

A NUTCRACKER

Created by Katie Rose McLaughlin, Joshua William Gelb and Ian Axness
From a Story by Dan O'Neil / Music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky



“The immersive space at the Knockdown Center was presented to the audience much like a present on Christmas morning, with the eager viewers kept in the audience until the grand unveiling. Once within the space, more careful surprises were in store.” *Culturebot*





The Nutcracker is the only ballet

that tracks the life of a dancer from their first ballet class to their final bow - Nutcracker has a role for everyone. But the Nutcracker doesn't just track the life of a dancer; the ballet itself, like any annually recurring holiday performance, becomes something of a time-stamp for its audience - marking the passing of time and the otherwise imperceptible and stubbornly gradual process by which we grow older.

Our Nutcracker boils down the cast of what is usually 60+ into a 6 person, multi-generational performance that tracks the life of a woman and dancer named Clara. We selected four moments within Clara's life to portray simultaneously upon four different stages: Clara's childhood, young adulthood, middle, and old age. Set to a new arrangement of Tchaikovsky's beloved score, live musicians accompanied this playful yet poignant exploration of coming-of-age-stories bookended by tragic death, of leaving things unsaid, and of loved ones left behind.

Traversing synchronously a single lifetime, A Nutcracker reinvents a classic narrative for a contemporary audience of all ages, inviting them to wander freely and explore a dreamlike world in which the breadth of life's manifold emotions and experiences harmoniously coexist.



A Nutcracker was originally presented

at the Knockdown Center in a workshop production featuring world-class dancers ages 7 to 80 years old. The audience entered the cavernous, nearly pitch-black Annex of the Knockdown Center, enveloped by dense haze and the haunting sound of Tchaikovsky's overture crackling on a small record player. This eerie dreamscape was crowned by the presence of an elderly woman (played by Merce Cunningham legend Valda Setterfield) asleep in a dilapidated nursing home apartment, her television still playing a classic rendition of the Nutcracker Ballet. From this crumbling image emerge visages of Clara's past; a 7 year old Clara just learning to dance; a 27 year old about to walk away from a professional career; a 57 year old whose troubled marriage intensifies her mounting fear of the future and regret for the past.

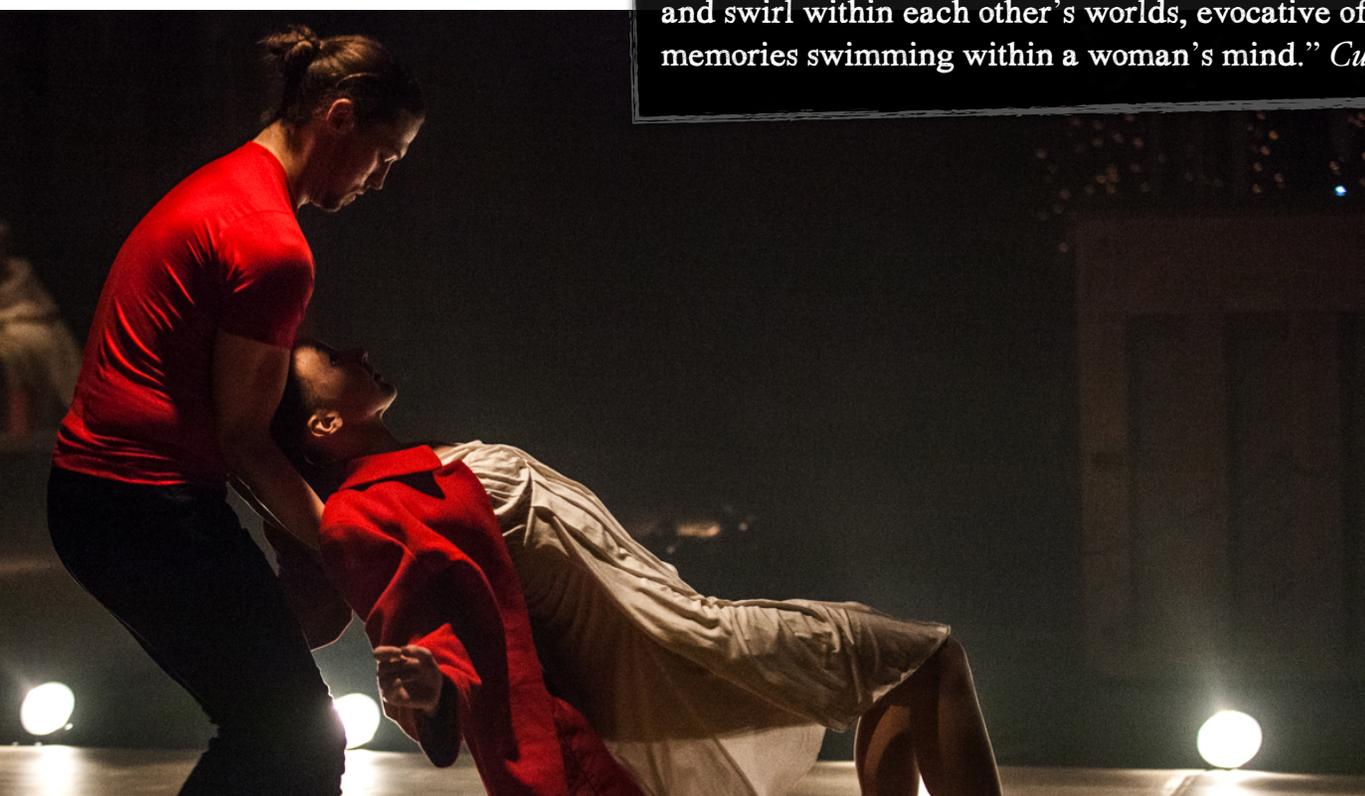
As these danced vignettes drove the audience across and around the enormous warehouse, the whole of Clara's history unfolded, accompanied by large banquet tables upon which vestiges of Clara's life overflowed: partially eaten Christmas cookies, an abandoned birthday cake, old pointe shoes and a dog collar from a pet dog that once ran away. The audience was invited to explore these tables, and upon close inspection, discover text fragments describing other key moments within Clara's life.

