



BRECON FESTIVAL BALLET

www.breconfestivalballet.com

Report on “The Nutcracker” 2019

16 months of planning and preparation, 137 performers, over 70 volunteers behind the scenes, 5 sold out performances at Theatr Brycheiniog which received a rapturous reception and some wonderful reviews and feedback. All in all, The Nutcracker 2019 can be considered a success!

From the moment the project was announced in September 2018 on Facebook, offers of help came flooding in. It seemed that local people were willing to contribute their time and skills towards Brecon’s own (and first) Christmas ballet. Katy Sinnadurai (artistic director) and Lesley Walker (company secretary) set about forming Brecon Festival Ballet Ltd, a not-for-profit company, so that donations could be received and publicity material begin to be generated. (Please note that BFB plans to become a charity in 2020, but a decision was made not to pursue this path in 2019, given the limited time available to mount the production.)

The volunteers were organised into groups, headed by incredibly skilled local artists, such as Rachel Giaccone, who designed some wonderful costumes on a shoestring budget. Rachel gave out materials and instructions to her team of seamstresses, and slowly the rats, soldiers, Georgian folk dresses and sparkly Snowflake costumes came to life. Brecon based young artist, Gemma Schiebe, came up with a colourful and inventive design for the “Kingdom of Sweets” backcloth. It had been over a decade since a cloth was last painted in the Theatr Brycheiniog workshop, but with the help of the theatre staff and the Westenders pantomime society, a full-size paint frame was built and a blank canvas purchased and stretched onto it to begin the work. Over many months, Gemma spent her evenings after work painting this backcloth, it was wonderful to see the process and this was a great achievement for a young artist that had never before painted something on this scale.

Other local skilled craftsmen and women made detailed and beautiful props, including cavalry horses, wooden guns and swords for the battle scene, a sleigh, an eight-foot-high clock, a mini theatre and a growing Christmas tree for the magical transformation scene! And many other volunteers gave generously of their time and ideas to help our fundraising campaign.

The total cost of putting on this huge and ambitious production was actually around one hundred thousand pounds. However, around £60,000 of this total was given for free, including accommodation for all the professional and student dancers (including at the Gremlin pub, 6 Bridge Street Air B&B and Cantref bunkhouse), free studio time and stage time in production week from our co-producers, Theatr Brycheiniog, over many months of rehearsals, the time of the 2 directors, Katy and Lesley, the prop makers, artists, other dance

teachers, chaperones, Welsh translator, programme and website designers and the choir mistress. Without these “in kind” donations, the project could not have been realised. The remaining £40,000 that BFB needed to raise was to pay for the Welsh Chamber Orchestra, the 10 professional dancers and the cost of materials for props and scenery, plus hire costs for additional costumes and scenery that could not be sourced or made in Brecon this time. Money also needed to be found for marketing and publicity, insurance, website costs and other sundries.

A fund-raising campaign was launched in February 2019, with the aim of raising this £40,000. We hosted many events such as open dance classes, a “Zumbathon”, raffles, bucket collections, bag packing in Morrisons in Brecon and a “Friends of Brecon festival Ballet” membership scheme. Many generous individuals joined the Friends, keen to get a glimpse “behind the scenes” at rehearsals. Others donated online to our JustGiving page. Lesley and Katy also spent a huge amount of time applying for grants from various grant giving bodies. It was the local organisations that responded most positively, with generous grants given by Brecon Town Council, Brecon Rotary Club, Gibbs Trust, Audrey Tyler trust fund, Brecknock Art Trust, The Arts Society, Brecknock, and a significant grant of £10,000 from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority’s Sustainable Development Fund. Brecon Town Council also got behind the project by announcing that their annual Christmas shop window dressing competition would be on the theme of the Nutcracker! Many shops got into the spirit and Brecon’s shop windows were full of Nutcracker themed decorations. This really got the town talking about the production and by mid-November tickets were almost sold out. In order that local people shouldn’t miss out on tickets, the dress rehearsal was also opened to the public, with the added benefit that the less experienced onstage performers would get used to an audience before the opening night.

