



A world full of cheese

by Josh Mailman

The six o'clock news was showing footage of the military campaign in Iraq. My three-year-old daughter saw something that looked familiar.

"Dad, what's that thing?" she asked as she pointed to US troops firing a field artillery cannon. "It's a cannon," I replied. "But what's it for?" she insisted. "It's a bad thing, like a gun, used for hurting people," I explained, trying to preempt any further inquiry into this child-unfriendly topic.

"But I thought cheese comes out of it," she replied innocently.

She was thinking of the scene in the *Nutcracker* (which we've watched many times on video) in which the Nutcracker's soldiers battle an army of mice. The mice are defeated when their attention is diverted to eating all of the pieces of cheese that the soldiers fire from their cannon. What a wonderful world it would be if our international disputes could be settled with cheese.

It's surprising that Tchaikovsky's 1892 *Nutcracker* was not actually performed outside Russia until the 1930s. Since then, year after year children and adults have enjoyed this Christmas favorite based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. The complete ballet features many beautiful musical moments omitted from Tchaikovsky's well-known *Nutcracker Suite*. Fans of Tchaikovsky's music will be especially delighted by the slow-building orchestral crescendo that accompanies the rising Christmas tree just before the Nutcracker soldiers go into battle.

How to enjoy the *Nutcracker*? There's the Warner Brothers video of New York City Ballet's Balanchine production starring Macaulay Culkin (as the Nutcracker Prince). There's conductor Valery Gergiev and the Kirov Orchestra's outstanding CD recording (on the

Philips label). And there's even the book version, illustrated by Maurice Sendak (published by Crown).

Yet there's no better way to enjoy it than to see it in live performance. Thanksgiving weekend provides the opportunity when the **Rochester City Ballet** and the **Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra** present their annual production twice daily in the Eastman Theatre. Former and current RCB artistic directors **Timothy M. Draper** and **Jamey Leverett** choreographed it and **Michael Buttermann** will conduct it. Former and current members of NYC's American Ballet Theatre will be performing: Sarah Lane and Misty Copland (alternating as the Sugar Plum Fairy), Sari Ostrum (Dewdrop), and Danny Tidwell (the Cavalier).

Choral music is another traditional favorite during the holiday season. RPO pops conductor **Jeff Tyzik** will present his annual Gala Holiday Pops concert on December 19, 20, and 21 in the Eastman Theatre. On December 12 and 13 at Asbury First Methodist Church, the **Rochester Oratorio Society** will present Handel's *Messiah*. Don't be alarmed by the repeated phrase "All we like sheep" — it's merely a clause prefacing "have gone astray" and has nothing to do with deviant shepherds.

If you are tired of the same old *Messiah* year after year, or crave more music like it, mark your calendar for December 14 when **William Weinert** leads the **Eastman-Rochester Chorus and Philharmonia** in Handel's mammoth oratorio *Solomon* in the Eastman Theatre. On December 21, look forward to the **Rochester Bach Festival** performing J.S. Bach's cantata *Nun dom der Heiden Heiland*, in which the string instruments depict the

words "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" with a steady march of plucking. The cantata displays Bach's internationalism as he borrows from the French overture and Italian opera styles.

Speaking of Italian Baroque, the Eastman School's **Collegium Musicum** (a 12-voice vocal ensemble, string orchestra, and continuo group, lead by **Paul O'Dette** and **Christel Thielmann**) will offer oratorios, cantatas, and concerti grossi by Carissimi, Rossi, Mazzochi, Scarlatti, and Locatelli on December 11. On December 4 and 7 at the Memorial Art Gallery, **Musica Spei** will link music and visual art in *Images of the Virgin Mary in Art, Sculpture, and Music*. On the program are vocal works of the medieval mystic Hildegard von Bingen and Renaissance masters Ockeghem, Josquin, Isaac, and Ciconia.

If it's 20th- and 21st-century music that lights up your tree, your holiday season is looking brighter than ever. On November 21, three dozen junior flutists (ages 10 to 15) from the Rochester area join the **Eastman Philharmonia Chamber Orchestra** in John Corigliano's *"Pied Piper" Fantasy*. Corigliano originally rose to fame with his magnificent film score to Ken Russell's science-fiction horror-thriller *Altered States* (1980). This time Corigliano applies his theatrical musical imagination to the famous legend about rats.

On December 4 in Eastman's Kilbourn Hall, **Zambouni's Performance Ensemble** flies in from Miami, Florida to dance to selected movements of **Brad Lubman's** electronic work *Clear Housing* (2003) (previewed in the *City Newspaper* article, "Digital Cubism," on October 9, 2003). **Musica Nova** will also play John Cage's *Four* (1991) and Earle Brown's *Novaro* (1962) on the same program. On December 10



Best enjoyed live: Jordan Drew as Clara in the 2001 production of "Nutcracker."

and 20, vocal ensemble **Madrigalia** will perform Christmas works of Rochester's own Sydney Hodkinson, Frenchman Francis Poulenc, and Englishman Herbert Howells.

British composer William Walton's superb *Viola Concerto* (1929) is both darkly melancholic and delightfully playful. On November 20 and 22 **Christopher Seaman** and the RPO will accompany guest solo violist **Nokuthula Ngwenyama** ("Thula") in this not-to-miss performance of Walton's concerto. On the same program Seaman — a Britisher himself — will be right at home in Benjamin Britten's "Four Sea Interludes" from *Peter Grimes*. And they're serving Brahms' *Symphony No. 4* as dessert. ■