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Milwaukee Ballet presents sensory-friendly performance of *The Nutcracker* for the first time

~ Partnership with Autism Speaks and Marcus Center for the Performing Arts gives new live theater option for the autism community ~

October 17, 2016: Milwaukee Ballet will perform a sensory-friendly version of *The Nutcracker* for the first time in its history for an audience of children and adults diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder or other sensitivity issues.

In partnership with *Autism Speaks* and with support from *Marcus Center for the Performing Arts*, this unique version of *The Nutcracker* will be presented on December 21 at 6pm at Uihlein Hall.

"Ballet is language through movement and it makes perfect sense for this art form to be adapted for the enjoyment of children and adults on the autism spectrum," said Milwaukee Ballet Artistic Director Michael Pink.

"At its heart, *The Nutcracker* is a heartwarming story about all the magic and mayhem that can happen when families get together for the holidays. We want to ensure as many families as possible can make memories for their children seeing this performance," said Pink.

Lauren Peter, Manager of Field Development at Autism Speaks, said stage productions at large venues can be overwhelming to people with autism.

"However, events can be tailored to meet their needs by making small modifications such as lowering sound levels and adjusting lighting. These simple accommodations go a long way toward providing an inclusive environment for everyone."

"We are proud to partner with the Milwaukee Ballet and Marcus Center on this wonderful initiative to make a timeless holiday classic like *The Nutcracker* accessible to local families affected by autism," said Peter.

Milwaukee Ballet Executive Director Julia Glawe said inclusion and accessibility are incredibly important parts of Milwaukee Ballet's mission.

“We are working closely with *Autism Speaks* and our long-time home, the Marcus Center, to ensure the performance is welcoming and accessible for families from this community,” explained Glawe.

The Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, led by President & CEO Paul Mathews, is loaning their box office, facilities, and ushers to support this initiative.

“In collaboration with Milwaukee Ballet, we continue to explore new areas of community engagement at the Marcus Center, and this opportunity is a wonderful and worthy initiative for our support,” said Mathews.

Autism Speaks is promoting the December 21 production through its newsletters, and tickets are General Admission for \$25 each.

The Nutcracker is a gift to Milwaukee from BMO Harris Bank. This is the fourth year BMO Harris Bank has sponsored the production. Milwaukee Ballet’s 2016-17 season is presented by Donna & Donald Baumgartner.

About Milwaukee Ballet

Founded in 1970, Milwaukee Ballet celebrates its 47th season as a staple of Milwaukee’s arts and culture community. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Michael Pink, Milwaukee Ballet has become world-renowned for presenting both bold new interpretations of story ballets, and cutting-edge, evocative contemporary works. Milwaukee Ballet is the home to an international company of dancers, and is one of only a few companies in the nation to maintain its own orchestra. Milwaukee Ballet School & Academy is the only professional dance school in the Midwest accredited by the National Association of Schools of Dance. Milwaukee Ballet’s award-winning Community Engagement department serves more than 30,000 people in Southeastern Wisconsin through original, interactive programs. **milwaukeeballet.org**

About Autism Speaks

Autism Speaks is the world’s leading autism science and advocacy organization. It is dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorder; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. Autism Speaks was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism. Since its inception, Autism Speaks has committed millions of dollars to its mission, the majority in science and medical research. On the global front, Autism Speaks has established partnerships in more than 70 countries on five continents to foster international research, services and awareness. **AutismSpeaks.org**

About Marcus Center for the Performing Arts

Established in 1969, the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts is the premier performing arts community gathering space in Southeastern Wisconsin. As the Marcus Center moves into its 47th year, it continues to build bridges between diverse members of our community through high-quality arts entertainment in the region and the state. The touring Broadway series, sponsored by Associated Bank, is recognized as bringing the best of Broadway entertainment to Milwaukee for the past 20 years and provides opportunities to educate, entertain and engage audiences. The Marcus Center is also the home to the Milwaukee Symphony, Milwaukee Ballet, Florentine Opera, First Stage plus a variety of other important community and family events throughout the year. The Marcus Center is a private non-profit 501(c) 3 corporation and is a dedicated veterans’ memorial in Milwaukee. **www.MarcusCenter.org**