

# The Canuckracker

## Detailed Background Information about the IJO's Christmas Spectacular

*The Canuckracker* is an exciting and innovative Christmas dance production that turns the traditional *Nutcracker* ballet on its head. With contemporary dance set to the music of legendary jazz composers **Duke Ellington** and **Billy Strayhorn** and a modern story that is very Canadian and a little bit high-tech, this show will delight children of all ages.

Developed and directed by bassist and conductor **Adrian Cho**, the production draws on the talents of over thirty Ottawa dancers, actors and musicians. Originally from Australia, Cho immigrated to Canada in 2000. For this production, he wanted a new story about friendship and teamwork in which the central characters would reflect Canada's multicultural society. He also foresaw the story's *Nutcracker* character as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Cho enlisted his wife **Deborah Ann Taylor** as a co-writer of the new story. Taylor is a Lutheran pastor from the United States, with twenty years experience in multicultural ministry and anti-racism work. She immigrated to Canada in 2002. In addition to the multicultural theme, Cho and Taylor included a high-tech element that will resonate with today's technology savvy children, while the show's important message about Internet safety will get a nod of approval from parents. Cho worked with the RCMP to ensure that the story met with their approval.

The dance for this new production is the work of modern dance artist **Mary Catherine Jack** who was selected by Cho for her extensive experience in the creation of dance works with and for children. Jack graduated from the University of Waterloo and Ottawa's School of Dance and has performed for Opera Lyra, the Guelph Contemporary Dance Festival, the School of Dance and in collaboration with many other Canadian dance professionals. Although the show's dance routines are jazz-oriented, the multicultural theme incorporates the folk influences of such countries as Africa, Spain, Mexico, Lebanon, China and Russia. Jack will be joined by other independent modern dancers who will also contribute individual choreography. They in turn will be joined by swing dancers from the *Swing Dynamite Dance Company* led by **Byron Alley** who choreographed the show's swing dance sequences. Completing the diverse cast are a number of Ottawa actors including disability activist and comedian **Alan Shain** and twelve year old model/actor/dancer **Bianca Gingras**.

The musical score for *The Canuckracker* includes the entire *Nutcracker* suite that Ellington and Strayhorn wrote in 1960. Their suite of jazz music was based on the popular classical music Pyotr Tchaikovsky created for the ballet. All the familiar themes are present but they have been infused with the elements of jazz. It's a fantastic, toe-tapping work that has become popular in its own regard but has never been performed in Ottawa. Additional music by Ellington and incidental music composed by Cho complete the score for this production which will be delivered in two acts.

The music will be performed by the *Impressions in Jazz Orchestra* (IJO), a dynamic, new orchestra that brings together many of Ottawa's finest jazz and symphony orchestra musicians to play symphonic jazz works. Cho, who is the orchestra's Artistic Director, founded the orchestra in 2005 and in the last two years has led the IJO in eleven concerts of repertory jazz including appearances in the main lineup of the Ottawa International Jazz Festival (OIJF) in 2005 and 2006. Each concert has been enthusiastically received and critically acclaimed by both audiences and the press as highly entertaining, informative and artistically innovative. The second of the IJO's two February 2006 concerts celebrating Black History Month was hailed by OIJF Programming Director, Jacques Émond as "*a tremendous jazz extravaganza with its superb writing, arranging, and playing by some of the best musicians around*" while jazz radio producer Ron Sweetman labeled it "*Brilliant in concept and execution.*"

The production of *The Canuckracker* will feature innovative methods of presentation. Instead of putting the orchestra in a pit, the IJO will take centre stage. All the action will take place at floor level which will facilitate a dynamic presentation for the audience. Full stage sets will be eschewed in favour of a unique blend of small set pieces, stage props and projected computer animation. CBC radio personality **Donna Leon** will narrate the story.

There will be one performance of this unique and exciting show at 2 PM on Sunday, December 2, 2007 in the International Ballroom of the Crowne Plaza Ottawa Hotel located at 101 Lyon Street. Tickets are priced at \$15 for children and \$25 for adults and \$70 for a family of two adults and two children and are available from CD Warehouse (3 locations), Compact Music (2 locations), the Crowne Plaza sales office (M-F, 9-5) and online at TicketWeb.ca. For further details visit <http://www.impressionsinjazz.ca> or call (613) 858-7904.