
DANCE

High energy director gives Davis its first 'nutcracker'

By DEL McCOLM
Arts editor

Davis will have its first local "Nutcracker" production today because of the high energy, organizational skills and imagination of City recreation co-ordinator Bob Bowen.

He's a charismatic, creative leader with the habit of making people of all ages feel confident. Whatever it is he thinks up for them, they seem to believe they can do it, whether it's to dance as mice in the Veterans Memorial theater today or swim like sharks in last summer's "Mysterious Island" pageant.

"Why shouldn't kids have a chance to act?" he asked, sitting on the sofa in my home. It bothers Bowen, a member of Davis Players, West of Broadway and Bad Actors, that children in Davis lack acting opportunities that adults have.

"Schools are limited now that teachers are refusing to do all the extra things we had in school, so kids are living vicariously through TV and that scares me," he said.

What really "spooked" him was the somber reaction of 7 to 9 year olds who attended a special matinee performance of "Dames at

Sea" last summer in which Bowen sang and danced.

"They didn't interact. They just sat there, wide-eyed, enthralled, but there was no spontaneity." Believing that this passivity was induced by television-watching habits, he decided to stage "Nutcracker."

"You won't be in the audience," he promised them. "You won't be watching TV, you'll be doing it up on the stage."

When he announced auditions, he didn't know if anybody would show up. Seventy-five arrived and he's using all of them. More kept calling all week during the marathon rehearsals and he's including them too.

"I decided I wasn't going to turn anyone away," he said firmly. "These are Joe Kids who aren't special in skills but have energy and commitment. This is their chance to shine."

At the auditions, some "sparkled, read well, put some emotion into their parts" so he selected Dawn Silberstein as the Mother, who becomes the Sugar Plum Fairy, Scott Camchois as the Nutcracker and Prince, Tim Nanson as Fritz, Suju Vijayan as Clara, Shalini Vijayan as Pipsqueak the baby mouse



Gesturing with his hands, Bob Bowen explains how his 75 young performers show enthusiasm for the play he is directing, "Nutcracker." "All you can see is just little eyes peeping out and big grins", he says.

and Tom Harting as the Mouse King.

Bowen is assisted by Kate Boyce and Emily Pott, costume co-ordinators, sound technician Scott Harmon, who is managing the music tapes, and Rusty Eddy, a graduate of the Davis recreation program who has returned to help others as Nutcracker's manager, said Bowen.

Can you teach 75 kids how to dance in one week?

With all the confidence of the natural dancer, Bowen answered, "Anybody can move to music." Dance captains instructed small groups in simple steps, adjusting the choreography to dancers' abilities.

Bowen was first formally introduced to dance classes when his roommate challenged him to take beginning ballet in his junior year

at UC Davis.

"I showed up the first day," he remembers, "and there were 50 beautiful women and me." He laughed, stretched out his arms, and said, "And I thought, where have I been all my life?"

Bowen, 25, was born in Hollywood and moved to Davis nine years ago when he was a high school junior. Davis had a "closed high school system," he reminisced and he spent his first days wondering with whom he'd eat lunch.

By the next year he was elected student body president.

Confident, enthusiastic, he enjoys working with people and is studying now for his master's degree in Public Administration at California State University-Sacramento.



Suju Vijayan, Shalini Vijayan, Tara Smith and Scott Cauchois pose in the courtyard.

Youthful touch for Yule play

There's been a flurry of activity around the Veterans Memorial Building all week and it reaches a peak tonight at 8:30 when the curtain rises on the Davis Life Enrichment program's production of the Nutcracker.

While the Davis version of the ballet classic may lack the professional stature of the Bolshoi's, the Russians can't begin to compete with the magic of the local performance. That magic includes taking nearly 70 youngsters some of whom have never seen a theatrical show much less been in one and turning them into Chinese dancers, penny whistles, mice and soldiers.

The classic story is followed closely in this simplified children's version. A little girl named Clara receives a wooden nutcracker as a Christmas gift. Clara's younger brother tells her its ugly, and Clara hotly defends the nutcracker. After the argument Clara falls asleep and dreams that the nutcracker has come to life.

The nutcracker then protects Clara and her Christmas tree from an army of mice, and Clara in turn protects the nutcracker from the head mouse. This final gallant effort breaks the spell placed over the Nutcracker, and he becomes a prince.

The nutcracker turned prince rewards Clara with a trip to the land of sweets where she meets the Sugar Plum fairy, the Chinese dancers, the Russian dancers, the penny whistles and a crowd of other magical creatures, all of whom dance for her pleasure.

When Clara awakens she realizes the nutcracker is still just a nutcracker but is happy to have visited such a magical land.

The land of Clara's dreams can be seen tonight as performed by Davis children from the ages of six to twelve. Admission for adults is \$1 and for children twelve and under, 50 cents. The audience will also be invited to a London bus Christmas caroling party complete with cookies and hot chocolate.

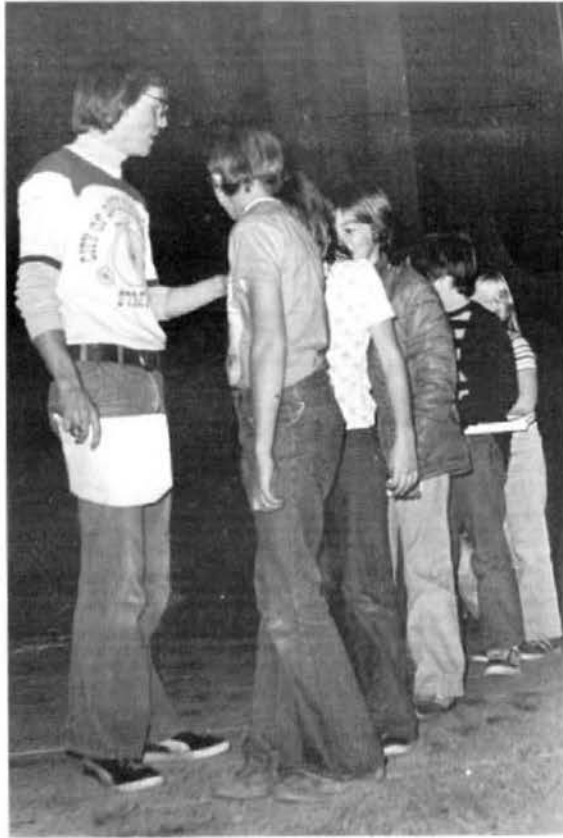
Photos by Cindy O'Dell



Mashari Melajan learns the Chinese dance with some help from Lynne Isbell.



Kids steal the stage but adults like Carol Bauman are still handy back stage.



When director Bob Bowen gives the commands...



Mousedom is just a tail, whisker and ears away for Shallini Vijayan.

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Even rehearsals are enthralling for these resting dancers and actors.

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