

# **BRECON FESTIVAL BALLET**

## **NUTCRACKER 2022 – REPORT**

### **The post-Covid return of the full-scale production!**



Kingdom of Sweets, photograph by Amy Azais

In December 2019, Brecon Festival Ballet (BFB) presented a full-scale production of “The Nutcracker” at Theatr Brycheiniog in Brecon, that clocked up a number of firsts. It was the first time that a full-scale production of this iconic ballet had been created in Wales. It was the first time that Theatr Brycheiniog had hosted a ballet company with a professional live orchestra in the pit. It was the first opportunity for many Wales-based classical ballet dancers to showcase their talents in their home nation. And for many of the audience members, it was the first time they had been able to see a famous, full-scale classical ballet in their hometown, without having to travel to a city to see such a spectacle.

The Artistic Director and choreographer of this production, Katy Sinnadurai BEM, was hopeful that, following the five sell-out performances in 2019, the BFB Nutcracker might become an annual fixture in Brecon’s artistic calendar, attracting audiences in the run up to Christmas every year.

Unfortunately, this question remained unanswered in 2020 and 2021, when Covid cases and lockdowns prevented the full-scale production from returning.

However, in December 2022, BFB was able once again to present 5 performances of this much-loved Christmas ballet. The question remained: would audiences want to return to see

the ballet again? The answer was a resounding “Yes”!! All 5 shows were close to selling out, audience reactions were enthusiastic and joyful and Theatr Brycheiniog has just invited Brecon Festival Ballet back for another Christmas season in 2023.

The wonderful news that the production looks set to return on an annual basis has benefits for so many people:

- The Welsh (and Brecon – based) professional dancers, who lost so much precious time and income during Covid, now take to the stage again to dazzle local audiences with their skill and expressiveness.
- The professional musicians of Welsh Chamber Orchestra, who also lost much of their employment during the pandemic, can once again play Tchaikovsky’s beautiful music, which features so many well-known tunes, to delight and inspire audiences.
- Many members of the local community get to take part each year, many onstage in adult acting or children’s roles, giving them the unique experience of performing live alongside professional performers.
- Many other community members become part of the BFB team by volunteering backstage in the making of costumes, scenery, props and in other roles such as publicity, hair, make-up and chaperoning the children.
- Audiences, deprived of live performance for almost 2 years, can once again experience the magic and escapism that a night at the ballet can bring.
- Theatr Brycheiniog can rely on an annual Christmas box office hit – after all, The Nutcracker is the ultimate Christmas ballet featuring snow, a Christmas tree, presents and sweets! – which will attract audiences to the theatre every December, thereby helping to secure its financial stability going forward.
- Hospitality businesses in the town of Brecon and the surrounding area benefit from visitors who come to see a Nutcracker performance, with restaurants, cafes, B&Bs and hotels all taking bookings from audience members making a day trip or staying for the weekend.
- The whole BFB production helps to mark Brecon out as a cultural destination and in this case, host to what we believe to be Wales’s largest professional dance event!
- Rather than local people travelling out of area to see a Christmas show, BFB’s Nutcracker does precisely the opposite, attracting people from far and wide to Brecon to see the kind of production usually seen in a large theatre or opera house, ensuring equality of access and opportunity to those living in more rural areas.
- Audiences with additional needs and/or small children are welcomed, with one BFB performance designated as a “relaxed performance”.

Brecon Festival Ballet is very proud of the opportunity it creates for Welsh dancers and musicians to perform to their “home crowd” as these opportunities can be hard to come by in Wales. The image below shows who was involved in Nutcracker 2022:

