

drama

'Nutcracker' opens with 110 kids tonight

By DEL McCOLM

When 110 Davis children showed up to try out for the third annual "Nutcracker," they all got in. That's the philosophy of Bob Bowen, City Cultural and Special Activities coordinator, who originated the annual event.

"We are going to accept whoever shows up for rehearsal," he said onstage Monday, their second day in the Veterans' Memorial Theater. "So many groups turn them away when they try out. It's important for this age (5 to 12 year olds) to have their chance in costume onstage in the spotlight. Many have never done anything like this before and I think there's a need for it."

Performing comes naturally to Bowen, 27, who has lived in Davis for 11 years and has performed locally or been involved with Sunshine Children's Theater, the Davis Players, Bad Actors, The Davis Comic Opera Company and

The Prince (Derrick Wydick), right, fights the Mouse King (Nate Ballard) while Clara (Allison Steele) watches in The Nutcracker, opening tonight.

West of Broadway. He also taught tap, social and jazz dance at the university and for City Recreation programs and has been part-time City Playground co-ordinator for five years while he graduated from UC Davis and began graduate study at California State university, Sacramento.

"Your basic shuffle" is being taught to all the dancers divided into ten groups, he says, including the Sugar Plums, Snowflakes, Mice, Chinese and Russians. Bowen taught the volunteer high school leaders, who are now instructing the dancing teams.

The "Nutcracker" cast has been rehearsing three hours each day all week around town and the show, sponsored by the Davis Parks and Community Services Department, opens tonight at 7 p.m. It will be repeated tomorrow at 2 p.m. in the Veterans' Memorial Theater.

The story is Clara's fantasy after a family Christmas party, including princesses, princes, sugar plum fairies, dancers and mice fights. The cast includes Allison Steele, 11, as Clara; Robby Westergaard, 11, as her brother, Fritz; Suju Vijayan, 12, as the mother and Tommy Randall, 12, as the father.

Mike Horton, 12, is the toymaker who sets the toys twirling; Nathan Ballard, 10, is the Mouse King and Meghan French, 4½, is the Pipsqueak Mouse.

The Sugar Plum Fairy will be portrayed by Angie Edwards, 12, the Nutcracker Prince by Derrick Wydick, 12, and Lara Smith, 12, and Peter Vigil, 12, will be the Queen and King of the Snowflakes. The popular Mother Mar-

shallow, who conceals all the gumdrop children under her skirts, is Jami Bach, 12.

All performers will wear costumes, says Bowen, which consist of basic skirts and blouses with tunics for the girls, pants and shirts with flourishes for the boys. The mice people will wear large ears. Each year all the costumes are saved for the following performance. Costumes were designed by Ann Ough and Charlotte French and this year's batch were sewed by Emily Pott and Dena Williams.

Shelly Schwartz, a high school student, is one of ten group dance leaders who volunteered, she says, because she was the "Pennywhistle" two years ago and she wanted to help.

"It'll really be nice," she says.

On the stage after rehearsal, Bowen stood listening gravely to a young dancer complain that her partner kept kicking her. "And then I kick him back and it starts a big fight," she says. Bowen assures her that tomorrow she will have a new partner. She leaves.

"How are the lights?" calls out a volunteer from the lightboard, as the theater gets dimmer.

Leaders of groups answer questions in the aisles.

Looking around the theater, noisy with activity, Bowen spreads his fingers through his hair and says, "We're going to pull this baby off."

After both performances, the audience is invited to go Christmas caroling with the cast on a double-deck London Bus through the city.



