

## **GCB Auditions and Casting Policies**

(July 2023)

### **Background**

GCB strives to produce the best show possible for our audiences *and* create a positive experience for our dancers and families. These equally important goals play into the challenging and complex process of casting over 100 dancers. GCB hopes to clarify expectations and minimize casting disappointment by establishing, communicating, and following the procedures and policies below.

### **Eligibility**

Our production is open to all members of the dance and performing arts community. Therefore, we welcome:

- Dancers from all local studios
- High school graduates
- College students
- Alumni dancers
- Community members

### **Audition Date**

Auditions will be held the weekend before Labor Day weekend and rehearsals will begin the weekend following Labor Day (subject to change). This new schedule (as of 2023) allows more time to complete the casting process.

### **Audition Location**

Auditions will either be held at the University of Montana School of Theatre and Dance (depending on availability and cost) or a local dance studio that serves GCB's needs for studio space, parking, and cost.

### **Audition Schedule**

A draft schedule will be posted online in June so families know what date and approximate time their dancer will need to attend. The final schedule with confirmed times for each age group (based on final registration numbers) will be posted on GCB's website at least (3) days prior to auditions. If the time for any age group needs to be changed due to final registration numbers, we will adjust. For example, Ages 7-8 may need to be split into two groups if registration numbers are too high for all registered dancers to be accommodated in one studio.

### **Audition Requirements**

- Must be at least (7) years old *on or before* the MCPS kindergarten cut-off date for the current school year.
- Must be enrolled (with any local dance studio) in a weekly *ballet* class during the current season (i.e. academic fall semester). Party Scene adult performers are exempt from this ballet class requirement.

### **Audition Process**

- Each dancer completes a registration form online <https://www.gardencityballet.org/the-nutcracker/audition/> by Monday before audition weekend. (Walk-in registration is discouraged but will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Artistic Director.)
- Each dancer submits required paperwork (general waivers and performance agreement), ballet headshot (approx. 3x5 in color or b/w, which will not be returned), and donor thank-you (a requirement for returning Nutcracker dancers only) during check-in.
- Each dancer receives an audition number to be pinned on the front of a leotard or dance shirt for the purpose of identification.
- Dancers are called into the studio as a group.
- Call-backs for partnering roles or solos may occur.
- Audition numbers are collected at the end of each audition and reused the following year.
- The Administrative Director assigns an audition number that matches the dancer to the registration form.
- The Administrative Director provides all registration forms, with matching audition numbers, to the casting committee. These are placed in the binder according to each age group.

- The Administrative Director also provides a one-page roster of all dancers by name and audition number, with space for notes.

### **Audition Policy**

- Dancers must attend the age group and audition time according to their *exact* age on the actual day of auditions.
- All dancers must be present for, and fully participate in, the appropriate scheduled audition. If, however, a dancer does not attend the appropriate audition, GCB will follow this protocol:
  - If the absence is due to illness, injury, or personal matter (considered on a case-by-case basis by the Artistic Director) of a *known* dancer (i.e. someone who has participated in GCB's Nutcracker, or who is currently known by one of our choreographers) *then* the Artistic Director will make every effort to cast the dancer in an appropriate role(s), if available.
  - If a dancer is *not known* to GCB or any of its choreographers and is absent for any reason (including being unaware of the audition, illness, injury, or personal matter), *then* the Artistic Director will cast only lower or mid-level roles best suited for younger or less experienced dancers (i.e. Gingersnap, Little Mice, Angel, Soldier), if available. For casting in roles that require a higher skill level (i.e. pointe or solos), the dancer must be present for the audition (in order to be assessed by the Independent Adjudicator in the context of all dancers at the audition).
- Auditions may only be viewed by the casting committee — Artistic Director, Assistant Artistic Director, choreographers for the season, independent adjudicator — plus a videographer (if needed). Staff and board members (many of whom are parents of dancers) do not view auditions.
- Video auditions and make-up auditions (due to a dancer's absence) are not permitted.

