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## Holiday salute

Ballet companies across the county are celebrating the season with 'Nutcracker' performances



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REVIEWS » movies + video games + music + theater + restaurants PREVIEWS » concerts + events + on the Net

INSIDE » Ventura's 'Twilight' connection | Jane Russell reminisces | CLU goes 'Gray' | Spasso's Italian innovations



PHOTOS BY DAVID K. YAMAMOTO / SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Dancing the lead role of Clara in Ventura County Ballet Company's production of "The Nutcracker" is a dream come true for 14-year-old Natalie Graham, center, of Fillmore. "When I play Clara, I think of her as a very young girl and it's Christmas and she's very excited because there are lots of family and friends," Natalie said.

# 'Nutcracker' wonderland



Natalie Graham, left, will be joined onstage in "The Nutcracker" by her father, Rick, and her 16-year-old sister Rebecca. Performances will take place Saturday and Sunday in Oxnard.

## Beloved holiday ballet begins pirouetting across Ventura County stages this week

BY ANNE KALLAS  
Correspondent

When the lights dim and Ventura County Ballet Company's production of "The Nutcracker" begins Saturday in Oxnard, Jeanne Graham said her heart will be filled with joy. The Fillmore wife and mother adores the holiday classic anyway, but this year's production will be extra special because her husband and two of her six children are featured prominently.

Graham's husband, Rick, will play a party father, and daughter Rebecca,

16, will play a party mother. Dancing the lead role of Clara, the young girl whose dreams of sugarplum fairies, snow princesses, dancing princes and evil rats drive the fairy-tale ballet, will be Graham's 14-year-old daughter Natalie.

Natalie has performed in "The Nutcracker" before, so the show has become something of a family tradition for the Grahams.

"The quality of 'The Nutcracker' is at the pre-professional level," Jeanne Graham said. "I'm proud of my children and love to show



COURTESY PHOTO

Dance Creations' sixth annual "Nutcracker" production is moving to a bigger venue this year. It will be performed Dec. 13-14 at Moorpark High School.

those immediate family members — grandmother and grandfather and aunt and uncles — the production. Sometimes we're not able to go visit the grandparents as often as I'd like, and when they are actually able to come and see ("The Nutcracker"), it's very rewarding."

Natalie Graham has been performing in "Nutcracker" productions since she was 8; she played a cook that first year. Playing Clara has been her "dream from the very start," she said.

"When I play Clara, I think of her as a very young girl and it's Christmas and she's very excited because there are lots of family and friends," Natalie said. "In the beginning, I'm very happy and joyful and then, for the battle scene, I'm very scared and having a very spiteful dream."

Playing Clara has been a dream for dancers around the globe for well over a century. The ballet, based on the E.T.A. Hoffman book "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" and featuring music by



COURTESY PHOTO

Dani Plats of Moorpark, a 13-year-old student at Mesa Verde Middle School, will dance the role of Clara in Moorpark Civic Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker." The fairy-tale ballet will be performed Dec. 19-20 in Thousand Oaks.

Tchaikovsky, had its Russian premiere more than 150 years ago. The show made its way to Western Europe in the 1930s and to America by 1940. Since then, "The Nutcracker" has become an annual holiday tradition.

Here, in chronological order, are some of the local dance troupes performing the show in the coming weeks.

### Ventura County Ballet Company

In addition to the Grahams, 90 Ballet Academy Ventura dancers from Camarillo, Ojai, Santa Paula, Somis and Ventura will appear onstage. The other principal dancers include Sergei Domrachev, returning for his seventh season as The Nutcracker,

and Enton Hoxha in his third year as Drosselmeyer, Clara's grandfather. Spencer Gavin will dance the role of the prince, and Victoria Luchkina will dance the role of Dream Clara.

The production will be performed at 2 and 7 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at the Oxnard Performing Arts and Convention Center, 800 Hobson Way. A Sugar Plum Cookie Party will follow each matinee. Tickets are \$9-\$23 general, \$15 for seniors 65 and older and \$10 for children 10 and younger. Call the ballet studio at 653-2800 or the box office at 486-2424. Visit <http://www.balletacademyventura.com> for information.

### Moorpark College

The college's dance department will present selections from "The Nutcracker" during a show that will also feature the school's choral ensembles performing John Rutter's "Gloria."

The performance will take place at 8 p.m. Dec. 6 at the Moorpark College

Performing Arts Center, 7075 Campus Road. Tickets are \$8-\$16. For information, call 378-1485 or visit <http://www.moorparkcollege.edu>.

### Conejo Civic Ballet Company

Ashlyn Lewis of Agoura Hills will play Clara in the company's fifth annual "Nutcracker" production. Her mom, Linda Lewis, will have a role in the party scene.

