

# NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

## **Burton meets Tchaikovsky in Vacaville Ballet Company show**

VACAVILLE — A longtime Vacaville Christmas tradition, “The Nutcracker,” will feature some new names and music as the Vacaville Ballet Company presents “The Nightmare Before Nutcracker” this weekend.

New company director Cassandra Kamakeeaina was looking for an updated take on the Tchaikovsky classic. Enter Tim Burton’s cult classic, “The Nightmare Before Christmas,” where one of the main characters gets a nutcracker that transforms into a skeleton.

“I wanted something fresh, exciting and fun,” she said. And she wanted to keep the traditional story. Act I is the “The Nutcracker” version that is well-known in theater circles. Act II is set in the land of nightmares.

The dancers love the approach.

Abby Sculley, a Vacaville High School senior, considered walking away from dance last summer when she took up running. She’s playing the Queen of Nightmares in the show.

“I like the idea,” she said of Kamakeeaina’s approach. She has a lot of stage time and loves the fact that she gets to add a little improvisation to her role.

Sculley and a few other cast members will spend the weekend performing, then taking finals next week. Throw in the fact that they are also applying for college, and Sculley said she’s pretty sure she’ll be wiped out after the last show on Sunday.

Family, friends and fellow dancers make it worth the extra effort.

“We’re like a family here,” she said. “I’ve made lifelong friends here.”

Friends, such as Vanden High School senior Macie LaGrand, who was 3 when she began ballet lessons. Sculley was 4.

LaGrand is also enthusiastic about “The Nightmare Before Nutcracker.”

“It’s very different,” she said. “We are learning new choreography. The music is a lot different (than Tchaikovsky).”

She shares the role of The Queen of Sweet Dreams with Vacaville Christian Academy junior Katelyn Reid.

“The challenging part is being good,” Reid said. “We can all find that darker side to get into the mood. To be completely good is kind of hard.”

Kamakeeaina took over the nonprofit dance group last year when artistic director Heidi LuMaye resigned after 17 years with the company and moved to Idaho. She grew up in Vacaville Ballet Company and served as assistant artistic director under LuMaye for seven years.

The 2001 Will C. Wood High School graduate even came home on breaks from college to dance in “The Nutcracker.” She’s directing a cast of 60, ranging in age from 5 to 17.

At the same time, the company is getting ready to move into a new home while tackling a new version of the Christmas classic.

The music was the first job Kamakeeaina tackled.

Rehearsal locations were another task on her list. Practices have been held at different locations, including a church and gym. Support from parents of the dancers and community have helped save her sanity.

“It takes more than one person to put on a show like this,” she said.

Maginnis-Honey, Amy. “Burton meets Tchaikovsky in Vacaville Ballet Company show.” *The Daily Republic*. [Fairfield-Suisun]. 13 Dec. 2013. B1.