

Produced by Justine Ward-Hook

McCain Theater
December 12th at 6:30
December 13th at 12:00



#### = Act One =

Herr Stahlbaum and his wife are having a Christmas Party. Clara and Fritz, their children, greet the guests, dance and play games. Later, the mysterious Dr. Drosselmeyer, Clara's Godfather, arrives and entertains the children with his magical toys and wind-up dolls. Dr. Drosselmeyer brings a special gift for Clara - a wooden nutcracker. Fritz becomes jealous and tries to destroy her gift. The party ends, the guests leave, and the Stahlbaums retire for the night. Clara sneaks downstairs with her Nutcracker and falls asleep. Clara awakens as she hears noises around the Christmas trees and her toy dolls come to life. The clock strikes midnight. Suddenly, the room fills with a mouse army and a giant mouse who attacks Clara. Her valiant Nutcracker, now life size, comes to her rescue. The Mouse King attacks the Nutcracker, but Clara hits him with her shoe and the Nutcracker wins the battle. After the battle, the Nutcracker is transformed into a handsome prince. The Nutcracker Prince leads Clara on a journey through the Pine Forest to the Land of Snow. The Snow Queen and King dance with the Snowflakes. Clara and the Nutcracker Prince depart for the Kingdom of Sweets escorted by the snow angels.

#### The Christmas Party

The Christinas rarty		
1. Drosselmeyer's Toy Shop	Jason Clayton (Drosselmeyer) Grayson Blaylock (Nephew) Diante Coker, Megan Johnston, Sarah Katherine Simmons, Mia Ordway, Rowan Winters, Rilynn Fortner, Kaydence Missler	
2. Decoration of the Tree	Justine Hook (Fraus Stahlbaum) Scott Hook (Herr Stahlbaum) Brianna Postles and Rilynn Fortner (Maids) Josie Shuler (Clara) Lincoln Nelson (Fritz)	
3. The Party	Lilly Nelson, Ella Kate Gamble, Ava Matthews, Josie Shuler, Maggie Newlin, Sarah Katherine Simmons, Mia Ordway, Maggie McPherson, Louise Hannah, Jane Newlin, Eleanor Keene, Lincoln Nelson, Eden Polson, Lyra Zeller, Avery Hook, Kaydence Missler, Georgia Brooke Valko ( <i>Party Children</i> )	
4. Drosselmeyer & the Dolls	Jason Clayton (Drosselmeyer) Grayson Blaylock (Nephew) Rowan Winters (Tiny Dancers) Megan Johnston and Diante Coker (Mechanical Dolls)	
5. Clara and her Nutcracker	Josie Shuler (Clara) and all Party Children	

0. Tarent's Dance	Diante Coker, Rani Higgins, Grayson Blaylock, Josie Shuler, Allie Purvis, Eleas Price (Adult Party Guests)	
Clara's Dream		
7. The Magic Spell Begins	Josie Shuler <i>(Clara)</i> Parker Gunn, Joanna McElroy, Archer Williams, Mabel Keene, Brooke Hempler, Mia Grace Sevy, Aurora Miller, Rivers Williams, Edie Davis, Camilla Hidalgo <i>(Toys)</i>	
8. Fight Scene	Josie Shuler (Clara) Grayson Blaylock (Nutcracker) Diante Coker (Mouse King) Mia Grace Sevy (Toy Rabbit) Brooke Hempler (Chinese Toy) Eden Polson (Soldier General) Lincoln Nelson, Kaydence Missler, Maura Lane Owen, Rowan Winters, Emory Parker (Soldiers) Avery Hook (Mouse General) Georgia Brooke Valko, Lyra Zeller, Maria Grant, Brynn Castleberry, Millie Parker (Mice)	
9. Land of the Snow	Brianna Postles (Snow Queen) John Mingle (Snow King) Josie Shuler (Clara) Grayson Blaylock (Prince) Camilla Hidalgo (Reindeer for sleigh) Jason Clayton (Drosselmeyer) Rani Higgins and Megan Johnston, Diante Coker, Grayson Blaylock (Icicles) Rilynn Fortner, Allie Purvis, Josie Shuler, Avery Hook, Laurie Purvis, Eleas Price, June Polson, Ava Matthews, Maggie Newlin (Snowflakes)	
10. Dance of the Snow Angels	Louise Hannah, Ella Kate Gamble, Sarah Katherine Simmons, Mia Ordway, Jane Newlin, Maggie McPherson, Lilly Nelson, Eden Polson, Eleanor Keene (Snow Angels)	

