

# Magic in the air as ice dancers enthrall

## *The Nutcracker on Ice* The Imperial Ice Stars

Canberra Theatre, June 13-17

Reviewer: **Michelle Potter**

**T**he *Nutcracker on Ice* is something of a surprise package. The Imperial Ice Stars are seasoned performers, largely Russian-trained, who can toss off turns, lifts and assorted spectacular moves on ice with apparent ease. But while the show may be on the whole a display of ice dancing, it also contains elements of the circus arts, moments of straight out magic, a reference or two to pantomime, even perhaps vaudeville, and, of course, draws for its storyline on the familiar ballet classic *The Nutcracker*.

The story unfolds simply. It tells of a young girl, Marie, who is given a nutcracker doll as a Christmas present. The adventures that follow include a midnight battle between an army of mice and a battalion of toy soldiers and the transformation of the nutcracker doll into a prince. The prince then leads Marie over snow-covered country to the Kingdom of Sweets, where a celebration of dancing is held.

The first act, the party scene and the battle with the mice, moves along swiftly. My main gripe is that the children at the



Left, members of the cast of *The Nutcracker on Ice*; right, Bogdan Berezenko (Nutcracker Prince) and Anastasia Ignatyeva (Marie).

party were grown people, and tall ones at that. While the casting may well reflect the technical skills required for the roles, an intrinsic element of *Nutcracker*, the magic of childhood, is lost and I thought that grown people fighting over toy bears looked a bit silly.

The second act begins with a snowflake scene as Marie and her prince travel through a forest. The

ice dancing may be at its least spectacular here but its choreographic simplicity is absolutely appropriate. There were some dramatic moments in this act, however. The Arabian Dance, for example, is performed as an aerial act with just wrist grips as support, and the Spanish Dance is enhanced by the addition of dancers manipulating rings of fire.

I was not a great fan of the costumes, which seemed to me to lack an overall cohesion in colour and style; nor of the sets, which similarly looked as if they each belonged to a different work. But what was absolutely brilliant was the dancers' ability to perform so well in the very small space on the Canberra Theatre stage that had been iced over. Ice dancing competitors usually have a huge

rink with plenty of preparation space in which to present their work. These dancers did all that competitive dancers do, and more, in a comparatively minute space.

Finally, if you cheer and shout loudly enough at the end – and there is plenty of encouragement in true pantomime style to do so – as an encore, the cast will treat you to a fast-moving display of icy tricks.

