

Ballet

N E B R A S K A

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 14, 2014

Contact: Erika Overturff (Founder and Artistic Director), (402) 541-6946

Print-quality photos are [available for download here](#).

BALLET NEBRASKA'S *NUTCRACKER* BLENDS NEW FEATURES, OLD FAVORITES

The premiere of a new French scene and the debut of a new Sugar Plum Fairy and are among the features of this year's edition of Ballet Nebraska's *The Nutcracker*.

"I'm always looking for ways to maintain the ballet's story and charm, while adding fresh touches," said artistic director Erika Overturff, who choreographs and stages the holiday classic, as well as dancing the role of the Snow Queen. "Personalizing the ballet for your own company and audience is something that every company has done since the beginning – it's part of the tradition of *The Nutcracker*."

The French scene – often called "*Mirletons*" or "*Dance of the Reed Flutes*" – gets a makeover this year, with new concept, choreography and costumes, Overturff said.

"I was listening to the music and thinking about things we associate with France," she said, "and I thought: What could be more French than cooking? I don't want to spoil the surprise, but I can tell you that the new scene involves a ballerina, a chef with a lot of assistants, and a cake."

A signature role in *The Nutcracker*, Overturff said, is that of the Sugar Plum Fairy – the benign ruler of the Kingdom of Sweets, who welcomes the young heroine, Clara, and commands a series of spectacular dances in her honor.

Making her debut as the Sugar Plum Fairy this year is Vivi DiMarco, a dancer in her third season with Ballet Nebraska. "Vivi impressed me from the start with her classical elegance and her warm rapport with audiences," Overturff said. "She's going to be a wonderful Sugar Plum Fairy." [Note to editors: separate feature on Vivi DiMarco follows.]

Ballet Nebraska will open *The Nutcracker* with a special pre-Thanksgiving performance at 7:30 pm Saturday, November 22, at the Arts Center at Iowa Western in Council Bluffs. Omaha performances will be at 2 and 7:30 pm Saturday, December 6, and 2 pm Sunday, December 7, at Omaha's Orpheum Theater.

Omaha Steaks is the Season Sponsor for Ballet Nebraska's Season 5. Major support for *The Nutcracker* is provided by the Iowa West Foundation, with additional support by the Douglas County Visitors Improvement Fund, the Nebraska Arts Council, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

Ballet Nebraska is the region's professional dance company. Ticket information for the Council Bluffs performance of *The Nutcracker* is available from the Arts Center box office at 712-388-7140. For the Orpheum Theater performances, ticket information is available from Ticket Omaha at 402-345-0606; online at www.ticketomaha.com; or from the box office, 13th & Douglas Streets. Information about Ballet Nebraska is available at balletnebraska.org.

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NEW SUGAR PLUM FAIRY MAKES HER DEBUT IN BALLET NEBRASKA'S *NUTCRACKER*

OMAHA -- Countless young girls dream of putting on a tiara, picking up a wand, and stepping into the spotlight to dance the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy in the classic holiday ballet *The Nutcracker*.

That dream becomes a reality this month for Ballet Nebraska's Vivi DiMarco, a third-year professional dancer who will make her Sugar Plum debut November 22 at the Arts Center at Iowa Western, then December 6 and 7 and Omaha's Orpheum Theater.

"It's *the* role in *The Nutcracker*," DiMarco said of her new character. "I've always adored the music; it's really sublime. If it's a dream, it's one you don't want to wake up from!"

DiMarco said she is thrilled to be dancing as the Sugar Plum Fairy, but admitted there is a lot of pressure that comes with it. "It's a role that's going to be danced – perhaps simultaneously – by dancers at the Joffrey Ballet, dancers at American Ballet Theater, dancers at the New York City Ballet," she said. "It comes with a lot of responsibility, and you definitely want to do justice to the role."

At Ballet Nebraska, DiMarco is noted for her versatility – moving easily from classical ballets such as *Les Odalisques* and *Giselle* to portraying a swaggering, leather-jacketed wild dog in Erika Overturff's *Party Animals*. Known within the company as a strong technician, she said she has learned she must go beyond technique to bring the Sugar Plum Fairy to life onstage.

"My teachers have been incisive enough to point out that I tend to dance better when I'm not so focused on the technical -- that the technical will actually resolve itself once I lose myself in the character," she said. "It's been really helpful to me – in the words of one director – to surrender to the dance."

What will be going through Vivi DiMarco's mind in that first moment when she steps out onto the stage as the Sugar Plum Fairy, bringing little girls' dreams to life?

