

Seasonal Sensations

Like Santa, New York's collection of legendary holiday shows appears only once a year – and fleetingly at that. Still, what would December in Manhattan be without this quintet of glorious, extravagantly mounted productions teeming with music, nostalgia and theatrical cheer? Happy, happy, joy, joy... and here's to a month of holiday magic!

By Griffin Miller



[The Nutcracker]



[The Klezmer Nutcracker]

George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*™ Sure it's a classic – if not *the* classic holiday fantasy of fantasies – where ballerina snowflakes fly across the stage, toys burst into exuberant life, and the young heroine, little Marie, is saved from the villainous Mouse King and his hench-mice by the brave Nutcracker... and it all takes place to Tchaikovsky's glorious musical masterpiece. And, of course, George Balanchine's unforgettable, dreamworld choreography. To be sure, this is Lincoln Center's most time-honored holiday tradition and for all the right reasons. Nycballet.com. Through 1/3.

Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* After a vibrant Broadway debut last year, this stage adaptation of the classic film musical has entered the realm of not-to-be-missed Big Apple holiday entertainment. The storyline – two showbiz guys and two beautiful sisters who manage to reinvigorate a struggling Vermont inn through song, dance and humor – is brought to life by the score: an awesome banquet of Irving Berlin hits, from “I Love a Piano,” “Sisters” and “Blue Skies” to seasonal favorites like “Snow,” “Happy Holidays” and the season's most iconic and beloved anthem, “White Christmas.” Worth noting: in the 2009 edition, the role of General Henry Waverly is played by David Ogden Stiers – several rungs up from his Major Winchester status on *M*A*S*H!* Whitechristmasbroadway.com. Through 1/3.

The Klezmer Nutcracker Based on Ellen Kushner's award-winning book, “The Golden Dreydl,” this totally irresistible family musical has returned to the Big Apple for this year's holiday season courtesy of Manhattan's celebrated Vital Theatre Company. Tchaikovsky's lush score – arranged by Michael McLaughlin and David Harris and performed by the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra – provides the musical landscape for this wonderfully imaginative spin on the traditional *Nutcracker* tale. Weaving together threads of Jewish folklore with fantasy and humor, Kushner's version follows young Sara, miserable at the family Chanukah party until mysterious *Tante* Miriam arrives with the gift of a Golden Dreydl – which just happens to be an enchanted princess in disguise who whirls Sara away on an exciting adventure through a magical world. Vitaltheatre.org. Through 1/3.

The Radio City Christmas Spectacular 2009 A huge, overstuffed Christmas stocking of a show bursting with all things merry and bright – including the Radio City Rockettes®! From its legendary “Parade of the Wooden Soldiers” to a thrill ride with Santa to his workshop at the North Pole where rag dolls dance away the winter chill, the *Christmas Spectacular* emerges as the star atop NYC's annual holiday festivities. And of course, as always, there's the stunning reenactment of the first Christmas in the “Living Nativity” replete with live animals and breathtaking visuals. Radiocitychristmas.com. Through 12/30.

Wintuk Cirque du Soleil's phantasmagorical fairytale about a young boy's quest for snow and the cavalcade of irresistible characters with mind-blowing physical abilities he meets along the way is back – by popular holiday demand! – at Madison Square Garden's WaMu Theatre. Layer upon layer of fairytale intrigue along with a spellbinding array of signature (and surprise) Cirque attractions give *Wintuk* a multi-generational-not-to-be-missed cachet. Wamusatmsg.com; Cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/wintuk. Through 1/3.