

# Urban Nutcracker

TONY WILLIAMS DANCE CENTER

**For immediate release**

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## ***Urban Nutcracker*, Delighting Audiences of All Ages, Returns for its 16<sup>th</sup> Year Boston's Most Diverse, Inclusive, and Fun Holiday Production!**

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Tony Williams Dance Center presents the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the Boston holiday classic, [Anthony Williams' \*Urban Nutcracker\*](#), December 16-31 at John Hancock Hall (180 Berkeley St, Boston, MA 02116). This modern holiday classic has been praised as "a Nutcracker with real soul" by *Boston Metro*. This year includes three special performances: an Autism sensory-friendly performance (Dec. 17) and an LGBTQ Night (Dec. 29), both designed to be inclusive and spread the joy of dance; and a New Year's Eve performance on December 31.

In 2001, local dance legend Tony Williams reimagined the classic holiday Nutcracker tale to become a Boston inner-city story with a neon-buzz, blending the rhythms of Duke Ellington with the classical music of Tchaikovsky. Annually, 150 performers – including professional ballet dancers – take the stage to showcase a broad diversity of dance forms starring the multicultural icons of Boston. Audiences will join heroine Clarice as she explores iconic Boston scenes such as Make Way for Ducklings, Top of the Hub, Chinatown, and the Boston Public Garden. The delightful story continues by following the magical journey of Clarice and her Nutcracker guide through classical ballet, tap, hip hop, jazz, flamenco, and more.

Tony Williams says of this year's production, "I am so pleased to be presenting the *Urban Nutcracker* for the 16<sup>th</sup> year. It is very rewarding to have the *Urban Nutcracker* be accepted by the Greater Boston community and be known as an enduring holiday classic. When it first premiered shortly after 9/11, it became clear that this production embraced multi-culturalism and represented a more inclusive holiday tradition. Little did I know back then that this inclusivity can bring us all together through dance as an art form which heals and unites."

The performances this year have several surprises in store for the audience. The famous Prologue section will feature dazzling guest artists, including: *Urban Nutcracker* alumnus and Tony Award winner, Yo-el Cassell; the dashing Gianni DiMarco as Drosselmeyer; and the Flamenco Dance Project. New this year is jaw-dropping traditional Georgian folk dance by Giorgi & Giorgi. Giorgi Shanidze and Giorgi Guginishvili have both traveled the world as principal dancers with the Ensemble Ibera and the National State Ensemble Erisoni, respectively. Both are currently dancers and choreographers with Mavi Dance, a Boston-based company dedicated to bringing ancient dance traditions to the modern day. Other special inclusions include Russian ballerina Kseniya Melyukhina returning for her first performances since having a baby to dance the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy, and former Boston Ballet and Festival Ballet of Providence ballerina Ruth Bronwen-Whitney dancing the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy.

This season's production includes the new sets and costumes originally designed for the 2015 "15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary" season of *Urban Nutcracker*. The stage comes alive with over 85 colorful costumes reimagined by local artist Dustin Todd Rennells (originally designed by Rebecca Cross) and made by hand in Boston, India, Russia, and China. The dazzling costumes of the Sugar Plum Fairy and Snow Queen were hand-beaded with over 450 Swarovski crystals on each costume.

The eye-catching sets by Janie Howland feature popular Boston landmarks like the Fenway Park scoreboard, the Citgo sign, and Downtown Boston. Of the sets, Howland says, "The redesigned sets for the *Urban Nutcracker* reflect the diversity of Boston's neighborhoods and our place in the global

community. Projections are used in Act II to add a fantastical element to the dream sequence and support the different nationalities represented in the dances. We are constantly upgrading the design to add some new surprises for the audiences.”

