

Getting into the spirit

Rockettes rehearsing, holiday lights shining, ice ready in Nashville

By Patrice Stewart
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NASHVILLE — What's a camel doing on the Grand Ole Opry stage? A peek behind the curtain Saturday revealed several camels learning their steps, instead of performers like Marty Stuart, Martina McBride, Jimmy Newman and Jeannie Seely rehearsing.

Well, camels such as Ivan, Carson and Wendy have to rehearse their roles, too. Then they will know exactly where to stand in their Living Nativity scene at the end of the Radio City Christmas Spectacular Show, which opens this weekend in the Grand Ole Opry House.

The Opry stars will perform in the Ryman Auditorium in downtown Nashville for a couple of months to make room for the Radio City show. It has become a family holiday favorite with Santas and elves, Raggedy Ann dolls, dancing bears, shimmying snowmen and the famous "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," as well as the Nativity with live animals.

The camels weren't the only ones tuning up for this holiday extravaganza.

High-kicking Rockettes

Backstage, a troupe of Rockettes checked on costumes and wigs, and a couple took time to talk to reporters in between practicing their eye-high kicks.

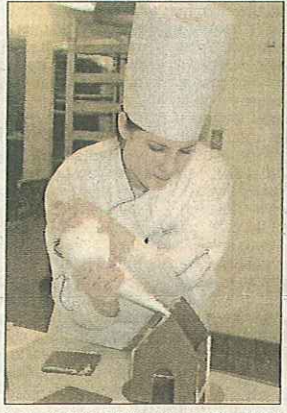
Clare Holmes, 33, is from Suffolk, England, northeast of London. She moved to the United States five years ago and lives in Las Vegas, and this is the dancer's fifth year to perform with the Rockettes.

"The high kicks are what Rockettes are famous for, and they are part of our audition process," she said. The all-day audition includes tap, jazz and kicks, both individually and with others.

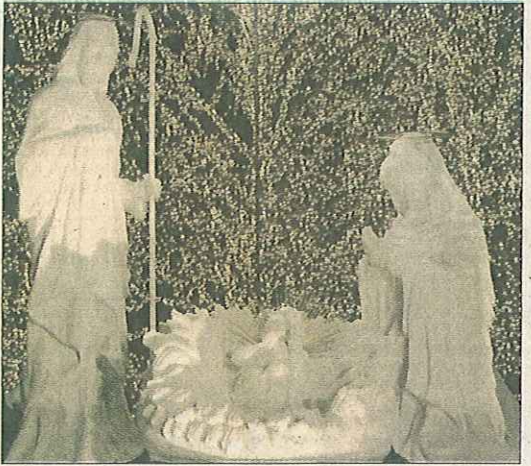
"All the Rockettes have been dancing for a while, and coming into this job, you might think you know all of



Daily photos by Patrice Stewart
Rockette Clare Holmes shows the stiff pants each dancer wears for the scene "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers."



Sous chef Sarah Zuccher applies icing to the top of a gingerbread house in the Opryland pastry kitchen. These creations will be in Gingerbread Corner.



The figures in this Nativity scene are among several dozen placed on the lawn in front of lighted trees at Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville through the holidays.

'There are 18 of us on stage at one time, and we do about nine numbers, with nine costume changes. It's quite demanding.'

Clare Holmes
33-year-old Rockette from Suffolk, England

it," said Holmes. "But we have to learn to work together in the rehearsal process — to dance together and not stand out as individuals, such as when we form a big wheel in the "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" scene. Then they fall like dominoes in one of the dance world's most famous acts.

In her dressing room, shared with five others, she showed the stiff, military-style white pants they wear in that scene. Then she pulled out the pinafores and red foam wigs the Rockettes don to become Raggedy Ann dolls and the Santa suits they wear while Santa sings "I'm Here."

"There are 18 of us on stage at one time, and we do about nine numbers, with nine costume changes," Holmes said. "It's quite demanding."

She said the show gets songs added occasionally, as well as "tweaking every year." The last major addition was the "Twelve Days of Christmas" scene.

"Every time you see the show, you catch things you didn't see before," said Holmes, who has performed this show in Detroit, Toronto, Costa Mesa, Calif., and Phoenix.

"You make a lot of good friends," Holmes said. "And we're all away from home over Thanksgiving and Christmas, so we spend the holidays together." Sometimes family members come to visit them for the holidays.