Rehearsals were gathering pace, the trickiest part being bringing together all the diverse elements of the ballet in one single production week running up to opening night, which was, of course, a world premiere! This ballet was a “first” in several ways:

It was the first time a full-scale classical production of The Nutcracker had been created in Wales. It was the first time that Welsh Chamber Orchestra had ever played for a ballet company. It was the first time that Theatr Brycheiniog had ever presented a classical ballet with a live orchestra. And, as respected dance critic, Deborah Weiss wrote: it was “almost certainly the first ballet of its kind to involve an entire community”

Although based on the traditional Nutcracker scenario that audiences know and love (and flock to every year all over the world), the choreography for this production was almost entirely original, created by artistic director Katy Sinnadurai. Having been a professional ballet dancer herself, with experience of dancing in this iconic ballet, Katy combined her past onstage experience with her own vision of the story to create this new production for Brecon. Thanks to the offer of studio space at Theatr Brycheiniog, Katy spent many Sundays throughout 2019 alone in the studio, trying out choreography and slowly piecing together the steps for the 99 dancers and actors. Katy decided to create a version of the ballet that would focus on the love story between Clara and her Nutcracker, who becomes a young man once the spell that trapped him within a Nutcracker doll has been broken. Katy felt that by focussing on the human story within the ballet, the audience would be more likely to understand the ballet and relate to it. Feedback received from the performances indicated that audience members did understand the story; they were seen cheering and laughing during the course

of the evening, and many told us that they shed an emotional tear. Theatr Brycheiniog staff reported audiences coming out of the auditorium after Act 1 and 2 full of excitement and praise. They said there was a real buzz in the building! We received 2 excellent reviews, one in the Brecon and Radnor Express and one on the website of the International "Dance for You" magazine. A link to this latter review, together with some of the feedback received can be found at the end of this report.

One of the aspects of Brecon Festival Ballet's Nutcracker production that we are most proud of, is the number of Wales-based participants. Many children in Brecon learn to dance, mostly with Mid Wales Dance Academy (which is based at Theatr Brycheiniog). But those talented few that go on from Brecon to be professional dancers only have very rare opportunities to perform in their home country. Of the 99 onstage performers in Nutcracker, 82 were Welsh or connected to Wales by training or employment. Most of the orchestral musicians and choir singers were from South and Mid Wales. And so, overall, we gave the opportunity to perform in a large-scale classical ballet to well over 100 Welsh people in our small town... a great achievement.

The production was of a high professional standard, even though the majority of onstage performers were students or amateurs, a few of whom had never set foot on a stage before! Collaboration was our key word here. By combining the professional with the local, aspiration levels were raised, children and students were inspired to raise their game to professional level. In future years, we hope that some of our principal dancers will have started their journey as a small child playing the role of a rat or a party guest in the Nutcracker! We know that the local community loves to come and support local talent on their journey.

Despite there being so many different groups of people that made up the Brecon Festival Ballet company of 2019 – dancers, musicians, actors, singers, stage crew, prop makers, costume makers and artists, old and young, professional and amateur – there was a lovely family atmosphere onstage and backstage. A feeling of all pulling together to create something special.

We are delighted to have been invited back to Theatr Brycheiniog in December 2020 for more Nutcracker performances and we look forward to bringing all these people together once more, with some new additions to the cast and crew no doubt, to create the magic all over again.

Katy Sinnadurai

Artistic Director, Brecon Festival Ballet.

Please see below our review and feedback.

Nutcracker 2019 Feedback

“A runaway success... a much-deserved triumph”

(Dance for You Magazine)

“A Christmas cracker”

(Brecon and Radnor express)

REVIEW in DANCE FOR YOU MAGAZINE:

<https://www.danceforyou-magazine.com/2020/01/13/the-nutcracker-brecon-festival-ballet-theatr-brycheiniog-brecon-wales/>

QUOTES FROM REVIEWS:

“A wonderful evening, technically, aesthetically and musically”

“The staging was a triumph... the entrance of the Snowflakes was rapturously received by the audience”

“It is hoped that this wonderful production of The Nutcracker by Brecon Festival Ballet (along with local participation and contribution) will now be a regular addition to Christmas at Theatr Brycheiniog. I for one will make sure I book again for next year’s production”

“... almost certainly the first ballet of its kind to involve an entire community”

“Katy... has succeeded in giving the small town of Brecon, a *Nutcracker* that is good enough to grace any stage, with equal success”

“... a production that was meticulous in detail, reflected absolutely the splendour of Tchaikovsky’s score and measured with intelligence”

“How it came together is a miracle of organisation, hard work and a concerted effort by a remarkable and dedicated group of people”

“... the Mirliton dance, in gorgeous tutus with a distinctly Welsh theme, was a huge hit”

“... there were so many individuals and teams of people who contributed to making the production a success – Brecon can be proud to add *The Nutcracker* to the list of attractions in the area”

HANDWRITTEN CARDS:

