

Los Gatos Ballet

Marcie Ryken, Artistic Director

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Evening Gowns for Athletes

Los Gatos, CA - Volunteer seamstresses, led by Creative Director Christine Ryvola, create over 250 professional-quality, handmade costumes for Los Gatos Ballet's Nutcracker. Most people do not realize that creating ballet costumes, particularly tutus, is a dying art. Even some major ballet companies are hard-pressed to create costumes of this caliber.

In April 2015, Newsweek Magazine ran an article about how the shortage of costume and tutu-makers has put ballet in a crisis. Los Gatos Ballet's level of costume design, materials and construction, particularly done by volunteers, is a rare commodity. "Our costumes are designed to be a visual feast from the moment the first dancer steps onto the stage, yet they must allow for extensive movement and stand up the rigors of strong dancers. Designing and sewing for ballet is like making evening gowns that have to function like athletic wear." says Ryvola.

More than 30 volunteers dedicate themselves to this art. "I love doing very detailed work." says software engineer and seamstress Renee Shaeffer. Educator and seamstress Cristina Burkett says, "I embellish the bodices and tutus of the lead dancers with Swarovski crystals, ribbon flowers, fabric flowers, and beads. Our costumes are made with the finest materials and are one-of-a-kind. I spend a lot of time thinking about the layout and playing around with the embellishments. I also start over if I'm not happy with the results, so the process is long and tedious...but oh so inspiring. It's emotional to hand over the costume to the dancer because I've poured my heart into it and have sacrificed so much to get it done."

Most of Ryvola's volunteers do not come with an extensive background in sewing. "When I signed up for the costume committee, I thought I was signing up to help the little girls get into their costumes. I had no sewing experience! So, you can imagine my shock when I went to the first meeting and was handed a pair of scissors to start cutting patterns. Christine Ryvola noticed that I enjoyed detail work and handed me a bodice to work on." said Burkett. "Ms. Ryvola has an amazing way of bringing out the best in all of us volunteers... her ability to spread the work out among our varying abilities, allows us to create beautiful costumes in relatively quick time." says psychologist and seamstress Lisa Kite.

Ms. Ryvola has also brought costuming classes to her volunteers by hosting the West Coast Tutu School at the Los Gatos Ballet studios in 2014. Several volunteers attended and learned

the art of making various kinds of tutus, bodices, leotards, dance dresses, tiaras, dyeing, draping, and pattern making. "I attended the Tutu School and learned the art of making romantic tutus (the ones that are long and flowing). I learned so much and hope that these classes are offered again." said photographer and seamstress Dena Crawford.

Ms. Ryvola is directly involved in the creative aspects of the ballet. In terms of costumes; she is responsible for the selection, design, construction, fitting and maintenance. When asked where she gets her inspiration, she said, "When I set out to design our Snow scene my goal was to create a look that audiences don't see in other Nutcrackers. I wanted to create a unique color scheme for what winter looks like here and I chose a color palette that includes the blues and greens of our wintertime ocean, and the silver white of our fog." For the Mouse King costume, she says, "I started with a Nutcracker storybook and went from there. I wanted him to look like an opulent king with a big velvet robe with old style ermine fur. Many of our costumes are so elaborate that they become like additional characters that perform a vital role in telling the story and improving our audience's experience."

"We are very fortunate to have such talented and dedicated volunteers. These ladies are incredible!" says Ryvola. When asked why these volunteers devote so much time to costumes, they said, "I help create something that makes my heart soar when I see the dancers wearing them." said Crawford. Tech marketing director and seamstress Brenda Chastaine said, "We are doing this out of love for our daughters, of dance, and to be a part of the Los Gatos Ballet family that works together to create these amazing performance opportunities for our children and our community." Kite said, "It is the attention to detail, creating sophisticated, complicated costumes that really stands out in a Los Gatos Ballet production. The audience is transported into the story of Clara and her Nutcracker Prince and every costume, from the Mice to the Snow Queen, leave the audience thrilled. I love being a part of that. And I love watching my daughter dance with a company that is dedicated to creating this level of production and performance."

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About Los Gatos Ballet

Our mission is to inspire and cultivate an appreciation and love of dance by providing quality educational and training programs, superb performances, and collaboration with other arts organizations. We are known for our delightful production of **The Nutcracker held this December 4,5,6 at the Flint Center in Cupertino**, have a repertoire of 5 full-length ballets and provide outreach programs in our community. This spring, we will be performing **Swan Lake**.

For more information, visit: www.LosGatosBallet.org

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