

"Nut"-in', Honey!: 5 Things I'll Remember from My "Nutcracker" Experience

Written by Mike Schulz

Wednesday, 20 December 2006 02:29

Being offered the role. I'm at work. The phone rings. It's Ballet Quad Cities Artistic Director Matthew Keefe, asking if I'd be interested in playing Drosselmeyer in *The Nutcracker* Th

. All I hear is "

Nutcracker

." You want me to

what

? Play Drosselmeyer in

The Nutcracker

, he repeats, a

little

slower

this time. I'm still not sure I understand, but I'm flattered by the offer, and we agree to discuss it further the next day. I hang up, and immediately Google-search: "Nutcracker, Tchaikovsky, ballet, Drossle Mire." I haven't seen it in more than 25 years.

I have

no

idea who this character is.



Accepting the role. Matthew and I meet, we discuss potential rehearsal conflicts and whatnot, and a few days later I tell him, yes, I would love to be in his show. I ask when I can pick up the script. There's a momentary pause. What do you mean?, he asks. / pause.

Should I pick up a script at the Ballet Quad Cities office? No, he says. Mike. It's a

ballet

. There's no

script

. Of course, I say. That makes sense. We hang up. I think to myself: Mike, you are in

way

over your head.

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Drosselmeyer's first dry run. My first big scene is in Act I, when my character doles out presents and makes the toys come to life. After several rehearsals, I finally get the chance to run this without stopping. We begin. I accidentally smack someone in the face with my cape. I give the wrong toys to the wrong kids. I'm not performing my actions on the correct musical beats. I do everything but break the pantomime by asking Clara how her day's been. The other cast members - most of whom, it turns out, have been doing the show since the *womb* - are very supportive.



The fireball. It's the last performance, and all has been going well during the show's run - even my magical entrance, when my character dazzles the crowd with a fireball bursting from his hand. Backstage, before entering, I converse with a very sweet lady who's helping with the dancers' costume changes. She asks if that fireball effect *always works*. So *far*, I say, looking for wood to knock. There is none. I enter the scene, and promptly screw up the fireball routine. I blame *her*.

Watching from backstage. I only have a cameo in Act II, which gives me the opportunity to watch most of it from backstage. And every performance, I watch the truly inspiring grace and beauty of the Ballet Quad Cities company, who make impossible movement look as simple as tying your shoe. So thank you, Matthew. Thank you, Joedy. And thank you, *Nutcracker*

cast - Amy, Jason, Colin, Jodi, Andrea, Margaret, Heidi, Frank, Eric, Briatta, Jennifer, Iona, Julia, Earl, Hannah, MaxandChandler, Courtney, Erica, Angela, Grace, Bennet, The Two Jakes, and all the rest - for the chance to watch you perform. It was an *honor* playing Drosselmeyer. (That's how you spell it, right?)