

The Nutcracker, Festival Theatre

✘ *The Nutcracker* is the lightest, most accessible of all Tchaikovsky's ballets. It's a Christmas delight, telling the story of a young girl named Clara who is gifted a nutcracker by the mysterious Drosselmeyer. The nutcracker comes to life as the Nutcracker Prince and helps Clara defeat the evil Rat King; the pair then travel to the magical land of sweets and see all manner of beautiful things. None of this is particularly serious but using the choreography of **Peter Darrell**, Scottish Ballet presents us with a curiously serious interpretation of this quintessential show.

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The orchestra, under the baton of Richard Honner, is excellent. If there's one instrument to choose when playing Tchaikovsky, it's the cello, and the section most certainly delivers, never less so than in the *grand pas de deux* between **Sophie Martin's** Sugar Plum Fairy and **Erik Cavallari's** Nutcracker Prince.

Cavallari is a strong dancer but seems at times a little detached from the whole affair, even aloof. The Nutcracker is still a children's toy, a playmate as well as a prince, and here lies my main problem with this production: it's excellent classical ballet but it lacks chemistry or wit. Where is the profundity of Kirkland and Baryshnikov? Where is the humour of Matthew Bourne?

It would perhaps be inappropriate to suggest that a production which so heavily features child dancers should be sexy, but this production is safe bordering on bland. The humour is somewhat forced and the addition of the monkeys is funny for the first five minutes, but becomes uncomfortable as they jape

and gawk from the wings during the more serious duets and trios – the audience becomes unsure of whether they are allowed to laugh and its attention is distracted.



The children of the cast are one of the strengths of this production. The discipline and talent, particularly of the children dancing in huge rat costumes, are fantastic. Credit here must go to the costume department who turn out dress after dress of astounding quality. **Lez Brotherston** has created a production of beauty and finesse. The staggered proscenium arch gives the sets a flexibility and depth that works very well.

The costume of the Rat King is stellar, as is the Rat King himself (**Victor Zarallo**), enthralling the audience for the brief time he appears on stage. **Thomas Edward**'s turn as the English dancer is one of the most charismatic on stage, and **Constance Devernay** and **Laura Joffre** are wonderfully fizzy and light as the Chinese dancers.



This is a production that does not know what it wants to be. It's not pushing any boundaries but it's technically excellent and very pleasing to the eye. The strength and dedication of the dancers are unquestionable. I just wish The Nutcracker Prince would smile a bit more.

On a final note, if you do visit this production, be sure to purchase a copy of the outstanding souvenir programme.

The Nutcracker runs from Sat 13 December 2014 to Sat 3 January

2015 at the Festival Theatre before touring to Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness and Newcastle.