



Jed Murphy BandWagon Magazine

When the Christmas season comes around, Debie Larsen is ecstatic, not because of the usual holiday festivities that sweep through Greeley, but because of a few performances that come only one time of year.

“After eleven years I’ve never gotten tired of this. I never got tired of the rehearsals. I never got tired of the music. I love it.” Larsen said during a break in a Sunday afternoon practice. The girls

(and guy) of the senior company taking a much-needed rest, echoed Larsen’s excitement about putting on a timeless classic like Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*.

“It’s better than Christmas!” said Melissa Davis, 19, with a smile. Davis knows that performing and producing *The Nutcracker* is not what some people would consider a normal Christmas. Where many see the holiday season as

a change to relax and step back from their hectic lives, the Colorado Dance Theatre steps forward and embraces what is in most cases the most physically and emotionally demanding time of their year.

In her eleventh year as artistic director for the Colorado Dance Theatre, Larsen took over the role after a choreographer left and she has not looked back since. Putting together a production of this size is no small task. With expenses that exceed \$40,000 and 115 dancers in the show itself, everyone involved consistently goes above and beyond what is asked of them. Larsen credits a very active board of directors for taking on a heavy share of the burden themselves, stating that many boards will delegate work to other people, but the CDT board will tackle large projects themselves. The CDT is also a nonprofit so all funding is done through fundraising of their own and private business donors. Tickets sales go towards expenses, but it is the local support that keeps them up and running. Each year, it is the donations from people here in Northern Colorado that lays the foundations for such an impressive endeavor.

It is the dancers that ultimately make the show and it is their dedication and energy that Larsen obviously enjoys. None of the dancers with the CDT's senior company are pursuing a career in ballet. "They do it because they love it," said Larsen, relishing the fact that she is working with performers who care deeply about the art and place the success of the show before any personal glory. With dancers ranging from six years old to women in their fifties, the cast comes from all walks of life. Nutcracker Prince, Colten Bray, 20, is a nursing major at the University of Northern Colorado and came to dance with the CDT because of the physical challenge he found in ballet. He started with hockey and did figure skating as a means of improving his skating. From there he found a natural transition into dance.

From mothers and professionals to full time students, the dancers for The Nutcracker give up a large portion of their already busy lives to be in this performance. In the weeks leading up to the show, they will spend sometimes up to eight hours a day six days a week rehearsing their parts. In all that time together, everyone in the senior company obviously becomes close-knit.

"Everyone helps each other a lot," said Lizzy Vestecha, 19, explaining the open-door policy of the CDT, no dancer who walks through is turned away. Only the best makes it into senior company (each dancer in senior company has over ten years of dance experience) but Larsen makes it a point to find a place for anyone who wants to be involved. Auditions are in August to make it into senior company the dancers must know the steps to the show beforehand. However, not making it into senior company or not really having experience with dance does not exclude someone from the show.

The performance of Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker by the Colorado Dance Theatre has become a tradition that invigorates the fine arts side of Greeley and it not something to be missed. Though those going in expecting something put on by a huge dance studio with a lot of funding will probably not get what they want, they will be impressed by how much a relatively small operation can do with limited resources. The CDT is not trying to compete through. Rather, they are simply putting on a show they love and put their all into, and that along is worth seeing. Make sure not to miss a single night when they play December 7th through the 9th in a spectacle that will truly make this holiday season a memorable one.