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## ▶ Theatre Reviews

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### Nut/Cracked

by Sandy MacDonald  
EDGE Entertainment Contributor  
Thursday Nov 2, 2006



A scene from Nut/Cracked.

Grab your loved one(s) and hightail it to the Boston Center for the Arts to catch David Parker and the Bang Group, a quirky New York dance troupe all too briefly in residence as guests of the Theater Offensive's 15th annual Queer Theatre Festival.

The program doesn't appear overtly gay-specific, except perhaps in the freedom of the partnering configurations. Nor - to my initial disappointment - does it engage in any pointed Nutcracker bashing. (The story has always given me the creeps: what's with that overattentive Herr Drosselmyer, anyway, and his curiously phallic choice of Christmas present?) Instead, **Nut/Cracked** uses variations on Tchaikovsky's score - by interpreters as varied as Duke Ellington and the Westminster Handbell Choir - as a jumping-off point for comically tinged

contemporary dance.

The "neo-vaudeville" label also proves - fortunately - something of a misnomer. Pratfalls are present, but they're purposeful, and as carefully choreographed as the multiple pirouettes executed - barefoot! - by the young and stunningly skilled Zack Winokur, a Concord Academy senior (Parker likes to round out his regulars with local casting). The whimsy factor is kept carefully in check: the comedy is more dry than broad.

What can you expect to see? A boy - Winokur - shockingly graceful en pointe, his delicate footwork illumined by the flashlight he carries. A young woman at war with her own limbs (Amber Sloan in the cast I saw) having it out with a possible suitor (Jeffrey Kazin); her repudiation includes a few Cagneyesque grapefruit-in-the-gob gestures. A hangover dance, perhaps unique in the canon, set to Ellington's Sugar Rum. A spirited *mano a mano* - or rather mostly *pied a pied* -- duel between two dancers (Sloan and Parker) practicing full-body percussion on swaths of bubble wrap ...

"Ya gotta have a gimmick" might seem the message, were the choreography any less ingenious, the dancing/acting not so thoroughly professional. I don't want to spoil the special nature of the closing "grand pas de deux" - a company favorite since 1963, and familiar to fans as something of a signature piece - but let's just say it involves an appendage ordinarily neglected in classical dance, or indeed any dance. Parker is all about offering a fresh vision of the visual and audible capabilities of the human body, and this piece, with its innocent pansexuality, is a thorough delight. Enjoy - you'd be hard-pressed not to.

At the Roberts Studio Theatre at the Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont St. (617-933-8600, [www.thetheateroffensive.org](http://www.thetheateroffensive.org)) through Nov. 11; Tues 7:30 P.M., Friday 9:30 P.M., Sat 2.00 P.M. Tickets \$34.

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Sandy MacDonald covers theatre for the Boston Globe and TheaterMania.com. She is also a travel/food writer and the author of *Quick Escapes Boston: 25 Weekend Getaways from the Hub (Globe-Pequot)*.

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