- *Brecon based music teacher and singer, Kath Davies:* I have never enjoyed a ballet as much as this. The interpretation of Tchaikovsky's wonderful music through your choreography was just beautiful. Also, so many lives were enriched by this, the young dancers (local and professional) plus us "older" performers. You give such confidence to all to be the best we can be!
- *Jenny Bryan:* what an amazing evening, a well-rehearsed and polished performance of the Nutcracker... Brecon certainly needed an event like that, hopefully it was the start of better times for our little town.
- *Ballet students, Francisca Ellison and Lucy Pearce:* What a beautiful show! How mesmerising everything was!
- *Jane and Andy Marshall:* Congratulations to you and all your team for a truly marvellous show – it was a triumph! We so appreciate all your dedication and efforts to give Brecon such a perfect Christmas show.
- *Wendy Herzberg:* You bring such professionalism to all the demanding work that you do that it will surely bring you much credit. Brecon will be well and truly on the map!
- *Wales-based ballet dancer, Ann Wall:* Thank you so much for all you have given me during this first season with BFB. I am so truly grateful to have been given this opportunity. This has been such a magical experience.
- *Wales-based ballerina and Sugar Plum Fairy in this production, Natasha Trigg:* Thank you for believing in me! Thank you for giving me this amazing opportunity, I am so grateful.
- *Brecon born ballet student, Isobel Ross:* I have thoroughly enjoyed my time dancing with BFB, it has been such a fun and joyful production to be a part of. I have had so much wonderful feedback from family and friends and can't wait to be a part of it next year. It's still surreal that I've been a part of a production with professionals and that Brecon hosted the first Welsh production of Nutcracker. Thank you for the amazing opportunity.
- *Chaperone and mother of ballet student, Sarah Ross:* Thank you for the opportunity for Bella to follow her dream and enjoy her first professional production. She and the King's girls have loved it. I'm sure this and the many years to come will stand them in good stead in the business. I've loved being part of it. Thank you.

FACEBOOK COMMENTS:

- *Mel Crawford-Trotman:* Congratulations Katy, and all the cast! Unbelievable that some of the snowflakes were so young, they looked so professional! A complete triumph all round for everyone involved! We all absolutely loved it.
- *Theatr Brycheiniog:* The Nutcracker Ballet was a brilliant end to 2019. We would like to say thank you to everyone involved. The talent and dedication of the dancers was outstanding. There are so many highlights.
- *Louise Cole:* We had such a lovely evening watching The Nutcracker at Brecon theatre tonight. Such talented people! A chance for professionals and local people to perform together is a wonderful gift! Thank you, Katy Sinnadurai, for bringing this wonderful performance to Brecon. I'm sure it captured everyone's hearts and inspired so many!
- *Theatr Brycheiniog duty manager, Zoe Matthias:* Absolutely stunning performance!
- *Joanna Lovett:* It was fantastic, enjoyed every minute of it!
- *Gill Patterson-Jones:* Amazing. Thank you for bringing such a fantastic show to Brecon. Hope you'll do another next year... I shall have to make coming to see it one of my Xmas traditions.
- *Brecon High School Drama teacher, Helen East:* thrilling, an absolute triumph... a production so full of stunning visuals, precision detail... but above all, it was full of love, and I'm sure a new group of professional musicians and dancers that will want to return to make this event a Brecon Xmas tradition. Amazing work.
- *Crispin Flower:* Well done Katy Sinnadurai and all involved, very impressive, especially the effective choreography for, and performances by, all the little ones.
- *Claire Nicholas:* It was beautiful I was mesmerised. Congratulations all, if it wasn't a sell-out, I would come to see it all over again.
- *Gillian Jeffreys:* A triumph!!! I was transported to a wonderland. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication. Congratulations one and all.
- *Actor and cast member, Sian Drinan:* Thank you Katy for all your dedication and hard work... it has been a delight to be involved in such a joyous production. Diolch.
- *Singing teacher and choir member Kath Davies:* What can I say? You are just a wonderful inspiration to so many! To see all those young people giving their all did my heart good... well I could go on... but thank you.
- *International dance critic, Deborah Weiss:* What a gift you have given to Brecon, to the whole community! Phenomenal... absolutely wondrous in every way.
- *Gerwyn Rees:* That was truly amazing Katy. Such a magnificent show in little Brecon. You had the courage and you certainly conquered. Well done to all involved.
- *Amanda Morgan:* Wow, I knew it was going to be amazing but didn't realise it was going to be off the scale incredible!! It was so emotional watching every single person giving you their absolute all. Katy, you really have brought out the absolute best in everyone involved and deserve every one of the fantastic accolades you are receiving. Thank you for an unforgettable night.
- *Lisa Jones:* WONDERFUL!!!! Llongyfarchiadau mawr i bawb.

