**KDA presents “The Nutcracker”- Participation FAQ’s**

**What is “The Nutcracker”, and why should my dancer be in it?**

“The Nutcracker” is the most recognizable ballet in the United States and has become a holiday tradition for thousands of dancers and non-dancers alike. “The Nutcracker” is usually the first live ballet performance experience a person has and makes lasting impressions on audiences around the country (and world!) every year.

As a dancer, “The Nutcracker” is usually the only constant from year to year in their performing life. Recitals in dance schools, as well as performances in professional companies, vary yearly, but “The Nutcracker” is a tradition almost everywhere. “The Nutcracker” is the performance that most dancers use to gauge their progress from year to year and is the performance when the most treasured memories are formed.

Performance opportunities are a huge part of a dancer’s education. Performances teach dancers perseverance, accountability, how to overcome disappointment, how to overcome fear of failure, and teamwork, among tons of other lessons. Dancers also get to apply classroom movements to real life performance- this helps inspire dancers to continue to work hard in classes. “The Nutcracker” also provides the perfect opportunity for dancers to show families and friends what they’ve been accomplishing in class- a rare occurrence since in-studio observation days are few and far between.

**Why are rehearsals conducted outside of regular class times?**

KDA has decided to make “The Nutcracker” an optional performance with rehearsal times outside of regular class times for a couple reasons:

First, we need to devote most of our class time to technique and development of dance training. Though performances are an important part of dance training, our main objective at KDA is to provide high caliber, pre-professional training designed to help dancers reach the next phase of their careers- whether that be a college dance program, small professional company, or larger pre-professional school. The amount of classes we take, along with the number of classes per week, has been chosen to best prepare dancers for their goals. By putting “The Nutcracker” rehearsals on a separate day, we ensure our technique continues to improve over the full course of the dance season.

We also want KDA to be an accessible and welcoming environment for all families and potential families. By making “The Nutcracker” an optional performance we extend our registration longer so families can sign up almost year round for classes with no pressure to be performance ready. We also make sure families are under no additional financial strain around the holidays- dance tuition is expensive enough without including another mandatory fee close to Christmas.

**What is my participation fee paying for?**

The participation fee for “The Nutcracker” is paying for a number of things. First, it pays your instructor for their time spent in rehearsals with you- all KDA instructors make $20/hr for sharing their time and talents with our students. Next, it pays for your dancer’s costume- dance costumes usually come from specific dancewear companies, and they can be pricier than you think considering how little fabric there is! The participation fee also helps us build sets and props for these first performance years, as well as cover some administrative costs like theatre rental, printing for tickets and posters, etc. If anyone ever has questions about how costs are determined or has concerned about how their payments are being spent, please don’t hesitate to ask! KDA is formed on a principal of transparent business practices and strives to keep our families informed and confident.

**Why are there four performances of “The Nutcracker”? Why are we performing in two different cities?**

“The Nutcracker” requires quite a bit of preparation- from time spent in rehearsals to the creation of sets and purchase of costumes, there are lots of odds and ends that must come together both for the faculty and for the dancers. We at KDA believe that since we all work so hard to prepare for performances we may as well make it worth our efforts and do multiple shows! It’s very little additional work to do more than one performance, plus it gives us the potential to earn more profit and gives the dancers more than one shot onstage. The performance schedule is demanding, but we believe that it is the best possible decision for dancers and audiences alike.

We have decided to perform at two different theatres in two different towns this year. We have made this decision for several reasons. First, we want to expand our audience beyond our physical location- we’re Kentucky Dance Academy because we want to serve the whole commonwealth instead of just one city or neighborhood! We think dance should be accessible anywhere and everywhere. We also believe that starting the tradition of taking our show to theatres outside our comfort zone challenges our dancers to adapt to new spaces, pushes our name recognition into new markets, and provides extra performance opportunities to our young artists. We also know that there are several existing Nutcrackers near us and want to set ourselves apart by taking our show on the road.

**If my dancer isn’t enrolled in ballet classes can they still perform in “The Nutcracker”?**

While “The Nutcracker” is at its core a ballet, we want this opportunity to be available to dancers in our school from all disciplines of dance. Dancers enrolled only in Tap, Acro, Jazz, and/or Contemporary are still eligible to be a part of this holiday tradition.

It is important to note that dancers not enrolled in ballet classes may not be cast alongside their peers in age for “The Nutcracker” just because they may not have the requisite ballet technique to adequately perform the same roles. This does not mean they automatically get smaller or less important roles- it just means their casting criteria may be different than the casting criteria for dancers enrolled in ballet. Non-ballet students will also still be expected to wear ballet shoes and adhere to the ballet dress code for rehearsals unless otherwise directed by the instructor.

Dancers who are injured or otherwise unable to perform at their full capacity are also still invited to perform in “The Nutcracker”. Casting, participation fees, costuming, etc. are all decided on a case-by-case basis for dancers who are injured during Nutcracker season.

**How is casting decided?**

Youth casting is essentially decided based on age and numbers of participating dancers. Youth dancers are kept more or less within their age groups as the choreography is designed for the skill sets specific to developmental milestones in each age grouping. Particularly large age groups may be separated into different roles to keep the stage less crowded and to give the dancers more time onstage. Youth dancers will always have only one role in “The Nutcracker”.

Pre-Professional casting is also based on age/level placement but has more criteria outside of simply age. Dancers in the lower levels of the Pre-Professional Division are cast similarly to Youth- based mostly on age/level since the choreography is designed to best suit particular technical abilities of particular levels. Upper levels of the Pre-Professional Division are eligible for specialized roles- solos, duets, trios, and occasionally multiple roles (dependent upon the year and number of participating dancers). Dancers in the upper levels are considered on: level/age, technique/technical abilities, attendance, past performances, progression in class, and general attitude and demeanor. Instructors also consider whether particular students need a challenging role to really push them or simpler choreography to help them build confidence. Miss Amanda also invites outside dancers and instructors in to hold an audition one Saturday prior to casting to help give additional input and keep the casting process as transparent as possible.

**Why are there volunteer positions for performances and dress rehearsals? Shouldn’t the staff and faculty do those jobs?**

Just like at schools, churches, and other community centers, there are times we at KDA will as for family volunteers for events or performances. Since KDA is a relatively new and small dance school, we don’t yet have adequate staff members to supervise dancers backstage and run the front of house during the shows. Any specialized jobs- jobs that require some experience or prior knowledge, like Stage Managers or Directors- are filled by paid staff/faculty members of KDA, though some simpler jobs that do not necessarily need prior experience are open to family members to fill.

Miss Crystal will be releasing a list of volunteer positions with descriptions of the job itself- these can range from “Backstage Moms” who will supervise dancers in their dressing rooms to “Ushers” who will assist audience members to their seats in the theatre. All of the jobs are intended to be low stress- though show days do tend to get hectic!- and family members are appreciated for donating their time and talents to us. People wishing to volunteer can sign up for jobs on the bulletin board closer to the performance dates.

No family members are ever expected or forced to volunteer at performances or events. No dancer will ever be punished or rewarded based on their family’s ability or inability to volunteer.