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Part Yiddish, part Nuyorican

Doug Elkins on his holiday show, 'Fraulein Maria'

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You've probably checked out New York City Ballet's "The Nutcracker" (playing Nov. 24-Dec. 30 at the New York State Theater) and the Rockettes' high kicks at Radio City Music Hall (through Dec. 30). Seeking more unusual fare, I called Doug Elkins, whose "Fraulein Maria," a holiday show inspired by "The Sound of Music," runs for only three performances.

Elkins, three-quarters Jewish and one-quarter Chinese, remembers seeing the film of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical while growing up with adoptive parents on Long Island. "It's an early memory," says the 46-year-old choreographer, "something I associate with building family, not only my nuclear family but my other families like the House of Ninja, the members of Zulu Nation, Bill T. Jones and David Dorfman. One of my first performances was as 'Re, a drop of golden sun,' wearing an oaktag sun, in kindergarten."

'Play it again'

His own young son, Liam, watched the video of the musical many times, and developed a fixation on the Bil Baird puppets doing "The Lonely Goatherd." "He'd say, 'Play it again,

play it again!'" remembers Elkins. "It became the Philip Glass version of 'Do, A Deer.'" Elkins gathered other performers, all very funny and some also parents, and worked up the numbers for this version.

"These are songs of celebration and determination that can incorporate big movement," he says, an odd notion since the Joe's Pub stage is very tiny. "I wanted to call it 'Von Trapped.' You can't have the whole family on the stage at the same time."

'Soul Train!'

"Fraulein Maria" includes many forms of dancing by club star Archie Burnett, along with David Parker, Keely Garfield, Jen Nugent, and members of the House of Ninja, a voguing group whose leader, Willi Ninja, recently died.

Elkins grew up watching "Soul Train" and PBS specials. "Willi and I knew kung fu and Bollywood; hence the Ninja style. I paid for college by break dancing in groups like New York Express and the Royal Rockers, Rennie Harris, Magnificent Force, Zulu Nation. I bounced back and forth between them. Wesley Snipes and I were in the same capoeira group. One of the Aikido people led me to Movement Research. The coin of exchange was movement." The result? A piece that, he says, is "an Esperanto informed by my background, like Yiddish and Nuyorican."

FRAULEIN MARIA

Dec. 8 - Dec 9

Joe's Pub at the Public Theater
425 Lafayette St.

\$15 in advance, \$20 at the door

\$12 for kids under 12; call 212-967-7555 or visit www.joespub.com.