"I think in that moment, I will just be feeling the energy from the audience, feeling the energy from the other dancers on the stage," she said. "I might think to myself, 'This is it; this is the moment,' – and offer up a silent prayer that what I'm feeling will be projected to the people watching."

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Ballet Nebraska is the region's professional dance company. Tickets for the Arts Center at Iowa Western performance of *The Nutcracker* are available from the Arts Center box office at 712-388-7140. For the Orpheum Theater performances, tickets are available from Ticket Omaha at ticketomaha.com, by calling 402-345-0606, or by visiting the box office at 13th & Douglas Streets. Information about Ballet Nebraska is available at balletnebraska.org.

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NUTCRACKER QUICK FACTS

- What:** Ballet Nebraska's lively, fast-paced version of the classic holiday ballet *The Nutcracker*
- When/Where:** Saturday, November 22, 7:30 pm at the Arts Center at Iowa Western, Council Bluffs; Saturday, December 6, 2 and 7:30 pm, and Sunday, December 7, 2 pm, at Omaha's Orpheum Theater
- Tickets:** For the Arts Center performance: Arts Center box office, 712-388-7140. For the Orpheum Theater performances: Ticket Omaha, 402-345-0606; online at www.ticketomaha.com; or from the box office, 13th & Douglas Streets.
- What's new:** Artistic director Erika Overturff has choreographed a fresh take on the French-themed variation (often known as 'Mirlitons' or 'Dance of the Reed Flutes') with all-new characters, choreography and concept. Company dancer Vivi DiMarco makes her debut as the Sugar Plum Fairy, ruler of the Kingdom of Sweets.
- What's special:** Its visual splendor and charming story make *The Nutcracker* a family favorite. The score is one of composer Piotr Tchaikovsky's most famous works. The choreography ranges from elegant classical ballet to lively "national dances" in styles including Spanish, French, Russian, and Chinese.
- What else:** Ballet Nebraska will perform three special student matinee performances at the Orpheum on December 4 and 5, in collaboration with Omaha Performing Arts. These performances reach thousands of students. Ballet Nebraska dancers visited area schools to provide workshops for students in preparation for their theater visit.
- Ballet Nebraska will take *The Nutcracker* on tour to Spirit Lake, Iowa, with performances on December 19 and 20. These performances incorporate children from the Spirit Lake area.

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BALLET NEBRASKA'S SEASON 5 COMPANY ARTISTS

Erika Overturff

Founder and Artistic Director

Artist Sponsor: Nebraska Orthopaedic Hospital and OrthoWest



Erika Overturff is the founder and artistic director of Ballet Nebraska, the state's professional ballet company. Under her leadership, Ballet Nebraska enriches the region through an exciting array of professional dance performances and a strong commitment to cultural education and community outreach programming.

Erika began her training in Iowa at the Academy of Ballet, continuing her studies at summer programs including North Carolina School of the Arts, American Ballet Theatre, Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, and the Kirov Academy. Erika earned her BFA in ballet performance and teaching from the University of Utah, which she attended on a full scholarship. She graduated *cum laude* in just three years and was chosen outstanding senior by the ballet department faculty.

Erika went on to dance with Montgomery Ballet, Alabama Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. She has performed principal and soloist roles in a wide range of classical and contemporary repertoire. Erika has also been a faculty member and guest teacher for schools throughout the United States.

As a choreographer, Erika has received critical praise for her work. She served as *répétitrice* for Montgomery Ballet and resident choreographer for Omaha Theater Ballet. She has worked on several collaborations with Opera Omaha and regularly creates new works for Ballet Nebraska. As part of the company's ongoing collaboration with Joslyn Art Museum for *Momentum*, Erika has choreographed original ballets inspired by museum artwork or exhibitions, including *Connemara* and *Cleopatra*. Other featured works include *Tropico* and the exuberant *Party Animals*. Erika also created Ballet Nebraska's lively and entertaining version of the holiday favorite *The Nutcracker*, which has premiered to enthusiastic audiences both at home and on tour.

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Matthew Carter

Ballet Master

Artist Sponsor: Union Pacific



Matthew Carter began his training in Pennsylvania with Sharon Filone at the Lake Erie Ballet School and Sandra Barnett at Little's Dance Studio. He went on to study on full scholarship at North Carolina School of the Arts, Miami City Ballet School, and the Chautauqua Festival Dancers. Matthew has danced professionally with Ohio Ballet, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, Lake Erie Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. He has performed numerous leading roles within the classical repertoire, including Prince Desire in *The Sleeping Beauty*, Franz in *Coppelia*, and Mercutio in *Romeo & Juliet*, as well as in works by George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Donald Byrd, Heinz Poll, Laura Dean, Luis Montero, and many others. He has also performed as a Guest Artist with Hawaii Ballet Theatre, Neglia Ballet Artists, and Ballet Tucson. Omaha audiences have enjoyed Matthew in roles such as The Asp in Erika Overturff's *Cleopatra*, The White Rabbit in Kennet Oberly's *Alice In Wonderland*, and Puck in Oscar Antunez's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Also a choreographer, he has premiered works with numerous schools and professional companies, including *Bacchanale Variations*, *Signs of Life*, *Sadako* and *Poseidon* for Ballet Nebraska. Matthew is the co-director of Motion41 Dance in Omaha and continues to serve as a guest teacher for schools throughout the country. Matthew returns for his fifth season as ballet master.