This year she will be one of the

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INSIDE: OBITUARIES, D:

BUDGET TRAVEL

Priceline.com morphs into hotel, airfare search engine

It used to be that Priceline.com was a rather exotic service mean only for the gamblers among us — the folks willing to accept the



Arthur Frommer

risk of a 6 a.m. flight or an out-of-center hotel. By featuring its bidding process ("name your own price"), Priceline.com came up with absurdly low air or hotel rates, but with the drawback of sometimes producing a dawn departure, a multi-stop flight or a badly located hotel.

The Priceline change

That's all changed. Although Priceline.com still maintains its "name your own price" option — the way to get the very lowest prices imaginable — it now also offers the same full-disclosure airfares and hotel rates that Web sites like Hotels.com, Expedia.com, Travelocity.com, Orbitz.com and others offer.

And would you believe it? It often undercuts the prices offered by those other full-disclosure Web sites. Moreover, it doesn't charge the same extra fees that those other Web sites often impose.

Best deal available

I hate to complicate your life, but what this means is the following: If you're simply looking for a flight or a hotel room, and are not hell-bent on getting the absolute lowest price, you should now go to the standard options on Priceline.com in addition to using those other traditional search engine services: Expedia, Hotels.com, Travelocity, etc. You have to add another search to be absolutely sure you're getting the best available deal.

But if you're looking for a really stunning price, a rate that can't be beaten, you can still utilize the alternate "name your own price" bidding features of Priceline.com. To "bid" for a cool price is still the route to amazing savings. An associate of mine recently was required to stay overnight in a hotel in Manhattan. He used Priceline, specified that he had to have a deluxe property in midtown, and ended up getting a room for only \$150 a night at the fancy and well-located Intercontinental Hotel (which usually charges around \$400 a night).

Slowdown in travel

It's also fairly obvious that the slowdown in travel has reinstated the appearance of top last-minute airfare deals on Priceline.com, for people willing to take a chance. Apparently, the airlines are now once again, and heavily, using Priceline.com to dispose of their last-minute unsold seats — of which there are a great many.

Booking.com

But the big news with Priceline.com is that it has also become a standard, full-disclosure search engine for

it up with, "So, next month I may need to borrow money from you. Does your offer still stand?"

Abby, I never offered to loan her money! I quickly changed the subject because I didn't want to say anything I might regret later. How do I tell her I don't want to loan her money without losing a friendship or hurting her feelings? — On the Spot in Seattle

Dear On the Spot: Tracy may be charming and fun to be around, but she's not a friend. In fact, she appears to be a bit of a hustler. Two can play that game.

When she raises the subject of the loan again — and she will — tell her: "Tracy, the last

Abby, I know it is wrong, but for some reason, I have been obsessed with him. Ever since I was 10 I have been his favorite student, and obviously he was my favorite teacher.

This school year is the first time Mr. M. isn't teaching any of my classes. I realize this is probably a good thing, but I'm having difficulty accepting it. I feel awful. How should I handle it? — Eighth-Grade Admirer

Dear Admirer: Many young ladies have had crushes on their male teachers, myself included. I am not minimizing your feelings for Mr. M., but with time and distance they will diminish. What you are experiencing is a combination of

California goods have expiration dates, and if they are old, they must be thrown out.

Please tell your readers to check the dates before sending items on to the food drive. Their generosity will reach the people for whom it was intended. I think they would be sad to know how much food is wasted because it was donated after the expiration date. — Kali in Reno, Nev.

Dear Kali: Your letter speaks for itself. People in need don't want spoiled food any more than the donors do. Thank you for writing.

Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Try using plastic bag, freezer to get gum out

Dear Heloise: My husband decided to help me out with the laundry only he left gum in his pocket, and now I have gum on a 100 percent polyester sweat suit that he bought for me. Is there any way to get the gum out?

I love your column. You can't believe all the hints I use.

— Lisa H., via e-mail

Try putting the garment into a plastic bag and then into the freezer for about an hour or so, just to harden the gum. Carefully remove the gum using a dull butter knife (don't use a sharp knife because you may damage the fabric). If any residue remains, treat it with prewash spray, or sponge cleaning fluid onto the back (be sure to test on an area that won't show first), then launder as usual. Don't put the clothing in the dryer until the gum's all gone. I've always believed that it's best to start with safe and easy cleaning aids that you have at home, and then go on to stronger cleaners or commercial preparations, if necessary. — Heloise

Hints from Heloise

Travel hint
Dear Heloise: For traveling, I find that the daily medicine containers from a drugstore or department store work great for putting your earrings in. For necklaces (especially chains), a flat container with double-sided tape in the bottom works great. It keeps chains from sliding around and tangling. — Wilma G. Littlerock in California

A 'grate' onion idea

Dear Heloise: By accident, I discovered a great way to grate an onion easily. I had cut an onion in half, and instead of hacking off the end before peeling off the papery layers, I pulled them up and away from the white portion. This ended up being a knoblike handle, which I could easily hold and grate the onion right down to the end without any loss of onion or fingertips. — Dave, Poway, Calif.

