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## DANCE REVIEW

### A company is born

#### Los Angeles Ballet starts ambitiously with an original 'Nutcracker.' Although the show could use some smoothing, the troupe proves worthy.

By Lewis Segal  
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It's no great tragedy that the Los Angeles Ballet "Nutcracker" isn't yet as stylish or even coherent as the best versions of the Christmas classic in Southern California. Every staging evolves from year to year, and there's plenty of promise in the hyperactive homegrown production by company artistic directors Thordal Christensen and Colleen Neary.

Right now, it's the brand new company that's important — a fledgling consortium of young artists who will soon be seen in works by master choreographers and who looked ready for the challenge Saturday evening at the Wilshire Theatre in Beverly Hills.

Guest artists Paloma Herrera and Benjamin Millepied brought star power and finesse to the occasion, but their scheduled replacements later in the run — company members Corina Gill and Oleg Gorboulev — danced the Arabian duet with so much authority that anyone could see they're stars in the making. Local stars, our stars: compelling motivation for balletomanes who say they want a major Southland classical ensemble to start supporting this one.

The ensemble also boasts everything from a daring firebrand named Sergey Kheylik who keeps attempting fearsome state-of-the-art bravura (and sometimes succeeds) to an artful character specialist named Adam Lüders who decades ago helped inspire George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins to create unusual dramatic masterworks.

As Clara, the technically accomplished Elise Miller needs to relax — this is a young girl's Christmas dream, remember, not an audition. But Jonathan Sharp manages to dominate the manic party scene as a distinctively young, flamboyant Drosselmeyer.

Here and in their formal dances, Christensen and Neary have plenty of good ideas — but they often set them against one another until the result becomes overloaded and counterproductive. For example, Clara's aggressive solos don't fit comfortably into the lyric "Waltz of the Flowers" corps patterns even as punctuation, and there are times when the major dancers get lost because of all the subsidiary cast members in the way.

Only the moment when the mice comically mourn their fallen monarch gives the audience a large-scale staging effect with no distractions — and it stops the show.

The production offers opulent 1912-era costumes originally designed by Mikael Melbye for the Royal Danish Ballet and new sets by Catherine Kanner more interesting for their color schemes (Chinese red in the Christmas party, for instance) than their unvarying flatness.

In the pit, Eimear Noone leads a small but skillful orchestra, augmented electronically on occasion, as in the children's Snow vocalise.

If the Christensen-Neary "Nutcracker" represents a work in progress, repeat performances late this month in Redondo Beach and Glendale just might correct the problems omnipresent on Saturday. Launching a company with an original full-evening work is doubly heroic — and doing it in the battle-scarred L.A. dance landscape merits everyone's patience and encouragement.

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