

**NNSL**

# Author Amber Henry commissioned to write inspiring children's book

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1 / 2 The joy of wanting and learning to dance in a beloved Christmas classic production is now the topic of a book commissioned by the Bella Dance Academy in Yellowknife for their 20th anniversary. The book, *If You Take Me to The Nutcracker*, was written by Yellowknife author Amber Henry and illustrated by John Henderson. Proceeds from the book will go to the Academy's Scholarship Program. In the photo, Amber Henry is shown doing a book reading at Somba K'e Park as part of a student appreciation event on Wednesday evening. Jill Westerman/NNSL photo

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A child's storybook vision of dancing on stage within a magical Christmas scene has now come

to life in a storybook written by Yellowknife author Amber Henry.

The book titled *If You Take Me to The Nutcracker* was commissioned by the Bella Dance Academy to celebrate its 20th anniversary and as a way to raise funds for their scholarship program.

Phoenix Smith, owner of the academy, said the intent of the story is to convey that “dance is for everyone.”

“There's a lot of different ways that somebody could be inspired to take dance, or to want to be a dancer,” Smith said.

### **For the love of dance**

Henry, the author of several children's books, said writing the book was special for her as she was a dancer as a child, so she could make that nostalgic connection.

“I was inspired knowing that kids come away from *The Nutcracker* wanting to dance,” she said. “The goal was to create a story that dancers of any background or skill level would see themselves in, and I hope we have succeeded, but we really wanted to send that message that dancing was for everyone, but it's also something that your family becomes involved with as well,” Henry said.

While the book was written for children between four and eight years old, Henry said there is no age limit for someone to enjoy the story.

### **Christmas classic**

Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky was commissioned to write the two-act ballet, *The Nutcracker*, in 1892. The dance, which depicts a child's imagination on Christmas Eve, has since become a well-loved tradition to watch during the Christmas season.

The ballet is also performed in Yellowknife at the Northern Arts and Cultural Centre by Bella Dance Academy members, Smith said, noting that about 100 dancers are involved in the major production.

Part of what makes The Nutcracker an endearing story, Smith said, is how people will experience different emotions and have different nostalgia, “depending on what point in your life you’re in and how you’ve experienced the story before.”

“So I think it’s really special, and as kids grow, they go back to The Nutcracker and they are going to experience it again and again in a different way.

“And if they go as parents and they take their kid to the Nutcracker, they're going to see that wonder and that magic in their kid's eyes, and maybe their kid will be inspired to take a dance class.”

### **In the drawing room**

Henry said she worked with illustrator John Henderson to bring the story to life on the pages of the book.

Henderson, who was a long-standing cartoonist for the Yellowknifer newspaper until 2023, said his daughter danced at the Academy from the time she was three and now she works there, so he was well-acquainted with the dance atmosphere.

"So when the idea for the book came up, I volunteered my time to the studio and Phoenix. I thought it was a neat project and a nice thought to support their scholarship fund," Henderson said.

Henderson said his favourite illustration is when the dancer in the story asks her mom to dance.

"Her Mom is adamantly saying, 'No, no, I don't want to,' with a little bit of fear in her eyes. But then of course she gives in on the next page or so and they dance.

"And that's my favorite one."

Henderson said it was a fun project for everybody involved.

"And, you know, ultimately, the intent behind the project is good. And if they sell some copies, I think it's great if the proceeds go to a good cause."

### **Special edition**

Smith said she is very proud of the book project.

"I'm excited. I think people will recognize imagery. You'll open the book and you'll see the stage that you recognize at NACC," Smith said. "I think it'll be special for people and special for our dance community in particular."

Henry, too, said she was happy with the book.

"I hope other people are really happy with it as well, but it was what was in my heart, and I think I got it on the page in the way that I wanted to tell it, so I just hope it speaks to other people, too," she said.

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