



Matthew Bourne's
Nutcracker!

Behind the Scenes Resource

CONTENTS

1. BEHIND THE SCENES RESOURCE – AN OVERVIEW	3
2. AN INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW BOURNE’S <i>NUTCRACKER!</i>	4
3. THE PLOT OF MATTHEW BOURNE’S <i>NUTCRACKER!</i>	6
4. MATTHEW BOURNE	
ABOUT MATTHEW BOURNE	12
MATTHEW BOURNE ON <i>NUTCRACKER!</i>	14
5. IN REHEARSALS	
AN INTERVIEW WITH ETTA MURFITT, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR	17
AN INTERVIEW WITH ASHLEY SHAW, PRINCIPAL DANCER	20
6. PRODUCTION ELEMENTS	
SET & COSTUME DESIGN: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY WARD	23
LIGHTING: AN INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD HARRISON	25
MUSIC: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRETT MORRIS	29
7. CREATIVE MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES	33
8. ESSAY QUESTIONS	38
9. REFLECTING & REVIEWING	40
10. REFERENCES	42

1. BEHIND THE SCENES RESOURCE – AN OVERVIEW

The content of this resource is accessible to all who love New Adventures' work but especially relevant to dance and theatre students and teachers.

Since *Nutcracker!* is a family show, a separate Primary School Resource has been developed for children of Key Stage 1 & 2 and their teachers and families – which you can find [here](#).

This main resource takes users on a journey 'behind the scenes', where they can uncover more about the show, its themes, and the creative process undertaken by Matthew Bourne and his team. Within it you will learn about the original inspiration for the show and hear first-hand from some of the members of the company.

Whether you have seen *Nutcracker!* before or are totally new to this production, it offers a deep-dive into the story, the characters and all of the incredible work that goes on behind the scenes to bring this production to the stage.

It is a handy reference for anyone with an interest in performance and the theatre... whether you are an avid theatre-goer or a first-time visitor.

For those considering a career in the theatre it will help you gain a deeper understanding of a career in performance and production; including through a series of interviews with members of the creative team and cast.

Throughout the pack activities have been developed to engage students with all aspects of the creation and staging of the show. These design, discussion and writing tasks can be identified via the following icons:



ACTIVITY:
DESIGN



ACTIVITY:
DISCUSSION



ACTIVITY:
WRITING

There is also a separate section for more thorough exploration of *Nutcracker!* via a series of essay questions and a number of practical, movement-based activities to be applied in the studio. The Reflecting & Reviewing section has been developed to engage students with creative and choreographic processes, and design and production, whilst creating opportunity for analysis and critical appreciation. And finally, hyperlinks have been embedded throughout this resource, to encourage further reading and exploration of associated topics and references.

2. AN INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW BOURNE'S *NUTCRACKER!*



THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

[Matthew Bourne](#) first staged his production of *Nutcracker!* in 1992 and this latest production is in celebration of its' 30th anniversary. Originally an Opera North Centennial Production, programmed as a double bill alongside the [Tchaikovsky](#) opera *Yolande*, Matthew has since toured *Nutcracker!* several times – the last of which was seen 10 years ago. This latest production is his biggest and brightest to date.

Just like [E.T.A Hoffmann's](#) original tale – which inspired the very first ballet version by [Marius Petipa](#) & [Lev Ivanov](#) in 1892 – *Nutcracker!* is a tale of a young woman with a big heart and a big imagination. Matthew says, *"Our version tells a simple story very, very clearly. It's a wish-fulfilment story, a story with a heroine (Clara) who has a lot to overcome and who eventually wins through. It's about growing up and first love and I think these are things everyone can relate to. I think this is why it remains so popular with all members of the family."*





2021/2022 REVAMP

Described by Lyndsey Winship, in the Guardian, on 16th December 2021, as a [“pink, chewy fizz of a show”](#) *Nutcracker!* is popular with audiences of all ages. It remains a relatable story of childhood imagination and daydreams and is set at everyone’s favourite time of year... Christmas! Filled with magical wonderlands and dancing sweets, it is a timeless classic and one of New Adventures’ best-loved productions of all time.

The first time Matthew created *Nutcracker!* he worked alongside the original scenario written by Matthew and his collaborators [Martin Duncan](#) and [Anthony Ward](#). This 30th anniversary tour stays close to its original in terms of the plot, storyline and characters, however it has been significantly refreshed in terms of the choreography, whilst Anthony has re-imagined his previous designs for the enigmatic costumes and set. Matthew says, “... *our aim was to take a fresh look at every aspect of the show whilst retaining the innocence and charm of the original production.*”

Matthew has been reinterpreting classical productions and giving them his unique twist for the past three decades. With his company, [New Adventures](#), Matthew has thrilled audiences the world-over with fresh and original retellings of some of our best-loved stories such as [Cinderella](#), [Romeo & Juliet](#) and [Swan Lake](#).

To hear Matthew Bourne talking about his career and the inspiration behind some of his shows, [CLICK HERE](#) 

To delve behind the scenes and access the resources created for some of New Adventures’ other productions, [CLICK HERE](#) 



ACTIVITY: WRITING

The Orphanage in Matthew Bourne’s *Nutcracker!* is ‘Dickensian’ in nature and inspired by the Victorian era. Choose two completely different eras to stage each of the two acts. One could be set in prehistoric times, whilst the other is set in the next millennium – they do not have to be chronologically connected. Detail how these different time periods might alter the staging, design, character portrayal and even interpretation of the storyline within that act. Back up your suggestions with theories that support your ideas, such as an understanding of socio and economic considerations, the general mood of the time and – if it is set in the future – an insight into what life might be like.

3. THE PLOT OF MATTHEW BOURNE'S *NUTCRACKER!*

Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!* is set in a Dickensian children's home called 'Dr Dross's Orphanage for Waifs and Strays'. Like with [E.T.A Hoffmann's](#) original story, '[The Nutcracker and the Mouse King](#)', the starting point for this tale of magic and wonder and escapism from everyday life is Christmas Eve. However, unlike many productions which begin with a bustling present-filled Christmas party, *Nutcracker!* begins with a much more paired-back, modest affair.