Easy-find scissors

Dear Heloise: I'm a needle crafter and use my scissors often, and I have to search through the bottom of my bag for them. I cut a 2-foot piece of bright-colored yarn, weave it through the scissors handle, tie a knot and then weave it through my bag handle, so when I need them, I can fish them out of my bag in a flash. — Joanne K. Paulich, Hammond, Ind.

Cell-phone programming

Dear Heloise: I program into my cell phone numbers for things like refrigerator filters, vacuum-cleaner bags and belts, etc. When I'm at the store, I don't have to try to remember the numbers. — Cathy, via e-mail

Frozen paint

Dear Heloise: I paint canvases and walls. This hint applies to both types of painting and to oil-based paint, as well as

acrylics. When you have to stop your project before finishing, don't bother to clean up the brushes, paint tray, rollers and/or pallet. Just put them in plastic bags and store them in the freezer. They'll thaw back out to the same condition. — Parrish Hirasaki, Dickinson, Texas

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Alviah Denard, daughter of Jeff and Nicole Denard, celebrates her fifth birthday today. She is the granddaughter of Donna Decatur A.G. and Denard Trinity (Daily)

COMMUNITY CALE

SATURDAY

Eagles Turkey Shoot, 9 a. freshment Place. Call 22 or 280-5166.

Music and Dance, Pricev Palace, Bulletproof Cour Band, 7:30-10:30 p.m., ca dress. Sponsored by Soem Talent Promoters arducers Association Inc., profit organization. Publ to listen or dance. Ca 4362 or 350-1666.

SATURDAY'S CHURCH EVENTS

Book Singing, 6:30 p.m., United Methodist Church och Road, Somerville, C. 6564.

Singing, 6:30 p.m., Pattil Church of God, Hartself Decatur Church of God (the Happy Melody Boys 773-2478.

Singing, 7 p.m., Living Fness Church, Alabama J Sunshiners; the Crusad 974-2079.

We publish notices of e general interest on the event and, when sp lows, for two days before Please submit items on in advance. Call 340-243 to Community Calenda *Decatur Daily*, 201 First. Decatur, AL 35609; e-ma news@decaturdaily.co to 340-2392.



Clare Holmes shows the red foam wig Rockettes wear with Raggedy Ann-style pinafores. Nirine Brown, right, wears a panda head and outfit for one dance scene in "A Radio City Christmas Spectacular."

Daily Photo by Patrice Stewart

Spirit

From page D1

two "swings" who are ready to go on stage as substitutes at any time another dancer gets sick. Those two have to know every dancer's part in every scene, rather than just one part.

Nirine Brown, 22, who is from Queens, N.Y., is also a fifth-year Rockette.

"I love to dance, and I started dancing at age 5," she said. She previously danced with the Rockettes in Denver, Myrtle Beach, Costa Mesa and Phoenix, and this is her second time in Nashville.

"We do our own makeup, including red lipstick and eyelashes you can see from the balcony," said Brown.

Like some other dancers, she has an extra challenge, because she dances the role of a panda bear in a scene from "The Nutcracker." She showed the panda head she wears and said she peeks out through the muzzle area, rather than the eyes. "They have lights in front of the stage to guide us, because you can't see much," Brown said.

The sparkly red outfits and Santa-style hats trimmed with white fur are from the "Christmas in New York" scene, when all the Rockettes come out of a taxi on stage.

"That's my favorite scene, because I'm from New York," said Brown. "We bring New York to you in Nashville." Tickets are \$35 to \$84.

This year for the first time, Radio City executives decided to send a different group of Rockettes to do one weekend of shows in Birmingham. They will perform at the Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center Arena Dec. 12-14.

Louise Mandrell

While the Rockettes and animals were rehearsing, Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center put the finishing touches on its 25th anniversary Country Christmas Celebration. The Tree of Lights was turned on Wednesday, adding up to more than 2 million lights outside and inside, as well as other holiday

Gaylord Opryland is hoping the economic downturn won't dampen holiday plans. "We believe more people may take 'stay-cations' close to home," said spokesman Jeffrey Zimmer, so they are offering a mix of new and returning activities for families and people of all ages.