### **Independent Adjudicator**

To make casting as fair as possible, the Artistic Director selects a neutral, unbiased dance professional who is not familiar with GCB dancers or affiliated with any local studio. This person's paid job is to rank and recommend (to the casting committee) all soloists, including *Clara*, and determine which dancers should earn a spot in the Snow Corps. The adjudicator is not given any information whatsoever about any of the dancers (i.e. name, age, studio affiliation) or past history with GCB (i.e. prior roles or number of years in the production). Typically, the adjudicator attends auditions for ages (13) and older. An adjudicator for GCB may serve multiple seasons but may not be hired for two consecutive seasons. GCB trusts the integrity of dance professionals and, therefore, does not have a nepotism policy for this position.

### **Casting Timeline and Protocol Following Auditions**

- Important — All information is kept confidential until the final cast list is posted online.
- Saturday or Sunday (at the conclusion of auditions): The casting committee holds a private meeting with the independent adjudicator to share thoughts and hear recommendations (GCB typically sponsors a post-audition meal; a private room in a restaurant or home is ideal for having open discussion.)
- Monday-Thursday: The Artistic Director (in collaboration, as needed, with other members of the casting committee) prepares a first draft and shares it (electronically or by meeting in person) no later than Thursday with the Assistant Artistic Director and all choreographers.
- Friday: Feedback from the casting committee is returned to the Artistic Director, who then finalizes the first draft.
- Saturday-Sunday: The Artistic Director and Assistant Artistic Director meet with the Administrative Director to cross-check casting (against the audition binder) for any omissions or oversights (i.e. Has a dancer been cast in two roles that rehearse at the same time? Did a dancer request only one role, but receive two? Did a dancer opt-out of the Party Girl role but get cast as such?)
- Monday, Labor Day: The final cast list is posted on GCB's website no later than Monday (11:59pm MST).
- Tuesday-Thursday: If a dancer declines a role(s) due to scheduling conflicts or casting disappointment, the Artistic Director and Assistant Artistic Director, with communication assistance from the Administrative Director, work to fill vacant roles (updating the online cast list as needed).

- Dancers (and parent contacts listed on the registration form) who drop out of Nutcracker *due to casting disappointment* will be emailed a standardized reply\* from the Artistic Director within 24 hours of their notice to GCB, and they will not be eligible for other roles that may come available due to other dancers vacating a role(s).
- Dancers who decline a role *due to a scheduling conflict* will be eligible for other roles that might come available due to other dancers vacating a role(s).
- Friday: Parent meeting (typically scheduled for one hour in evening) followed by first day of rehearsals.

**\*Standardized reply as follows:**

*Dear (name of dancer and/or parent),*

*We always hope for each dancer to have a positive reaction to casting decisions, but unfortunately there is some disappointment every year. It weighs heavily on us when dancers are unhappy, and we truly regret that you have decided not to participate in this Nutcracker season. Please know that we value all our dancers and families, especially those who have been involved year after year.*

*If you indicated a desire to meet in January for a conversation about casting, I will reach out after the production to schedule a meeting. Otherwise, we wish you the very best and warmly invite you to audition again in the future.*

*On behalf of the Casting Committee,  
Marie Barnett, Artistic Director*

**Understudies**

Assigning understudy dancers is an important part of casting that is critical to the success of our production. Understudies learn essential parts of the ballet, knowing they may never perform these roles. It is likely that many upper-level dancers will be assigned an understudy role, and we appreciate those who generously agree to contribute their hard work, time, and talent. Understudies will be assigned by Oct 1 and will attend all rehearsals, as able, going forward. Understudy dancers should not expect to be cast in that role the following year.

