



*Barrington Dance Ensemble Presents*

# “THE NUTCRACKER”

by LISA STAMOS

LEFT AND BELOW: SCENES FROM A PREVIOUS  
BDE PRODUCTION OF “THE NUTCRACKER.”  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLY STACHURA



EACH DECEMBER, Barrington Dance Ensemble produces one of the finest performances of “The Nutcracker” in the Chicago region. This is the 31st season to enjoy BDE’s interpretation of the universally known magical holiday story about Clara, a girl who receives a nutcracker as a Christmas present and later falls into a dream. In this two-act classical ballet, first choreographed in 1892 by Marius Petipa and featuring the enchanting Tchaikovsky score, toy soldiers come to life by the family Christmas tree and battle a mischievous army of mice. Clara and her nutcracker, transformed into a prince, travel into the Land of Sweets, ruled by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The dancers, sets and costumes, and music bring joy to people of all ages.

In 1984, Mary Brennan founded Barrington Dance Academy, and in 1989, founded the nonprofit Barrington Dance Ensemble—a place where students of her academy, area dance schools, and professionals could perform together.

“The Nutcracker” came about by accident,” Brennan said. She wanted to do a few scenes of the classic ballet for her students’ parents to enjoy three decades ago. “Through the collaboration with stage manager Lee Potter, choreographers, set and lighting designers, and a costumer, the small project transformed into the full ballet right before my eyes.” These days, Brennan is known as “The Nutcracker Lady.”

### I WAS ONCE A MOUSE

“We had absolutely no funding to create sets, costumes, or lighting, and I was very busy teaching and raising my two children,” Brennan said. But neighbors, parents, and

## Putting on the SHOW

The planning for BDE’s Nutcracker show begins in early January, a few weeks after the sets and costumes are stored away from the December shows. Artistic Director Mary Brennan and her team compiles a wish-list for hiring guest artists and they work up the set repair projects. They hire professional stage crew, costumers, set designers and electricians, and count on Barrington High School theater tech students to round out the team. The show’s performance requires 100 performers and another 100 helpers for volunteer manpower. About 80 of the cast members are BDE Company members or local dance students, and the rest are hired professionals.

Brennan believes that the caliber of the performers, and the hundreds of uniquely designed costumes, set BDE’s performance apart. The student dancers audition in August for parts, and tirelessly rehearse every weekend until show-time. “This show is a big boat to put in the water,” Brennan says. “It’s chaotic and we have so much fun, and for so many, it kicks off the holiday season.”

ON A RECENT SUNDAY AFTERNOON, BDE DANCERS WAIT IN THE COSTUME ROOM FOR THEIR FITTINGS. FROM LEFT: KENZIE RAJSKI, SCARLETT DIOL, AVA BUSH, AND EMINA LUTSI.




the community at large pulled together to make this charming love story happen. This formula is still at the heart of each delightful annual performance.

One of the most endearing aspects of BDE's longevity is that students who started young in the show—perhaps as those adorable little mice who prance about on stage with their puffy gray costumes, tails, and gloved mouse hands—grow up and return as parents or even grandparents of the next generation of dancers. The little dancers watch the older dancers in

awe. The older dancers assist the little ones. Life-long friendships are made.

“The Nutcracker is one of the best-known ballets in the world,” Brennan said. “At BDE, we are a huge, multi-generational dance family, and it is magical to me!”

Show tickets for “The Nutcracker” are on sale now at [barringtondance.org](http://barringtondance.org). Tickets are \$25–\$38. Performances will be Friday, Dec. 6 at 7 p.m., Saturday Dec. 7 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., and Sunday at 2 p.m., all at Barrington High School. 

## HANNAH RAY BRUCE, *Principal Artist and Entrepreneur*



Hannah Ray Bruce, born and raised in Barrington, Illinois, began dancing at age 5, but it wasn't until she was 12 that she started her formal ballet training at Barrington Dance Academy and Barrington Dance Ensemble. Despite the late start, with the support of her teachers and her determination, Hannah was equipped to continue dancing at a higher level. She graduated summa cum laude from Point Park University with a BFA in Dance and launched her professional career with Central Illinois Ballet under artistic director, Rebekah von Rathonyi, where she climbed to ranks to principal dancer. During her six seasons she performed some of her favorite roles including Sugar Plum Fairy, Firebird, Cinderella, Daisy in *Gatsby the Ballet*, and originated the role of Christine in *Phantom of the Opera*.

After marrying her high school sweetheart, Hannah moved to Washington, D.C., dancing with Chamber Dance Project under artistic director Diane Coburn Bruning. Simultaneously, Hannah built a social media following as a wedding content creator leading her to launch her business, *To Have and To Post*. She recently returned to the Chicago area with her husband as they welcomed their first child this past June. Hannah will continue to perform with Chamber Dance Project in Washington, D.C. this season. Reuniting with Barrington Dance Ensemble for *The Nutcracker* feels like a full-circle moment, as she credits them for shaping her into the dancer she is today.



ABOVE: ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON, STUDENTS PRACTICE SCENES FOR THE UPCOMING NUTCRACKER SHOW.



COSTUME DESIGNER AND MISTRESS ALICESON RUBEL-HACKETT HELPS SELA ANDERSON WITH HER COSTUME FITTING.

BELOW: ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MARY BRENNAN IS THE FOUNDER OF BARRINGTON DANCE ACADEMY AND BARRINGTON DANCE ENSEMBLE.