6. Parent's Dance .....

Scott Hook, Justine Hook, Jason Clayton, Brianna Postles,

Intermission (15 minutes)

#### Act Two =

Clara and the Nutcracker Prince continue their journey. When they arrive in the Kingdom of Sweets, the cooks have prepared delectable treats for their arrival. They are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. In Clara's honor, the Sugar Plum Fairy ushers them up to the sugar mountain and arranges for the inhabitants of her kingdom to entertain them while they eat: hot chocolate, a Spanish Dance; tea, a Chinese Dance; coffee, an Arabian Dance; candy canes, a Russian Dance, and Clara enjoys the dance of the Danish Marzipan while she eats almond icing. Then taffy, tiny gumdrops & the French gingerbread cookies dance. To top off the evening she watches the Waltz of the Flowers, and finally the Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier dance a Grand Pas de Deux. As the celebration draws to a close, the sleigh returns to take her home and her dream ends...or was it a dream?

#### Land of the Sweets

1. Greeting and Gumdrops	Rani Higgins (Sugar Plum Fairy) John Mingle (Cavalier) June Polson (Gumdrop Soloist) Parker Gunn, Joanna McElroy, Archer Williams, Mabel Keene, Mia Grace Sevy, Brooke Hempler, Edie Davis, Aurora Miller, Rivers Williams (Gumdrops) Josie Shuler (Clara) Grayson Blaylock (Prince) Camilla Hidalgo (Reindeer)
2. Spanish (Hot Chocolate)	Rilynn Fortner and Diante Coker <i>(Soloists)</i> Brianna Postles and Allie Purvis <i>(Demi Solists)</i> Eleas Price, June Polson, Laurie Purvis, Avery Hook
3. Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy	Rani Higgins (Sugar Plum Fairy)
4. Chinese (Tea)	Lincoln Nelson and Ella Kate Gamble (Soloists)  Eden Polson, Georgia Brooke Valko, Sarah Katherine Simmons, Lyra Zeller, Eleanor Keene, Maggie McPherson, Mia Ordway, Kaydence Missler
5. Chinese Reprise (Tea)	Rani Higgins, Megan Johnston, Grayson Blaylock
6. Marzipan (Almond Icing)	Allie Purvis and John Mingle (Soloists) Brianna Postles and Rilynn Fortner (Demi- Soloists) Avery Hook, June Polson, Maggie Newlin, Ava Matthews
7. Pollichinelles (Gingerbread Cookies)	Laurie Purvis and Eleas Price (Ginger Sisters) Diante Coker and Grayson Blaylock (Gingerbread Men) Josie Shuler (Clara)
8. Arabian (Coffee)	Megan Johnston and John Mingle (Soloists)

9. Taffy	Ava Matthews and Maggie Newlin (Demi-soloists) Josie Shuler (Clara)
	Millie Parker, Rowan Winters, Maria Grant, Brynn Castleberry, Maura Lane Owen, Emory Parker
10. Russian (Candy Canes)	Avery Hook <i>(Soloist)</i> Eden Polson, Maggie McPherson, Louise Hannah, Lyra Zeller, Georgia Brooke Valko, Lilly Nelson, Eleanor Keene, Jane Newlin, Sarah Katherine Simmons, Kaydence Missler
11. Dance of the Cavalier	John Mingle (Cavalier)
12. Waltz of the Flowers	Megan Johnston and Diante Coker <i>(Soloists)</i> Rilynn Fortner, Brianna Postles, Allie Purvis, Eleas Price, Josie Shuler, June Polson, Laurie Purvis, Avery Hook, Ava Matthews, Maggie Newlin <i>(Flower Petals)</i>
12. Grand Pas de Deux & Coda	Rani Higgins (Sugar Plum Fairy) John Mingle (Cavalier)
13. Finale	All Land of the Sweets Cast





### Proud to be the official school of the Meridian Ballet Company

Teaching beginner through advanced for ages 3 - adult For more information visit us at: www.MeridianBallet.com or call 662-266-0500

#### **Production Information**:

1. Director and Choreographer ..... Justine Ward-Hook 2. Staging for Pas de Deux ..... Justine Hook and John Mingle 3. Restaged and re-choreographed after .. Marius Petitpa and The Royal Ballet versions 4. Lighting AD Bishop **David Bayles** 5. Sound ..... Kalob Adair 6. Video ..... Nikki Ordway 7. Photography ..... Scott Hook and Jessica Gamble 8. Program .....

