



TUCKA PHOTOGRAPHY

A performer in "Urban Nutcracker" looks as if he might crack his nut dancing.

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REVIEW. If you haven't already done so, put the BalletRox's "Urban Nutcracker" on your "Things I must do this holiday season" list. It's been called "hip," "edgy" and a host of other adjectives of that ilk. But all I could say when the curtain came down was "wow."

At its core, the "Urban Nutcracker" is essentially a superb rendition of the Tchaikovsky classic. But it's urban-centered, current and diversely cast.

Hardly the provincial street setting of most "Nutcrackers," the story's prologue is a hodgepodge of hip-hop, steppers, tap dancers, doo-wop singers and a battle for street cred via dance-off between internationally renowned

flamenco dancer Isaac de los Reyes and tapper extraordinaire Khalid Hill ("Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk").

Even the grand Christmas Eve gala has a different look to it. Yes, there are people of all colors dancing and even, thankfully, little girls of all sizes. But it's the joy with which they dance that distinguishes this production from its contemporaries.

IT'S EASY TO forgive the missteps of a bubbly little girl oozing charm or an adorable little boy who's not quite sure what's going on when the adult dancers deliver such an impressive, impeccable "Nutcracker."

While the snow is falling at the close of Act I, it's clear that the dancers are creating this winter wonderland. As the Snowflakes spin in unison, the Snow

'Urban Nutcracker'

Now to Dec. 17
John Hancock Hall
130 Berkeley St.
Boston
MBTA: Red/Green Line to
Park Street
\$20-\$40
877-548-3337

Prince (Marlon Taylor Wiles) and his Snow Queen (Caitlin Novero) float across the stage in a stunning display of dance that will take your breath away.

Wiles reappears in Act II with Min-Tzu Li in an extraordinary Arabian dance and Novero also enjoys another scene-stealing moment as the Dew Drop Fairy.

MIFA KO IS the quintessence of grace as the Sugar Plum Fairy and together with her Cavalier (Ramon Thiel) they close the show with a stunning pas de deux that rivals any I've ever seen.

Artistic director Anthony Williams nicely intersperses some Duke Ellington swing into the production as well as some playful touches such as hula hoops and contemporarily clad soldiers for the fight scene.

But what Williams has done best is create an ensemble that exudes joy as they float through this great holiday classic. It's such a rare treat to see so many talented people dancing for the sheer love