

**‘Tis the Season:
Triangle Youth
Ballet performs *The
Nutcracker* in Durham
December 11–13.**

By Jennifer Yourkavitch

Since 1995, Triangle Youth Ballet has staged its iconic production of *The Nutcracker*, missing just two years due to the pandemic. With a live orchestra, dancers will take the stage at the Carolina Theater of Durham for four public performances in mid-December.



Photo from Serena Dudek Sommer.

All dancers are under age 18 with the exception of the Cavalier (lead male dancer) and the parents in the party scene (full disclosure: your correspondent danced in this role). Being in this production requires a considerable time commitment starting as early as August for senior dancers. Part of the magic of this production is the continuity of dancers through different roles as they age. Although the school is based in Chapel Hill, several dancers hail from Carrboro and they wanted to talk about their experiences in this holiday tradition.

Photo from Serena Dudek Sommer.

Rowan Thayer, age 8, is performing for the first time in two roles, a Little Angel and a Ginger Cookie Kid. She is very excited about it, having watched her older sister progress through roles in her dancing career. She is concerned about remembering everything but loves to dance with her friends. She likes being in this show “because I’ve watched it a million times and I want to do it.”

Her sister, Lyra, is now in her fourth production and has the roles of Soldier and Chocolate Drop. She said, "I really like performing in it. The people are really nice." Lyra's friend, Delaney Wang, likes to perform in this ballet and agrees "the people are so nice." She is a mouse and a Mirliton in her third year in the production.

Meena Subramanian – Llamas, in her second year in this production, is a mouse and a Marzipan demi-soloist. “*The Nutcracker* is a very fun production. I like dancing with my friends.” She has always liked the marzipan scene music best and this year she gets to dance in it. She works hard in several classes per week to develop and maintain strength for dancing en pointe.

Jackie (Nikko) Sommer, a senior at Carrboro High School, is the Arabian Dancer, Lead Flower, and Mechanical Soldier for her last year in the production. She can remember wanting to be the Marzipan Princess ever since her first year performing; her dream came true last year and is a favorite memory among her performances. She was the “naughty Ginger” her first year and that was “the most fun.” Jackie’s advice for younger dancers is “stretch and do the conditioning [exercises].”

Jackie's mother, Serena Dudek Sommer, is a parent dancing in the party scene. Dr. Dudek Sommer, who also takes adult ballet classes with Triangle Youth Ballet, is dancing in this production for the fourth time. She has also assisted with sewing and "costume engineering" for several years. She returns each

year because “it’s fun! This is something I can do—get dressed up, put on makeup, and have fun at a party.” And being on stage with her daughter is “extra fun.” She remarked, “*The Nutcracker* is special for a lot of people,” and believes this production is different because it “draws the community in.”

Kate Currin, Associate Director at Triangle Youth Ballet, agrees that the connections with local organizations make it unique. This is her 18th year with this production, which includes a live orchestra with local musicians who convene annually especially for these performances. A boys' choir complements the music in the "snow" scene. And there is always a performance for people with special needs. She also commented on another distinctive part of this production, "the institutional knowledge [among the dancers] that exists independently of the instructors." Many of the dancers learn choreography for different roles by watching other dancers over the years.

You can purchase tickets here for these performances at The Carolina Theater in Durham December 11, 12, and 13 at 7pm with a matinee December 13 at 2pm.



Naughty Ginger; Photo by Melissa Edwards