Erin Alarcón

Company Dancer

Artist Sponsors: Clyde & Deborah Overturff



A native of New Jersey, Erin Alarcón received her dance training under Christine Taylor and Luba Gulyaeva of New Jersey Civic Youth Ballet. Erin earned her B.A. in dance performance at Mercyhurst College under the direction of Tauna Hunter. During summers she studied with Eglevsky Ballet and Joffrey Ballet. She has worked with a number of guest artists including Laura Alonso, Bruce Marks, Vivi Flindt, and Bill Evans. Erin has studied abroad with Valerie Valentine of the Dutch National Ballet, danced professionally with SoMar Dance Works and Ballet Concert, and has appeared as a guest artist with Iowa Dance Theater. She has performed the title roles in *Giselle*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Cinderella*. With Ballet Nebraska, she has been featured in Mikhail Fokine's *The Dying Swan*, as Fee in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and in leading roles in *The Nutcracker* and *Alice in Wonderland*. She also serves as Ballet Nebraska's operations manager. This is Erin's fifth season with the company.

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Ryan Christopher

Company Dancer

Artist Sponsor: Victor & Linda Mattes



Ryan Christopher grew up in Colorado playing baseball and football through high school. He received his classical ballet training at International Youth Ballet on a full scholarship under the tutelage of Mark Carlson and German Zamuel. Ryan also trained during summers at The Performing Arts Conservatory of Texas directed by H. Christopher Fairbank. Ryan previously danced with Denver's Ballet Ariel and Boulder Ballet where he performed soloist roles in classical repertory including *Le Corsaire*, *Les Sylphides*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Cinderella*, *The Nutcracker*, *Peter Pan*, *Giselle*, *Napoli*, *Beauty & the Beast*, *Les Patineurs*, and many neoclassical and modern works. With Ballet Nebraska, Ryan has performed featured roles in ballets such as *Snow White*, *Momentum*, and *The Nutcracker*. He has appeared as a guest artist throughout Colorado and around the United States. This is Ryan's second season with the company.

Vivi DiMarco

Company Dancer

Artist Sponsor: John Ritland & Greta Vaught



Hailing from Chicago, Vivi DiMarco trained in ballet, modern, and Vaganova character dance at the School of DanceWest Ballet under the direction of Ricardo and Regina Moyano. While attending college, Vivi continued to train at Hubbard Street's Lou Conte Dance Studio and the Ruth Page Center for the Arts. She also directed and choreographed for University Ballet, where she danced lead roles in student productions of *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Vivi was a trainee at Joffrey Ballet, performing in trainee productions of *Paquita* and Gerald Arpino's *Birthday Variations*. She graduated with honors from the University of Chicago with a B.S. in chemistry. At Ballet Nebraska, Vivi has danced featured roles in *The Nutcracker*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Les Odalisques*. Vivi returns for her third season at Ballet Nebraska.

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Claire Goodwillie

Company Dancer

Artist Sponsor: Midlands Choice



Claire Goodwillie began her ballet training at Omaha Theater Ballet School of Dance. She spent summers training with Pacific Northwest Ballet and Ballet Austin. She also trained in Banff, Canada. Claire appeared in numerous Omaha Theater Ballet productions as both a student and apprentice, including *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Firebird* and *Coppélia*. With Ballet Nebraska, her featured roles include Rat Queen and Dew Drop Fairy in Erika Overturff's *The Nutcracker*, Red Queen in Kennet Oberly's *Alice in Wonderland*, Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, vampire bride in Winthrop Corey's *Dracula*, and Geisha in Matthew Carter's *Sadako*. She has performed several times with Opera Omaha and Omaha Symphony. Claire returns for her fifth season with the company.

