



“GIVING THE KIDS THE CHANCE TO DANCE WITH US, TO PERFORM ON THE STAGE AND TALK WITH US AND HAVE FUN. IT’S THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF ALL THIS.”

Carolina Siscanu, a soloist and one of the Moscow Ballet’s audition directors for the “Dance With Us” program, auditioned local children in St. Petersburg at the end of October for roles in the December 28 performances in St. Petersburg. Siscanu has been dancing since she was nine years old and graduated in 2009 from the National School of Ballet in Chisinau, Moldova. She has performed solos in ballets Swan Lake, Giselle, Coppelia, and Don Quixote in countries all over the world including Great Britain, Spain, Italy, China, Sweden, Belgium, and France.

Tampa Style had the opportunity to speak with Carolina Siscanu about the “Dance With Us” program and how she thinks it enhances the performance.

TS: When you’re auditioning children, what do you look for? Is it simply those with the best technique or is there something special you look for?

CS: *It’s always different. Sometimes it’s the kids with the better technique, sometimes it’s the kids with the smiling faces. I always try to look at their face or their body to see how relaxed they are, if they’re showing me the movement that I asked them to do. It always depends on the kids to show me something special.*

TS: What is your favorite part of the audition process?

CS: *At the beginning, when the kids first meet me, they don’t know anything about me or how I am. They don’t know if I’m a bad teacher or a funny teacher, but after a couple minutes of auditions they start to relax and see that I am a funny teacher, that I’m trying to make jokes with them and try to move them to show me whatever they can. I try to teach them something new, something from Russian ballet choreography and help them to enjoy what they are doing. That’s my favorite part.*

TS: Besides the auditions, what is your role with the children that are cast for the performances?

CS: *I also teach hour and a half master classes with the kids in the cities we do auditions, we can do these before auditions or after, and I hope they really enjoy that. I try to teach them something new and fun. I’m also in charge of teaching the choreography after auditions. I teach [the kids] all the parts from the Nutcracker and then after that the teachers just work with them to help*

TS: How do you think casting children in the performance enhances the show?

CS: *it’s a really good chance for the kids to be on the stage with Russian dancers: to dance with them and to learn more from them, to learn how to express your emotion and to express your dance better. Kids learn a lot from us and we, because of the kids on stage, make the performance more alive, because people see not just*

Russian dancers who are used to dancing, but kids who try also to show something new to improve their dance and their movement. I think the dance is more interesting with kids.

TS: What sparked your interest in becoming a dancer?

CS: *At the beginning, when I was 9 years old, it wasn’t by choice. My mom saw and read a lot about the ballet and she saw that it was a good chance for me to try it, so she pushed me in that. After a couple years of dancing I realized that this is really interesting and gives you a chance to see more in the future than being a simple child. This is a good opportunity for kids to travel, to meet new people, to meet new teachers, new choreographers and new dancers. It’s a really good thing, dancing ballet.*



A NEW HOLIDAY *Classic*

By Autumn Barker

No holiday season would be complete without attending a performance of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s iconic ballet, *The Nutcracker*. This season head to the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg on December 28 to see a twist on the holiday classic with the Moscow Ballet’s performance of *The Great Russian Nutcracker*.

While the main storyline remains the same, there are several key differences between the original Nutcracker and The Great Russian Nutcracker. The Moscow Ballet’s production of The Great Russian Nutcracker incorporates Russian folk elements into the classic Christmas tale setting the story in Moscow and featuring the city’s iconic skyline as a backdrop, and incorporating traditional Russian characters like Ded Moroz (Father Christmas), Snegurochka (Snow Maiden) and Matryoshka dolls. The most notable difference is the absence of the iconic Sugar Plum Fairy, but don’t let her absence deter you from watching this

beautifully crafted production. Instead of seeing the Sugar Plum Fairy dance her way through the Land of Sweets, you’ll watch the Dove of Peace, which is created by two dancers each wearing a 20 foot feathered wing, welcome Masha and her Nutcracker Prince to the Land of Peace and Harmony. A moment that is equally as breathtaking and beautiful as the classic’s Sugar Plum dance.

One of the most unique elements of the Moscow Ballet is their “Dance With Us” program, which allows local children between the ages of seven and 16, with at least one year of ballet training, the opportunity to audition for a chance to perform in the production alongside the company’s professional dancers. The children that are selected are cast in the roles of Party Children, Mice, Snowflakes, Snow Maidens, and Spanish, Russian, Chinese, or French Variations depending on their age and skill levels.



TS: What is your favorite dance, either as a soloist or in general?

CS: *If you mean the shows, my favorite performance is Don Quixote. I love this performance, it's really funny, it's relaxing, it's enjoyable and it's really interesting. I love the Nutcracker as well because it's really fun, and my favorite is the one we are doing in America because we have the kids and it's a lot of fun doing that.*

TS: What is the most interesting part of the Moscow Ballet's production of 'The Great Russian Nutcracker'?

CS: *The most interesting part of the Moscow Ballet is the "Dance With Us" program, giving the kids the chance to dance with us, to perform on the stage and talk with us and have fun. It's the most important part of all this.*

TS: Do you plan to continue working with children later on in your career?

CS: *Yes, in the future I would love to work with them. I'd like to try to give my knowledge to the kids so that they can be better, and perhaps to become great professional dancers.*

The Moscow Ballet will be performing 'The Great Russian Nutcracker' at St. Petersburg's Mahaffey Theatre on December 28 at 12 p.m., 4 p.m., and 8 p.m. Don't miss the opportunity to see this unique take on a holiday classic! ●

For more information visit themahaffey.com or nutcracker.com.



Mary Feola & Johana Romo at Zoofari



Zoofari



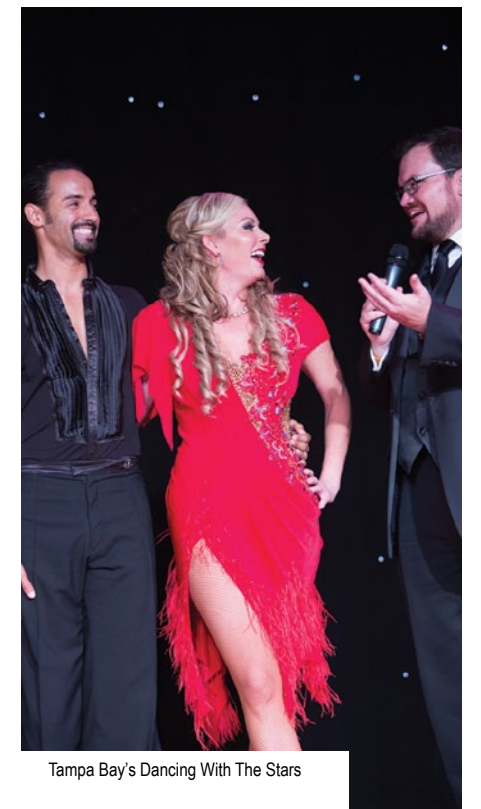
Aly Luttmann, Hillary Orr, Zerlina Utai & Amanda Holmes at Zoofari



Busch Gardens Tampa's Christmas Town



Zoofari



Tampa Bay's Dancing With The Stars