ACT ONE

Christmas Eve at Dr Dross's Orphanage for Waifs and Strays

The young residents of the orphanage (all played by adult dancers) are dressed in black and grey – matching their dark, gloomy and monochrome surroundings. Watched closely by Dr Dross, his wife, Mrs Dross, and their two children, Sugar and Fritz, it is quickly evident that the children are fearful, downbeat and reliant on one another for friendship and support.

It is Christmas Eve and the orphans are visited by a number of the orphanage's Governors. Dr and Mrs Dross are intent on ensuring that the visitors leave feeling satisfied that the orphans under their care are happy and thriving and goad the children into a series of dance and athletic shows of strength to assure them of their good health.

The orphanage is briefly decorated with festive garlands and a Christmas tree is rolled out to give the illusion of a place imbued with the spirit of the holiday season. Yet, as soon as the patrons leave, all the niceties are withdrawn and the tree is thrown out of the window. Toys that the orphans have been given are taken away, including a nutcracker doll that had been gifted to Clara.

The orphans are packed off to bed; including a devastated Clara who is desperate to get her toy back. Believing no-one to be around, Clara gets out of bed and tries to retrieve her nutcracker doll from the cupboard into which it was put. The clock strikes midnight... Clara hears someone entering the room and runs back to bed. Sugar appears and is looking for the nutcracker doll. Sugar opens the cupboard... only to find that the toy doll is now a huge, life-size, walking, talking Nutcracker. Terrified, Sugar runs away, leaving a curious Clara to find out who this giant doll is and why he has appeared.

The Nutcracker appears to have come to help the orphans and starts breaking apart the walls of the orphanage, revealing that the previously discarded Christmas tree has grown to giant proportions on the outside, which they can use to aid their escape. But, before they can leave, Dr Dross and his family reappear to find out what all the commotion is. Encouraged by his presence, the orphans begin a revolt against Dr and Mrs Dross and their two children, tying them to the beds with bedsheets, before making their exit from the orphanage – led by the Nutcracker.



A Frozen Lake

We're suddenly transported to a crystallised kingdom of snow and ice, all blue skies and fluffy white clouds and winter chill. The music is lighter, brighter, more positive and upbeat and the stage is soon filled with pure-white costumes, including woolly hats and scarves. The only hint of pink comes from Princess Sugar in her candy-floss coloured dress and sparkling tiara.

Whilst Clara and Nutcracker enjoy time on the ice with the other orphans, trouble starts to brew as Princess Sugar and Prince Bon-Bon start to exhibit the same selfish, wily and disruptive behaviour as they did as Sugar and Fritz back at the orphanage, with Princess Sugar hell-bent on diverting Nutcracker's affection for Clara and transferring it to her. Using her brother as a means of getting what she wants, Princess Sugar supplies Prince Bon-Bon with

a snowball, which he throws at Nutcracker knocking him to the floor. Seizing her opportunity, Princess Sugar rushes to Nutcracker's side, whilst Clara – distraught – rushes away, alone.

Soon Clara and Nutcracker find themselves in a complicated quartet with the Prince and Princess, with Clara partnered with Prince Bon-Bon and with Nutcracker firmly within Princess Sugar's determined grasp. Clara eventually makes a break from Prince Bon-Bon only to find Nutcracker and Princess Sugar appear to be in perfect unison, with Nutcracker falling under her spell. Undeterred, Clara heads off in hot pursuit of Princess Sugar and Nutcracker, leaving Prince Bon-Bon alone and, seemingly no longer of use to his bossier and more controlling sister, he is subsequently chased away from the frozen lake by the orphans. As snow starts falling, we see that Clara is still alone and now desperately sad, cold and forlorn.



ACT TWO

The Road to Sweetieland

As the curtains rise for Act Two, they reveal a tired and beaten looking Clara, collapsed on the floor under a signpost – left to the Frozen Pond or right to Sweetieland. It appears Clara isn't sure where to head to next. Then, as if by magic, a pair of cupids – resembling the twins from the orphanage – appear from out of the blue, seemingly to answer Clara's pleas for help. They conjure up a new dress for her and escort her in the direction of Sweetieland in the hope that she will be able to track down and win back her beloved Nutcracker.

As the Cupids and Clara head off together, Princess Sugar reappears with Nutcracker – who appears to be smitten with the affection that she is lavishing upon him. A rather downbeat Prince Bon-Bon follows on behind, carrying the ice-skates and reluctantly pandering to every one of his sister's whims. It seems everyone is heading to Sweetieland – but who will get there first?

With Clara and the Cupids nowhere to be seen, the entrance to Sweetieland looms on the horizon and Princess Sugar and Nutcracker, with Prince Bon-Bon tailing behind, arrive full of excitement. As the double doors burst open King Sherbert and Queen Candy burst forth, rather delighted at the handsome specimen that Princess Sugar has brought home. After sizing him up and checking Nutcracker is to their taste, they give the Princess and her admirer their seal of approval before ushering the young couple and Prince Bon-Bon into their kingdom.

Just as the doors close behind them the Cupids reappear, hurrying Clara along with them. As Clara reaches the doors and starts to make her way into Sweetieland, she is repelled by the sudden re-entrance of the King and Queen with Princess Sugar and Nutcracker. She hides and watches in horror as she sees that Nutcracker seems to have fallen completely under Sugar's spell and with the full agreement and encouragement of the Princess's rather odious yet powerful parents.



As the four of them head off into the giant mouth that forms the entrance to their sweetie-themed domain, Clara feels it's no use and thinks she has lost Nutcracker forever. But, with some forceful insistence from the Cupids, she once more makes an approach to get inside. Yet, the doors fly open once again and this time she is stopped in her tracks by a large, and rather unflinching, doorman – the Humbug Bouncer – who blocks her every move.

