

Nutcracker dances on

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Written by Lauren Bishop

The premiere of the Cincinnati Ballet's new "Nutcracker" is more than two weeks away. But the celebration of the beloved Cincinnati tradition — with all-new twists on costumes, sets and choreography — begins this week and continues through mid-December:

A free event called Nutcracker Ballet & (Root) Beer takes place from 5:15-7 p.m. Thursday at the Cincinnati Ballet Center, 1555 Central Parkway, West End.

Visitors can watch a rehearsal in the ballet's Mickey Jarson Kaplan Performance Studio, meet dancers and staff and go behind the scenes. Drinks will be available from a cash bar, and pizza will be donated by LaRosa's. To reserve tickets, call the box office at 513-621-5282.

The Children's Nutcracker Luncheon takes place from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Dec. 10 at the Hyatt Regency, 151 W. Fifth St., Downtown for \$45 per person or \$650 for a table of six. The luncheon, hosted by Cincinnati Ballet's BRAVO!, features a lunch and ballet selections from Frisch's Presents The (New) Nutcracker by Cincinnati Ballet Otto M. Budig Academy students. After the performance, children are invited to the dance floor to be a part of the Rat King Parade.

The curtain opens on "Frisch's Presents The (New) Nutcracker" at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 15 at Aronoff Center for the Arts, 650 Walnut St., Downtown and continues with a dozen more performances, the last at 1 p.m. Dec. 24.

As of last week, tickets (\$40-\$85) were still available for all performances, but make plans to see the show soon: Cincinnati Ballet implemented a demand-based pricing strategy for the 2011-2012 season, meaning that ticket prices could increase as demand increases.

The lower price level will stay the same for all performances.

The Nutcracker Premiere Gala, a pre- and post-show event, begins at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 17 at 580 W. Sixth St., Downtown for \$250-\$500 per person (includes Nutcracker ticket) or \$2,000 for a table of six.

Includes a light supper, music by Leroy Ellington & his Pink Flamingos and a silent auction before the performance. The post-show part of the gala includes dessert and dancing with artistic director and CEO Victoria Morgan and company dancers.

Also now available: souvenir nutcrackers for \$50 and tiaras that look like the Snow Queen's tiara, modeled after the top of the 41-story Great American Tower at Queen City Square (Great American is a Nutcracker sponsor), for \$25. Get them at the box office at the Cincinnati Ballet Center or at the Aronoff Center for the arts during performances.

Information and tickets: 513-621-5282, cballet.org.