

Nutcracker gets Maximiliano Guerra's revision

All five performances were sold out because this is the seasonal classic for all ages

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FOR THE HERALD

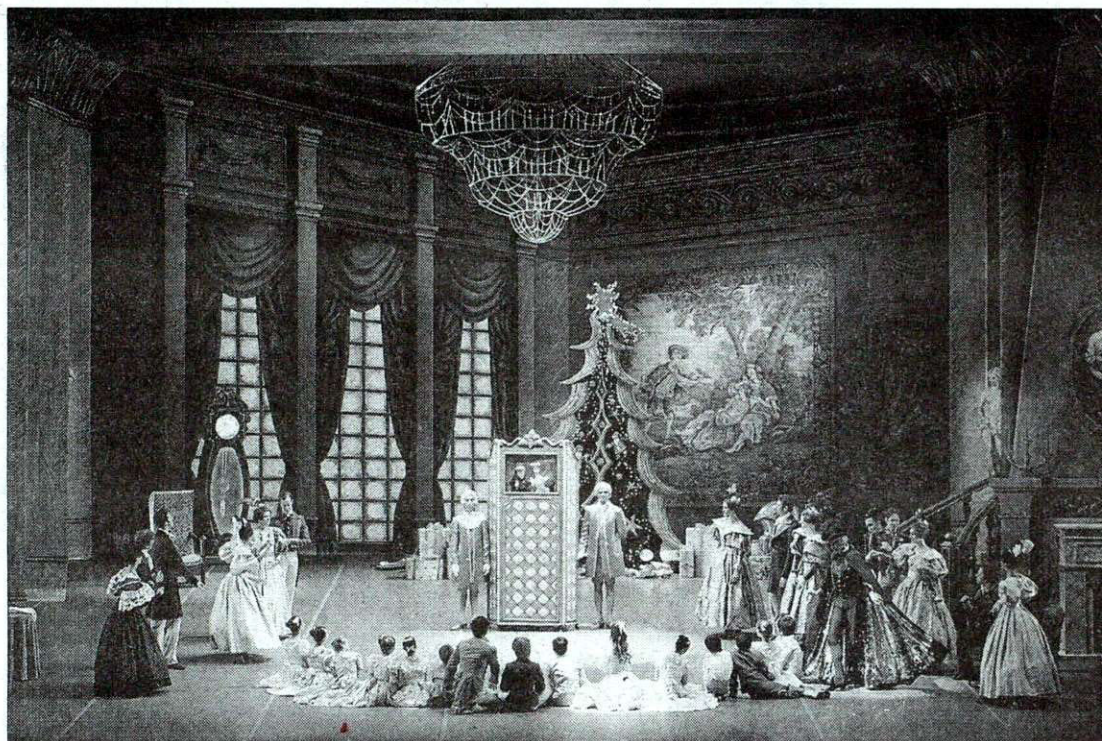
Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* (*Cascanueces*) is the world's bestseller of Christmas-and-kids ballets. Last year I wrote about the performances of this surefire masterpiece. Then the original choreography by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov was revised by Lidia Segni, the erstwhile director of the Colón Ballet.

This year, in fact, *The Nutcracker* wasn't scheduled: we were supposed to witness the première of *Anna Karenina*, with music by Tchaikovsky (several scores in a modern arrangement) and choreography by Boris Eifman, whose *Rodin* was staged in 2014. Alas, once again the Colón Theatre gave no explanation about important changes and scrapped it.

And so, again *The Nutcracker*, with a foreseen twist: the revision was by Maximiliano Guerra, this year's Ballet director. Foreseen considering that he had done, this same year, his version of *Giselle* for Paloma Herrera's farewell performances in the provinces, and replaced *Eugen Onegin* (postponed for next year) with his choreography of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, now questioned by his widow as possible plagiarism of MacMillan's mighty opus. And in 2016 we'll have Guerra's vision of *Don Quichotte*... isn't it a bit too much?

Of course the five performances were sold out, for this is a ballet that adults of all ages can see with nostalgic eyes of infancy. My first reference will always be the *Nutcracker Suite* included in that Disney marvel, *Fantasia*, which I've seen a dozen times since I was six.

I've had wonderful experiences with Balanchine's choreography in New York and several times at the Colón, the innovative and im-



A scene from *The Nutcracker* as staged at the Colón Theatre.

mensely talented conception of Rudolf Nureyev, especially when he did the main male (Petipa/Ivanov separate the parts of Drosselmeyer and the Prince, but Nureyev's idea was that, for the girl, both were the same person due to the great influence of the benevolent magician).

However, ex Colón Theatre Director García Caffi got into a row with Aleth Francillon, heiress of the Nureyev legacy; she made it clear in a published statement that she had been grossly treated and wouldn't allow the production of any of ballet of his for as long as García Caffi was at the helm; will it be possible now with Darío Lopérfido and Guerra? Well, two title changes in a season isn't a good thing for any institution,

and many subscribers felt cheated this year. We shall see...

Anyway, this year, Guerra's *Nutcracker* had five sold-out performances with three casts; the main leads were, successively, Carla Vincelli/Federico Fernández; Nadia Muzycza/Juan Pablo Ledo. The one I saw was Karina Olmedo/Edgardo Trabalón. I can safely assume that the first two were quite good, and the third one certainly was. Olmedo is a veteran but she manages through her flexible and refined art to give the image of a young girl, and her technique remains admirable. As to Trabalón, he handles his powerful physique with great energy and precise steps. So I can vouch that the current Colón Ballet has first-rate principals.

interesting: a Harlequin, a Columbine and a Moor. And in the final tableau, *Confiturebourg*, the Sugar Plum Fairy was eliminated (pity) but the divertissement was quite agreeable: the Spanish Dance (a bolero), the Chinese, the Arab (languid, by a man and two odalisques), the Russian (quite effective) and what became here an elegant Pastoral by a shepherd and two shepherdesses (musically it is called *Flutes*).

It's worth remembering that, of the sinister side in Hoffmann's tale, little remains in *The Nutcracker*. Even the battle with the mice is for kids, but its charm is undiminished.

Martín Miranda was an elegant and tasteful Drosselmeyer. The rest of the cast is too ample to be mentioned here; suffice it to say that everything was well-danced and showed that there are plenty of able professional dancers in the troupe.

The musical side was very good, except for some uneasy trumpet moments, the Buenos Aires Philharmonic was in top form and Emmanuel Siffert conducted with sure knowledge and coordination with the dancers. The Children's Choir sang from a loge lateral to the orchestra and sounded nice (they only intervene in the *Waltz of the Snowflakes*). The stage designs (Sergio Massa) and costumes (Gino Bogani) were known from last year and remain quite agreeable.

Final remarks: this was the very last performance of the whole season, and now comes the long summer holiday until late February. The performance was also viewed on a large screen set up at the Plaza del Vaticano next to the Colón Theatre, and it was also streamed live. Finally, there was a closing homage to about a dozen members of the *corps de ballet* who are retiring. It was the right thing to do and a moving occasion.

Before I go any further, an appraisal of Guerra's revision. He promised that it would be fun (maybe having in mind that Segni's wasn't...) and he was partly right: there is more animation in some details, though little imagination for choreographic gags (he could take some hints from Kylián, e.g.). He also said that his *corps de ballet* would always dance, and that was more accurate: they were indeed quite active, especially in the long battle between the soldiers and the mice that so frightened Clara, the girl. My favourite ensemble was the exquisite *Waltz of the Snowflakes*, in which the female side of the Corps was disciplined and beautiful.

The automats in the First Act were

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