As a steady stream of visitors to Sweetieland arrive and gain entrance, it becomes clear to Clara that without an invite she is going to struggle to get in. Firstly, the Allsorts Trio appear and Clara tries very hard to be accepted as one of them by joining in with their Spanish-flamenco inspired dances. Her plan seems to be working, but in the end – with no spare invite – it is only the Allsorts that can get past the doorman.

Next to arrive is the Knickerbocker Glory – a beguiling and bewitching performer who seems to mesmerise and enchant Clara with his sultry dance and his cigarette-smoke. Again, she dances with him in the hope of accompanying him through the doors but it becomes clear the Knickerbocker Glory has no intention of extending a plus-one to Clara as he waves his invite at her and disappears inside.

Undeterred, Clara spots a group of giggly girls and hopes that they will take her under their wing. The Marshmallow Girls giggle and gaggle and waggle their way around the stage, looking for the way to the party. They are all laughter and bounce seemingly without any notice of anything other than themselves and one another. Clara hides herself among their ‘marshmallowy’ bodies and tries her best to sneak in unnoticed, but the Humbug Bouncer has spotted her and stands in her path as the Marshmallow Girls filter past her, invitations held aloft.

It seems Clara will never get into Sweetieland but, then arrives a group of loud mouth, high-energy, all-action sweets whose unruly behaviour provides the perfect distraction moment. As the Gobstoppers get into a fracas with each other, which the Humbug Bouncer attempts to break-up, Clara – guided by the Cupids – seizes her chance and rushes through the unguarded doors. She has finally made it to Sweetieland.

Sweetieland

Inside Sweetieland, Princess Sugar is in her element and surrounded by the adoring and fawning attentiveness of the Marshmallow Girls; who are fussing around her and hanging on her every move. Meanwhile, Prince Bon-Bon has spotted the Cupids and is intent on seeing them off. As he chases them away Clara hides out of sight.

Princess Sugar and Nutcracker embark on an intimate duet in preparation for their upcoming nuptials... complete with a ginormous wedding cake decorated from top-to-toe with all of the sweets. As the sweets mingle with King Sherbet, Queen Candy and Prince Bon-Bon in a giant getting-to-know you dance, Princess Sugar, Nutcracker and Clara are nowhere to be seen. In one giant ‘sugar rush’ that builds to a crescendo of licking and eating and tasting and having fun, the celebrations are truly underway.

Princess Sugar and Nutcracker reappear alone and clearly enjoying some quiet time after the chaos of having everyone around. The lights are dim and the music soft and it looks to be the last chance the happy couple will have to be alone together before they tie the knot – and they are seemingly more in love than ever.





But then, the Cupids reappear once more trying to win back Nutcracker's attention so they can redirect it to the one person they know loves him more than anyone... Clara. Clara arrives just in time to see the Cupids' fruitless efforts and to witness Princess Sugar and Nutcracker in a deep embrace – as the Cupids, exhausted by their endeavours – collapse to the floor.

In a matter of moments King Sherbet and Queen Candy, and the wedding guests arrive back on the scene and Princess Sugar and Nutcracker walk down the aisle together to the great excitement of family and friends. At the end of the ceremony the guests gather round to offer their congratulations before leaving Princess Sugar and Nutcracker alone once again. They embark on individual solos demonstrating their masculine and feminine energies to one another – but, just as the Princess finishes an impassioned dance for Nutcracker, Clara reappears. Prince Bon-Bon emerges from the other direction at just the same time and as Clara makes a beeline towards Nutcracker, he heads her off by grabbing her arms and dancing with her, as Princess Sugar and Nutcracker also join back together.

An interesting quartet ensues with the two pairs constantly switching partners back and forth. When Clara manages to dance with Nutcracker, he seems to be reminded of the love they once shared and becomes distracted from Princess Sugar. Yet, just as Clara makes a final ditch attempt to partner up with Nutcracker again, she is spun into the path of the Humbug Bouncer. He marches her off just as all of the sweets reappear to continue the festivities for the newlyweds.

Princess Sugar throws her wedding bouquet which is caught by a rather pleased and hopeful Prince Bon-Bon. The dancing and festivities build to another crescendo and it seems that there is no possibility of Clara and Nutcracker ever being reunited; but in the melee of people, suddenly we see that, seemingly out of nowhere, it is Clara that is once again partnered with Nutcracker. A furious and condescending Princess Sugar intervenes, and Nutcracker is headed off in the opposite direction to Clara.



The lights dim and we see that the dress that the Cupids gave to Clara has been replaced with her orphanage issue nightdress. The glitz and glamour of Sweetieland has evaporated and it seems that Clara is back at Dr Dross's Orphanage for Waifs and Strays. Then, in Clara's hand we spot her nutcracker doll... no longer an athletic life-size figure but the same motionless, inanimate object that she was given on Christmas Eve. Princess Sugar has disappeared too, and Clara is all alone. She throws the doll across the floor and hugs herself. Was it all a dream after all?

Clara also doubts herself and her ability to distinguish fantasy from reality. Disillusioned and feeling devastated that this was perhaps just a figment of her imagination, she goes to climb back into her bed. But, as she pulls back the covers, she is thrilled to find Nutcracker there. They embrace and kiss and use a series of bedsheets tied together to make a final escape from the orphanage to happiness.



ACTIVITY: WRITING

Imagine that you are a reporter for a fictional publication and that you have interviewed one of the orphans from Dr Dross's Orphanage for Waifs and Strays. You will interview them about what has been happening there, so that you can write a headline-hitting article about the terrible conditions the orphans have been subjected to. Through your clever line of questioning your mission is to uncover secrets about them and the other people who work and reside at the orphanage; as well as to find out more about the visiting Governors. Deliver your 'exclusive scoop' in a 500-word article aimed at your preferred readership.