Stephen James

Company Dancer



A native New Yorker, Stephen James trained at School of American Ballet in New York City and American Dance Theater in Herricks, NY. He studied at Ailey School as a fellowship student and graduated from State University of New York (SUNY) Purchase College in White Plains, NY with a BFA in dance. Stephen spent summers training with Miami City Ballet, Alonzo King's Lines Ballet, Ballet Austin, and Dance International New York in Spain and New York. He performed with Kazuko Hirabayashi Dance Theater, apprenticed with Staatstheater Nürnberg Ballett in Nuremberg, Germany and danced as a member of the second company at Ballet Hispanico. Stephen has also performed with the Eglevsky Ballet, RG Dance Project, and was most recently a company dancer with VERB BALLETS of Cleveland, Ohio. This is Stephen's first season with Ballet Nebraska.

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Bret Samson

Company Dancer

Artist Sponsor: Sao Cheng Liu & Rebecca Huang



Originally from Wisconsin, Bret Samson began her dance training at Lake Shore Dance with Amy Aichele and Gwen Agee in Saukville, and later with Melissa Anderson and Rafael Delgado in Milwaukee. Bret continued her training at Steps on Broadway in New York City. She has previously performed with Milwaukee Ballet II, Madison Ballet and Omaha Theater Ballet. Bret has performed in works by noted choreographers Harrison McEldowney, Oskar Antunez, Winthrop Corey, Kennet Oberly, and Jean-Paul Commélin.

A founding member of Ballet Nebraska, Bret has danced as White Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, Arabian and Chinese leads in *The Nutcracker*, and featured roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Dying Swan*, and *Sadako*. She has also danced in Opera Omaha productions. This is Bret's fifth season with the company.

Kelsey Schwenker

Company Dancer

Artist Sponsor: Omaha Marketing Solutions



Boulder native Kelsey Schwenker began her classical ballet training with Ballet Nouveau of Colorado, where she was a five-year member of its student company directed by Julia Wilkinson Manley. She trained during summers with Kansas City Ballet, Burklyn Ballet Theatre, Boulder Jazz Dance Workshop and Paul Taylor Dance Company. Kelsey received her BFA in ballet performance, graduating summa cum laude from the University of Oklahoma, where she trained with Mary Margaret Holt, Donn Edwards, Steve Brule and Jeremy Lindberg. Kelsey has performed in notable works including *Rodeo*, *Divertimento*

No. 5, *The Firebird*, *Afternoon of a Faun* and *Les Biches*. With Ballet Nebraska, she performed leading roles in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Poseidon*, as well as featured roles in *The Nutcracker*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Dracula*, *Bacchanale Variations* and *Sadako*. She is rehearsal director for Repertory Ensemble, the company's youth performance group. Kelsey returns for her fifth season with the company.

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Katie van der Mars

Company Dancer



Katie van der Mars is a graduate of the University of Utah where she received her BFA in ballet performance. She began her training in classical ballet at Corvallis Academy of Ballet in Corvallis, Oregon. Katie trained during summers with Atlanta Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and Ballet West. During her time in Salt Lake City, she performed as a 3-year member of the university's resident company, Utah Ballet, where she danced in *Giselle*, *La Bayadere*, *Paquita*, the pas de deux from *Scheherazade*, *The Nutcracker*, *Les Odalisques pas de trois* from *Le Corsaire*, *The Firebird*, Fokine's *Ruslan & Ludmilla*, and many contemporary works. At Ballet Nebraska, Katie has danced featured roles in Kennet Oberly's *Alice in Wonderland*, Erika Overturff's *The Nutcracker*, and Ballet Nebraska's mixed-repertory production *Momentum*. Katie returns for her third season at Ballet Nebraska.

Sasha York

Company Dancer

Artist Sponsor: Children's Hospital and Medical Center



Originally from Chelyabinsk, Russia, Sasha York trained at Paavola School of Dance in Flint, Michigan. He later returned to Russia, where he trained with Urey Urivich. Sasha was accepted into the pre-professional program at Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, where he performed in company productions of *Don Quixote*, *The Nutcracker*, *Peter Pan*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. He has worked with many well-known choreographers such as Harrison McEldowney, Viktor Plotnikov and Septime Webre. With Ballet Nebraska, Sasha has performed as Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Marc Antony in *Cleopatra*, the title role in *Dracula*, Claude in *Swing, Swing, Swing!*, Cavalier and Snow King in *The Nutcracker*, and White Knight in *Alice in Wonderland*. He previously danced for two seasons at Omaha Theater Ballet. Sasha returns for his fifth season with the company.