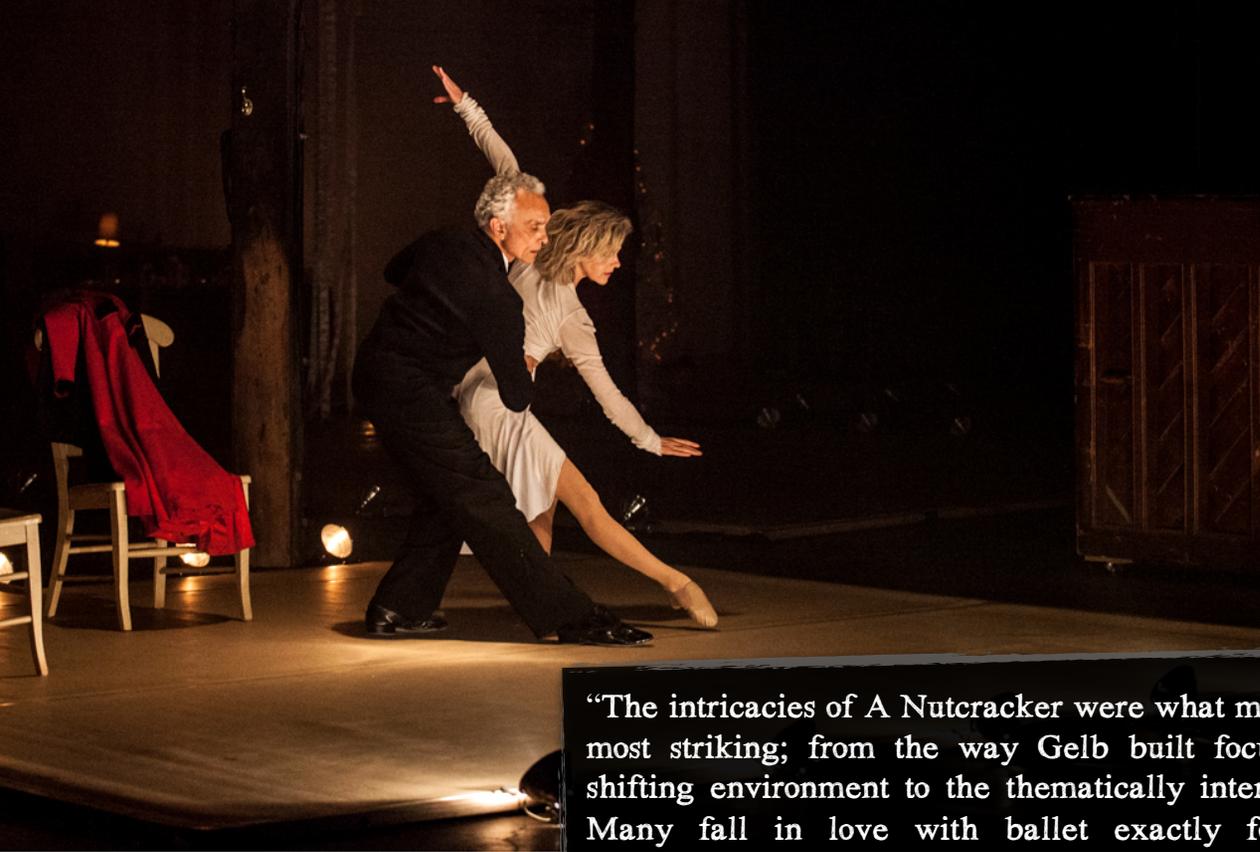
The performance escalated as our characters began to drift from stage to stage revisiting moments from the past or briefly inhabiting a future they could not quite comprehend. In one particular instance, 57-year old Clara's husband finds himself visiting 27 year-old Clara, recalling her as she was the day they first met. Recollections intersected and collided. Nightmares of rats crept around the periphery. Until ultimately our Part One culminated in a striking sequence for the four Clara's, suspended in time and driven together by memory.

Following the overwhelming success of our workshop in December 2014, we have started to develop the second half and are looking for partners to help us annually mount a full production for subsequent holiday seasons.



“This multigenerational company dance solo fragments and swirl within each other’s worlds, evocative of the hazy memories swimming within a woman’s mind.” *Culturebot*





“The intricacies of A Nutcracker were what made the production most striking; from the way Gelb built focus in a constantly shifting environment to the thematically intertwined costuming. Many fall in love with ballet exactly for it’s extremely presentational grandeur, so the detailing of this production felt both familiar and somewhat subversive.” *Culturebot*



A Nutcracker: Part I (The Workshop)

was created by choreographer Katie Rose McLaughlin, director Joshua William Gelb, and music director Ian Axness from a story by Dan O'Neil. It was presented in a fully staged workshop performance December 12-14, 2014 at the Knockdown Center as a collaboration between JV Squad and Designated Movement Company in association with Sprung Floor Solutions. A Nutcracker: Part I (The Workshop) was designed by Sara C. Walsh (sets), Josh Smith (lights), Diego Montoya (costumes) and Gavin Price (sound) featuring performances by Gary Chryst, Kaitlyn Gilliland, Pierre Guilbault, Lisa Lockwood, Valda Setterfield and introducing Louisa Blakely with musical performances by Ian Axness and Sara Kommer. All photos by Maria Baranova.



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