ACTIVITY: DESIGN

Nutcracker! – perhaps more than any other of Matthew Bourne's creations – is enjoyed by people of all ages and remains a firm family-favourite. Why do you think it appeals to young and old alike? Create a series of promotional posters designed for different age groups – focus your marketing material on the following potential audience members:

- A 6-year old
- A 16-year old
- A 36-year old
- A 66-year old

For further development, create a 60-second [elevator pitch](#) (a spoken-word marketing spiel) to further promote the show to each of these age groups.

4. MATTHEW BOURNE

ABOUT MATTHEW BOURNE



Matthew Bourne is widely hailed as the UK's most popular and successful choreographer and director. He is the creator of the world's longest running ballet production, a seven-time Olivier Award winner, and the only British director to have won the Tony Award for both Best Choreographer and Best Director of a Musical. Matthew started his dance training at the comparatively late age of 22 and danced professionally for 14 years, creating many roles in his own work. As Artistic Director of his first company, Adventures in Motion Pictures from 1987 until 2002, Matthew created many award-winning works.

Further hit productions were created when New Adventures was launched in 2002, becoming one of the UK's busiest and most successful dance company's and a major exporter of British dance across the world. Matthew is also a West End and Broadway choreographer; a more than 20-year relationship with producer Cameron Mackintosh has resulted in the globally successful musicals *Mary Poppins*, *My Fair Lady* and *Oliver!*

In 2008 he established the charitable arm of New Adventures to increase opportunities that inspire young people with a passion for dance and in 2010 created the New Adventures Choreographer Award to showcase the talents of emerging choreographers. In 1997 Matthew was made an Honorary Fellow of his former college, The Laban Centre, becoming a Companion of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in 2012. He has six Honorary Doctorates from The Open University, and the De Montfort, Plymouth, Kingston and Roehampton Universities, as well as the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Matthew has been recognised by numerous international awards. He is also a Companion of Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts and a proud patron of many organisations, including The Arts Educational School, Laine Theatre Arts, CREATE and Shoreditch Youth Dance. In 2015 he became the first dance figure to be given The Stage Award for Outstanding Contribution to British Theatre presented by the UK Theatre Awards.

Matthew was knighted in the Queen's New Year Honours 2016 for services to dance and awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Award in recognition of his outstanding services to the art of ballet.

To watch a Two Minute Tale with Matthew Bourne, [CLICK HERE](#) 

To listen to Matthew Bourne being interviewed for the inaugural episode of Bourne To Dance, the New Adventures podcast, [CLICK HERE](#) 



ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION

Matthew Bourne credits the lavish Hollywood movies of the 1930s as offering inspiration for much of his work, including *Nutcracker!* Discuss which sections of the show you feel have been inspired by Hollywood movies and in what way? Think about how this is reflected in not only the choreography, but also the portrayal of the characters, the set, the lighting and costumes. Talk about what other influences you feel may have inspired the show and explain the reasoning behind your suggestions. For further development, watch more of Matthew Bourne's creations and see what parallels you can find within them in terms of the influences, inspirations, choreographic devices, use of music and production elements.



4. MATTHEW BOURNE

MATTHEW BOURNE ON *NUTCRACKER!*



You first staged *Nutcracker!* three decades ago. What is it like to be bringing back this show for its 30th Anniversary Tour and why did you feel that now was the right time to resurrect it?

We first did *Nutcracker!* in 1992... it's a much-loved piece within the company but we haven't done it for 10 years and we don't do it every year like some companies do at Christmas as we also do lots of other Christmas shows... It seemed like a great time to bring it back because it is something that people miss if they haven't seen it for a while – it's a favourite – but it's quite an old production and the real impetus for bringing it back was the chance to take another look at it and bring it into the next century in a way. It has also let Anthony Ward, who was our original Designer for the show, have another look at the costumes and the set, and we worked together on that and it was a real treat to be able to do that and to give the public a new version of the piece.

Can you tell us a little about some of the changes we might expect to see within this new version; and why you have chosen to make those particular adaptations?

I'm someone who likes to give my collaborators freedom to create and I talked with Anthony Ward, our Designer, about what we could possibly do with the piece and then I left him to his own devices for a while to really think and give his contribution to the show; which is enormous... The story that we tell hasn't changed (over the years) but we've embraced lots of new technology that wasn't around when we first did it. We have projection in the show as a tool and sometimes projection is used in a way that people wouldn't even realise... I may be wrong, but I think that over the years Anthony has done more dance productions and worked with more dance companies and maybe feels that he knows more now about how dancers move and what works for the

costumes and so some of the costumes are a bit more sleek in design and are a bit more flattering I would say. They look incredible and Anthony would say it's his fantastical side that comes out in this piece... He's really enjoyed having fun again with *Nutcracker!*

Are there any particular cultural or social references within the show that you have updated for the current audience?

Cultural references can be problematic because they can date the show if the references are very current at the time at which it is created... I try to create shows that are more classic in their interpretation but do make use of different influences. So, *Nutcracker!*'s influences haven't changed and the cultural references are fairly classic ones such as a Dickensian orphanage; with the books of Charles Dickens – which influenced some of the beginning of the show being a thing that everyone understands.

Sometimes the references aren't needed to be known by the audience – they are just things that inspire you... our skating scene is based on a Norwegian

Olympic skating star, called [Sonja Henie](#), and she went on to become a Hollywood star and they created these extravaganzas on ice around this special talent that she had. These extravaganzas got bigger and bigger and bigger and that was very inspiring for our snow scene where we give the illusion of ice-skating through the movement.

I do think our piece is more identifiable for young people... the characters of the Gobstoppers, the Marshmallow Girls and the Allsorts Trio, are the kinds of characters that you can easily understand, unlike in the classical versions of *The Nutcracker* where the comparable characters (in Act Two) are based on what is often seen now as being cultural stereotypes presented in the form of a series of [national dances](#). These also feature in many other ballets where, as an example there is a Chinese Dance or an Arabian Dance or something like that. Some of them have been choreographed over 100 years ago and so they can tend to be very stereotypical and actually there's a big movement in ballet generally at the moment to try and change those things and to rechoreograph them and rebrand them and give them a new identity.





