with 47 credits already completed, earned at Houston Ballet through its program offering college courses to dancers.

“I’m happy to let go of the aches and pains, and the pointe shoes. There’s a reason we call them ‘pink coffins’: because your feet are absolutely dead after performing in them. They may look pretty, but they are miserable to wear,” said Ms. Clement. “But being onstage – there’s nothing like it.” She looks forward to seeing her fellow artists “from the other side,” as an observer in the audience.

Rising Young Star to Make First Appearance in Leading Role

Houston Ballet’s production of **The Nutcracker** showcases the depth and range of the company, from the young apprentices to the principal dancers. **The Nutcracker** is a time when promising young dancers are given a chance to shine. Houston Ballet Soloist Christopher Coomer, a native of Birkenhead, England who joined the company in 2004, will debut as the Prince. Scheduled to return to the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy are Mireille Hassenboehler, Amy Fote, Melody Herrera, Sara Webb, Kelly Myernick, Nao Kusuzaki, Katharine Precourt, and Hitomi Takeda. Slated to return to the role of Prince are Linnar Looris, Simon Ball, Connor Walsh, Ian Casady, Nicholas Leschke, and Randy Herrera.

In addition to delighting Houston audiences, many of Houston Ballet’s principal dancers spend a portion of the holiday season making guest appearances with other ballet companies. Connor Walsh will perform the Prince in Arlington, Virginia on Dec. 6 – 7. Mireille Hassenboehler and Simon Ball will dance the Sugar Plum Fairy and Prince at Gulf Shore Ballet in Fort Meyers, Florida on December 11 – 14. Melody Herrera returns to her hometown of Santa Cruz,

California to perform as the Sugar Plum Fairy on Dec. 18 – 21. Sara Webb and Ian Casady will delight audiences as Sugar Plum Fairy and Prince in Victoria, Texas Dec. 11 – 14. Nicholas Leschke and Amy Fote will perform the Prince and Sugar Plum Fairy in Midland Dec. 13 – 14, and Ms. Fote will return home to Manitowoc, Wisconsin to perform Snow Queen and Sugar Plum Fairy on Dec. 19 – 21.

Children and *The Nutcracker*: A Magical Combination

This season's performances of **The Nutcracker** will have 113 children from Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, who range in age from 7 to 19. Fifty seven students between the ages of 7 and 12 are featured in four casts of party children in the first act and three casts of clowns in the second act. All the children are from the greater Houston area.

This year, Trevon Anderson, age 7, and Miguel Gonzalez, age 8, will debut as party children in **The Nutcracker**. Trevon and Miguel participated in **Chance to Dance**, an outreach program offered to a diverse group of children, regardless of ability or experience, from schools around Houston. Trevon and Miguel were brought to Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy this fall for a series of introductory classes along with other students from Energized for Excellence Academy.

Houston Ballet launched **Chance to Dance** in November 1999 as a pilot program. Houston Ballet Managing Director Cecil C. Conner, Jr. explains, "**Chance to Dance** makes ballet accessible to children who may not otherwise have the opportunity to explore classical dance. It is a great vehicle for Houston Ballet to find untapped talent and potential in our community."

Shelly Power, associate director of Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy says, "Getting boys interested at an early age is incredibly important. We are delighted to see such a wonderful response from young male students who are participating in **Chance to Dance**."

Each fall and spring, students from elementary schools around Houston are invited to Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy to participate in a series of six ballet classes. Most of these

students have never taken a ballet class before. Each class is led by a Houston Ballet instructor and is accompanied by a live accompanist. Body awareness is stressed, teaching children how to control and discipline their bodies and their minds. The classes progress to having the children perform barre work around the edges of the room, then working in the center of the room without the assistance of a barre, then to moving freely across the floor. During these final classes, Ms. Power assesses the children's skill levels, determining those who will continue their studies at the Academy.

Last year 59 students from four schools signed up for **Chance to Dance**; 13 students from that group were awarded full scholarships to Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy.

Houston Downtown Management District Offers Free Holiday Trolley Rides

Houston Downtown Management District is offering free holiday Trolley rides on Friday evenings and all day Saturday and Sunday beginning the day after Thanksgiving and through the end of December to approximately 10 different locations downtown Houston. Two Holiday Trolleys will make it simple for visitors to park once and experience multiple downtown destinations during their visit. As the area bustles with the spirit of the holidays, visitors can take one of the two trolleys to various locations around downtown, including the outdoor ice skating rink and Christmas Market at Discovery Green, the Theater District, City Hall's fabulous tree, as well as holiday programming at the newly renovated Central Library to name a few. For more information and a map of the Holiday Trolley, visit www.houstondowntown.com.