#### The Nutcracker Guest Artists



#### John Mingle

John Mingle is a distinguished principal guest artist and ballet teacher, acclaimed for his dynamic stage presence and more than a decade of professional performances. A Texas native, John began his training at Corpus Christi Ballet under Cristina Stirling Munro and later trained at Dallas Metropolitan Ballet under Ann Etgen and Bill Atkinson. He furthered his studies on scholarship with the San Francisco Ballet School, Pacific Northwest Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and Ballet Frontier of Texas before earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance Performance from Southern Methodist University. While at SMU, he was selected to perform Waltz Man in George Balanchine's Serenade at the grand opening of the Winspear Opera House.

John's performance career includes 10 seasons with Alabama Ballet, as well as seasons with Cincinnati Ballet and Dayton Ballet and appearances with regional companies across the country. His extensive repertoire spans both classical and contemporary works, with principal roles such as Basilio and Espada in Don Quixote, Romeo in Romeo and Juliet, Prince Désiré in The Sleeping Beauty, Franz in Coppélia, the Cavalier in George Balanchine's The Nutcracker, Hilarion in Giselle, and Von Rothbart in Swan Lake. He has also performed lead roles in Balanchine's Western Symphony, Christopher Bruce's Rooster, and Twyla Tharp's Nine Sinatra Songs, and has collaborated with acclaimed choreographers including Jessica Lang, Amy Seiwert, and Joshua Peugh. His artistry was recognized nationally with a 2019 feature in Pointe Magazine.

In addition to performing, John is a sought-after ballet teacher and currently serves on the faculty as an adjunct instructor at Samford University, Birmingham, AL. His students have earned numerous accolades, including winning the 2025 Miss Alabama Pageant and placing as 4th runner-up at Miss America 2025. John is thrilled to return to Meridian Ballet for another wonderful season of The Nutcracker.



#### Rani Higgins

Rani Higgins is originally from Guntown, Mississippi and continues to live and share her love of dance here in our state. She began her dance training at the age of 3, and transferred to study classical ballet with Justine Hook in New Albany at the age of 8. In 2011 Rani auditioned and became a member of the New Albany Ballet Company where she began dancing principal roles starting with Clara in the Nutcracker and adding many more valuable roles over the years such as: Titania in Mid Summer Night's Dream, Aurora in Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella in Cinderella, The Enchantress in Beauty and the Beast, The Caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland, Glinda in Wizard of Oz, and multiple solo and partnering roles in the Nutcracker over the years. Rani has performed in Meridian in the Nutcracker, Peter Pan, and now Aladdin.

Rani has also studied with Joffrey Ballet during their summer programs and currently is running her own studio and dancewear shop in Saltillo, Dancing in the Rain.

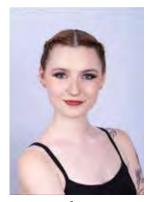
#### Meridian Ballet Staff & Invited Dancers



Diante Coker



Brianna Postles



Megan Johnston



Grayson Blalock

#### Thank You to Our Volunteers

We can't fully express our gratitude and appreciation for all of the parents and community volunteers who make this program a success. Without your willingness to work together as a team the ballet would not be possible. From the bottom of our heart, thank you for your tireless hard work and dedication.



#### The MERIDIAN BALLET encompasses the MERIDIAN SCHOOL OF BALLET and the MERIDIAN BALLET COMPANY.

#### About the Meridian School of Ballet

The Meridian School of Ballet provides beginner through advanced instruction to girls and boys ages 3 to adult. Previous students have been invited to dance in Joffrey Summer Intensive programs in New York, Miami and Chicago, the Mississippi School for the Arts in Jackson, Ballet Magnificat, and professionally for the Nashville Ballet. Students are afforded the opportunity to perform in Ballet Company productions.

At the Meridian School of Ballet we recognize classical ballet as a cornerstone of the performing arts that takes a lifetime to master. It is the foundation for modern dance, musical theater, gymnastics, synchronized swimming, figure skating, and more. Ballet is unquestionably an athletic art that requires both a teacher and a coach. So in addition to developing technique, grace and coordination, ballet teaches students how to overcome challenges, push physical limits, sharpen mental focus, build confidence, maintain physical fitness, and foster artistic creativity.

#### About the Meridian Ballet Company

The mission of the Meridian Ballet Company is to create a love of classical ballet and provide opportunities for Meridian School of Ballet students to perform regularly. It is a non-profit, youth oriented, pre-professional organization that performs full length ballets featuring guest artists, graduates of the school, and current students. Positions in Company productions are awarded through an audition process, and all students of the School are afforded an opportunity to dance in lead, supporting, or ensemble roles as determined by the director and guest artists.