Your version of *Nutcracker!* is set in a Dickensian orphanage – what inspired this decision and what creative opportunities did it bring in terms of character development and design?

It's a very Dickensian thing – the idea of the 'sad Christmas' like in '[A Christmas Carol](#)' and thinking back that was very influential in terms of the whole [Scrooge](#) character which is very Dr Dross... The thing that was really important for us visually, and something Anthony and I discussed from very early on, was going from a world that had feeling in it and ensured that you had feelings for these characters... and included a couple of villains (Dr Dross and Mrs Dross) so contained some really nice storytelling devices – but was a very drab, monochrome world into, first of all, a very white, silvery, snowy landscape – which emphasizes the escape from this dark place into this light place – and then, in Act Two, going into this complete technicolour world; which is even more technicolour this time around! But it was certainly this idea of going from the dark into the light and then into the colour, that was our concept.

What do you feel are the core themes of *Nutcracker!* and what is it about the story that especially resonates with you, and could possibly resonate with other people that see it?

Our *Nutcracker!* is a 'coming of age' story deep down. We decided early on that all the adult dancers were going to play the orphans – so they were going to play young people – and we pitched the age at early teens, really, as this is a very important phase in young people's lives. Clara, who is our heroine, goes on a journey from a girl to a woman, during the piece... I have to say, however, that it's not a really 'deep' piece – it's a lot of fun and a lot of it is set in a fantasy world. But, at the heart of it there is the sense of (it being about) growing-up and encountering those things that you do encounter as you grow up. Clara's journey does take her to meet lots of different kinds of people and she fights for the boy that she's fallen in love with at the orphanage. And so, there are various life lessons within it, disguised in a lot of fun and confectionery... literally!

To watch an short film of Matthew Bourne discussing *Nutcracker!* [CLICK HERE](#)



5. IN REHEARSALS

AN INTERVIEW WITH ETTA MURFITT, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!* first premiered in 1992 and also toured in 2012 for its 20th anniversary. What is it like bringing a show back to audiences for a third time and how does it differ from staging a brand new production?

Matthew and I were sitting down the other day and trying to work out how many times it is that we've done *Nutcracker!* and it's 8 times! Each time you come back again to stage a piece you know really well, even though you don't want it to be the same, you know what makes it work... Sometimes though, you have to recognise that you're working with a brand new bunch of people who are going to bring different things to it... you have to 'start from scratch'. You have to talk about characterisation, the story, what's happening when and where, what people should be feeling and all of the dancers have to go through a whole character analysis to work out who they are and what they're doing which is exciting.

What's quite useful about doing a pre-existing show is that as you're rehearsing it you can get the scenes and the dances together quite quickly and then you can spend more time working on the character and the storytelling. When you are doing a show that's already in existence you have a bit of knowledge about it already, which is helpful, yet there's also enough freedom to allow people to bring different things to it.

It's different when you're starting on a brand new piece as in that instance you know nothing apart from maybe a scenario and maybe a few workshops that you've done prior to rehearsals starting. Everything is being found in the rehearsals and it's sort of like a mystery unfolding. They are both equally stimulating but very different processes.

Including the creatives, cast and technical staff there are somewhere in the region of 60 people working as part of the *Nutcracker!* team. What are the challenges and the opportunities that present themselves by working as part of such a large group staff team?

Having 60 people working on *Nutcracker!* is extraordinary and as always with New Adventures we're a bit of a family. So, all the crew, the production team, the dancers, the stage management and everyone that's involved have all worked together for a really long time and we all know one another really well. This means there's a bit of a short-hand to the way that we work... I suppose what's interesting is that a lot of the production team have worked together for a very long time and it's a lot of the dancers who are new to the company this time around. So, there's a short-hand going on with the creative and the production team and the dancers



are trying to work out what that short-hand is and slowly but surely, they're starting to understand how we get a show like this on stage.

The rehearsals have all taken place at 3 Mills Studio; before moving to the Theatre Royal, in Plymouth, where the show opens. Can you tell us what a typical day looks like for the company?

A typical day is the same for everyone. It begins with morning class and then there's a break and then we do our first rehearsal session – usually from 11.20am to 1.30pm – then it's lunch. Then we do 2.30–6pm and then we sometimes work in the evenings too and that would be from 6.30pm to 8.30pm.

We just dive in and if it's a pre-existing show then anyone who has done the show before will be helpful in teaching the choreography and elements of the show to the new dancers. Also, those older, more experienced company members will gently guide the newer members to help and assist as much as they can too, because that's our ethos as a company and we don't just have a Rehearsal Director who teaches everyone everything.

If someone has experienced and performed in a role previously then we want that person to teach that role to a new person, because then they're giving that person all their knowledge and experience about

that role... It's a rolling legacy which I think is really important to have and we've always done that and it's always felt really enriching for people who play the roles.

I have a rehearsal team working alongside me that consists of the Resident Director, a Rehearsal Assistant and [Dance Captains](#)... They all have little pieces of knowledge about the show and so they teach the material and we put the show together between us. As Associate Artistic Director, I am responsible for re-staging it all so that means bringing all of the different elements together to make it all work.

Can you also explain what that transition feels like from studio rehearsals to dress rehearsals on stage and what the particular pressures are for you during that period, within your role as Associate Artistic Director?

When you're re-staging a production you've always got the 'studio version' that you end up with after 4 weeks and it works really well... The next thing that happens is that you take that studio version and you plonk it on stage and everyone's in costume and the space feels different... You realise that some of the storytelling might not be working so it has to be re-spaced, re-staged, brought further [downstage](#) or moved somewhere else and so there's a lot of shift and change during the [technical rehearsal](#).