The Story of *The Nutcracker*

The Nutcracker tells the story of Clara and her magical nutcracker doll. One Christmas Eve, the mysterious Dr. Drosselmeyer arrives at the Stahlbaum family's Christmas party and presents Clara with a special gift: a wooden nutcracker. After the party, as the clock strikes midnight, Clara awakens to find the room filled with giant mice. The nutcracker comes to her rescue and a fierce battle ensues as the nutcracker leads the toy soldiers against the mice and their leader, King Rat. The nutcracker overcomes King Rat, and then is transformed into a handsome prince who takes Clara on a magical journey.

To the delight of Clara and the audience, the evening is filled with dance. The Snow Queen leads eighteen snowflakes in a brilliant waltz in the Land of Snow, where the trees are laden with icicles. Then the Nutcracker Prince takes Clara on a boat ride across the Lemonade Sea to the Kingdom of Sweets where they are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Sugar Plum Fairy treats Clara to sweets and entertainment provided by the inhabitants of the kingdom: chocolate, a Spanish dance; coffee, an Arabian dance; and tea, a Chinese dance. Next comes the comical Madame Bonbonaire whose huge skirt is filled with tiny clowns. Then there is the Russian dance and the Waltz of the Flowers. Finally, the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Nutcracker Prince dance a grand pas de deux. As the celebration draws to a close, Clara becomes sleepy. She awakens back in her bed, as the nutcracker salutes his little princess Clara.

The History of Houston Ballet's *The Nutcracker*

Houston Ballet first presented **The Nutcracker** thirty-six years ago on December 28, 1972, at Jones Hall for the Performing Arts in downtown Houston. It was the company's first full-length production, and featured choreography by Frederic Franklin and designs by Peter Farmer. The company gave six performances in 1972. That number has increased to thirty-two in 2008. Last year, the production grossed over \$3.4 million dollars in revenue for the organization, which was over 50% of the company's total ticket sales for the year.

In 1976, Houston Ballet presented the production with choreography by the company's new artistic director Ben Stevenson. In 1987, the current production with designs by Desmond Heeley, lighting by Duane Schuler, and choreography by Mr. Stevenson was unveiled. Mr. Heeley's enchanting settings for the popular story have received great critical acclaim. Pete Szatmary of *Houston Press* observed,

"The sets -- which are what the eyes feast on most in this evening of visual splendors -- are simply spectacular. The house in which the Christmas party takes place is wrapped just like a gigantic present and is stuffed with all sorts of goodies; it's like an ornate picture book. The magical Christmas tree grows to such a size that it makes the one at New York's Rockefeller Center look puny." ([The Houston Press](#), November 29, 1993.)

Houston Ballet's **The Nutcracker** also spawned the Nutcracker Market, a unique holiday fundraiser on the national dance scene that brought in over \$2 million in net revenues for Houston Ballet in 2007, attracting over 60,000 shoppers to Reliant Center.

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HOUSTON BALLET
THE NUTCRACKER
FACT SHEET

WHAT: THE NUTCRACKER (1987)
Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
Choreography by Ben Stevenson, O.B.E.
Designs by Desmond Heeley
Lighting by Duane Schuler

Generously underwritten by:
Continental Airlines
Shell Oil Company Foundation
Baker Botts L.L.P.
Devon Energy Corporation

ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

A little girl named Clara receives a magical nutcracker on Christmas Eve, and sets out on a wondrous journey to the Land of Snow and the Kingdom of Sweets. Featuring breathtaking scenery and costumes by Desmond Heeley, **The Nutcracker** is the perfect yuletide gift: the ideal means of introducing children to the power and beauty of classical dance, and a delightful way for the entire family to ring in the holiday season.

WHEN: November 28 – December 28, 2008

At 7:30 pm Nov. 28*, 29*
and Dec. 6, 7*, 12, 13, 14*, 16*, 17*, 18*, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27,
28*

At 2:00 pm on Nov. 29*, 30*
and Dec. 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28

*Indicates discounted performance.

WHERE: Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center
501 Texas Avenue in downtown Houston

TICKETS: \$17 - \$125. For tickets call (713) 227 2787 or 1 800 828 ARTS.
Tickets are also available at www.houstonballet.org, the Houston Ballet Box Office at Wortham Theater Center and all Ticketmaster outlets, Macy's, Fiesta, Warehouse Music and select FYE, H-E-B and Ritmo Latino stores.

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