Bob Bowen

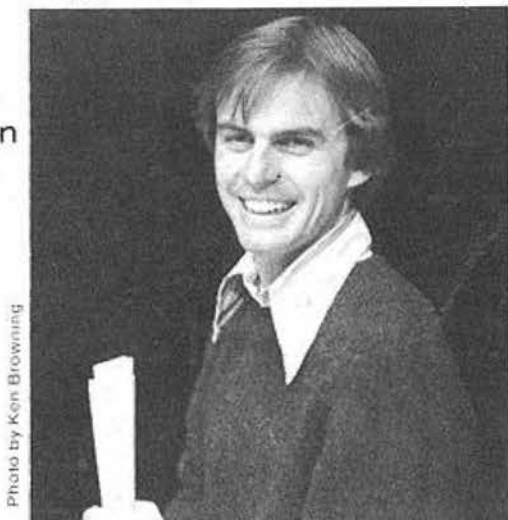
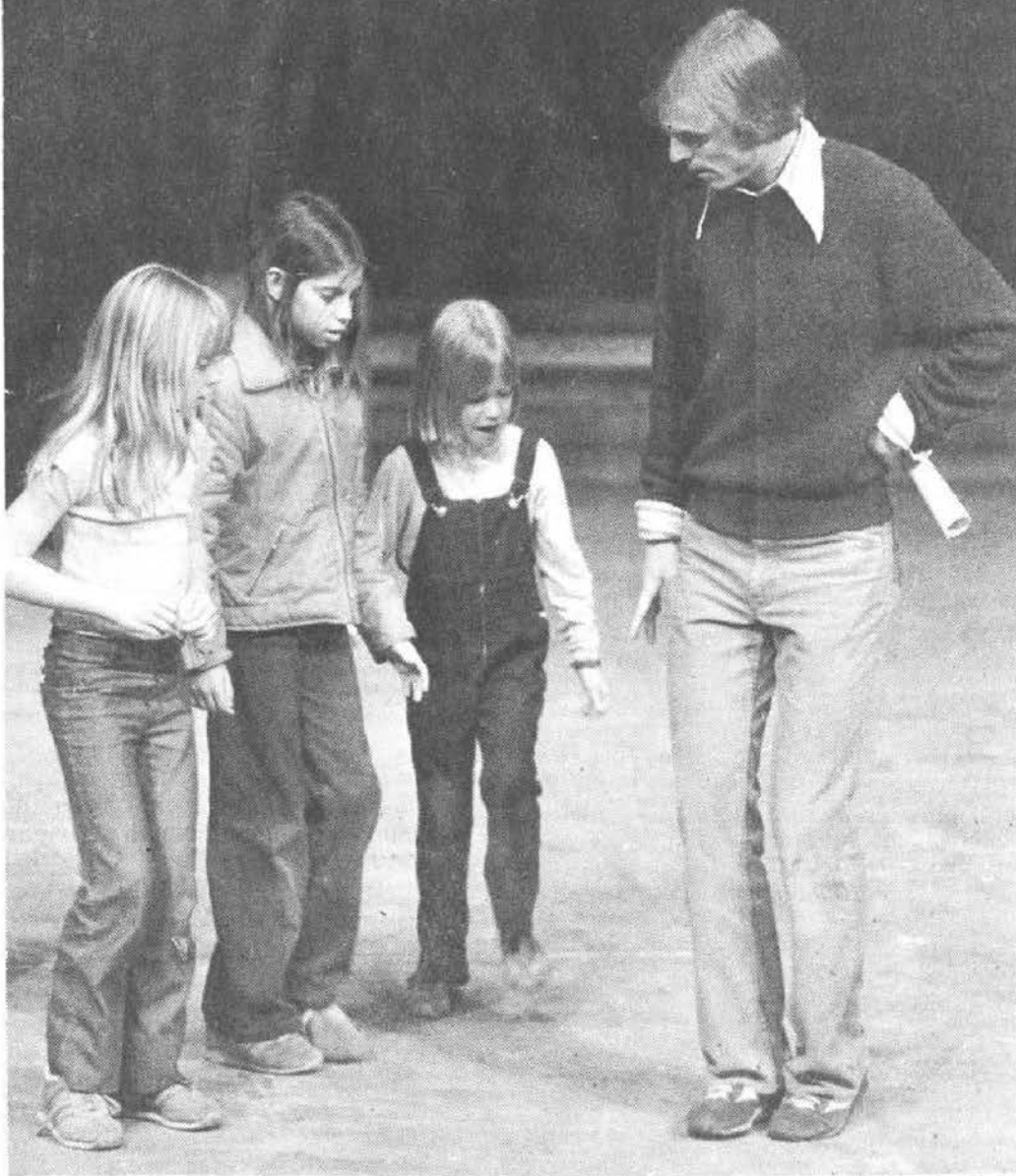


Photo by Ken Browning



Enterprise Photo

Following director Bob Bowen's lead, 10 groups of dancers will be rehearsing "The Nutcracker," which will be presented Friday at 7 p.m. and Saturday at 2 p.m. in the Veterans' Memorial

Theater. Tickets are \$2 for adults, 50 cents for children under 12. Tickets are available at the Davis Parks and Community Services Department.