

**THE TRADITION CONTINUES:
THE JACKSONVILLE SYMPHONY'S *FIRST COAST NUTCRACKER***

Jacksonville, FL (December 5, 2018) – A production that has been enchanting Jacksonville for over 40 years, the Jacksonville Symphony's *First Coast Nutcracker* will be performed on December 14, 15 & 16. This is the only performance of *The Nutcracker* in the area with a full, live symphony orchestra. In total, there are 350 different costumes seen throughout the performance. 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 has been choreographed by Rhonda Stampalia who has been the artistic director/choreographer for the *First Coast Nutcracker* since 1998.

THE STORY: 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.

WHEN:

- Friday, December 14 at 8 p.m.
- Saturday December 15 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.
- Sunday, December 16 at 2 p.m.
- (The Jacksonville Symphony’s production 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.

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: New to *First Coast Nutcracker*, **Diana Catalina Gómez** was born in Cali, Colombia, and trained at Incolballet. After her graduation, she joined the Colombian Company for three years under the direction of Gloria Castro. She was awarded a contract with Ballet Gamonet in

Miami, Florida, under the direction of Jimmy Gamonet. After leaving Miami, Gómez joined Tulsa Ballet and performed ballets by choreographers such as McGregor, Tharp, William Forsythe, Val Caniparoli, Ma Cong, Ben Stevenson, Edward Liang, Volpini, George Balanchine and Nicolo Fonte. Some of her principal roles have come in ballets such as *Don Quixote*, *The Nutcracker*, *Paquita*, *Coppelia*, *Dracula*, *Cinderella* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, among others.

Also new to *First Coast Nutcracker*, **Rodrigo Almarales** trained with National Ballet School (Cuba), National Ballet School (Mexico), National Ballet School (Canada) and Hamburg Ballet School. Almarales performed as a soloist from 2007-2009 with the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Germany and was a top-seven finalist on Italian television show "Amici" in 2009. He spent the 2010-2011 season with Boston Ballet before joining Cincinnati Ballet in 2011. Almarales' extensive performance experience includes full-length ballets such as *The Nutcracker*, *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella*, *Don Quixote* and *The Sleeping Beauty*.

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

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 Orchestras. 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.