Gingerbread Corner

A new Gingerbread Corner area opens Nov. 22, with gingerbread ornaments to decorate and a Winter Wonderland with train rides. Santa will arrive Nov. 23, and breakfast with the Grinch can be scheduled, too.

In the Gaslight building next door to the hotel, this will be the second and final year of a colorful ice display featuring "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas." Thirty-five ice-carving artisans from China spent the last six weeks creating the Grinch and dozens of other familiar characters and Whoville houses from 1.5 million pounds of colored ice. Twenty-foot ice slides, an icicle tunnel and a crystal ice Nativity scene are part of the display, which costs \$14 to \$22 to tour, depending on the day of the week.

Mandrell, as the hostess and performer for the new Christmas dinner and show named "Joy to the World," will play all kinds of instruments, including the accordion, and sing classic Christmas songs, while mixing in some comedy and holiday spirit.

She formerly had a show in the Tennessee Smokies. In this show, she will include nephew Matt Dundey, son of Barbara Mandrell, and his wife, Christy Sutherland, a Christian recording artist and songwriter.

"We'll take a trip to the North Pole, and I'll have some fun sharing the joy of what Christmas is all about," Mandrell said.

"And I think the greatest thing you can share with friends and family at the holidays is food," so she will do that with a family-style dinner: Tickets are \$32 to \$65.

Mandrell and executive chef Michael Swann introduced the food for the dinner show to be held in an Opryland ballroom. He and his team of 15 chefs and 175 cooks have been planning

On the Net

www.ChristmasatGaylordOpryland.com

comfort food, family food, and it ties together well with this show." His salad combines apple bites, bleu cheese and orzo pasta with wild rice, barley and cranberries.

The menu includes roasted chicken with cranberry cornbread stuffing, beef tenderloin pot pie and several home-style vegetables, finished with bread pudding with eggnog sauce and cheesecake with cherry sauce.

On the General Jackson Showboat, another family-style dinner including braised short ribs and honey glazed chicken will be served to tunes such as "Blue Christmas," "Jingle Bell Rock" and other holiday songs. Famous classics also will be sung by "Nash Vegas on the River" impersonators representing Elton John, Tina Turner and Elvis. Fiddle player Tim Watson's "Tennessee Christmas" will be the mid-day show. Cruises with meals and shows range from \$34 to \$88.

Holiday craft show

In the convention center, a Hall of Trees and holiday craft show will open Nov. 22-23.

Meanwhile, poinsettia trees and holiday decorations can be viewed on a stroll through the indoor, glass-roof conservatories of the resort.

"Rockabilly Christmas" will be the theme in the Cascades atrium, where 1950s Christmas tunes will come alive with live bands and dancers on floating "icebergs." Music is different each night in Fuse, the new nightclub.

Those who tire from all those activities, whether guests participating in resort holiday packages or just strolling through, can be rejuvenated on site at the Relache spa with cranberry-pomegranate holiday facials, pedicures and other treatments.

Self-parking to stroll through and take in the decorations, lights and manger scene is \$18. Times and ticket prices for shows, dinners, ice displays and other events vary, for a complete

What we know about heaven

Dear Dr. Graham: When we get to heaven, will we know what's happening on earth? If so, how can we be happy?

There's so much misery in the world that I'd think it would just make us sad. — G.R.



Billy Graham

Dear G.R.: The Bible doesn't answer all our questions about heaven, and we don't know exactly how much knowledge those in heaven have about what happens here. The Bible does say that "we are surrounded by ... a great cloud of witnesses" (i.e., those who have already entered heaven) but it isn't clear if this means they are able to observe our lives (Hebrews 12:1).

But what we do know about heaven is that we will be with God — and because of that, heaven is a place of supreme joy: The Bible says,

"You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11). And even if we do see something of what is happening on earth, we'll see the whole picture then, and we'll realize how it all fits in with God's eternal plan. We'll realize too that evil and death will be defeated, and Christ will be victorious. That will give us joy.

Heaven is the heritage of every believer — because Christ conquered death and Hell and Satan by his resurrection from the dead. Have you put your faith and trust in him for your salvation? Make sure of your eternal destiny by turning to Christ in repentance and faith, and committing your life to him.

Then ask God to use you to encourage others who are overwhelmed by life's burdens. Yes, our world is full of misery — but God wants to use you to point others to Christ, who alone can give us hope and new life.

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