STAGE REVIEW

Tutus, high-top sneakers make for good mix

By Jon W. Sparks
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In its 10th year, the New Ballet Ensemble and School's "Nut Remix" remains a vital collaboration that winningly blends styles and textures. The traditional approach to "Nutcracker" gets its due — there are luminous dancing snowflakes making their customary moves — but the "Remix" of Tchaikovsky's masterpiece is a savvy treatment that opens the door to invention.

So while there are tutus and pointe shoes, there are also high-top sneakers and camo pants. You'll see plisés and pirouettes followed by breakdance and jookin' moves. It's a mingling that, through smart choreography and deft performance, is fresh and energetic.

The "Nutcracker" story is a guideline: The story begins on Beale Street with a welcome local flavor. Tchaikovsky's music is also generally followed, but the departures are splendid, as when Uncle Drosselmeyer spins out a scene with Booker T and the MG's "Green Onions." It absolutely works.

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Sometimes Tchaikovsky gets a welcome updating, as when the global dance tour in the second act goes to France and we hear a Duke Ellington take on the classic.

The fusion is everywhere beyond the eclectic mix of styles. Dancers include professionals along with the children from the school. The diversity is rich among performers as well as the second act's scenes. Noelia Garcia Carmona highlights a robust segment with Flamenco dancing accompanied by Roy Brewer's guitar work.

The African section is a high-octane presentation with glorious drumming, while the Arabian scene is a work of elegance with breathtaking grace from dancers Mandy Possel and Shamar Rooks.

Next week are the Ballet Memphis performances of "Nutcracker" at the Orpheum, a traditional and sumptuous production that shouldn't be missed. If you were to see both versions, you would have two different experiences and very likely would enjoy both.