

## Nutcracker tradition lives on in Gramercy

By Maciej Wroblewski

On Sunday, December 11th, the Gramercy Park Block Association invited neighborhood children and 13th Precinct Emergency Service Truck #1 and Detective Squad children to attend the New York Theatre Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker" at the Florence Gould Hall on 59th Street between Madison and

Park Avenues.

Among the stars of this year's production was seven-year-old Julia Opatrny, the daughter of Gramercy Park residents Susan Sutherland and Robert Opatrny. Julia played the part of the lead angel.

Since 1989, the GPBA has been a supporter of the New York Theatre Ballet's Project LIFT, a

scholarship program for the city's homeless children.

"The program includes not only scholarships, but a tutoring program, a mentoring program and community performances and we're delighted and proud to be a part of it," explained Arlene Harrison, president of the GPBA.

A poster child for the

program is Steven Melendez, 18 who has been with the New York Theatre Ballet since being discovered by the organization's Artistic Director Diana Byer in a city shelter when he was seven-years-old.

To date, more than 650 of New York City's shelter children have benefited from the program.



Nutcracker lead angel Julia Opatrny (center) with two angel dancers from NYTB