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'Nutcracker' performances galore usher in holidays

By Brie Iatarola

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'Tis the season to overeat and get your annual "Nutcracker" fix. Four venues will play host to this holiday classic.

First up is Spreckels Theatre, featuring City Ballet's rendition, which nabbed a Tommy Dance Award for "Best Nutcracker" in San Diego, and the melodies of City Ballet Orchestra, conducted by John Nettles. The performance opens Dec. 8 and ends Dec. 17; show times vary. Check www.cityballet.org or call (858) 272-8663 for details.

For the 36th year in a row -- making it the city's longest-playing "Nutcracker" -- San Diego Civic Theatre also keeps alive the premise of E.T.A. Hoffman's original tale, performed by the California Ballet Co., with the San Diego Symphony presenting the work of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, from Dec. 16-24. For fans fascinated with Sugar Plum Fairies, there will be Sugar Plum parties following the 1 and 2:30 p.m. shows. Visit www.sdcivic.org or call (619) 570-1100 for more details.

Mandeville Auditorium at UCSD La Jolla jumps on the bandwagon with its own version of the ballet, as more than 100 dancers, clad in sparkly costumes, prance across the land of yuletide dreams.

But if the traditional ballet puts you to sleep faster than a cup of warm milk, consider visiting the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, where the Gay Men's Chorus of San Diego (GMCSO) performs "The Nutcracker (Men in Tights!)." GMCSO's holiday concert, in which the men of the chorus perform all the roles, guarantees you've never seen a Sugar Plum Fairy like this one. The show runs from Dec. 15-17. Call (619) 574-6273 or visit www.gmcso.com for more information.

Tradition takes a back seat to trendy as the Old Globe presents Teatro Máscara Mágica's Mexican-inspired holiday musical, "La Pastorela de la Estrella," written by Max Branscomb and directed by William Virchis.

In this morality play, Archangels Michael and Gabriel, Lucifer, supermodels, Nacho Libre, Howie Mandel and Superman all partake in the shepherds' journey to Bethlehem to witness the first Christmas. No need to fret if your Spanish-listening skills stink -- although the Christmas carols are sung in Spanish, the majority of the script is in English.

The show runs from Dec. 7-23. Visit www.TheOldGlobe.org or call (619) 234-5623 for details.

If the onslaught of conventional Christmas carols drives you nuts, maybe you're just listening to the wrong songs. Let go of that little Grinch inside of you and venture to the California Center for the Arts at Escondido, where Mark Curran & The Cruisin Oldies Showband honor Elvis and The Everly Brothers in this holiday tribute, rocking out to Oldies hits such as "Jingle Bell Rock" and other fun Christmas classics.

Curran -- dubbed one of the West Coast's best Elvis impersonators -- his seven-piece backup band and the Memphis Soul Singers will bring these songs to life in a way that is sure to make you want to shake your groove thing and sing along with them. Show begins 8 p.m. Dec. 16. Tickets can be purchased online at www.artcenter.org/tickets.htm. Visit www.cruisinoldies.com for more details.

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