“Hip-hop holiday fun... [with] enthusiasm and a sense of inclusive community onstage.”  
-*The Boston Globe*

All performances of the *Urban Nutcracker* will take place at John Hancock Hall  
180 Berkeley St, Boston, MA 02116

Dec 16   7:30 PM	Dec 24   11 AM
Dec 17   11 AM (Autism Sensory Friendly)	Dec 24   3 PM
Dec 17   3 PM	Dec 29   7:30 PM (LGBT Inclusive)
Dec 18   11 AM	Dec 30   1:30 PM
Dec 18   3 PM	Dec 30   7:30 PM
Dec 22   7:30 PM	Dec 31   3 PM
Dec 23   7:30 PM	

*All performances are approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes with one intermission.*

Ticket Prices: \$25-\$85; Discounts for groups of 15 or more

MBTA: Green Line to Arlington, Orange Line to Back Bay

More info: [urbannutcracker.com](http://urbannutcracker.com), 888-596-1027

### **About *Urban Nutcracker***

The *Urban Nutcracker* celebrates multicultural Boston through a broad range of diverse dance styles. Produced by the Tony Williams Dance Center, the *Urban Nutcracker* harnesses the power the arts to unite diverse communities to be a catalyst for positive social change.

Presenting sponsor of *Urban Nutcracker* is Adage Capital. Additional support is provided by Chobee Hoy Real Estate.

### **About Tony Williams**

Tony Williams is a dance pioneer and retired international ballet star. Williams’ dance philosophy uses the arts to unite diverse communities in Boston, having had direct experience on how transformative the arts can be on young lives. As a young man, he gained access to Boston Ballet’s dance program and progressed to become their first African-American principal dancer. From there he danced with the Joffery Ballet, Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and performed all over the world. When Williams retired, he returned to Jamaica Plain, where it all began, and opened a dance school. Not long after, he produced the beloved *Urban Nutcracker* which annually enjoys a successful run downtown. Widely respected as a progressive dance educator, Williams has won the Dance Teacher Magazine Award and Wheelock Family Theater’s Wheel Award. In 2014, he founded the Tony Williams Ballet and expanded his dance school to Concord, MA.

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### ***Urban Nutcracker At-A-Glance***

Since 2001, *Urban Nutcracker* has been delighting audiences of all ages. Below, you'll find some interesting facts and figures about Boston's most unique family holiday experience!

#### **Interesting Production Facts:**

- Instead of Clara, the main heroine in *Urban Nutcracker* is named Clarice, and her brother is Omar instead of Fritz.
- *Urban Nutcracker* features a diverse cast of dances throughout the production. Tony Williams, the founder of the Tony Williams Dance Center and the choreographer of *Urban Nutcracker*, was Boston Ballet's first African-American principal dancer. Making sure dancers of any background have access to dance education is one of Tony's most important priorities.
- Many of the street scenes are classically "Boston", with scenes from Make Way for Ducklings, the iconic Citgo sign, Chinatown, the Top of the Hub, and the Boston Public Garden.
- The music is not just Tchaikovsky...Tony Williams also weaves in jazzy Duke Ellington tunes
- This year the performances run Dec 16-31 and include an LGBT performance (Dec 29) which features cross dressing dancers and drag queens, and an Autism Sensory Friendly performance (Dec 17). The show will be tailored to be sensory friendly in order for maximum audience comfort that will feature house lights at half capacity, sounds lower in volume/intensity, volunteers to provide support, and a quiet area. And the audience will be encouraged to dance, sing and shout!

#### **Costume Facts**

- There are 85 complete costumes in *Urban Nutcracker* with over 1,200 individual costume pieces
- There are 125 head pieces in the production
- Dancers use over 300 pointe shoes throughout the three weeks of performances
- Over 250 pairs of dance tights are used
- While most of the costumes were hand-made in Boston, the Act II costumes were created by hand in India, Russia, and China (scenes from the show)
- The Russian costumes are based exactly on traditional Ballets Russe costumes from the turn of the century. The Chinese costumes are a modern cross between Chinese and Indian modern designs
- Every costume is hand washed between each performance
- The elaborate beading on the Sugar Plum Fairy and Snow Queen costumes is unbeaded and re-beaded by hand for each cleaning post-performance. The Snow Queen costume has over 5,000 Swarovski crystals set on panels for easier removal

- Each Snow corps costume has 450 Swarovski crystals. There are 8 of these costumes on rotation for 6 dancers
- The Nutcracker/Rat fight scene is set in black light to reveal hidden black light details
- There are 24 people on the costume staff. They are all volunteers except one, Dustin Todd Rennells, who reimagined the costumes in 2015