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Press Contact: Livia Squires
cell:310.273.4340
email:livia@squirespr.com

Westside Ballet of Santa Monica Announces 2015 Performances of *The Nutcracker*

Related community outreach events include abbreviated performances for Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District elementary school students, and a free performance for deserving community organizations



Santa Monica (November 3, 2015) – In its 5th decade of performances, Westside Ballet of Santa Monica, with live music by Santa Monica College Symphony Orchestra, returns to present its enchanting rendition of the holiday classic, *The Nutcracker*. After selling out its 2013 and 2014 performances, the company announced its 2015 return to the Broad Stage at the Santa Monica Performing Arts Center will include a total of nine presentations scheduled from November 28 – December 6.

A visually stunning production by and for the community it serves, Westside Ballet of Santa Monica's *The Nutcracker* features young dancers from the affiliated Westside School of Ballet, performing alongside acclaimed adult professional guest artists. Endearing children's roles include party children, mice, and soldiers. The 2015 production also welcomes several new young male cast members from Westside School of Ballet's Boys Division.

Martine Harley, Westside Ballet of Santa Monica Artistic Director says, "I am continually impressed by our students' commitment to their ballet training--they are exceptional. They have an unsurpassed sense of teamwork, dedication and support for each other. I have held back tears as I watch our senior dancers work through what will be their last Nutcracker performances with us."

Westside Ballet of Santa Monica's *The Nutcracker* tells the story of Clara, a young girl who receives a Nutcracker for Christmas before being transported to The Kingdom of Sweets where she is entertained by dancing candies and childhood fantasy characters come-to-life.

Based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" and the Marius Petipa classic, Westside's rendition is the complete, traditional ballet, from the Victorian-style party scene to the glittering Sugar Plum Fairy.

Special effects include a growing Christmas tree, a firing cannon, and falling snow. The 2015 Snow Scene features enhanced choreography in the Snow Queen pas de deux and the corps de ballet sequences.

As featured in the Los Angeles Times, the artistic direction captures the spirit of the legendary George Balanchine, passed on by Westside's founder, Yvonne Mounsey, who created the

Nutcracker role of Center Spanish during the peak of her career as principal dancer with New York City Ballet.

Accompanied by Santa Monica College Symphony playing Tchaikovsky's majestic score, Westside Ballet of Santa Monica's *The Nutcracker* provides a perfect opportunity to introduce children to classical music and dance.

2015 Sugar Plum Fairy Artists and Guest Artists

Westside Ballet of Santa Monica is proud to announce the casting of three Sugar Plum Fairy artists for the 2015 season. All of them received their formative training from Westside School of Ballet.

Lucia Connolly trained with Westside Ballet from the age of 4 to 16, and is now studying on a full scholarship at The School of American Ballet in New York, the official training school for the New York City Ballet.

Alternating with Ms. Connolly are current Westside Ballet of Santa Monica company members Molly Novak and Giorgia Martelloni Zabriskie. Molly and Giorgia are both Santa Monica residents attending Santa Monica High School. Molly has attended summer intensives at the School of American Ballet, the San Francisco Ballet School, and Balettakademien in Stockholm, Sweden. Giorgia has attended summer programs with the School of American Ballet, the Miami City Ballet, and the Boston Ballet.

Westside also welcomes back resident guest artists Evan Swenson (formerly with Houston Ballet), Seth Belliston (formerly with Pacific Northwest Ballet) and Johnny Zhong (formerly with Classical Ballet of Guangzhou).

Community Outreach Dress Rehearsal Performance

Since its inception, Westside Ballet of Santa Monica has offered affordable performances and donated thousands of tickets to deserving community organizations.

Following in this tradition, Westside will open its doors to its December 2, 2015 dress rehearsal performance to members of Westside Children's Center, Neighborhood Youth Association, Kids In Sports, Everybody Dance, Venice Family Clinic, Santa Monica Police Activities League, Virginia Avenue Park, and more.

Abbreviated Performance for Elementary School Students

For the third consecutive year, approximately one thousand elementary grade students in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District will be treated to private, abbreviated, presentations of the Nutcracker held on Wednesday, December 2, and Friday, December 4. Children will hear a narrated version of the Nutcracker story and see excerpts from the ballet followed by Q&A with the dancers.

Nutcracker Dancers Receive College Credit for Performing

Under a new education initiative launched in 2013, Westside's dancers who are high school students concurrently enrolled in Santa Monica College dance course 59A will receive credit for the performances. So will Santa Monica College Symphony members who are Santa Monica College students. The credits are transferrable to any of California's public four-year colleges and universities.

Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein, SMC's Associate Director of Public Policy who was instrumental in creating the partnership, says the program will create a pathway to attract students into arts education careers.

"Young people think of dancing in a professional company or performing in an orchestra, but they don't necessarily see the academic opportunities. We're trying to capture their interest early," explains Tahvildaran-Jesswein.

Past Productions

Westside Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* is a Los Angeles tradition dating all the way back to 1973 – the longest running *Nutcracker* production in Los Angeles.

Many professional dancers have made their stage debuts in Westside's *Nutcracker*. A few of them include Monique Meunier (NYCB, ABT), Anna Liceica (ABT), Martine Harley (Houston Ballet), Melissa Barak (NYCB, Los Angeles Ballet, Barak Ballet), Andrew Veyette (NYCB), Stayce Camparo (Kansas City Ballet) and Francis Veyette (Pennsylvania Ballet).

The Nutcracker will be performed with the Santa Monica College Symphony at the Broad Stage at the Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center, 1310 11th St, Santa Monica, CA 90401. Show dates and times: Nov. 28 at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m., Nov. 29 at 11 a.m., Dec. 3 – 4 at 7 p.m., and Dec. 5 - 6 at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. All tickets are \$40. Tickets may be purchased online at www.westsideballet.com, or by phone (additional fees apply) at (800) 595 – 4849 (4TIX).

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About Westside Ballet of Santa Monica - Westside Ballet of Santa Monica, a nonprofit organization, is one of the nation's premier ballet training companies. This pre-professional company was created by Yvonne Mounsey (New York City Ballet) and Rosemary Valaire (Royal Ballet) in 1970.

The company provides the promising young dancers of the Westside School of Ballet the performance opportunities that are so vital to their growth — and makes dance more accessible to local children and families. Based in Santa Monica, California, Westside Ballet of Santa Monica comprises approximately 100 dancers, ages 8 to 18.

For more information, visit www.westsideballet.com