Because you are working with the [set](#) for the first time – and, for this particular production of *Nutcracker!* we have a lot of new set pieces – we’re having to invent and problem-solve as we go along. So, suddenly the show is starting to take on a different shape and the more you go on the more you start to work more quickly within the technical rehearsal because you start to realise what’s going to work and what isn’t going to work.

Then, after technical rehearsals, you have your first [dress rehearsal](#) and that’s when everyone gets the chance to really perform and then, from that point, you have more of an idea what the show is – after seeing it run all the way through from start to finish for the first time. Then there are loads of notes that need to happen because some things are going to work storytelling-wise whilst other things aren’t so you have to readjust again... The next phase is developing people’s performances a bit more, making sure that the dancing is as good as it can be.

The pressure is always quite high for me, because in the rehearsal period I have 4 weeks to get three people into each role and that’s incredibly difficult. I am used to doing it, and I’m good at it now, and I just have to forge ahead and keep going.

To watch a short film of Etta Murfitt discussing *Nutcracker!* [CLICK HERE](#) 

To watch a Two Minute Tale with Etta Murfitt, [CLICK HERE](#) 

5. IN REHEARSALS

AN INTERVIEW WITH ASHLEY SHAW — PRINCIPAL DANCER



Can you let us know about the role you play in the current national tour of *Nutcracker!* and any particular influences or inspirations that you have used to inform your characterisation of that role?

I play Sugar, who is the daughter of Dr and Mrs Dross, and she's a very bratty, obnoxious character – who is super fun to play. I mainly drew inspiration from previous casts, but there are also some other characters who I think she is quite similar to who I also took inspiration from, such as [Veruca Salt](#) from 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' (by Roald Dahl) as well as [Angelica Pickles](#) from 'RugRats' – particularly for Act One because Sugar is a young

girl, stomping around and chucking tantrums! There is a big transition in Act Two because she becomes Princess Sugar, in Sweetieland, who is much more mature and grown-up and much more aware of her sexuality and starts using that (to her advantage).

In New Adventures we are so fortunate that we often have performers with us who have played those roles previously who can pass on their gems of wisdom... It's so helpful actually having support from someone who has been in the same position as you before and understands what it's like and how hard it is... One of the most brilliant things about this company is that there's usually 2 or 3 people playing each role and so you really do learn with, and from, one another. We help one another out and give feedback about the character and encourage each other to try different things that we think will work for the character and what doesn't.

Matthew's production of *Nutcracker!* has become one of his best-loved productions and is enjoyed by audiences of all ages. Why do you think it's such an iconic show, and what do you personally love about it most

I think Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!* is so loved and iconic because it's such a beautiful story and it has everything you want from theatre – it's fun, it's colourful, it's vibrant, it's heart-warming, its Christmassy and it's magical. It's all these different things and I think audiences just gravitate towards that. One of the reasons I love it so much is the contrast between Act One and Act Two. I feel as though you get so much from this show. It's not one specific genre, you get a little bit of everything, and I think it would be very hard to leave after seeing the show feeling disappointed.

The show is very physically demanding, so can you tell us how you look after your body (and mind!) during a tour such as this, and how does your role as Rehearsal Assistant play a part in helping the other members of the company to take care of themselves?

This show is really physically demanding and, stamina-wise, it's one of the toughest shows I've done in Matthew's repertoire so we really have to look after ourselves. Aside from all of the obvious things, like eating right, going to bed at a good time, making sure we warm up and cool down properly, we also have an amazing physio who is on tour with us at all times and gives us our 'MOTs' and keeps us in check.

As Rehearsal Assistant, I help to make sure that people are doing all the right things for their bodies – especially once we get into performing 8-shows each week as it's a lot. As long as all those boxes are ticked we're usually okay!

When we're on tour, depending on the show day, we usually have class around 11.30am. We do class every single day, usually alternating between ballet and contemporary, to not only warm-up but also to make sure we're keeping our technique (skills) up and to keep improving as dancers. We then usually go into 'notes', which again, we have every single day



from the previous day's show/s. We constantly get feedback and the show is constantly evolving. It never stays the same and [Matthew](#) and [Etta](#) might have new ideas and want to try new things, so we have a lot of notes and a lot of rehearsals. As Rehearsal Assistant, I assist with implementing those notes and if anything needs changing then I will run the rehearsal and direct everyone to do those things.

We will then have a dinner break and then about an hour to get into hair and make-up and then it's showtime! The show comes down about 9.30pm and then we'll finish about 10pm and then go home and do it all over again the next day!

How many different costume changes do you have during the show, and how do you manage these so quickly between the different scenes?

This show is actually pretty calm in terms of costume changes... I start in the orphanage in my black, Victorian dress – although I am not an orphan... My next change is to get into my snow costume, which is probably my quickest change in the whole show, although it's not actually that quick. But, I do have to change my tiara and hair as well as my dress. And then, we always have a costume change in the interval, where I put on this gorgeous 'snow' dressing



gown. Then, I have quite a long time after that to get changed into my glamorous, pink, wedding dress. We have a lot of help with our costume changes and wig changes. We have our on-tour wigs team who come everywhere with us and help us with our hats etc; and then at each venue we have a set of local dressers who are backstage to help us get into our dresses and shoes.

What is your favourite scene to perform in the show, and why?

My favourite scene is the quartet which is just after Princess Sugar's solo and Clara comes into the land that she's not supposed to be in. It's the real moment when the two leading female characters come head-to-head and it's set to the '[Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy](#)' – so another really iconic section of the score – and the choreography is great and you really get to understand more about who both of the characters are. My character in particular really gets to be quite aggressive and it's a really fun moment. By the end of that section... there is a stand-off between Princess Sugar and Clara and we give one another a real 'death-stare' and it's so fun having that electricity between us on stage because it's been building up for the whole show and then suddenly we get that moment to release everything.

