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Chris Van Allsburg's original artwork is a part of the set design of Grand Rapids Ballet's new "Nutcracker"

During a ballet production, the **choreography** is one of the most important ways to tell the story and communicate emotion. This year, **Grand Rapids Ballet** is reimagining "The Nutcracker" with the creative team of children's book illustrator/author Chris Van Allsburg and set designer Eugene Lee for set and production design, and **Val Caniparoli** for choreography. Grand Rapids Ballet's new version of "The Nutcracker" will be a unique production for West Michigan, which stays true to the original story. Grand Rapids Ballet chose Val Caniparoli of the San Francisco Ballet, who is known for his innovative choreography, to choreograph and create a new "Nutcracker" voice.

**Choreographer Val Caniparoli**

Val Caniparoli, a longtime choreographer since 1982, is one of America's most sought after choreographers. He has contributed to the repertoires of more than 45 dance companies and won many awards. He has been with the **San Francisco Ballet** for over 40 years, where he is a principal character dancer.

**Caniparoli** is known for his innovative choreography and his versatility. His body of work is based in classical ballet, but his choreography is also influenced by many other types of movement, ranging from modern dance and ethnic dance to social dancing and ice skating. His diverse body of work has led to him being one of the world's most highly sought after American choreographers.

**Caniparoli's Choreography**

Caniparoli believes in collaborating with the entire creative team on a ballet production. He also isn't afraid to change a successful ballet if he comes up with a promising new idea while working on a production.

Caniparoli shares some of his creative process, "I rarely think of steps. I'm inspired to create by being in the room with the dancers and with the music. I'm one that collaborates right away with everyone that's involved in the project. I don't wait for the designers to come in. They are in the studio from day one. They are affected by the rehearsals. Sometimes I'm affected by a design, and it gives me a great idea. It all intertwines with me."

He feels that collaborating with the dancers is important to creating choreography. "In many ways, the dancers take ownership of the ballet and give it a better quality product because of it. Everyone is involved and takes great pride in what they accomplished," says Caniparoli.

**Reimagining 'The Nutcracker'**

Grand Rapids Ballet's Artistic Director Patricia Barker has worked with the creative team of Van Allsburg, Lee and Caniparoli to create a new "Nutcracker" that is unique to West Michigan, while still honoring the traditional storyline. The choreography plays a key role in bringing the production together for this vision.

Caniparoli choreographs from the perspective of both a dancer and choreographer. He comments, "I've been dancing the San Francisco Ballet version of "The Nutcracker" for 43 years, and I'm still dancing it. I'm heavily influenced by three different choreographers within those 43 years - Lew Christensen, William Christensen, and now Helgi Tomasson. I'm influenced heavily by Lew Christensen's version of "The Nutcracker." The Christensen brothers brought the first version of "Nutcracker" to North America, at the San Francisco Ballet. I'm highly influenced by their background, which was classical ballet and vaudeville. I was coached by Lew Christensen. There is this great picture of him coaching me as Drosselmeyer during "Nutcracker" rehearsal, and I distinctly remember how he taught me and what he wanted me to do. So that is ingrained in my head for how I want this Drosselmeyer to be. It's my interpretation of how he taught me, so it is kind of cool how things are handed down."

Caniparoli believes "The Nutcracker" is the hardest and most important ballet for a choreographer. He says, "The challenge is telling the story, and connecting everything, and making everything mean something to the audience. You want adults and children to love it and come back every year. The big challenge is also the importance of the work. It's got to last, at minimum 10 years. It's the hardest ballet for any choreographer because of audience expectations, and working with both children as well as company dancers."

Reimagining "The Nutcracker" is not new to Caniparoli. "This is my third version of "The Nutcracker," and each version is different. I love recreating it and rethinking it, and trying to find different ways of making that music work for me as well as the audience. It is like a different viewpoint of it. I love that challenge," says Caniparoli.

Caniparoli's shares his hopes for audience reaction, "I want this "Nutcracker" to be fun for everybody and have a sense of humor as well as magic. I want the audience to have fun and to take their children, and watch their wonderment as they see it for the first time. I want them to see it through their children's eyes."

Val Caniparoli's versatile choreography style and his "Nutcracker" history and training, make him an ideal voice for bringing Grand Rapids Ballet's new "Nutcracker" vision to life.

Grand Rapids Ballet will present "The Nutcracker" on the weekends of Dec. 12-14 and Dec. 19-21. Friday shows are at 7:30 pm. Saturday shows start at 2:00 pm and 7:30 pm. Sunday shows begin at 2:00 pm. Ticket are available through **Ticketmaster** or through the Grand Rapids Ballet Box Office. Ticket prices start at \$20. For more information, visit the **Grand Rapids Ballet website** or call (616) 454-4771.

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- San Francisco Ballet's 'The Nutcracker' - a unique production
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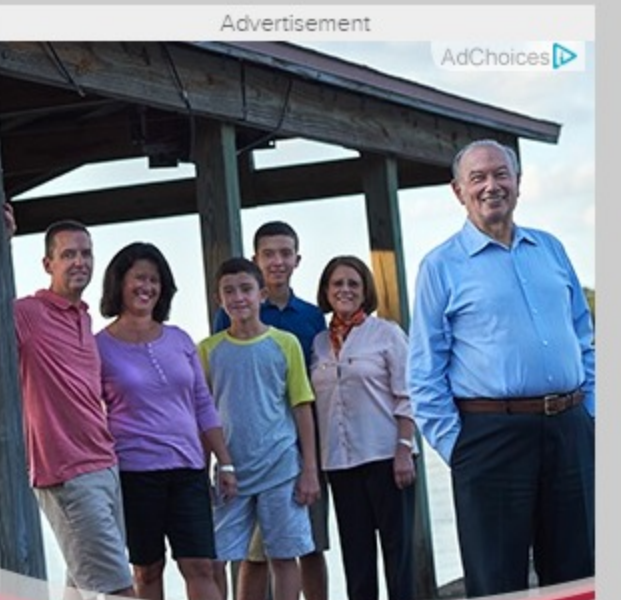
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