

OTC colonel debuts as Mother Ginger

by Eloise Lundgren, OTC Public Affairs

Col. Jeffery Harris, U.S. Army Operational Test Command deputy commander and chief of staff, makes his debut as Fort Hood's celebrity Mother Ginger for Ballet Austin's annual "The Nutcracker" at 2 p.m. Dec. 14 at the Long Performing Arts Center in Austin.

Joining the long list of other celebrity Mother Gingers, Harris is the latest Soldier to trade in his Army Combat Uniform for an elaborate and over the top theatrical costume. The Mother Ginger (or Mother Gigogne as she's called in Europe) costume is a tall platform that looks like a hoop skirt. The celebrity, dolled up with heavy makeup, a wild hat and a robust fake décolletage, stands atop the platform and gestures outrageously while the "Bon Bons" (small children) pour out from under the skirted platform, dance about and then disappear back under the "skirt."

The entire performance takes less than three minutes, but is the comedic highlight of the ballet. Russian composer Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky, who scored the ballet, saved his most vulgar music for this sequence. Sounding like a series of fairground tunes, the Mother Ginger sequence is wildly popular in American productions of the ballet but not so much in Europe.

First performed in San Francisco in 1944, the timeless ballet is staged in countless American cities every year, particularly around Christmas. This will be the 51st performance of Ballet Austin's "The Nutcracker."

Beginning in 2004, Fort Hood celebrities joined the ranks of Texas elite like Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, humorist Kinky Friedman, Dell Computers CEO Michael Dell, noted cyclist Lance Armstrong and former Gov. Ann Richards as those who have performed as Mother Ginger. Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Pete Chiarelli's wife, Beth, was the first Fort Hood VIP to play the part, delighting more than 2,000 ballet lovers while her husband, then the 1st Cavalry Division commanding general, was in Iraq with the division.

Following Beth were Brig. Gen. Chris Tucker, OTC commanding general; Command Sgt. Maj. Larry Wilson OTC's command sergeant major; Col. Curt Potts, OTC commander; Brig. Gen. Don MacWillie, OTC commanding general; Col. Steve Duke, OTC's Maneuver Test director; Kenny Crawford, OTC deputy commander/chief of staff; and Col. Joe Martin, OTC

commander. All performances have been sold out.

“I’m truly looking forward to carrying on this Fort Hood tradition,” Harris said. “First, it’s an honor to represent all the Soldiers, DA civilians, contractors and their Families at this holiday event.

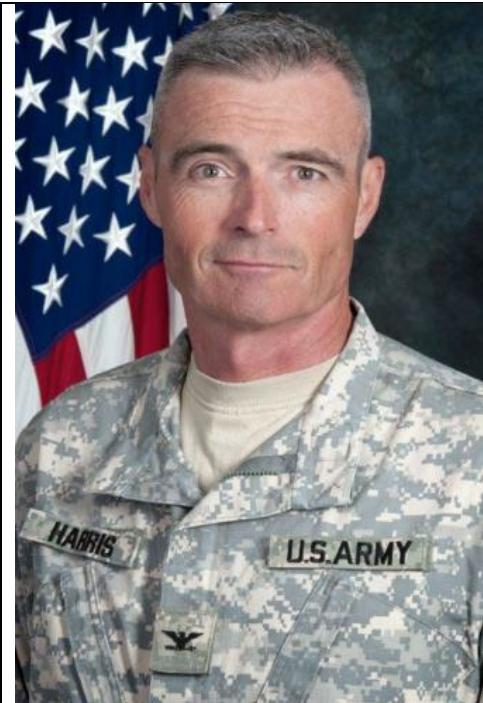
“Second, and just as importantly, it’s my pleasure to be part of Ballet Austin’s annual tradition and to be able to thank them for their support of Soldiers and their Families,” he said. “What a great opportunity to be in front of more than two thousand people, many of whom have never had direct contact with the military, and get to enjoy the fun right along with them.”

Has Harris received any advice from former Mother Gingers?

“I haven’t asked for any pointers from anyone, nor have I looked at videos of previous performances,” he said with a laugh. “I want to make this effort a completely unique performance and perhaps give it a flair that the good people of Austin have not yet experienced.”

Tickets are available for the Austin Ballet performances by going online at www.balletaustin.org or calling 512-476-2163.

Source: Fort Hood Sentinel, November 7, 2013



Col. Jeffery Harris

In this 2009 Sentinel file photo, OTC Commander Col. Donald MacWillie performs as the fairy tale character, "Mother Ginger," dancing along with the "bonbons" during a performance of the Nutcracker in Austin. Sentinel file photo



In this 2011 Sentinel file photo, Colonel Kenny Crawford prepares to leave his dressing room at the Long Performing Arts Center in Austin, before taking center stage as Mother Ginger. Sentinel file photo