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BALLET THEATRE OF MARYLAND RETURNS THE MAGIC OF *THE NUTCRACKER* TO MARYLAND HALL

Magic, storytelling, and classical dance meld in this beloved holiday classic, brought to the stage by professional company dancers and local student performers.

ANNAPOLIS, MD (December 1, 2021) – Ballet Theatre of Maryland will present the holiday classic *The Nutcracker*, December 11th-19th. This yearly tradition from Maryland’s premier ballet company takes the stage at Maryland Hall with a live, in-person audience for the first time since 2019. It will feature performances from the company’s 38 professionals alongside 47 student and trainee dancers from BTM’s Conservatory and the local community.

Says Artistic Director Nicole Kelsch, “Last season, we were proud to present this holiday tradition in any way that local restrictions allowed. This year, we are thrilled to perform the full production in a traditional setting with all of our vibrant sets and costumes. We look forward to sharing this festive classic with our audiences once more.”

BTM’s *Nutcracker*, which features choreography by former director Dianna Cuatto, retells Clara’s timeless adventure to rescue her beloved Nutcracker from the Rat Queen’s evil spell. As audiences travel with her through the whirling Kingdoms of Snow and Sweets, they will note the many young students who share the stage with the professional company.

Emily Carey, a principal dancer with the company as well as the student cast’s rehearsal mistress, says, “Dancing and working with children are my two biggest passions in life, so getting to combine them during The Nutcracker Season is a wonderful treat. The children in our cast are all such intelligent and talented dancers. Every rehearsal, I witness the excitement in their eyes as they experience the magic and wonder of this production and it is truly the most special part of my job!”

To share this sense of wonder with *The Nutcracker*’s youngest audience members, BTM will offer a holiday meet-and-greet with costumed characters an hour before all performances. Onstage and off, audience members will experience the power and beauty of the story anew as the mysterious Drosselmeier transports them back in time through the language of dance and theater.

Take in Ballet Theatre of Maryland's performances of *The Nutcracker* December 11th – 19th, Saturdays at 7pm and Sundays at 1pm and 4:30pm. Per Maryland Hall's regulations, audience members will be required to wear a mask. In-person and streaming tickets are on sale now at \$47 for adults, and \$28 for seniors, children, and students. A military discount is also available. Many shows are filling up quickly, so audiences should book soon. To purchase tickets or learn more, visit www.balletmaryland.org.

Ballet Theatre of Maryland, founded in 1978, is designated as Maryland's premier professional ballet company and conservatory and has a long history performing at venues throughout the state. The company is comprised of 23 professional dancers, 15 apprentices, and 17 trainees. Professional faculty members of the Conservatory of Dance are current in their field, most with degrees or certifications in dance education. The conservatory offers a full curriculum of classes in ballet, jazz, modern, tap, partnering, and conditioning while providing students with professional performance opportunities. For more information about BTM, please visit www.balletmaryland.org or call (410) 224-5654.

Nicole Kelsch received her early training from Peter and Kristin Degnan at Ballet Northeast in Pennsylvania. She also received training from Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, Milwaukee Ballet, Ballet Austin, Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts, and Princeton Ballet. Nicole graduated from Point Park University in Pittsburgh, receiving her Bachelor of Arts in Ballet Performance in three years. Upon graduation, she danced professionally with Columbia City Ballet, Atlanta Festival Ballet, and Connecticut Ballet.

In 2006, Nicole joined The Ballet Theatre of Maryland as an apprentice under the direction of Dianna Cuatto. She was promoted to Principal Dancer in 2008 and throughout her career was featured as Clara and The Snow Queen in *The Nutcracker*, Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*, the Firebird in *The Firebird*, Swanhilda in *Coppelia*, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, as a Principal in Antony Tudor's *Continuo*, the Principal Couple in *Italian Symphonette*, Titania and Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Magdalena in *An American Southwest Carmen*, Cinderella in *Cinderella*, Guinevere in *Excalibur*, Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*, Pearl in *The Little Mermaid*, and has performed the *Don Quixote Pas de Deux*.

In 2008, after having served on the faculty for two years, Nicole became the School Principal for The Ballet Theatre of Maryland Conservatory. She was named the Ballet Mistress for the company in 2015. Nicole retired from performing in March 2020 and became the Artistic Director in July 2020. She successfully led the company through a full 2020-2021 performing season at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, staging performances of Edward Stewart's *Dracula*, Dianna Cuatto's *The Nutcracker*, *An American Southwest Carmen*, and *The Little Mermaid*.

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