Festival Ballet Providence puts on ‘Nutcracker’ with new costumes, cast

By Channing Gray
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This is year 21 for Mihailo Djuric’s version of this seasonal Tchaikovsky classic, and as might be expected, he has made some “tiny” changes. He’s freshened the choreography in the Snow Scene and came up with new costumes for the party.

Even though Archie, the plucky Yorkie who has made cameo appearances during Festival Ballet Providence’s last 19 runs of the “Nutcracker,” has been grabbing all the headlines as he heads toward retirement, Mihailo Djuric, the company’s artistic leader and Archie’s boss, would like the world to know that there is other news to be told about this weekend’s shows at the Providence Performing Arts Center.

For starters, dance fans will get to see nine fresh faces, new dancers from across the globe who will be starring in major roles, including Brazilian-born João Sampaio as the regal Cavalier, Seattle’s Charlotte Nash as the Dew Drop Fairy and Jay Markov of Phoenix as the dashing Nutcracker.

And not to forget the three Claras from Festival Ballet’s school — 15-year-old Madeline Colesano from Barnstable, Massachusetts; Abigale Evangelista, also 15, from Saunderstown; and Samantha Shorr, 14, from East Greenwich.

By the way, this is year 21 for Djuric’s version of this seasonal Tchaikovsky classic, and as might be expected, he has made some “tiny” changes. He’s freshened the choreography in the Snow Scene and came up with new costumes for the party.
You may recall that many of the costumes for the show were stolen a few years ago. Some were returned but the company has had to borrow others to outfit the entire cast. Now there’s a new, complete set.

And there’s a new marble staircase in the second act, Djuric said.

While dancers come and go, Archie, who joined the company at eight months old, has made this holiday tradition happen for close to two decades, sauntering across the stage of the Providence Performing Arts Center at the start of the show.

With tours over the years to Hartford, New Bedford and other cities, Archie will have logged 150 appearances by Sunday.

Archie’s job is being passed along to three local pooches selected from nearly 50 wannabes. The finalists are Teddy, a corgi owned by Amanda and Mike Meehan of North Providence; Phoebe, a petite golden doodle owned by Jane Bromberg of Providence; and Bronx, a golden retriever owned by Christine and Dennis Rockwell of Kingston.

All three dogs will make their debuts during the weekend, under the watchful eye of Archie. Some of them may return for encore performances next year, said Djuric, but a new crop of pups also will be considered.

That’s not to say Archie is completely out of the picture. Once a ham, always a ham.

He’ll be checking out his three replacements, pass along a few tips, then suit up as Santa Dog and “one last good-bye to old friends,” Djuric said. “After Sunday, it’s a life of sleeping and treats. I’m just hoping we do well at the box office so we can afford all those treats.”

On the other hand, Archie’s future might hold more than treats. “Dogcracker” might just have legs, Djuric said. “Who knows, it might end up on Broadway.”

— Channing Gray can be reached at tsangpo47@providencejournal.com.

If you go ...

What: “The Nutcracker”
Where: Providence Performing Arts Center, 220 Weybosset St., Providence

When: At 7:30 p.m. Friday, 2 and 7 p.m. Saturday, 1:30 p.m. Sunday

Tickets: $25-$85

Information: (401) 421-2787, ppacri.org, festivalballetprovidence.org