

# Montreal version of the Nutcracker shines in Czech Republic



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BRNO, CZECH REPUBLIC

The Nutcracker choreographed by Fernand Nault for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens is in its 51<sup>st</sup> annual outing at Place des Arts and shows no signs of stopping.

But Place des Arts is not the only theatre staging this beloved Tchaikovsky ballet. Now you can catch Nault's version in Central Europe. This month, the Brno National Theatre Ballet is staging it for the first time at the Janáček Theatre in Brno, Czech Republic.

Mário Radačovský, the company's new artistic director, danced in Nault's Nutcracker as a former principal dancer with Les Grand Ballets Canadiens. He was behind the decision to bring the Nutcracker to Brno.

"I truly believe that Mr. Nault's Nutcracker is the most beautiful in the world," he said in a recent interview. "To me it's the best production because of the visuals and because of the involvement of so many kids and the whole school. I wanted to start something completely new and dynamic here, something from a different continent."

A native of Slovakia, Radačovský first brought Nault's Nutcracker to Bratislava in 2008 when he headed the Slovak National Ballet. It was a popular and commercial success. Unfortunately, Radačovský was abruptly dismissed two years later amid political infighting, and the company chose not to renew the licence for the show, opting instead for a more traditional Russian version.

Upon moving to Brno, the Czech Republic's second city — a two-hour drive from Prague — Radačovský had big ambitions for the local company. His first order of business was bringing over Nault's Nutcracker.



“Our budget is much smaller than the National Theatre in Prague, and this production is expensive,” he said. “But I was so sure about it, I said I’ll take a loan in the bank, I don’t care. I knew that this kind of production was going to be an incredible success. If it worked in Montreal for 50 years, there’s no reason it shouldn’t work in Brno or anywhere else.”

He saved money by buying most of the costumes and scenery from Bratislava.

“I was still ready to do everything brand new, even though it’s very expensive, because I knew that this Nutcracker is like the golden egg,” Radačovský said.

André Laprise, trustee and official rehearsal master of the Fernand Nault Choreographic Trust, travelled to Brno and helped mould the production into proper shape.

“In the end,” said Radačovský, “André said this was so much better quality-wise than in Bratislava and almost the same quality as in Montreal, maybe even better!”



The Brno company is surprisingly international. More than half of the dancers are non-Czechs. There are even two Canadians in the corps de ballet: Arthur Abram from Montreal and Peter Lerant from Toronto. Abram formerly danced for Radačovský in Bratislava and followed him to Brno. He dances the role of the Nutcracker and is on the publicity poster.

“I think our Nutcracker is very special,” said Abram, 25. “The company is full of classical dancers with strong technique, so I think it adds a classical touch. Montreal is more of a modern company. They don’t do classical anymore, so I think it makes a difference, because we are used to a classical look. I don’t know if it’s better or worse. We are very unique; we don’t try to look like Montreal.”

Lerant said he thought it was cool that they were getting a Canadian ballet.



“I danced the James Kudelka version for many years in Toronto and I was excited when I heard the Montreal version was coming because a lot of things in the Kudelka version are taken and influenced from it, like the sheep and the chefs,” said Lerant, 21, who trained at the National Ballet School in Toronto and has been in Brno since 2013.

The public and critical reception has been overwhelmingly positive. Of the 12 shows slated for December, Radačovský said 10 were already sold out.

One local critic complained, however, that the show is too North American and compared it to a Disney movie.

“I’m happy (the critic) said that, because this company is 130 years old and for the last 50 years it’s always been influenced by the Russian style and Russian esthetics,” Radačovský said. “So in that sense, I would say that what I saw here before was too

Russian.”

“When they look at our version they say it’s very American, but have a look at the Montreal version — that’s the American one!” said Abram, whose younger sister portrayed Clara in the Montreal production several years ago.

“I think the costume designer adapted all the costumes to what the people here are used to look at. She wanted to go her own way, so it’s not a reproduction of what we have in Montreal, but our own unique vision.”



Radačovský is happy to offer audiences something they won’t find anywhere else in Europe. He has also discussed seeking ways to collaborate with Les Grands Ballets, such as exchanging principal dancers or even having Les Grands perform in Brno.

“I think the Nault Nutcracker is one of the main reasons why I’m here in Brno,” he

said, alluding to what he sees as a recent increase in the theatre management's willingness to invest in quality. "Martin Glaser (general director of the Brno National Theatre) trusted me. He took a risk, and it paid off."

Tickets for the Brno Nutcracker, by the way, can be had for \$12. It could well be the start of a long run.

***The Montreal version of the Nutcracker is on at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier of Place des Arts until Dec. 30. Ticket prices range from \$37 to \$74 for children younger than 12 and from \$62 to \$124 for regular admission (plus taxes). Details: [placedesarts.com](http://placedesarts.com)***