Our guest artists travel from professional companies such as the Alabama Ballet, Indianapolis Ballet, and Nashville Ballet. The Company's strong relationships with professional dancers provide an avenue for our young dance force to perform at the highest level in full length pre-professional ballets.

Before moving to Meridian, the Ballet Company flourished as the New Albany Ballet Company from 2011 to 2022. Since its inception the company has staged full length performances of "The Nutcracker", "Cinderella", "Sleeping Beauty", "Wizard of Oz", "Mid Summer Night's Dream", "Alice in Winter Wonderland", "A Cinderella Christmas", "Peter Pan", "Beauty and the Beast", "Aladdin", and "Once Upon a Time". We are excited to create and produce new ballets in Meridian for years to come.

The Company operates independently from the Meridian School of Ballet, and relies solely upon the funding generosity of area businesses, performance tickets, boutique sales and small grants. Please consider supporting the company with a donation and receive an ad in our program.

Mailing address: Meridian Ballet 419 46th Ct. Meridian MS 39305

www.MeridianBallet.com

#### About Our Director =



#### **Justine Ward Hook**

Justine Ward Hook, a native of New Albany, serves as director of the company. She received her early ballet training with Sharon Long and danced with the Tupelo Ballet Company for 9 years where she also began her teaching career. She spent two sessions with Ballet Magnificat and performed with Ballet Mississippi. After participating in multiple full length ballets as a dancer, she discovered a passion for directing and staging ballets for the local community to foster a love for dance.

During her ballet career she has danced and studied extensively with professional companies and world renowned teachers such as, Anne Burton Avery (Atlanta Ballet), Linda Divin and Steven Mills (Ballet Austin), Finis Young (Joffrey Ballet), David Howard (Royal Ballet), Mia Michaels ("So You Think You Can Dance"), and Bob Rizzo. She continues to travel for conferences and workshops to bring new ideas back to her dancers, and instill in them a love of classical ballet and an appreciation for the arts.

Mrs. Hook has also coached flag, rifle, and majorette lines, and show choirs throughout north Mississippi. She has also choreographed multiple musicals and plays for schools and community theatre groups.

Justine is married to Scott, and they have 5 children: Kai, Layla, Jon, Avery, and Aiden.

"I'm so excited that you and your children have chosen to grow with us! It has been an extreme privilege to work with all of these students this performance season. We hope you enjoy "The Nutcracker" with all of our talented students and guest artists."

- Ms. Justine

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#### **Ballet Company**



#### **Senior Company Members**



Rilyn Fortner



Allie Purvis



Eleas Price



Laurie Purvis



Isabel Collier



Josie Shuler



Avery Hook



June Polson

#### Junior Company Members



Maggie Newlin



Ava Matthews



Sarah Katherine Simmons



Ella Kate Gamble



Mia Ordway



Louise Hannah



Maggie McPherson

#### **Company Apprentices**



Eden Polson



Eleanor Keene



Lilly Nelson



Jane Newlin

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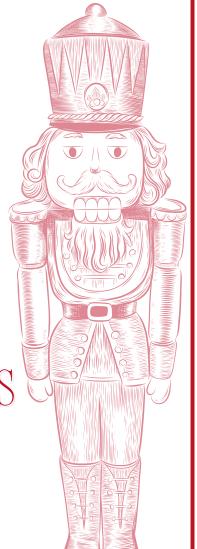
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## Matthews Congratulations!

Love -Mom, Dad, Jude, Ella, Emmy, & Annabelle

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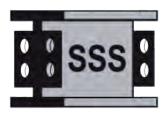




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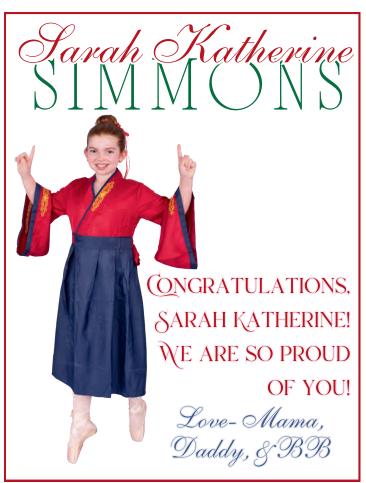
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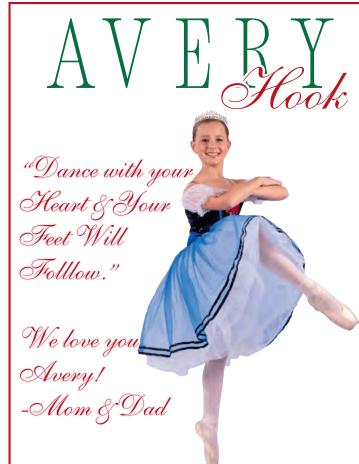
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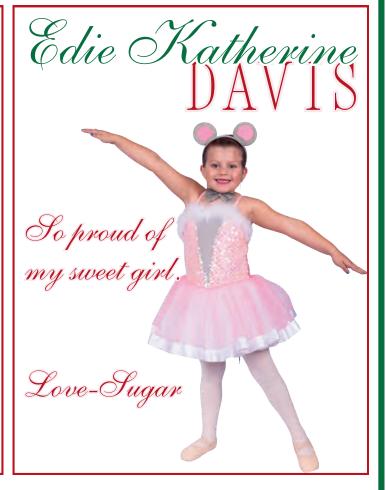




