

# 10 new things in 'Nutcracker'

Dec 14, 2011

Written by Lauren Bishop

It took 10 years and \$2 million, but the Cincinnati Ballet's revamped "Nutcracker" (full name: Frisch's Presents the (New) Nutcracker") premieres Thursday at the Aronoff Center for the Arts. Weren't there but want to go? Here are 10 new things you can expect to see in the dramatically different production.

## 1. New choreography.

"Every step is different," said choreographer Victoria Morgan, the ballet's artistic director and CEO. She strove for a less formal, more animated and fast-moving production (which clocks in at 1 hour, 46 minutes, about 15 minutes shorter than past years), still set to Tchaikovsky's classic score. As dancer James Cunningham put it: "Victoria choreographs in color."

## 2. New sets.

Kansas City-based designer John Ezell created bold new sets for the production that were built painted by South Glens Falls, N.Y.-based Michael Hagen Inc. Morgan said she chose Ezell, who has also designed sets for Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park productions, because he has a playful, whimsical style that matches hers. Ezell described the sets as "high-calorie content": The Land of the Sweets sets, for example, appear to be made of marzipan.

## 3. New costumes.

Tony Award nominee Carrie Robbins designed all-new costumes, taking her inspiration from 1830s-1840s European fashion marked by shoulder-exposing necklines, poufy sleeves, tiny waists and bell-shaped skirts. The costumes were built primarily by the ballet's own wardrobe department, Playhouse in the Park and Madcap Puppets.

## 4. Creative new sponsorships.

Ballet staff and board members lobbied about 60 companies, more than twice as many as in the past, to fund the production, approaching specific companies with specific sponsorships in mind. One highly visible example: The ballet asked if

Great American Insurance Group would pay \$150,000 to sponsor the snow scene – and in return, the ballet would model the Snow Queen’s tiara after the arch at the top of the 41-story Great American Tower at Queen City Square Downtown. Other major sponsors include Frisch’s and Robert H. Reakirt Foundation, PNC Bank Trustee, and PNC.

### **5. New opening.**

The ballet opens in a bustling kitchen scene where the Stahlbaum family is preparing for a Christmas Eve party, rather than in toymaker Herr Drosselmeyer’s workshop. It’s called Blanche’s Kitchen after Blanche Maier, the late mother of Frisch’s president and CEO Craig Maier.

### **6. New star.**

The star of this production is a little girl named Clara, rather than an adult dancer named Marie in the Cincinnati Ballet’s previous “Nutcracker,” choreographed by San Francisco-based Val Caniparoli.

### **7. New inspirations.**

The dancing flutes called Mirlitons have been replaced by Mirlipoos, inspired by Morgan’s beloved miniature poodle, Teddy Moe. “I tried to use Teddy Moe moves,” Morgan said. “It’s very playful and fun.”

### **8. New characters.**

The enormous Mother Ginger and her children have been replaced by a Mother Hen and dancing chicks that remind Ezell of Marshmallow Peeps; Robbins called the scene “screamingly funny.”

### **9. More kids.**

More than 140 young local dancers and gymnasts appear in multiple casts of the new “Nutcracker,” and their excited parents will be able to identify most of them in costume.

The mice, for example, aren’t big and scary, but rather small and cute, with costumes that allow their faces to peek out.

### **10. More magical moments.**

Morgan sat down with two local magicians – magic memorabilia collector Ken Klosterman of Loveland and Wood Herron & Evans associate attorney Sean Owens, who curated Klosterman’s collection as a college student –to brainstorm ways to incorporate magic tricks into the production. Owens didn’t want to give

too much away, but he said audiences should watch for special effects throughout the show – particularly when Drosselmeyer appears. “People should probably pay attention when he’s on stage,” Owens said.