

In June 2007, with much coercing and bribery, I attended my first (and last) opera. I chronicled my experience in one of the *Enterprise* issues that month—no doubt all of you cut it out, framed it or immediately sent it to some literary critic for nomination for a prestigious writing award. Well, OK, so most of you didn't even read it—but thanks to the *Enterprise* staff for being kind enough to publish it.

In that article, I pretty much said I would commit *hari kari* (sword suicide for those of you who aren't schooled in Japanese) should I ever have to attend another opera—in fact, now that I have seen *Madam Butterfly*, I don't even like to look at butterflies.

I also mentioned in the article that my next huge step in the maturation of my artistic training should be to see a ballet—but I would probably not go back to Bass Hall, the wonderful venue at which we saw *Madam Butterfly*, unless there was nudity and they served Coors Light during the performance.

Alas, I am here to report that I have now filled that other square—and (sigh) there was no nudity (but really close—more on panty hose in a moment) and no Coors.

For a Christmas present this year, a dear South Korean lady friend of the Russells, Sami Park, purchased tickets to *The Nutcracker* at Bass Hall—for her, my wife, her two boys and me. How could I turn Sami (a former ballet teacher) down and hurt her feelings? Besides, I so longed to see grown men prancing in tights! Right.

Now, before I go too far in this article—and perhaps am barred from returning to my home town, let me note that I have been reading the *Enterprise* and I must be very careful with my remarks about *The Nutcracker*.

It has been reported that cute little Emily O'Neal, 12 years young, is one of the students dancing in the Colorado Ballet's production of this famous ballet—and I don't discourage her a bit for doing what she is doing. Even I thought the younger ballet members of the Texas *The Nutcracker* were extremely adorable, very athletic and amazingly energetic—my hat's off to all of them!

Emily, "break a leg," sweetie—am sure you will enjoy every performance!

However, the older women in these ballets really **MUST** get some decent dresses to wear while spinning and tapping and toeing in their ballet shoes. These stiff chiffon outfits that look like a porcupine stuck its toe in an electrical socket have got to go.

The tutus (those are "ballet skirts" for you cattlemen who read the wonderful "It's the Pitts" columns—which I love) are simply weird. However, the tight tights that the tiny talented ladies wore were fine—what man wouldn't want to look at nicely shaped legs for two hours? But...let's discuss the men in the performance next.

Come on! How many of you guys, when in a dream or when you are courting a lovely lass, have pranced and danced and twirled and toed around your fair damsel—often picking her up and lasciviously clutching her as you ran around a stage **HALF NAKED**? Now, as much as I liked to see the ladies in very tight stockings and cute slippers, I detest seeing men wearing leggings so tight, one could see the veins in one guy's leg.

And I have no idea why each man appeared to be wearing a baseball cup or a huge sock rolled up and stuck you know where—it was gross! Even Scots wear a long kilt over certain body parts! One best not walk around a Texas street that way if one wants to stay healthy.

The lighting and stage sets and children running around in wonderful costumes was all dazzling and very entertaining, although Joshua, the 9-year-old Korean boy who was "dragged" to this play by his mother did ask, "Are they ever going to say anything, Grandpa Bob?" (He calls me his grandpa—another story.)

Guest Commentary

Written by Bob Russell

Whereas the opera singers didn't want to do anything but warble for two hours, the dozens of hose-hugging dancers in *The Nutcracker* uttered nary a word! Perhaps we need to invent the Balopera or the Opallet—combine a little bit of singing with a little bit of dancing? Wait, I think that is called a “musical.” (And the only one of those I liked—and I have seen more than one—was *West Side Story*—probably because I thought Natalie Wood was sexy!)

The *Nutcracker* music, on the other hand, was fabulous. First of all, I am not a classical music buff—in fact, I rarely listen to any at home and my wife and I have slept through more than one Fort Worth Symphony performance over the years. I lean toward jazz, Christian music, popular music—and a little of the modern western tunes and singers.

But...no Tchaikovsky, no Bach and no Handel (except for the Hallelujah Chorus—very nice). Still, for some reason, back in my Holyoke High School days, I had *The Nutcracker* record (remember those round plastic discs?) and I listened to it a lot then...so it was wonderful to hear a nice orchestra belt out those famous tunes.

Back to the men. I thought of going up to them after the performance and offering them some of my jeans or Sunday pants but it appeared that the packed house at the beautiful hall we were in actually LIKED to see those dudes do their dapper dancing in darn near nothing—so I resisted.

In the end, I figured those half-naked men must have been from San Francisco and just happened to be in Texas—and the only safe place they could act like they were acting was on stage in *The Nutcracker* (pardon the pun).

So...no nudity, no Coors Light, and I survived. I have seen one opera. Done. I have attended one ballet. Done. I am now educated in the fine arts. I have even been to a few modern art museums. There is nothing left for me to see—wait! What about Gaelic tap dancing? What about Texas line dancing—ladies in extremely tight jeans and guys in boots! Now we are talking.

Editor's Note: Bob Russell graduated from HHS in 1964. A retired USAF officer and retired Lockheed Martin fighter cockpit designer, Bob is an avid writer and has published a number of things over the years. Bob swears he has never worn tights or a tutu, but he admits there were a few parties at Colorado State University and times drinking hard with fellow fighter pilots that might have caused his memory of the evenings to be blocked out. If any of you witnessed him in a tutu or skin-tight leggings prancing around, he apologizes profusely and promises never to do that again.