

THE JACKSONVILLE SYMPHONY'S FIRST COAST NUTCRACKER RETURNS!

Jacksonville, FL (December 6, 2017) – A performance that has been enchanting Jacksonville for over 40, the Jacksonville Symphony's First Coast Nutcracker will be performed on December 15, 16 & 17.

This is the only performance of *The Nutcracker* in the area with a live symphony orchestra! In total, there are 350 different costumes seen throughout the performance; including some new ones this year! Also making its first appearance is a magical, growing tree that will appear on stage. With world class artists and a 15 foot Nutcracker Tree in the lobby, this event presents entertainment in and out of the theater.

Once again the Ballet will be choreographed by Rhonda Stampalia who has been the artistic director/choreographer for the First Coast Nutcracker since 1998.

WHO: Jacksonville Symphony Assistant Conductor **Deanna Tham** will lead the performance. Hailing from Saratoga, California, Tham has conducted and guest conducted all over the United States, most recently working with renowned conductors Marin Alsop and James Ross at the Cabrillo Contemporary Music Festival. Before joining the Jacksonville Symphony, Tham was the music director of the 350-piece Louisville Youth Orchestra. Tham has also served as the music director of the Boise Philharmonic Youth Orchestra and has conducted the Boise Philharmonic, Ballet Idaho and Opera Idaho.

GUEST ARTISTS:

Yumelia Garcia will return as lead dancer for The First Coast Nutcracker. Garcia was born in Caracas, Venezuela where she received her professional training at the Escuela de Ballet Gustavo Franklin. Upon graduation at the top of her class, she was invited to join the National Ballet of Caracas at the age of 15 and was promoted to soloist one year later. Garcia began her U.S. career with Heinz Pohl at Ohio Ballet and soon thereafter she joined Milwaukee Ballet rising to principal dancer.

After retiring from Joffrey Ballet in 2014, Yumelia Garcia continues her close collaboration with the Jacksonville Symphony this holiday season as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, after stunning performances in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella* during Jacksonville's 2014-15 and 2015-16 seasons.

Mauro Villanueva will join the Ballet as lead male dancer. Villanueva grew up in San Antonio, Texas and began his dance training at the age of six with Shawn Knife. At age 9 he joined the University of Incarnate Word Ballet School directed by buddy and Susan Trevino, co-founders of The Joffrey Workshop Texas. In 1998 he attended a summer course and consequently studied for two years at the Nutmeg Conservatory in Connecticut. In August of 2000, Villanueva joined the Joffrey Ballet as an apprentice and two years later received a full company contract.

Additional lead dancers include: James Boyd, Brian Palmer, Benjahmin Svyatoslavich and Carlos Garland.

WHAT: Prior to 1972, only selected vignettes, known as “Nutcracker Suites,” had been presented in Jacksonville. At that time Thelma Johnston Baggs, a prominent supporter of the ballet and well-known teacher, was inspired by George Balanchine’s production of *The Nutcracker* and wanted to bring a full production of the ballet, complete with a live orchestra, to Jacksonville. Furthermore, she envisioned that this production would showcase the talents of the many non-professional students of ballet in the area.

The ballet, performing with the Jacksonville Symphony under the direction of Willis Page, opened for two sold-out performances at the Civic Auditorium on December 16, 1972. The inaugural production drew 6,400 people, paying \$3 for tickets to the matinee and \$4-\$7 for the evening performance. For \$20, patrons could sit in the Magic Circle and attend a champagne reception. These two premiere performances were so popular that the Women’s Guild of the Jacksonville Children’s Museum (sponsor and support organization) ran a newspaper ad apologizing to people who were turned away at the door.

From the beginning, there was a concern that provisions be made to enable children to attend the ballet who might otherwise not have the opportunity. At the suggestion of Virginia Fox, tickets were provided for children from the Children’s Home Society and within a few years, one or two special school performances were added to the schedule each year. What was started in 1972 continues to flourish to this day, with four performances this year delighting thousands of school children.

WHEN:

- Friday, December 15 at 8:00pm
- Saturday December 16 at 2:00pm and 8:00pm
- Sunday, December 17 at 2:00pm
- (The Jacksonville Symphony’s performance of Handel’s Messiah will be going on the same weekend)

WHERE: All performances will take place in the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts in the Jim and Jan Moran Theater.

SPONSORS: The Jacksonville Symphony’s First Coast Nutcracker is presented by VyStar Credit Union.

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The Jacksonville Symphony is North Florida’s leading music nonprofit offering live performances at Jacoby Hall in the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts and other venues throughout the area. In addition, the Symphony provides music instruction for youth and operates the Jacksonville Symphony Youth Orchestra. For more information about the Symphony, visit JaxSymphony.org, like them at [facebook.com/JaxSymphony](https://www.facebook.com/JaxSymphony), follow them on @jaxsymphony, on Instagram at JaxSymphony and on YouTube at JacksonvilleSymphony.