

2 Citrus Dance students in cast of Guelph Nutcracker



By Victoria Botelho

Canada's Ballet Jorgen's interpretation of the Nutcracker was created by choreographer and artistic director Bengt Jorgen. With well over 100 costumes in vibrant coloured fabrics and 20th century landscapes for backdrops inspired by Franklin Carmichael's Church and Houses at Bisset (1931), Tom Thompson's Snow in the Woods (1916), and L.L FitzGerald's Trees and Wildflowers (1922), having the opportunity to be a part of the cast for at least one of the shows is a huge accomplishment, especially for the two young dancers from Orangeville who have made it to this year's performance in December.

At 11 years of age, Erin Stuckey from Citrus Dance Inc. in Orangeville will be dancing her second year at this year's Ballet Jorgen show as a chipmunk. She will be featured in the second show on December 23rd at the River Run Centre in Guelph.

Ms. Stuckey has been involved in the art of dance since she was 2 1/2 years old. Although she enjoys ballet, she does all styles of dance such as jazz and vocal. She plans to continue with ballet and hopes to increase her talents the older she gets.

And 12-year-old Marissa Manzerolle, also from Citrus Dance Inc., will be dancing her very first year at the Jorgen as a squirrel. She will be showcasing her talents on the stage at one of the Guelph shows.

Ms. Manzerolle has been dancing ballet since she was three years old, but only came to the Citrus studio about a year later. Although ballet is her favourite form of dance, she does all the styles that are offered at Citrus. She says she hopes to continue with ballet for many years and improve on her techniques as well as "keeping her shoulders down."

With the countless competitions that the two girls have competed in throughout the course of this year, the stage is nothing new to Erin and Marissa. This being her second year, Ms. Stuckey will be performing as one out of four chipmunks in her cast and Ms. Manzerolle will be performing as one of the squirrels for her first year ever in the ballet.

"It [is] harder than a bear cub," Erin admits when comparing her role as chipmunk in this year's Nutcracker to her previous year, "but it's also fun and it's tiring."

Although she is incredibly happy about dancing in the Nutcracker for a second year, with a large part comes a large responsibility.

Ms. Stuckey is preparing for the ballet by working twice as hard during rehearsals than she did last year to be more than ready for this year's performance.

"I'm really happy that I got a chance to be in it," Ms. Manzerolle expressed when asked how she feels about being given the opportunity to be in the Nutcracker performance this year, "I auditioned wanting the part of the squirrel and I [am] really happy that I got it. It means that I get a chance to show what I can do and another chance to be on stage because I love performing."

With how big the show is, it is only reasonable that the dancers have longer and more intense practices in order to prepare for their performance.

"Every Sunday [but] we get some Sundays off and we [dance] for about an hour," Ms. Stuckey said when asked about practices for this special performance.

"Every Sunday, I have practice in Guelph for the ballet," Ms. Manzerolle explained in regards to her practice schedule. In order to prepare for the ballet, both dancers have to give their all, even at practices.

For a couple of ballerinas as young as Erin and Marissa, it's inevitable to have some nerves and anxieties towards a ballet as big as the Nutcracker, but both girls are beyond confident in themselves and are excited for their performances.

"I [am] nervous for my show, but I know my family is going to be there so I'm going to be okay," Ms. Manzerolle admits.

Even though she is nervous for the show, seeing as this is her first year at Canada's Ballet Jorgen (CBJ), she is slowly but surely getting ready to take on the familiar stage and is working extremely hard to make her first year at CBJ memorable, for her, her family and for the audience.

For the dancers that make it to the Ballet Jorgen, it's a huge accomplishment. The dancers must audition in front of judges with given and unfamiliar choreography while hoping they don't get eliminated.

The auditions "were pretty easy," Marissa said. "I worked really hard though because I really wanted to show them what I could do," she added in regards to how the auditions went in her perspective.

Until the dancers are chosen, new choreography is introduced and talents are tested. After auditions are over, the dancers can take a breather and embrace the fact that they have been chosen out of many and will be dancing in Canada's Ballet Jorgen along with select others from cities throughout Ontario and the professional dancers who are a part of the travelling cast that is at every show.

With the Canadian spin on this old tale and the flawless and precise movements of each and every dancer on the River Run Centre stage, the Ballet Jorgen's Nutcracker is one show you wouldn't want to miss out on, especially with two of Orangeville's very own dancers, Ms. Stuckey as a chipmunk and Ms. Manzerolle as a squirrel.

The Guelph performances are both next week, Tuesday, Dec. 23 and Wednesday, Dec. 23.

The city-owned River Run Centre is at 35 Woolwich Street. For tickets call the box office at 519-763-3000. For information, email info@riverrun.ca.