To watch a short film of Ashley Shaw discussing *Nutcracker!* [CLICK HERE](#)

To listen to Ashley Shaw being interviewed for *Bourne To Dance*, *New Adventures* podcast, [CLICK HERE](#)



ACTIVITY: WRITING

Choose one of the sweets in Act Two (the Gobstoppers, the Allsorts Trio, the Marshmallow Girls or the Knickerbocker Glory) and create a back-story which provides more information about them. Think about:

- Their relationship to King Sherbet, Queen Candy, Princess Sugar and Prince Bon-Bon
- Why they have received an invitation to Sweetieland and who it is from
- What their personalities are like
- What they were doing before they arrived in Sweetieland
- What their objectives are for being there, where they are heading afterwards and for what reason



6. PRODUCTION ELEMENTS



A production on this scale requires a huge team of people – both on and off stage – to bring it to its audiences. For this latest national tour of *Nutcracker!* Matthew gathered back together many of his original team of collaborators, as well as some new ones.

New Adventures relies on the skills of lots of people who think creatively and enjoy using their imagination. These all form part of the team of ‘creatives’ that determine what the show will look, feel and sound like, including...

[Matthew Bourne](#): Director & Choreographer

[Anthony Ward](#): Designer (Set & Costumes)

[Howard Harrison](#): Lighting Designer

[Brett Morris](#): Music Director and Principal Conductor

[Paul Groothuis](#): Sound Designer

[Duncan McLean](#): Projection Designer

With a cast of more than 30 performers and more than 20 technical staff working hard behind the scenes to keep the show on the road, *Nutcracker!* is one of the most logistically complex of all of the New Adventures’ productions... not least because of the enormous wedding cake that features towards the end of Act Two, which requires careful removal and reassembly between each different venue.

Taking *Nutcracker!* out on the road is very complicated as there are lots of people that need to travel with the show; as well as all of the costumes and the scenery that all helps to tell the story to the audience.

For a complete list of credits for the cast, creatives and technical staff, **CLICK HERE**



Elements of the show have been refreshed and reimagined for this latest anniversary tour and the interviews that are included in this section with Anthony Ward and Howard Harrison explore the inspirations behind the set, costume and lighting within *Nutcracker!* and how they have been created.

One aspect that hasn't been re-thought or updated is Tchaikovsky's score, which Matthew credits as possessing the "*magic to turn us all into kids again.*" The interview with Brett Morris explains more about this iconic score and its use within the show; as well as the challenges of working with such a complex piece of music.

To listen to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra playing the 'Waltz of the Flowers' from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, [CLICK HERE](#)



ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION

Throughout *Nutcracker!* our perception of fantasy and reality is constantly challenged. It is hard to know what is actually happening and what is simply a figment of Clara's imagination. Think of other films, books or live performances that purposefully use an interplay between fact and fiction. Discuss what the impact is for the viewer or reader and debate both the opportunities and challenges it presents to the author or director. Talk about your own interpretation of Clara's experiences within the storyline and discuss what, if any, changes you would make to the plot to either enhance or decrease the fluidity of the narrative as it conjures up both real and imagined worlds.



6. PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

SETS & COSTUMES: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY WARD



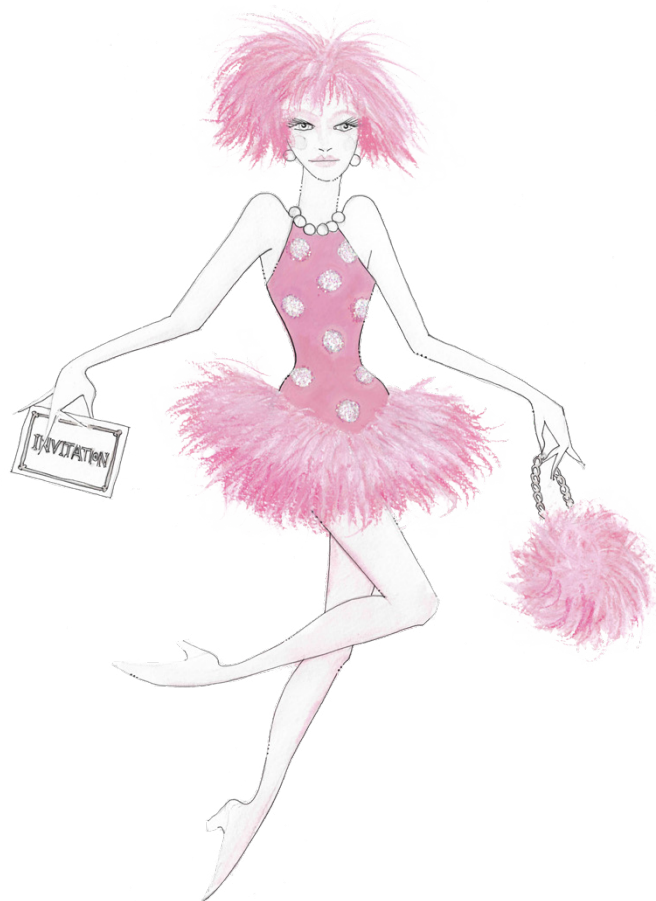
This is not the first time you have worked with New Adventures on a production of *Nutcracker!* so what does it feel like to have had the opportunity to refresh the look of both the costumes and the set for this 30th Anniversary tour? In particular, what are the challenges and opportunities that arise when revisiting a show you have previously designed?

To come back to *Nutcracker!* again has been wonderful. People work with me that have great skills and we all get together to make some magic and I absolutely love that. I'm 64 now and would have been in my thirties when we first staged *Nutcracker!* and I really feel that I've learnt so much of what I know 'on the job' and *Nutcracker!* really typifies that. I have the opportunity to have another go at *Nutcracker!* after that very first production and felt that I'd made it a lot better... having come back and had the chance to have a go at it again, I've been able to look back and see things from that second production that I've wanted to change. That is part of the job – continually wanting to improve and make things as good as you possibly can... This provides both an opportunity and a challenge.



