

Nutcracker ballet showcases talents

BY VALERIE SPENCER
Staff Reporter

A magical world in the Land of Sweets soon will come to life.

The Minnesota Ballet will perform the world-renowned Nutcracker Ballet at Truman on Dec. 4 as part of the Kohlenberg Lyceum Series. Not only do students and community members have a chance to see the famous ballet, but 56 individuals from across Missouri, several of whom are Truman students, are performing as well.

Melody Jennings, instructor in health and exercise sciences, is helping to coordinate rehearsal times for all the local members involved. Jennings said that although it is a large endeavor to work with students ranging from 8 years old to college-aged, she is happy to help bring the Nutcracker to Kirksville.

"It seems like everybody's idea of a Christmas is to see a Nutcracker," Jennings said. "And so we're lucky that we're able to provide that for our students."

Jennings said the Minnesota

Ballet came to Kirksville in September and conducted open auditions, and everyone who auditioned received a part.

"We've got some girls coming over from Macon," Jennings said. "We've got girls from Unionville, from Edina, so we've got quite a smattering of people beside from just the college students."

Several of the college students in the production get to dance with members of the professional company, Jennings said.

"It's very exciting for them to test themselves and push themselves," she said.

Rehearsals began in early October, and members of all the dances got together at least once a week since then to practice. Jennings said it took a lot of work, but she thinks everyone will be ready in time for the show.

"It's quite an undertaking," she said. "I was very overwhelmed, but the kids have been really good. They come as often as they can. ... They've been working really hard, and the last rehearsal I was at, I was

very pleased."

Jennings said every family involved in the performance will have two tickets held for them so parents can see their children. With the already-limited seating in Baldwin Auditorium, Jennings said she expects tickets to go fast.

"[The show] will be totally sold out, I'm just sure," she said.

Jennings said that once the dancing combines with the technical aspects of theatre, she thinks it will be a stunning performance.

"It is going to be very extravagant," she said. "They have ... beautiful costuming, beautiful painted drops to portray all the different scenes. It's going to be amazing."

Junior Samantha Putthoff is one Truman student working to make the Nutcracker a memorable experience. Putthoff said she plays both a party girl and a Russian dancer during the show and that she is eager to work with the Minnesota Ballet.

"Getting more professional companies on campus ... makes everybody step up," she said.

The 56 local individuals involved have been practicing very hard to get their choreography down, but they only get to rehearse with the Minnesota Ballet once before the one-night show, Putthoff said.

"I wish we got to do more than one performance," she said. "We've been rehearsing all semester, and it's just for one performance. We just get that day to rehearse with the company, and then do one performance, and then we're done."

But Putthoff said she is making the most of her experience and has enjoyed getting to dance frequently and perfect her technique.

"With this, you really have to know what you're doing, and you have to be technically correct and be able to perform it on top of that," she said. "So it's nice to be able to get back to that type of dancing, which there's not usually a venue for at Truman."

Graduate student Jenny Lamb also is involved with the Nutcracker. Lamb said she started taking dance lessons when she was 10 and now teaches lessons at the Student Recreation Center. However, she has had trouble getting used to dancing en pointe



Phil Jarrett/Index
Melody Jennings, instructor of health and exercise sciences, rehearses with Truman students and local children in the Party Scene of the Nutcracker in the Pershing studio.

again, which she must do in her role as a Spanish maiden.

"I haven't been en pointe for six years, so it's been a lot of working getting back into it," she said. "But it's been a lot of fun, and a good workout at least."

Lamb said she has worked with professional ballet companies before and that all of her experiences have been enjoyable.

"I always wanted to be a professional dancer when I was little, so it is kind of exciting to get to interact with [the professional dancers] and to see the people who have made this their profession," she said. "... And they're really nice people. They love sharing all of their experiences and talking to you about yours. It's kind of a community almost."

Lamb said that working with a professional company, especially in such a well-known

ballet as the Nutcracker, can be intimidating but that she tries to use the butterflies she gets before a performance to her advantage.

"I've heard that when you've lost your nerve, you've lost your passion," she said. "Typically when I walk out on stage, I kind of go into just muscle memory, like an automatic impulse of what I've learned. Sometimes I don't even necessarily remember doing it because I'm just so in a zone."

But Lamb said she realizes she's just part of the whole, and she's really working to put on a great show for the audience.

"This is really a community event, not just for Truman," she said. "It's for everyone in Kirksville."

Winston Vanderhoof, senior graphic designer for publications and co-chair of the Kohlenberg

Lyceum Series committee, said he worries about seating for the popular event.

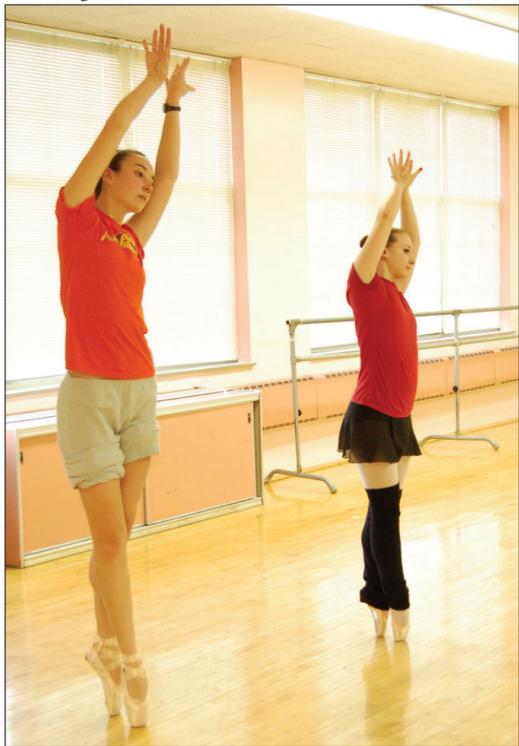
"We've had people already stopping by the SAB office already asking for [tickets], and they're not even slated to be available until Nov. 27," he said.

The Lyceum committee met earlier this year to decide what shows to bring to campus, Vanderhoof said. The Lyceum committee tries periodically to bring the Nutcracker to campus, and this year it was able to do so, he said.

"It just so happened that the Minnesota Ballet's and our time schedules just worked hand in hand," he said. "It was a good opportunity to bring in a classic ballet. And we haven't had a ballet here in a while, so we wanted to bring something we hadn't seen in a while to Truman."

Vanderhoof said the Lyceum series is meant to bring performances to Kirksville that people in the area might not ever have the opportunity to see otherwise and that he thinks the Nutcracker was a good choice.

"You've got a classic ballet and a classic story, and I expect a great performance," he said.



Valerie Spencer/Index
Graduate student Jenny Lamb and freshman Lauren Ayers rehearse for the Spanish dance in Act II of the ballet.

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