**Other Casting Considerations**

- We do not solicit weekly conflicts (i.e. church, soccer games, dance studio/company rehearsals) prior to auditions and *then* cast the ballet around everyone's other commitments — if a dancer has a recurring conflict with the rehearsal time for a certain role, the dancer will need to choose between Nutcracker and the personal conflicting commitment. GCB provides a rehearsal template (posted online prior to auditions) to help families determine potential or existing conflicts.
- We do not guarantee any special casting for seniors in high school (i.e. being a senior does not mean an automatic spot in the Snow Corps or an automatic featured role or solo).
- We do not cast based on how many years a dancer has been in our show (first-time dancers may be cast in coveted parts, i.e. Party Girl or Sheep).
- To some degree, casting may depend on the limitations of our existing costume inventory. Sometimes we can purchase/make/alter an existing costume to accommodate a dancer for a certain role, but not always. For many of our handmade costumes the fabric may no longer be available (so making an additional costume for certain variations is not an option).
- We do try to cast dancers in different parts from year to year, but this is not a guarantee.
- Parents who are board members, donors, committee chairs, etc. receive casting information at the same time as all families, and do not receive preferential casting for their children.
- Dancer behavior (positive and negative) is noted and may be considered when casting.
- Dancer attendance (from prior years) is noted and may be considered when casting.

**Casting Policy**

- Every reasonable effort will be made to cast all dancers who audition.

- Every reasonable effort will be made to include all abilities.
- There is no guarantee that all dancers who audition will be cast — audition numbers may exceed our costume inventory and available roles.
- The Artistic Director is not required to cast everyone in an equal number of roles.
- The Artistic Director is not required to cast based on age, grade level, length of time in the production, or studio affiliation (i.e. the role of *Clara* does not formally rotate from one studio to another).

### **Adults Auditioning for the Party Scene**

Sometimes there is a lot of interest from community members (often from parents of current dancers), but we've also been known to "beg" people to participate in the Party Scene. GCB used to collect the standard performance fee tuition from all adult Party Scene performers but changed to soliciting a donation that is "personally meaningful" instead. A full policy is located on the GCB website.

- Minimum age 21 or older
- No formal dance experience required

### **Local Actors and Performers**

At the discretion of the Artistic Director, GCB may hire professionals to perform certain character roles (i.e. Drosselmeyer). Where possible, GCB casts community members who are willing to donate their time and talent.

### **Professional Guest Artists**

Each year, GCB hires professional dancers on contract for the leading roles of *Sugar Plum Fairy* and *Cavalier*. Securing guest artists can be a challenge; the Artistic Director should begin this search as early as possible — ideally no later than March, with a goal to have contracts signed by July. Every year, GCB receives one or two inquiries (cold calls) from professional, freelance artists and we maintain this contact information on file. GCB also solicits professional dance companies from around the country, as well as seeks referrals from prior GCB guest artists. On occasion, we invite certain guests to return, though ideally not more than two years in a row. Guest artists elevate the quality of our production — they are inspiring for our young dancers, as well as exciting for our audiences. (GCB reserves the right to hire professionals for other roles as well, if needed.)

### **Cultural Appreciation or Appropriation?**

*The Nutcracker* ballet was originally choreographed in 1892 by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, to a magical score by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. At this time in Russia, dance artists were becoming aware of, and the public was gaining interest in, the vast world of art and culture beyond their own borders. Tchaikovsky's score celebrates his personal understanding and appreciation for the music, rhythms, and instruments from other cultures including China, the Middle East, and Spain. Garden City Ballet follows the original choreographers' lead of honoring the cultures that are celebrated in the music, while avoiding stereotyping of people that are being represented. Our intention is to provide choreography that is culturally sensitive — but that also honors the traditions of the original ballet. Many articles have been written, and can easily be found online, exploring *The Nutcracker's* portrayal of ethnically diverse cultures in today's world.

### **Decision and Authority**

#### **Board of Directors**

- Setting performance tuition fee
- Approving policies
- Contracts and background checks

#### **Artistic Director**

- Assistant Artistic Director
- Choreographers
- Auditions / independent adjudicator
- Casting

- Rehearsals / attendance
- Tech week and performances
- Production meetings
- Guest artists and other local performers
- Costuming, sets, props
- Dancer bonding, meetings, behavior, dress code, hair

#### Administrative Director

- Communications
- Website
- Audition registration (and required paperwork)
- Rehearsal schedules / attendance
- Tech week and performance schedules
- Collecting performance tuition fees and operating optional fundraisers
- Costume fittings
- Parent volunteer requirements and SignUp
- Committees
- Guest artists travel and lodging
- Production Assistant
- GCB Intern
- Parent and new family meetings
- Bun check for all dancers on final rehearsal day