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Contact:

Michael Layer

Director of Marketing & Public Relations

(803) 799-7605

[acebry@columbiacityballet.com](mailto:acebry@columbiacityballet.com)

**Columbia City Ballet Adapts Nutcracker Classic for Pandemic in America**

*Artistic, Executive Director William Starrett uses holiday tradition to teach historical parallels of current moment*

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** – William Starrett and Columbia City Ballet are bringing a COVID-19-safe, magical holiday production of Nutcracker to Columbia in eight spectacular performances at the Koger Center for the Performing Arts. Not only are COVID-19 protocols such as socially distanced seating and sanitation procedures being practiced, but Starrett has set the classical ballet, Nutcracker, in the early years of the 20th century coinciding with the Spanish Flu Pandemic.

“Many of us forget how devastating the influenza pandemic was in 1918. Over 600,000 Americans died because of that disease and many more were likely saved because people adopted simple public health measures like mask wearing and social distancing,” Artistic and Executive Director William Starrett said. “These lessons aren’t new but with simple costume adjustments we can tell our story, remember the moment we’re in, and keep our dancers safe.”

Columbia City Ballet will be using costuming from our recent production of Great Gatsby to enhance Nutcracker’s 1920’s vibe and our costume department has produced more than 250 masks to complement each costume. Silver sequins for the snow scene and vibrant pastels for Waltz of the Flowers, everyone has an appropriate mask that is both effective and attractive. The costume department has even developed a special process for laundering the masks between performances. Executive and Artistic Director, William Starrett says this season’s production of Nutcracker won’t only be a staging of a much loved ballet, but in large part an extended Public Service Announcement on the importance of masks, social distancing, hand sanitizing, and all the other things we need to do collectively to stem the tide of the COVID-19 pandemic. Starrett furthermore states that he feels it is very important to remind the public that we have in fact experienced a pandemic before and that we survived it and continued to thrive as a nation.

Columbia City Ballet is celebrating a milestone 60th Anniversary Performance Season and this production of Nutcracker marks our return to the stage following the abrupt cancellation of the 2019-2020 Performance Season due to the onset of the pandemic. Nutcracker will be presented in eight performances, over two weekends, December 12-13 and December 19-20. You can see this family holiday tradition at 3:00 pm and 7:30 pm on each of the two Saturdays; and at 1:00 pm and 5:30 pm on each of the two Sundays. Masks will be required for all audience members, and there will be strict adherence to other COVID-19 safety protocols. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.kogercenterforthearts.com](http://www.kogercenterforthearts.com), by phone (803-251-2222), or in person at the Box Office located at 1051 Greene street, Columbia, SC 29201.

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*Columbia City Ballet's mission is to offer South Carolina and Southeastern audiences the highest quality ballet. We in South Carolina can proudly claim one of the strongest and most versatile ballet companies in the Southeast. Since the Columbia City Ballet's founding in 1961, it has fully integrated the world of dance within the community as the largest performing arts organization in the state.*