



### Hard Habits to Break: "Nuncrackers," at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse through December 30

Theatre - Reviews

WRITTEN BY THOM WHITE

MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2011 06:01



Marc Ciemiewicz, Kristen Jeter, Courtney Washington, Jillian Prefach, and Nancy Evans in Nuncrackers

Of all of the installments in the Nonsense series, which includes six sequels and three spinoffs, the Christmas musical Nuncrackers – currently running at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse – seems to me the most palatable. For one thing, it has the added benefit of its Christmas theme; there's just something about the holidays that puts you (or at least me) in a cheery mood, which, in turn, makes it easier to forgive the show's shortcomings. And when you add the merry goofiness of the Little Sisters of Hoboken, it's hard not to be in good spirits throughout the show.

This, the fourth Nonsense piece by Dan Goggin (who wrote the songs, lyrics, and book), finds the nuns, Father Virgil, and the Mt. Saint Helen's school's four most talented girls staging a cable-access TV show for Christmas. The sequel includes the usual Nonsense humor – filled with double entendres and clichéd jokes – plus familiar carols and a wild, nuns-in-tutus version of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker ballet.

The musical's most obvious weakness lies in its obvious jokes, and it doesn't help that director Jim Hesselman has his actors overselling their punchlines, in an effort to make sure the audience doesn't miss the intended humor. For instance, Sister Amnesia mistakenly introduces the ballet by exclaiming the phrase "BALL-BUSTERS!", and has to be told it's "NUT-CRACKERS!" Ugh. Is there anyone in the audience who would've missed that one if it were vocalized at a normal level? (Jokes are funnier when you simply get them than when they're slapped in your face.) Still, there's something about the bright, exuberant tone of Hesselman's work, and the cast's portrayals, that makes the lack of subtlety hardly matter.

Jillian Prefach has the good fortune of playing the happiest, most unassuming nun of them all: Sister Amnesia. This air-headed, Southern-twang sister shines brightest during a "Secret Santa" segment in which Prefach delivers Catholic-themed gifts to a handful of audience members. While the 10 Commandments sticker set and the two-inch golden ruler are relatively amusing themselves, it's Prefach's partially ad-libbed conversations with the Circa '21 patrons that makes each gift worthy of a hearty laugh.



Nancy Evans and Marc Ciemiewicz in Nuncrackers

There's a similar magic created by Marc Ciemiewicz as Father Virgil, substituting (in drag) for "Sister Julia, Child of God" in the show's cooking segment. Ciemiewicz, who I think could make a reading of the phone book charmingly chuckle-worthy, takes Goggin's overly



ShareThis

search... Search

Advanced Search

Playcrafters Barn Theatre Leaving IOWA November 11-12-13 18-19-20. Tickets \$10. playcrafters.com

Suscribe To Weekly RiverCitiesReader.com Updates. 3,069 subscribers. Subscribe button.

predictable choice to have the priest drink the rum he's adding to the fruitcake recipe and turns it into comedy gold. Channeling Nathan Lane, Ciemiewicz is just so sweet, so friendly, and so over-the-top funny, that the joke's lack of originality is lost in the laughter he elicits.



Courtney Washington, Jillian Prefach, and Kristen Jeter in Nuncrackers

As Reverend Mother, Nancy Evans nails the character's controlling but jovial nature while reprimanding her nuns for their rebellious ways. Her attempt to replace the injured – and, except for her foot, never seen – Sister Mary Leo as the Sugar Plum Fairy is a hilarious balancing act of self-confidence and (intentional) lack of ballet talent. (Ciemiewicz, similarly dressed as the Sugar Plum Fairy, also shines in this scene with his impressive *en pointe* dancing.) While Kristen Jeter's moxie as the Brooklyn-born Sister Robert Anne is unmissable, it's her heartwarming performance of the song "All I Want for Christmas" that's unforgettable. And Courtney Washington's dignified and driven Sister Hubert brings down the house on the gospel-infused show-stopper "It's Better to Give," Goggin's most rousing number in the musical.

Whether thanks to Goggin or Hesselman, there are also some clever updates added here. There's a reference to Beyoncé's "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)" in one of the numbers (which could not have been in the original show, as it was written several years before that song was released), and Hesselman – who also choreographed this production – smartly incorporates a few iconic steps from Beyoncé's music video, punching up the pop reference. While my guess is that the older audience members missed this and the mention of the girl group the Pussycat Dolls, they're welcome inclusions for those of us who caught them. The updates are also much-needed additions to a series that's aging, although *Nuncrackers* seems to be weathering the years better than other *Nunsense* shows.

For tickets and information, call (309)786-7733 extension 2 or visit [Circa21.com](http://Circa21.com).

Hits: 111   Email this   ShareThis   Set as favorite

### Trackback(0)

TrackBack URI for this entry

### Comments (0)

Subscribe to this comment's feed

### Write comment

Name

Email

Website

Title

Comment

smaller | bigger

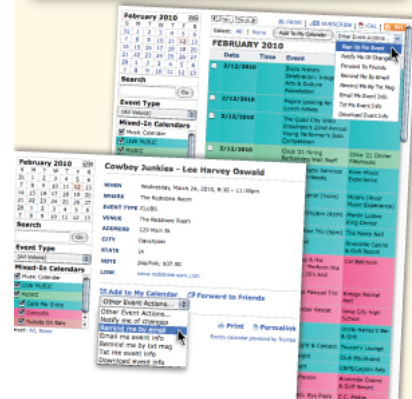
Subscribe via email (registered users only)

I have read and agree to the [Terms of Usage](#).

## Search, Save, Sort, Share

Add to My Calendar

- facebook**
- YAHOO!** Calendar
- Microsoft Office Outlook** Calendar
- Windows Live** Calendar
- Apple** iCal
- Google** Calendar



**RiverCitiesReader.com/calendar**

### Latest Comments

<http://www.tenisupra.com>

It's so nice to have you do all of the...

...

makes a monday night the only decent night on uk...

**Ron Paul not only Predicted the Collapse but also would have Prevented it**

If the economy is the primary issue in the upcoming...


**Corrected!**

Corey: Thanks for pointing this out. That sections has been...

**Ron Paul Revolution!**

I really hope people see what is going on and...

[See All Tags](#)

 **Tags**

[Circa 21 Dinner Playhouse](#) [Courtney Washington](#)  
[Dan Goggin](#) [Jillian Prefach](#) [Jim Hesselman](#)  
[Kristen Jeter](#) [Marc Ciemiewicz](#) [Nancy Evans](#) [Nuncrackers](#) [Nonsense](#)

[< Prev](#)      [Next >](#)