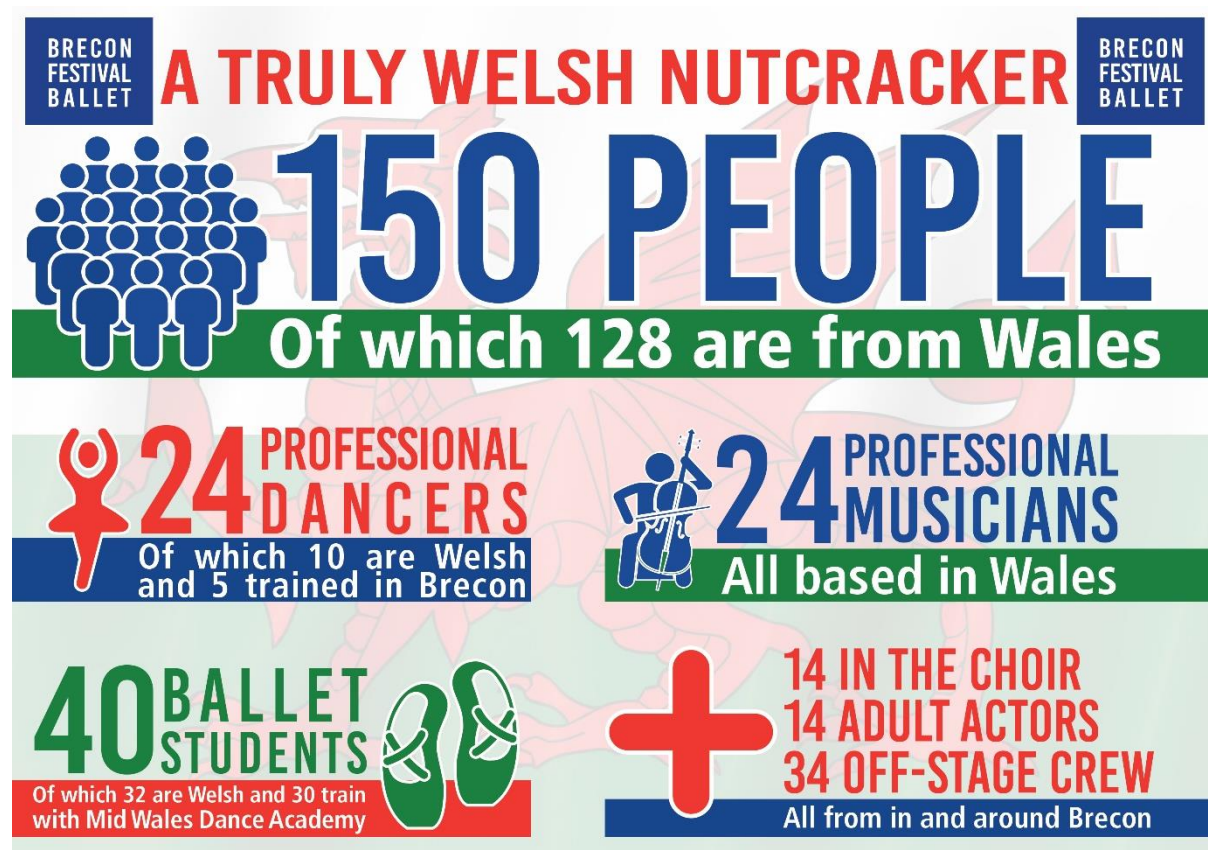


Image design by Tin Wheeler

With the help of donations and grants from a variety of grant-funding organisations, BFB will continue to present this production annually and also consider the creation of new works, which will also involve the local community working alongside professional dancers and musicians.

## **REVIEW OF BRECON FESTIVAL BALLET'S "THE NUTCRACKER"**

**written by Sue Carlton Jones, former Royal Ballet dancer.**

*Getting back to seeing Brecon Festival Ballet's complete production of The Nutcracker was like opening a box of my favourite sweets! The Christmassy expectations of the sheer joy of the festive season could not have been better represented than the performance I saw on their last night on Sunday December 18th.*

*Mr. Tchaikovsky could not have been more pleased that his beloved score was given the love and sensitivity it deserves by the step-by-step choreography and dedicated devotion to detail, expression and execution of this beloved ballet and best loved story as presented to us by Katy Sinnadurai, the founder and artistic director of the company. His music TELLS the story and Katy made it real.*

*In my opinion Katy is a consummate professional in her approach to teaching, coaching and choreographing. Aided by the intrepid Lesley Walker, the founder of Ribbons Ballet School, now known as Mid Wales Dance Academy, and also secretary for the company, these tireless people brought to us the most enjoyable production possible. The full house and the impressive newly refurbished front of house at The Brecon Theatre was the epitome of the Christmas spirit that we all love when going to see this ballet.*

*Welcome back to Lowri Shone in her original role as Clara. She danced charmingly and acted with great feeling for her Nutcracker Prince. The visiting guest artist Joshua Feist proved to be an ideal and considerate partner for her, and his beautiful technique and pleasing personality lit up the stage.*

*The corps de ballet as snowflakes in act one and waltzing flowers in act two were outstanding. Their lovely smiling faces, clean well-rehearsed technique and their oh so pretty costumes and head dresses were thrilling. These dances and dancers could compete easily with many well-established professional companies. Bravo in force to these ladies.*

*The battle scene between the toy soldiers and their rival rats lead by a feisty King (Berwyn Cooper) was crafted and executed immaculately with some very amusing moments.*

*I would like to compliment the crisp and doll like dance of Harlequin and Columbine. Joel Morris and Georgia Smart were the dancers. Very impressive. Also the crowd scenes at the party were very entertaining, particularly the over merry lady of a certain age who showed us how to properly enjoy a festive turn on the floor!*