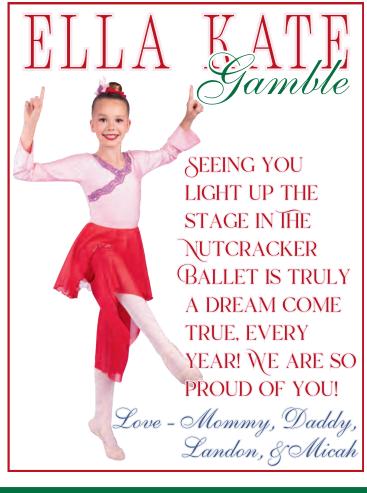


We ave so proud of you, Maggie!

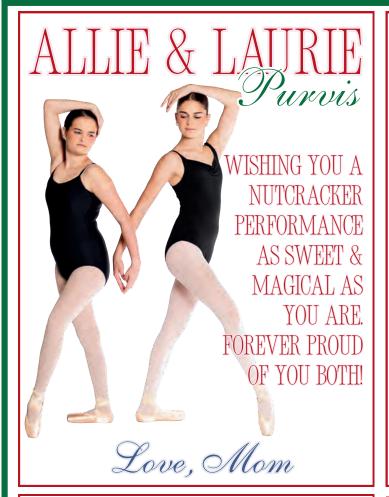
Love-Daddy, Mommy, Riley, Luke & Mavy Alice

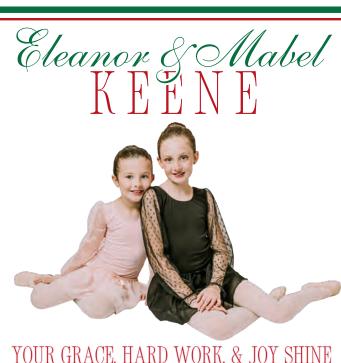












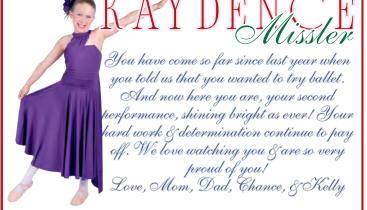
YOUR GRACE, HARD WORK, & JOY SHINE WHEN YOU STEP ON STAGE. WE ARE SO PROUD OF YOU & LOVE YOU MORE THAN ANYTHING!

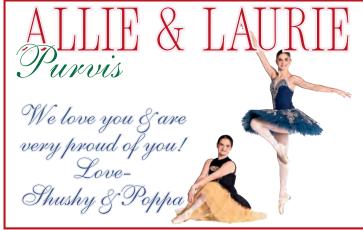
Mama, Daddy, KiKi, & Bea













**ADVISORS** 



Alam & Melissa Mitchell

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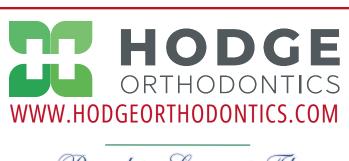
MERIDIAN BALLET, & THE ARTS IN

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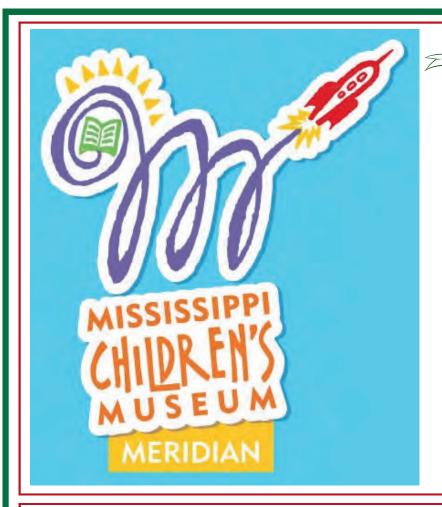








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