

'Children's Nutcracker' now holiday tradition

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The room was filled with a collection of holiday revelers, dancing dolls, a herd of unicorns, some bon-bons, soldiers and horsemen, rats, sheep, snowflakes, flowers and other amazing creatures.

And, of course, there was a "nutcracker."

For without this key element, the upcoming holiday classic at Henderson Fine Arts Center would hardly be complete.

And while it may have seemed like mass confusion for anyone walking in off the street, artistic director Deena Laska had the rehearsal well under control as the Children's Center for Dance Education worked on a recent Saturday afternoon to put the finishing touches on their performance, which will take place at 3 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 7, at Henderson Fine Arts Center.

It's no small task for a cast of nearly 100 dancers (plus parents) crammed into the center's studio on Hoffman Drive. But they manage quite well, with props and set pieces to boot.

"It's a lot different when we get on the Fine Arts Center stage," said Henderson dancer Sarah Stone, who is a veteran performer with the dance group. She's a junior who first danced in the holiday show as a fifth-grader.

"I just love it," Stone said. "I never get tired of it. Each year there are different dances and different costumes."

Laska said this year's edition of "The Children's Nutcracker," which is actually a condensed version of the Tchaikovsky ballet, is one of the best yet precisely because so many of her cast members have performed it in previous years.

She's also noticing that because of the climate in the world today, people are paying special attention to starting and maintaining holiday traditions closer to home. "And we've got a remarkable amount of talent right here," she said.

Her dance center is versatile, she said, with young dancers from Boonville, Evansville, Newburgh, New Harmony and Princeton, Ind., Madisonville and Illinois communities in addition to Henderson, she said. The group, in addition to the kick-off Henderson Fine Arts Center performance on Saturday, will be performing "The Children's Nutcracker" in New Harmony the following day and three subsequent shows at Mater Dei High School in Evansville.

This year the group will be accompanied by musicians of The Evansville Philharmonic.

Tickets, on sale at Henderson Fine Arts Center box office (270 830-5324) are \$7. They can also be purchased by calling the Children's Center for Dance Education at (800) 411-9990.

In addition to Laska, key production personnel include Missy Patton, stage manager; Connie Grossman, stage assistant; Dina Winstead, props manager; costumers Elana Stone, Ana Fonseca, Bridge Cavender and Rose Corning; Joh DeVries, technical production manager; and Debbie Smith, marketing and publicity.

The cast of "The Children's Nutcracker":

Clara: Katelin Schoenbaechler; Fritz: Gregory Kell; Herr and Frau Stahlbaum: Jeremy and Kelly Shelton; Grandmother: Heather Gill; Drosselmeyer: Holt Walborn; Drosselmeyer's Apprentice: Jon Hill; Maids: Mackenzie Patton, Scottie Ellis;

Dancing Dolls: Kelsey Cavender (Spanish), Jessica Bailey (Arabian) and Kiersten Record (Chinese); Parents: Ursula Wheeler and John Cartwright; Party Girls: Lauren Grossman, Anna Corning, Shannon King, Molly Patton, Ashley Melloy, Kaitlyn Cavender; Party Boys: Dylan Winstead, Heath Gill, Noah Katz, Noah Gilliam, Alejandro Fonseca;

Prince: John Cartwright; Soldiers: Elaine Hackworth, China Phelps, Kennedy Phelps, Bailey Collins, Megan Weinzapfel, Marlana Embry, Caitlin Moore, Michelle Schmitt, Amy Deig; Horsemen: Avery Hartley, Noah Katz, Noah Gilliam; Mouse King: Heather Gill; Rats: Alyssa Kress, Christie Kelley, Scottie Ellis, Abby Rich, Mackenzie Patton, Jessica Peters, Lydia Thornton.

Snow Queen: Johnna Jones (Henderson), Ursula Wheeler (New Harmony); Snow King: Holt Walborn; Snowflakes: Melissa Corning, Erin Washington, Danielle Stucki, Lindsey Inman, Sarah Stone, Lesley Galloway, Jessica Peters, Abby Rich, Alyssa Kress; Unicorns: Lindsey Deig, Samantha Winstead, Sarah Bowlin, Paige Richards, Tate Fritchley, Amanda Royer, Carice Nia Rodney, Abigail Meadow, Danna Riley;

Angels: Hannah Brown, Megan Rutledge, Liselotte Doggen, Elizabeth Brandenburg, Sally Stroud, Lexi Skelton, Leah Hill, Alexandria Julian, Megan Clevidence, Emily Davis, Brenna Jewell, Anna Leigh McVicar, Lacy Kuhs, Audrey Brand, Mary Beth Gibbs, Lauren Gibbs, Elizabeth Rodriguez, Shelby Riley, Parker Sturgell, Corrissa Guthrie, Valeria Shilova, Alyssa Scherzinger, Hannah Williams, Brooke Sturgell, Claire Mumford, Sarah Tenbarge;

Little Angels: Mackenzie Polley, Courtney Record, Sydney Feldhake, Madison Feldhake; Sugar Plum Fairy: Melissa Corning; Flower Buds: Lesley Galloway, Lindsey Inman, Mackenzie Patton, Abby Rich, Alyssa Kress, Lydia Thornton, Heather Gill, Jessica Peters;

Bon Bons: Myranda Moye, Emily Rodgers, Victoria Welch, Hannah Venderly, Danielle Tessier, Mikayla Gilbert, Haley Gawarecki, Jaddyn Olivas, Michelle Blanchette, Savannah Brown, Wendy Bradford, Kelsie Beard, Valerie Mehringer; Spanish: John Cartwright, Erin Washington, Danielle Stucki; Arabian Prince: Alejandro Fonseca; Arabian Corps: Lydia Thornton, Heather Gill, Abby Rich, Scottie Ellis, Ursula Wheeler;

Russian Soloist: Holt Walborn (Henderson), Heath Gill (New Harmony); Chinese: Mackenzie Patton, Lindsay Inman, Sarah Stone, Lesley Galloway; Bo Peep: Ursula Wheeler (Henderson), Jessica Peters (New Harmony); Boy Blue: Holt Walborn (Henderson), Jon Hill (New Harmony); Sheep: Amanda Marlin, Alexandra Perry, Brianna Hengen;

Mother Ginger: Mary Gilliam, Noah Gilliam, Stephanie King, Alejandro Fonseca, Lauren Grossman, Dylan Winstead, Kristen Uhr, Gregory Kell; Dew Drop Fairy: Melissa Corning; and Flowers: Lesley Galloway, Lindsey Inman, Erin Washington, Danielle Stucki, Sarah Stone, Ursula Wheeler, Heather Gill, Lydia Thornton, Johnna Jones, Mackenzie Patton, Abby Rich, Jessica Peters, Alyssa Kress.