

TNT

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DECEMBER 6 - DECEMBER 12, 2018

A Joyous Tradition

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
liven's up the holidays
with 'The Nutcracker'

3 EDITOR'S PICK

We're slipping on ice – and climate change

4 HAPPENINGS

Celebrating the man who would be skiing

5 MUSIC BEAT

These girls are TNT, they're dynamite

7 WINE 'N' DINE

My Bonnie's lies over the open, for now

SO

AAM's Roof Deck Café
View the weekly menu at
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Aspen Art Museum
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Dancing With Diversity

The clock struck midnight and magic filled the air. Suddenly Clara was surrounded by soldiers!

The Rat King and his army were about to steal her away!

Nutcracker! She needed help!

With a flourish of his black cape, Uncle Drosselmeyer transformed the Nutcracker doll into a real life soldier!

at King

terrible feat

beg

Genuine performances help ASFB's 'Nutcracker' stand out

Evan Supple (right) as the Rat King in ASFB's production of 'The Nutcracker.'

BY TODD HARTLEY, TIME OUT WRITER
PHOTOS BY SHAREN BRADFORD, ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

Of the many roles in "The Nutcracker," which Aspen Santa Fe Ballet brings back to the Aspen District Theatre this Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 8-9, outside of Clara (the story's heroine) and the Nutcracker himself, there are few characters as memorable as the one portrayed by ASFB company member Evan Supple. Unfortunately, as high an honor as it may be to personify the role, it doesn't sound so great when spoken aloud.

"I get to be the Rat King," Supple said, proudly.

It will be the second year in a row portraying the villain of the ballet's opening act for Supple, who is in his third year with ASFB at the tender age of 24. This time around, he'll also be adding the sizable role of the Cavalier, who dances with the Sugar Plum Fairy in the second act.

They're two of the great characters, along with a cast of local kids and other amateurs, that audiences here and

in Santa Fe have come to expect each holiday season from ASFB's consistently impressive annual production, which deserves credit for standing out from a crowded field.

It's not uncommon in the U.S. to claim "The Nutcracker" as a holiday tradition. It's performed in countless towns across the country and reportedly generates as much as 40 percent of the yearly revenues of some ballet companies, but what makes "The Nutcracker" in Aspen so memorable, according to Supple, is that it's not just about the ballet dancing; it's also about the other dances envisioned by choreographers Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, along with composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, when they conceived the work back in 1892.

"It's cool, in the second act, that much of the ethnic dances - if you will - are authentic," said Supple. "We have a real flamenco dancer doing a Spanish dance. We have two Russian folk dancers. We

have a silk dancer that does the Arabian part. You're not going to watch imitations. It's a genuinely diverse evening. You're not just watching ballet, which is uncommon for the 'Nutcracker' tradition in the U.S."

That diversity, it should be noted, extends beyond the dances and the imported talent to the ASFB dancers themselves, who belie ballet's reputation as a strictly Caucasian, elitist pursuit. People of color make up half of the company, and they come from all regions of the U.S. and different socio-economic backgrounds.

Supple is the lone foreigner, hailing from Ontario, Canada, although he did spend his university years in New York at Marymount Manhattan College. It was there, the summer before his senior year, that he auditioned for ASFB directors Jean-Philippe Malaty and Tom Mossbrucker, who had a position waiting for Supple when he got out of school.



Jenelle Figgins

"I always admired the company throughout college," said Supple. "I got my dream job before I even graduated."

It's a dream job in a dream location (though they spend time in Santa Fe, the dancers live here in Aspen), and for Supple and the rest of the company it's a chance to toe-step into a great holiday tradition that brings professional dancers and community members together like no other. That interplay between pros and amateurs, said Supple, is a big part of why "The Nutcracker" continues to be so beloved here and elsewhere.

"I think it's imperative for kids to have this opportunity," he said. "I did 'The Nutcracker' several times when I was 8, 9, 10 years old, and that experience being on stage with professionals at that young age was really integral to my figuring out that this is what I want to do."

And now, here he is, 14 years later, dancing with one of the country's premier ballet companies in a wonderful version of "The Nutcracker," and he gets to be the Rat King.

And he should be damned proud of it.

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Sadie Brown

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET
presents

NUTCRACKER



at THE ASPEN DISTRICT THEATRE

DECEMBER

8 at 2 PM | 9 at 1 PM
and 7:30 PM | and 5 PM

tickets: ASPENSANTAFEBALLET.COM