- *Alison Fletcher:* thank you so much for bringing this amazing performance to Brecon... such a fantastic opportunity for the local dancers to work with the professional dancers & Kings... you really have brought out the best in each and every one of them.
- *Christina Murchie:* Wow!!!! Thank you so much for an amazing show to remember. 🤩 You have really brought out the best in everyone and produced the most wonderful show. Abbie has gained so much out of this experience and has thoroughly enjoyed watching all of the professionals and Kings students.
- *Kaye Davies:* Huge congratulations Katy Sinnadurai, a fabulous show. Loved seeing faces I knew on stage which made it more magical for me. Thank you for bringing the ballet to Brecon, your hard work certainly paid off.
- *Principal dancer, Joel Morris:* Thank you for everything Katy Sinnadurai, it's been a magical experience.
- *Theatre board member, Karen Griffiths:* Truly magical performance! Massive thanks to everyone involved.
- *Paula Rogers:* What an achievement... I had goose bumps from the moment the Orchestra started playing... A truly spectacular show in every way.
- *Jodie Carey:* I cried! Enough said! It was phenomenal!
- *Artist, Veronica Gibson:* Fabulous, joyful, gorgeous! Thank you so much, & huge congratulations!!

EMAILS:

- *Mayor of Brecon, Ann Matthias:* It was a superb production and an absolute joy to be part of the audience. Please pass on my big congratulations to all involved in the production.
- *Artist, Tessa Waite:* It was a magical production full of warmth, sensitivity and charm. In particular, during the snowflake scene I was transported into a dream like state and felt I could have been in a theatre in Moscow, Paris, London... at any time in the last couple of centuries. The buzz in the theatre was wonderful, so much animation and laughter. You and your company offered us all such a wonderful and uplifting experience.
- *Pianist, Paul Shallcross:* choreography was superb; the music, the dancing, the whole was a wonderful afternoon of high-quality artistic endeavour.
- *Lawyer, Roger Lane:* the most astonishing achievement. Not only to pull off the most complex, entirely new, even dangerous (because of the risk of failure) endeavour but to succeed in making it totally real, heart-warming and professional was climbing ballet Everest!
- *Artist, Veronica Gibson:* I saw the matinee today with friends and I was transfixed! Friends agreed with me that we could have been in any Capital city! Consummately professional, superb, beautiful, joyous, glorious!! Thank you for forming Brecon Festival Ballet!
- *Fund-raiser, St David's hospice care, Sally Morris:* I just wanted to tell you how much we enjoyed the ballet last night. It was an absolute triumph in every way. I loved the

mixture of professionals with children and local folk, I thought there were some delightful touches in the acting, and having a live orchestra made such a huge difference. It was enchanting in every way - thank you so much!

- *Theatre Brycheiniog board member, Elizabeth Jefferys:* What a triumph – a just reward for your vision, ambition, drive and sheer hard work. I'm lost for superlatives to describe last night's performance.
- *Chair Theatr Brycheiniog, Sally Jones:* Last night was splendid! A fabulous production enjoyed and appreciated hugely by the capacity audience and with the dancing enhanced by the music and beautiful costumes and sets. It was a great night and a wonderful atmosphere.
- *Ann Payne:* Just to let you know we so much enjoyed the Nutcracker on Friday evening, Katy. Well done, it was brilliant... Even my husband was impressed and that is saying a lot! It was lovely to have such a full theatre too. Shall look forward to the next one.
- *Theatr Brycheiniog life patron, Rita Hughes:* What a wonderful night. A fantastic performance and production which sent us home feeling full of joy. Your storytelling was great. The best Nutcracker storytelling I've seen. The choreography and dancing were lyrical and lovely; so fitting the occasion. The costumes were gorgeous and the whole performance believable and warm. An absolute delight. I don't know how you achieved it all but you should be so proud of this. Brecon and Wales should be very proud of you.

THE MOST COMMON COMMENT OVERHEARD BY THEATRE STAFF IN THE FOYER:

- I can't believe we have this in Brecon!

LAST WORD FROM A SMALL CHILD OVERHEARD IN THE TOILETS AFTER ACT 1:

- I wish I could watch Nutcracker every day for the rest of my life!