*In act two the divertimento were notable. The Spanish was an exhilarating show of authentic flamenco like choreography performed really well by Bethan Cooper and guest dancer Kamal Singh. The Arabian Dance was my favourite. The sensuous movements of Clara Rust aided by the seamless partnering and dark but compelling look of Berwyn Cooper were excellent. He has improved amazingly in the last two years.*

*The coveted role of The Sugar Plum Fairy was danced by Natasha Trigg, a longstanding student of Katy Sinnadurai. She is an elegant looking ballerina and was partnered by her Cavalier Jacob Hornsey. They managed to pull off the demands of these iconic solos and the pas de deux well enough, but it is unusual to see a tall-framed dancer such as Natasha in this role, as the Sugar Plum Fairy is usually danced by a more petite dancer. I would like to see Natasha continue to develop in this role to produce a more sugary charm and easier, more assured footwork.*

*Compliments to the stage management - lighting and scenery crafters, all the backstage helpers and theatre staff. Your input was as ever faultless.*

*Finally, the Welsh Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Anthony Hose. They were the icing on the cake, and they played so well. They made the ballet complete for sure. When they were in the pit for the first performance of Nutcracker in 2019 it was a major achievement and the first time ever for Theatr Brycheiniog to host a full-scale professional ballet with live music. What a treat for us all.*

*The much-needed refurbishment of the front of house has been completed and much admired. The foyer and bar were bustling with happy theatre goers and the atmosphere was wonderful. The house was full and the lady in front of me was determined to make her name as the most vociferous and*



*enthusiastic appreciator of the performance ever after each number. Possibly the proud mother of a cast member?! At the end of the performance there were standing ovations. I wish the Brecon Festival Ballet every success for the future. Their Nutcracker is now a compulsory annual treat for all dance and Christmas lovers in the County and far beyond. My admiration for you is boundless!*

Sue Carlton Jones, Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2022



Berwyn Cooper and Clara Rust in the Arabian dance, both professional dancers who grew up in Brecon and had their early dance training at Mid Wales Dance Academy at Theatr Brycheiniog

Photograph by Amy Azais

**Below are some of the comments and feedback (email, letter and social media comments) from the 2022 Nutcracker performances:**

- I cried at how amazing this production was to be honest! BRAVOS to everyone especially to all the senior cast members!! Amazing.
- May I take this opportunity to express the joy I experienced watching the Saturday Matinee performance of the Nutcracker. I was captivated by the beautiful production of the ballet. Congratulations to Katy Sinnadurai BEM and all involved, including the Theatre staff. It was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon and made my Christmas.
- Thank you for another wonderful Nutcracker! Nick and I had a lovely time on Sunday night, and both the beautiful performance and the lovely family atmosphere in the Theatr have got this Christmas off to the best start. (Theatr Brycheiniog trustee)
- I just wanted to let you know how fabulous the Nutcracker was. I saw it on Friday and enjoyed every minute of it. Something to be very proud of.
- It was such a lovely experience for our players and team. It is also great news to hear that the ballet will be welcomed back next year. (Welsh Chamber Orchestra)
- Congratulations on the really wonderful “Nutcracker” ballet, with super dancing, musicians and production in general. We so enjoyed it and I’m very pleased to be a “Patron”.
- It was so wonderful to see the Nutcracker on Sunday - I mean what an achievement! You have done an amazing job and I just love how community orientated it was. Just brilliant. Maya had an absolutely wonderful experience which will stay with her forever. (Parent of student dancer taking part)



Local adults and children, with professional dancers, in the party scene in Act 1

- WOW last night was just breathtaking and beautiful. The grace and talent of everyone involved in the production of The Nutcracker is incredible, the ballet just exudes creativity and passion for all who take part. If you can get tickets, you should go! It is truly amazing (Theatr Brycheiniog social media post)
- Absolutely amazing.
- Thoroughly enjoyed every minute this afternoon. Many congratulations Katie Sinnadurai! All the dancers were beautiful and the orchestra amazing. What a treat!
- Absolutely brilliant! Thank you everyone.
- A stunning performance in a beautiful theatre.
- It was a spectacular performance last night.
- Brilliant show, well done all.



Nathan Keenoo and local children in the Trepak, photo by Amy Azais

- Watched Friday night, was brilliant, really enjoyed it.
- Can't wait to watch it again what an amazing show.
- Excellent performance this afternoon. Congratulations.
- I enjoyed it so much I can't wait for the next performance. It was the first ballet I've ever seen. Well done to all involved.
- Congratulations to all involved. It is always a pleasure to be part of this amazing production. (backstage helper)
- Fabulous, thoroughly enjoyed it, well done all!
- Glorious. What an achievement. (audience member and former Arts Council advisor)





Berwyn Cooper as King Rat and Joshua Feist as Nutcracker in the battle scene  
Photo by Amy Azais

*Report by Katy Sinnadurai BEM, January 2023*