

It was truly a sight to behold!

By NANCY VEIGA

Peter Tchaikovsky was probably dancing in his grave this weekend when he saw the life and vitality infused in his "The Nutcracker" by Bob Bowen and his cast of Davis children at the Veterans' Memorial Center.

Broadway is missing its bet by not signing Bowen immediately. The city of Davis Parks and Recreation Department has really scored a gem with this creative and innovative man who can take nearly 200 children and groom them into saavy little stage actors in a very short time.

So the Davis version of "The Nutcracker" isn't Mikhail Baryshnikov and Cynthia Gregory pirouetting around. It's something better.

It's children of all sizes and ages dressing up and putting on the ritz. Bowen has prepared them for everything, and even on opening night Friday the young actors and actresses didn't miss a beat. They performed as if they had been doing it all of their lives.

Yes, there were a few wigs that flew off or a couple of steps that were forgotten, but nothing more experienced actors have never encountered. And the children did it with such flair and nonchalance — their brilliant smiles glossing over the rough spots.

There was never dead time, never a noticeable



Photo by Ken Browning

Delightful snowflakes

The glittery little snowflakes in "The Nutcracker" twirl and patter around the stage Friday at the city of Davis' annual performance of the play. Directed

line forgotten, never hesitation about what should be done and when. The children — from the tiniest gumdrop to the Nutcracker himself — brought a sparkle to the old Christmas favorite that is sometimes so tired and old it's hardly worth the effort.

Alistair Wandesforde-

Smith was wonderfully brave and kind as The Nutcracker who befriends little Clara after she saves him from the Mouse King. Amanda Altier is splendid as Clara, the little girl with a great imagination.

But the life of the play are the colorful costume-clad children who dance, wiggle and frolick on the

by Bob Bowen of Davis Parks and Recreation Department, this year's performance featured nearly 200 local children.

stage: the party guests, the mousemaids, the dancing dolls and cats, the giggly little mice and brave, albeit short, little soldiers.

The gnomes with their pointy hats and big round bellies, the snowflakes, the sugar plum pages, the Spanish, Chinese, Russian and Arabian dancers, the

pennywhistles and the tiny gumdrops that skirmish out from under Mother Marshmallow's hoop skirt — they all bring the stage alive.

The clown dancers and flower dancers and ballerinas Aimee Hayes and Elizabeth Hulbert danced their way into the hearts of the audience. It was a sight to behold.

To add the finishing touches, the play also had its own special effects. Like the Christmas tree that grew to full size right before your eyes. And the giant flower that grows and unfolds to reveal a ballerina behind its petals.

There were real smoke charges from the cannon and lots of fog. And at the end, when it was the audience that should have been cheering the actors, the actors jumped with glee and wished the audience a merry Christmas.