



# Ballet plus aerial combine for 'Cracked!'

*By Rebecca Ralstin, guest reviewer*

VidaDance Company and Kansas City Aerial Arts presents "Cracked! A Reimagined Kansas City Nutcracker" at the City Stage in Union Station for three performances.

This represents the fourth collaboration between VidaDance Company and Kansas City Aerial Arts, and they said that are simply thrilled to present a creative and original production that is inspired by Kansas City and for Kansas City.

"The Nutcracker" ballet by Russian composer, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky continues as an American Christmas tradition since George Balanchine's production debuted with the New York City Ballet in 1954. The Nutcracker's libretto tells the adapted story of E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King."

In the ballet, the story follows a young girl, Clara, on Christmas Eve as a family and friends gather to decorate the Christmas tree and receive presents to children.

Clara and her brother, Fritz receive an elaborate wooden nutcracker carved and painted like a soldier. Clara loves her nutcracker, and out of jealousy, Fritz, breaks her toy and feels her heart break along with it.

Clara returns to the parlor in the night to check on her beloved nutcracker and as the clock strikes midnight her world transformed into and she finds herself in a battle between gingerbread men and mice, led by The Mouse King. From here, Clara journeys through a magical forest with dancing snowflakes into the Land of Sweets ruled by the Sugar Plum Fairy and experiences a celebration of sweets: Spanish chocolate, Arabic coffee, Chinese tea and Russian candy canes.

The Mouse King has turned into the Prince and the Sugar Plum Fairy has been awaiting the return of and she ushers Clara and the Prince together. There is a final waltz by all the wonderful sweet that ends with the magical kingdom waving goodbye to Clara and the Prince as they leave in a reindeer drawn sleigh into the night.

This “reimagined” production follows young Clara as she begins her evening celebrating Christmas Eve in true KC style by swinging it up downtown on 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine with some smooth jazz and blues inspired encounters. She is surrounded by friends and family in a lively rendition of “decorating the Christmas tree” excited to celebrate the season and see what wonderful presents her Uncle – a famous and celebrated toy maker – will bestow upon them all this event night. This upbeat jazz number serves as an introduction of the full company setting the stage for the story to come.

Instead of the usual cast of characters from Tchaikovsky’s The Nutcracker, Clara is presented with toy gifts that come to life before her very eyes reminding the audience of another famous girl from Kansas and her well-known friends: The Tin Man, The Cowardly Lion and The Scarecrow. This a lovely and heartwarming homage to The Wizard of Oz and gives the audience a taste of the local favorites to come.

Despite the wonder of these new and unique toys, Clara is still drawn to the small and colorful Nutcracker and as the nights soiree dies down, she drifts off to sleep and into

another world full of energetic and engaging characters.

Through her dream Clara encounters the charming Quarterback, Patrick Mahomes and a few of his Kansas City Chiefs as they take on the Oakland Raiders in an aerial acrobatics attack between the two teams. These aerial artist perform in "duets" on flying trapezes that is fun and thrilling to watch.

The audience follows Clara as she is enchanted by the magical Cherry Mash Fairy, pirouetting prairie sunflowers, Plaza inspired flamenco dancers, modern moving Roasterie baristas, suave snowflakes and stunning aerial trapeze and silk work that are pleasing to the eye and mesmerizing to watch unfold.

The dancers give nod to Christopher Elbow Chocolate, The Roasterie Coffee and Sporting Kansas City with some cute and clever costuming. Even the beautiful pas de deux showcases a Royals baseball player!

The aerial performers are breathtaking. They move effortlessly lifting their bodies onto trapezes, silks and flying rings. The strength to move so gracefully from position to position amazes. The aerialist perform as soloists and as duets in a variety of storied performances that showcase different skill levels. Artists weave their bodies in silks in elaborate holds and falls that are magical. The trapeze work alone will have the audience questioning their own upper body strength as the aerialist pull and hold themselves in positions that are as athletic as they are graceful.

It's obvious that this company has had a lot of fun in selecting different and daring variations of Tchaikovsky's famous orchestrated ballet in their Kansas City retelling of the storybook tale. Ranging from rock n' roll and hip hop to new age inspired and transcendental modern – the music is lively, fresh, beautiful and even unexpected.

VidaDance and KC Aerial Arts create quite the spectacle in this heartwarming and entertaining showcase. With so much

talent on stage at once sometimes it's difficult for the audience to know what dancer or duet should hold one's eye. Some numbers do outshine others but the audience is ever aware of commitment given in each step and spin by these dedicated performers.

The audience is sure to enjoy the charm and creativity in this fun, unique and festive production curated specially for KCMO and KCK. For those locals whom are looking for something new and unexpected to experience this holiday season that is outside of the predictable, this is a night to enjoy.

With skill levels ranging from novice to professional, the audience will be charmed by these dancers and acrobats. Instead of staying in with the family and half-watching an old holiday classic, try something new and get tickets to this original production

These performers deserve support and applause! It might even strike the spark of inspiration in the audience to take a class and dare to take the stage one as well.

VidaDance and Kansas City Ballet united to produce "Cracked." The production team is: Lindsey Dinneen, artistic director; Erin Steeley, rehearsal director; Daniel Parks, KC Aerial Art owner; Kelsey Aicher, training company conductor; Kelsey Aicher, Trena Reed, Erin Steeley, Production coordinators; Daniel Parks, lighting design; Kelsey Aicher, Dan Parks; Lindsey Dinneen, Trena Reed, Erin Steeley, costumes; Mary Kay Smith, house manager; Kevin Dinneen, photography; Spencer Studios and Geoff Platt, Show Image Photography and Graphic Design.

Dancers: Lindsey Dinneen, Malory Gittemeier, Kirstie McDermott, Caitlynn Noltie, Breanna Oppermann, Jessica Parra, Joseph Pilgram, Ananna Roberson, Sophie Yancey; Kaitlin Alter, Mike Huerter, Ashley Taylor, guest artists. Aerialists: Laurel Beekman, Katie Billups, Anna Francis, Lorelei Galles, Malory

Gittemeier, Jessica Harvey, Melissa Hoefer, Taylor Kramer, Kelly Payton, Harlowe Persaud, Meghan Spencer, Joseph Sheeran, Cassie Stevens, Nora Stevens, Littany Supca, Kate Vilain, Kaylei Wiedenmann, Elaina Zinn

VidaDabce Studio Students: Gwynevere Deterding, Erica Domen, Heather Foos, Mia Gille, Angie Ginenthal, Bethany Jones, Kaitlyn Loeffler, Zoe Miller, Victoria Paul, Ashley Penner, Bryson Shields, Nirmita Thandu, Laura Warne.

The performance dates and times are at City Stage in Union Station: Fri. Dec 6, 7:30 p.m; Sat. Dec. 7, 7:30 p.m.; Sun. Dec 8, 2 p.m. For more information regarding tickets, please see the Kansas City Ballet website.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/cracked-a-reimagined-kansas-city-nutcracker-tickets-80201770655>