It will be performed at 2:30 p.m. Dec. 7 in the Fred Kavli Theatre at the Civic Arts Plaza, 2100 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks. Tickets, \$14-\$24, are available in person at the box office or through Ticketmaster, 583-8700 or <http://www.ticketmaster.com>. Call 495-7940 or visit <http://www.balletarts.org> for information.

### Dance Creations

The company's sixth annual "Nutcracker" is moving to a bigger home this year.

"We originally sponsored

**NUTCRACKER** » from page 12

this production as a way of giving Simi Valley its own 'Nutcracker' ballet, presented at the Simi Valley Cultural Arts Center," Dance Creations co-founder Chris McCarty said. "We have now outgrown the small theater and will be trying the Moorpark High venue for the first time."

Performances will take place at 7 p.m. Dec. 13 and 2 p.m. Dec. 14 at Moorpark High School, 4500 Tierra Rejada Road. Tickets are \$12-\$15. Call 582-2598 or visit <http://www.dancecreations.com>.

**State Street Ballet**

The company, now in its 15th year, will throw a Sugar Plum Party for children following both "Nutcracker" matinees.

Performances, featuring a mix of State Street dancers and Gustafson Dance students, will take place at 2 and 7 p.m. Dec. 13 and 2 p.m. Dec. 14 at the Granada Theatre, 1214 State St., Santa Barbara. Tickets are \$28-\$53 general and \$19 for children 12 and younger; seniors and students get a \$5 discount. Call 899-2222 or visit <http://www.granadasb.org>.

**Pacific Festival Ballet Company**

A cast of 120 dancers, including guest artists from the San Francisco Ballet, will be featured in this 15th annual production, which is being presented by California Dance Theatre's nonprofit classical company. Playing the prince will be 13-year-old Hogan Fulton of Thousand Oaks, who earlier this year performed the title role in the Elton John musical "Billy Elliot" on London's West End.

"We always have something new and different," said Lori Sorensen, the company's administrative director. "In the snow scene where it snows on the audience — the only production in Ventura County to have snow fall on the



Hogan Fulton, center, will play the prince in Pacific Festival Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker." Earlier this year, the 13-year-old Thousand Oaks performer starred in the Elton John musical "Billy Elliot" on London's West End. COURTESY PHOTO



Footworks Youth Ballet will perform its version of "The Nutcracker" Dec. 13-14 in Oxnard. The performances will feature the Moorpark Symphony Orchestra, which will play Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" score live. COURTESY PHOTO

audience — we've changed it a bit. And Act II was spiced up last year and even more so this year."

Performances will take place at 2 and 7 p.m. Dec. 20 and 2 and 6 p.m. Dec. 21 in the Fred Kavli Theatre at the Civic Arts Plaza, 2100 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks. Tickets, \$24-\$39, are available in person at the box office or through Ticketmaster,

583-8700 or <http://www.ticketmaster.com>. Visit <http://www.californiadancetheatre.com> for information.

**Footworks Youth Ballet**

The Moorpark Symphony Orchestra will perform Tchaikovsky's score live when the Footworks troupe presents its version of "The Nutcracker." The combination of live

music and dance is the way that ballet "was meant to be seen," according to Footworks marketing director Elizabeth Spencer.

A family educational hour will be held one hour before showtime. "We talk about aspects of the production, lighting, costumes, shoes and the intricacies of the story," Spencer said. "It started as a children-only event but morphed into a family event because we noticed adults were enjoying the program as much as children."

Performances will take place at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 13 and 2 p.m. Dec. 14 at the Oxnard Performing Arts and Convention Center, 800 Hobson Way. Tickets are \$12-\$25. Call 676-1600 or visit <http://www.footworksyouthballet.org>.

**Moorpark Civic Ballet**

Starring as Clara in the company's 13th annual "Nutcracker" production will be 13-year-old Dani Plats from Moorpark. She'll be joined by a cast of more than 80 dancers. Guest artists will include Sayat Asatryan, who was a principal ballet dancer with the Moscow Kremlin Ballet, and

Kirsten Ann Heinrich, who has performed with the San Diego Ballet and Pittsburgh Ballet Theater.

Performances will take place at 7 p.m. Dec. 19 and 1:30 and 6:30 p.m. Dec. 20 in the Scherr Forum Theatre at the Civic Arts Plaza, 2100 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks. Tickets, \$18-\$22, are available in person at the box office or through Ticketmaster, 583-8700 or <http://www.ticketmaster.com>. For information, call 529-1958 or visit <http://www.moorparkciviballet.com>.

**All American Ballet Company**

New choreography by Alexei Badrak, formerly with Russia's Bolshoi Theatre, will be featured in this "Nutcracker" production. More than 70 young dancers, plus professional guest artists, will take part in the show.

Performances will take place at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 20 and 2 p.m. Dec. 21 at the Ventura High School auditorium, 2 N. Catalina St., Ventura. Tickets are \$12-\$25 in advance. Call 650-6316 or visit <http://www.allamericanballet.org> for information.