



Sugar plum fairies make their return to Ventura County

Anne Kallas, Special to The Star 3:31 p.m. PST November 14, 2016

When Ventura County ballet companies want to fill seats during the holiday season, they pirouette to "The Nutcracker."

Five dance companies in Ventura County put on major productions of the classic ballet, with music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. With hand-sewn costumes and dozens of dancers, "The Nutcracker" offers them a chance to showcase their programs, even if the ballet isn't a money-maker. In fact, most dance studios have created special nonprofits devoted solely to raising money for various productions, with an emphasis on "The Nutcracker."

Pam Rossi, who runs the dance school Pam Rossi's Dance Ten, also heads up the Moorpark Civic Ballet — a nonprofit devoted to "The Nutcracker" production.

"We created a nonprofit organization so we could do more and have more resources," she said, adding that nonprofits can accept donations, which are vital to the costly production. "By creating a nonprofit, we can reach more people."

Rossi said dancers don't have to be enrolled in her school to be cast in "The Nutcracker," but they do have to be enrolled in some type of dance class.

The Moorpark Civic Ballet, in addition to the Conejo Civic and Pacific Festival ballets, will be offering "The Nutcracker" this season at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Both the Scherr Forum and the Fred Kavli Theatre are being used.

The Ventura County Ballet and Footworks Ballet will be performing "The Nutcracker" at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center.

Betsy Manninen, spokesman for Footworks Ballet, the nonprofit arm of the Oakley Ballet Center, said renting such a large venue is not cheap.

"The (Oxnard) Performance Center is an expensive venue, and that alone requires a fundraiser," Manninen said. The company has volunteers who help sew costumes, and they try to save money by borrowing sets from other companies.

"'The Nutcracker' is not meant to be a moneymaker," she said.

It's a ballet that never gets old, she noted.

"The girls still get back into it each year," she said, adding that Footworks has produced "The Nutcracker" for more than a dozen years. "They're excited about their new roles. There is a newness and freshness about moving into elevated roles that feeds new energy for the kids."

Kathleen Noblin, executive director and founder of the Ventura County Ballet, the nonprofit arm of the Ballet Academy Ventura, said "The Nutcracker" allows her young dancers an opportunity to work one-on-one with professional dancers who are hired for the more demanding roles.

"A child can go to a school and just take classes and they can learn ballet. But our school is a training ground for traditional Russian techniques," she said. "Our dancers work side-by-side with professionals who mentor the children."

She called the November production at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center "a way to kick off the holiday season" and noted that the Ventura County Ballet performances also include a three-day run in at the Ventura College Performing Arts Center.

Robin Twarowski of the Conejo Civic Ballet, which is the nonprofit arm of the Ballet Arts school in Westlake Village, said "The Nutcracker" allows young dancers to grow from the less demanding roles to progressively more challenging ones.

"We don't do competition," she said. "We believe our dance training is geared toward performance, which is what they're training for. The younger ones start with little roles. They get better roles as they get older and learn more."

Like the other companies, Twarowski said the Conejo Civic Ballet hires professionals for the more challenging roles.

"For the principal roles we hire a few people. We hire someone to perform the Sugar Plum Cavalier, who is also teacher at school. We hire the Nutcracker Prince dancer too," she said.

If you go

Ventura County Ballet: 2 and 7 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, Oxnard Performing Arts Center. Tickets: \$30, \$35, \$40 for adults; \$24, \$28, \$40 military/seniors; \$15, \$40 children. Tickets available at the box office at 449-ARTS or online through [etix.com](https://www.etix.com).

Ventura County Ballet: 2 p.m. Dec. 10 and 11, Ventura College Performing Arts Center, with the Ventura College Symphony. Tickets: \$40 adults; \$32 military/seniors; \$25 children under 10. Tickets available at the box office at 486-2424 or online through brownpapertickets.com.

Conejo Civic Ballet: 2:30 p.m. Dec 11, Fred Kavli Theatre, Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Tickets available at the box office at 800-745-3000 or online at www.civicartsplaza.com or Ticketmaster. Tickets: \$36, \$31, \$20. Group discount available.

Footworks Ballet: 2 p.m. Dec. 10 and 11, Oxnard Performing Arts Center. Accompaniment by Footworks Community Orchestra and the Carpe Diem Chorus. Tickets: \$19, \$24, \$29, adults; \$19, \$21, \$26 military and children. Tickets available at the box office at 449-ARTS or online through etix.com.

Pacific Festival Ballet: 2 and 7 p.m. Dec. 17 and 18 at the Fred Kavli Theatre, Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Tickets available at the box office at 800-745-3000 or online at www.civicartsplaza.com or through Ticketmaster. Tickets: \$46, \$38, \$30.

Moorpark Civic Ballet: 1:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Dec. 17 at the Scherr Forum in the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Tickets available at the box office at 800-745-3000 or online at www.civicartsplaza.com or through Ticketmaster. Tickets: \$25-\$30.

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