

MAGAZINE
Cincinnati Woman

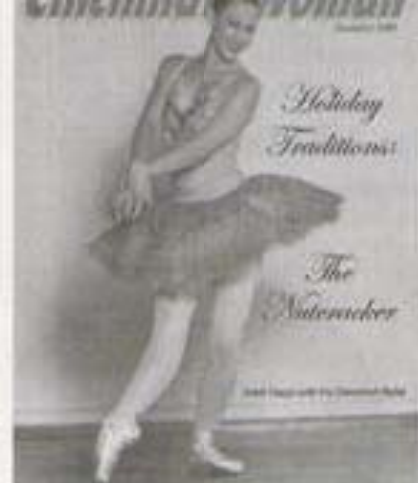
December 2008



*Holiday
Traditions:*

*The
Nutcracker*

Kristi Capps with the Cincinnati Ballet



On the Cover

Kristi Capps is the Sugar Plum Fairy in the Cincinnati Ballet's *The Nutcracker*.
 Photo courtesy of Life Photography Studio.
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By Jennifer Davis
Cincinnati Woman Magazine

Terry Honebrink chokes up a little when she talks about her father.

"Dad was a Marine. He was a gruff guy. But there was this real soft side of him - he loved ballet," she remembers fondly. He loved the centuries-old art so much that he chose to instill that same passion in his young daughter. Little did he know, perhaps, that he had created a tradition that would not only see him through the remainder of his years but would carry over to his grandchild, Ann.

Ann Honebrink is now an upper-level student with the Otto M. Budig Academy of Cincinnati Ballet, but her passion for dance began much the same way her mother's did. Aside from attending the production with her mother while in utero, Ann was less than one year old when she witnessed her first production of *The Nutcracker* at Cincinnati Ballet.

"She was 11 months old and did not move," Honebrink recalls warmly. "From the moment the curtain went up to the moment it dropped, she was completely mesmerized."

A few short years later, the family tradition carried over to the stage, and Ann made her *Nutcracker* debut as a Baby Mouse onstage with the company, only one year after Honebrink's father passed away.

Emotion fills Honebrink's voice as she thinks back on that time. "When she ran out on the stage, my dad wasn't there. But... he was."

A World of Wonderment

While her daughter trains with the Academy, Honebrink now works in the marketing department as Group Relations Coordinator. Watching her daughter grow up in the place that has been such a part of her life has meant the world to her - particularly this year, as Ann rehearses with the company in hopes of performing in the show.

"She gets tears in her eyes - it's really cute," laughs Melissa Santomo, Director of Marketing for the Ballet, and a fellow Academy mom.

It would seem that much of the appeal of *The Nutcracker*, and the reason it has become such a rich tradition for so many families, is the wonderment of it all. The elegant grace of the dancers, making every step appear so effortless, the breathtaking costumes, the brilliant sensory experience... and the absolute delight of the children who come, year after year, to marvel as an entire world



Kristi Capps is the Sugar Plum Fairy. Photo by Life Photography Studio, Donna Lind.

opens up in front of them.

For Santomo, one of her favorite parts of the show each season is the thrill of the children who come out at intermission. "Intermission is right after the snow scene. The snow scene is my favorite," she says. "To see them come and enter into this world is absolutely amazing, and that's what gives me joy in working with the ballet - to be able to see this every year."

Santomo remembers when her own daughter began at the Academy. "We had just missed *Nutcracker* auditions. She talked

about auditioning for them for a year after that. She auditioned for a Ginger child, and she was so worried that I wouldn't know what her number was [to pick her out]. When she came out in the Mother Ginger skirt, the tears came out. Every year we go together."

Kristi Capps as Marie

As a principal dancer with the Cincinnati Ballet, Kristi Capps has done her share of *Nutcracker* performances. In addition to her 12 seasons in Cincinnati, she danced in a *Nutcracker* every single season for 13 years before, beginning with the delightful child roles and, as in this season, Marie.

Despite her evolution from a bright-eyed child to a disciplined leading lady, Capps confides that her favorite *Nutcracker* role was that of the Snow Queen, right here in Cincinnati. "It was my first big pas de deux. There's a little spot in my heart for that role," she says cheerfully.

Performing in as many productions of *The Nutcracker* as she has, Capps has worked with hundreds of children, much to her delight.

"I started ballet because I saw *The Nutcracker* on TV, and that's what I wanted for Christmas. When you see the little girls and little boys, I know exactly how they feel. It's just such a magical ballet. Every little girl wants to be the Sugar Plum Fairy. For many kids, that's the first ballet they see. It's always colorful, and when you're young and there's the party and the presents, the story makes sense to children in that way."

A Little Different

This company's production is a little different than the *Nutcracker* that many people are familiar with. While it's not a radical step away from familiarity, this particular production is a bit closer to E.T.A. Hoffman's telling of the tale.

"This storyline follows a little more closely to the original *Nutcracker* story," says Honebrink. Fear not, however, patrons who are wary of change. "The sets and costumes were all done over in Russia. The colors will absolutely pop at you."

Perhaps the most exciting thing about *The Nutcracker* at Cincinnati Ballet, and arguably one of the best reasons to build your own family tradition around it, is the unwavering dedication and passion for the production that every employee of the Ballet puts forth. Traditionally, Cincinnati Ballet's fundraising team, the Bravo Committee, throws a Nutcracker Ball. With this being the

Ballet's 45th year, however, they decided that on December 6th an anniversary gala "45 at 45" will act as both a fundraising effort and celebration of the Ballet's long presence.

Additionally, and perhaps more traditionally, the annual Children's Nutcracker Luncheon returns, this year to the Westin Hotel on Fountain Square, and features a shortened *Nutcracker* experience, performed by upper-level Academy students.

"This is for the little kids who are just too tiny to sit through an entire *Nutcracker* performance," Honebrink explains. "They get a little mini performance."

Start a Family Tradition

With families living further and further away from each other and communication whittling itself down to shorthand messages over text, tradition is a notion that can often be easily discarded. Santomo is passionate when she explains the wonderful implications of becoming a Nutcracker family.

"[People] should bring their family to start a tradition. It's a fun, family friendly ballet. It's a great introduction to ballet because the storyline is easy to follow. A lot of people get turned off by ballet because there's no talking. [Even] for little boys, the battle scene is just awesome."

With a cast of over 100, including two separate children's casts, *The Nutcracker* is a massive undertaking for any organization. And yet, every season, Cincinnati Ballet outdoes itself in staging some of the finest performing art in the region. What is it, exactly, that makes all the hard work, the training of over 80 small children and an enormous expense worth it, year after year?

Honebrink's smile translates over the telephone wires. "Just the splendor... and... it's magical. It's just magical."

Cincinnati Ballet's "Frisch's presents *The Nutcracker*" runs December 12 to 27, 2008. Information is available at www.cincinnatiaballet.com.

Jennifer Davis is a freelance writer based in Northern Kentucky, where she lives with her husband and daughter. She is currently studying theatre at Northern Kentucky University, and is working her way towards a career as a full time arts writer.



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