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Apprentices

Rebecca Brenner



Ohio native and former member of Rochester City Ballet, Rebecca received her ballet training from Columbus City Ballet School and University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. She attended summer intensives with American Ballet Theatre in New York City, trained on merit scholarship at Orlando Ballet School in Florida, and participated in Youth American Grand Prix, competing twice in its New York City finals. She has performed Balanchine works including *Walpurgisnacht Ballet*, *Valse-Fantaisie*, *Stars and Stripes*, *Raymonda Variations*, and *Serenade*. At Rochester City Ballet, she appeared in *The Nutcracker*, *Cinderella*, *Serenade* and the premiere of Jamey Leverett's *New York Cityscapes*. This is Rebecca's first season as an apprentice with Ballet Nebraska.

Katherine Eppink



Katherine is a graduate of the University of Utah, where she earned a BFA from the department of ballet. Katherine began her classical ballet training in Des Moines at Iowa Dance Theatre. She also danced on scholarship as a member of Utah Ballet, the resident performing company of University of Utah, where she performed lead roles in *Serenade*, *Coppélia*, *Swan Lake*, *Ruslan and Ludmila*, and *The Nutcracker*. Katherine spent summers training with Pacific Northwest Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet, Ballet West, Nashville Ballet, Ballet Met, and Korean Ballet Theatre. Katherine joins Ballet Nebraska this season as an apprentice.

Alyssa Grimsley



Alyssa began her dance training at Western Arkansas Ballet in Fort Smith, Arkansas. She trained during summers at Joffrey Midwest, Ballet Austin, Tulsa Ballet, and Cincinnati Ballet. Alyssa graduated *summa cum laude* with a BFA in ballet performance from the University of Oklahoma, where she trained with Mary Margaret Holt, Clara Cravey, Steve Brule, Ilya Kozadayev, and Jeremy Lindberg. Alyssa toured with Oklahoma Festival Ballet at the Haydn's Classical Music Festival in Eisenstadt, Austria and with Burklyn Ballet Theatre to perform at Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. A member of Regional Dance America, she performed in the southwest region honors piece at the USA International Ballet Competition in Jackson, Mississippi. Alyssa joins Ballet Nebraska this season as an apprentice.

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Amaris Sharratt



Amaris began her training at Ballet Arts in Tucson, Arizona under the direction of Mary-Beth Cabana. She spent several summers training on full scholarship at Pacific Northwest Ballet, Houston Ballet, and Ballet Tucson. As a Marshall Thurber Scholarship recipient at Burklyn Ballet Theater, Amaris performed in Edinburgh, Scotland, at Fringe Festival, where she performed a featured role in Robert Royce's *Beauty and the Beast*. She also performed with Milwaukee Ballet II, Houston Ballet, Nevada Ballet Theater, Ballet Tucson, Earthen Vessels, and Hopestone Dance Company. Amaris danced featured roles in *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *Paquita*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Amahl And The Night Visitors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the title role in *Cinderella*, among many other classical and contemporary works. Amaris joins Ballet Nebraska this season as an apprentice.

Anna Swenson



Anna began her classical ballet training at Theater Ballet of Spokane, Washington, where she performed in original works by choreographers Charles Askegard, Dodie Askegard and Deidre A. Kellogg among others. She studied during summers at Walnut Hill School for the Arts, Joffrey Ballet's Jazz and Contemporary program, and School of Alberta Ballet in Calgary, Canada. She joined the trainee program at School of Alberta Ballet in 2012, performing in Aram Manukyan's *The Nutcracker* and in Yukichi Hattori's *Numbers*. With Ballet Nebraska, Anna has performed in *Snow White*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Momentum*. Anna returns for her second season as an apprentice with Ballet Nebraska.

Chloé Watson



Chloé graduated *cum laude* from Purchase College Conservatory of Dance at State University of New York (SUNY) with a BFA in dance performance. She began her classical ballet training at Dallas Ballet Center and graduated with distinguished high honors from Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, Texas. She studied on scholarship at Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and performed in George Balanchine's *Serenade* at Jacob's Pillow. While at university, Chloé studied at Paris Opéra Ballet at the invitation of Kazuko Hirabayashi, and traveled to Madrid with members of Compañía Nacional de Danza, where she performed in Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments*. As a Ballet Nebraska trainee, Chloé performed in *Snow White*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Momentum*. She presented her original work *Temporary Dwelling* as part of Ballet Nebraska's *New Works* program. Chloé returns for her second season with Ballet Nebraska.

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Trainees

Katherine Boatright



Mercyhurst College, Erie, PA – BA in Dance Performance
Dance and Performing Arts Academy, Bartlesville, OK
Osage Ballet, Pawhuska, OK
Ballet Concerto, Fort Worth, TX

Whitney Walsh



Joffrey Ballet, Chicago, IL – Trainee
California Dance Theater, Westlake Village, CA
Pacific Festival Ballet, Agoura Hills, CA

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