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These castings will provide information about the entire "audition" process so make sure you attend if you have questions. Please contact your SA, RA, or SA 9line at 472-3900.

# 'Waltz' a ride for the senses

By JASON HARDY  
Senior staff writer

Beginning this weekend, Nebraska residents are invited to take a trip.

Don't worry, in no way does this trip involve Grandma's house and leftover turkey as dry as the holiday conversation.

This Friday, Omaha's Blue Barn Theatre, 614 S. 11th St., is taking patrons on a whirlwind tour transcending time, space and human emotions via a production of Paula Vogel's award-winning play, "The Baltimore Waltz."

Though the title brings to mind images of elegant, relaxing dancing, the play is actually a rock 'em, sock 'em raucous comedy and drama meshed together at breakneck speeds.

In the 1½-hour performance, there are 30 scene changes, numerous costumes, constant lighting and music shifts and somewhere in there is a coherent plot as well.

Despite a cast that's only three members strong, this production is in no way a small undertaking. Director Kevin Lawler admitted that this piece's intensity was sometimes hard to handle.

"It's a definite challenge," Lawler said. "The whole play is like being caught up in a whirlwind, and it's really challenging for a director to keep that tempo."

He said ultimately it was the three actors who suffered most from the play's wild nature.

"They're really conditioned. It's almost like an athletic event for these guys, but they do a great job of sustaining the energy of the play," Lawler said. "Basically, they just don't have time to get tired."

The play itself takes place in the mind of one of the main characters, Anna. She dreams of a wild trip she wishes to take with her brother, who has been diagnosed with a fatal illness. Together the two jaunt across Europe and come in contact with a wide variety of wacky characters, all played by the same guy - Nils Haaland.

He said his role required 30-second costume changes and an enormous amount of character traits that presented quite an obstacle.

"It's like one character to the next in a matter of seconds. It's very intense," Haaland said. "In that regard, you really have to know your lines, because if you mess up on one line, it could really throw off the whole show."

Playing the part of the ill-stricken brother Carl is Eric Griffith, who said "The Baltimore Waltz" demanded a strong commitment physically and mentally.

"It's kind of exhausting, but at the same time it really gets you fired up," Griffith said. "Everything on stage is moved by us three and a stage manager, and since the show really zips along, it has to become an automatic thing."

Because the show essentially is a dream, it turns into a collage of themes and images derived from a dizzying variety of influences from film noir to dirty jokes. However, at the root of the play is the serious-dealing of grief and death that Lawler said helps make it more understandable to audiences.



MATT HANEY/DN

"It works on so many different levels at the same time," Lawler said. "It deals with film styles and different classic art styles that we've grown to love, but then it also touches very deeply on the AIDS crisis."

"You'll laugh until you cry with this one."

Griffith said the play's humor helped to better illustrate more serious implications about life.

"The underlying story is very serious, but it's treated with fun," Griffith said. "You're going along laughing and then it snaps and you're like, 'wow.' And just when you start laughing again your guard goes down and it's like, bang, here's the point."

"The Baltimore Waltz" starts Friday and runs through Dec. 22 at the Blue Barn Theatre. Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$10 for students and seniors. The show starts at 8 p.m.

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# Omaha's 'Nutcracker' tradition to continue

By LIZA HOLTMEIER  
Staff writer

Clara and her Nutcracker prince can continue to dance in the Land of Sweets.

Thanks to the Omaha Theater Company, the holiday tradition of "The Nutcracker" ballet lives on in Omaha.

This weekend, the Dayton Ballet presents its last performances of "The Nutcracker" in Nebraska. OTC plans to mount its own production next year.

OTC picked up the Dayton Ballet's contract to perform "The Nutcracker" after Ballet Omaha, the original sponsor, dissolved.

Dayton Ballet has performed its rendition of "The Nutcracker" in Omaha the last two years, replacing the Ballet Omaha performances after the professional troupe disbanded.

But with the demise of Ballet Omaha's board of directors and school, the Dayton's presence in Omaha ends.

Dermot Burke, Dayton Ballet's artistic director, lamented the closure of his company's Omaha chapter.

"The audiences have embraced (Dayton Ballet)," Burke said. "And the people we've worked with have been gracious and hospitable."

But Burke is confident that Omaha will not go without a professional ballet company for long.

Robin Welch, the director of dance at OTC, plans to audition dancers in New York and Chicago next year.

After the Omaha Theater Company forms, it will eventually have two versions of "The Nutcracker." Welch choreographed the first, to be performed next year, and set it in the 1920s. The second version, to be performed

every two years, will place the ballet in Russia at the turn of the century.

Burke said this year's "Nutcracker" served as a dress rehearsal for the theater company. The organization could learn about the business and marketing aspects of a show without having to mount a production from scratch.

This year's "Nutcracker" should also help to keep the dance audience alive in the Lincoln and Omaha area.

Many Omaha families have already incorporated the ballet into their holiday traditions.

With its famed score by Peter Tchaikovsky, "The Nutcracker" has become one of the most beloved ballets of all time, and most professional companies have it in their repertoire.

The ballet tells the story of a young girl named Clara who travels to the Land of Sweets after falling asleep on Christmas Eve.

"It allows the audience to recapture that innocence we lose as we learn the rules of life," Welch said.

Because of the proliferation of "Nutcrackers," each company tries to make theirs a little different.

"Even though you may have seen a million Nutcrackers, you've never seen the same one. Every company has a slightly different dream," Welch said.

The Dayton Ballet opens its "Nutcracker" at the Orpheum Theater, 409 S. 16th St., in Omaha tonight. Show times are tonight through Saturday at 7:30 p.m. with matinee performances Saturday at 2 p.m. and Sunday at 1 and 4:30 p.m.

Ticket prices are \$29, \$24.50 and \$17.50 for adults. Children's tickets are \$19, \$17 and \$11.50. For reservations, call Ticketmaster at (402) 422-1212

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