Can you tell us what if anything, has been done differently this time around? And if there have been changes, what has inspired them?

I feel that I have come from an older generation of designers that came from the ideas of making things feel very 'real-world' on stage and we've used a lot of a very traditional technical device called [Trompe-l'oeil](#) to give the illusion that a lot of the scenery is 3-dimensional when in fact it is flat as a pancake! What has been great about it this time around is that we have been able to achieve these really great effects by working with Luke Smith (Associate Set Designer) who would take my sketches and then use his expertise in computer-design to work out what Trompe-l'oeil elements were needed to give the illusion of the pieces of set being 'moulded' or 3-D. Then our fantastic scenic painter would bring these designs to life by painting them as per Luke's [CAD](#) designs.



Presumably, a decade on from when the show last toured, there are different creative techniques and technological advancements available to you than there were then. So, what, if any, evolutions in set and costume design have enabled you to do things differently for this latest production?

[Rachel Woodhouse](#) has been Costume Supervisor for *Nutcracker!* and I have worked with her many times before. Once I've designed the costumes we get together to discuss how to construct them and what sort of fabrics we're looking for. Then often we would go out shopping for fabrics, however, this time around – due to Covid-19 – we haven't been able to do that. In fact, what we've seen is that so many of the fabric shops we used to use – around Berwick Street, in London, for example, have closed down entirely, which is really sad.

Once Rachel knows what we need she will book makers that she feels will be good at creating these particular costumes, as some makers will have a particular area of expertise – for example, this time around we worked with a maker whose particular speciality was 'stretch' (i.e. making costumes with stretch fabrics) and so they did all of the new costumes for the Marshmallow Girls.

Another element we've brought into this latest production – thanks to [Howard Harrison](#) is that we've hidden a lot of lights into the set... For example, the giant wedding cake now lights up as there is a lot more that is possible now with lighting, in terms of the use of LED strip lighting and so on.

Projection is also much more widely used and more viable to use than it was previously and is very much part of the theatre world. Actually, it's quite difficult to do a show nowadays without it because of the amazing elements that it can bring to it and [Duncan McLean](#) has done an incredible job with this show.

Can you explain something about the process that takes place as you bring your vision for the set design to life? I'm specifically wondering about how the design journeys from say, an image in your head, to a sketch on paper, to a model box and then finally to stage, for example?

We have the opportunity to create a whole new world for each show... We start with small models of what the final production will look like and then we need to create that in large-scale for the theatre – but that initial process of creating the sketches and then the white-box models is a bit like entering a snow-globe and it's wonderful.

We discover the elements that we want and then work out – like a puzzle – how they are going to fit into the ground-plan; which is essentially the amount of space available within the stage space. Our Production Manager will have visited (the theatre) with us, during the design process, so that we can identify and problem solve as we go along and we work together, as a team, because everyone involved is trying to achieve 'the dream'.

There are so many different highly-skilled people who work on a show of this scale. Coming together with all of the different contributors with their amazing expertise is always inspiring... everyone from draughtsman, the painters, the costume makers, the carpenters and so on.

The use of props is also key within a show as they help to tell the story. In *Nutcracker!* that is especially important in the way we convey the transition of the nutcracker doll into the character of Nutcracker. This time around the doll we use has a much bigger head and so (from an audience perspective) it reads much better as it's much easier to see. We had to have a head sculpted for the doll and then a head sculpted for the actual character to wear, so that they match. The fact that the performer then has to dance in it and then also take it off on stage to reveal who he is, was quite a challenge and involved the props and costume departments working together.





The Wedding Party scene includes an enormous three-tiered wedding cake which has to be strong enough for dancers to perform on. How did you set about creating something suitable for a touring show that was durable, yet versatile enough to travel from venue to venue?

I think we've always used the same base for the cake (in each of the productions) but the rest of it gets stripped off each time (the show has been re-staged) and then I have another go at designing what it is going to look like visually and I absolutely love this latest version. Howard's lights that he has hidden within the cake look great and it is amazing now.

There is a socking-great central metal structure and then sheets of plywood clad all over that, but the funny thing is that I don't get hugely involved in the construction of things – I focus on the front/audience-view and what it looks like, and I leave the build to other members of the team. I have worried about the cake, but it's worked out really well and I'm so grateful to everyone who has worked on it.



ACTIVITY: WRITING

Explain how the use of costume design by [Anthony Ward](#) in *Nutcracker!* extends the audience's understanding of the main characters, their role within the story and their personalities. Particularly pay attention to the different personas that some of the characters take on in Act Two, compared to Act One, and how the costumes provide both sufficient differentiation, coupled with enough continuity, for audiences to understand the transitions that take place – for example, from Dr Dross to King Sherbet or from Sugar to Princess Sugar. Think about:

- Colour
- Material
- Era
- Style
- The way the design of the costume affects movement

6. PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

LIGHTING: AN INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD HARRISON



Can you explain a little about your working process on designing the lighting for *Nutcracker!*

From memory, I think it was 2002 when I first worked with Matthew Bourne on *Nutcracker!* and, over the years, it has been done several times since then although this version is definitely the biggest and shiniest. I'm always led by the scenic designer and so the set always governs or dictates what you can or can't do and what you should or shouldn't do.

You have to work in harmony with the set and costumes and bring the best of that out. I remember years and years ago seeing Anthony Ward's design for the show and thinking this was the most fantastic take on it. It seemed to make it much more modern and relevant and fun – and that fun and magic is what I have wanted to reflect in the lighting, too.

How does lighting help the audience understand when the story is taking place in the 'real-world' of Clara's orphanage, compared to when the story transitions into Clara's dream worlds?

The orphanage is run by horrible people... and all the orphans dream of escaping – either by being adopted or by getting out another way. The antithesis is a place where you can eat sweets all the time, because that's one of the things the children are never ever allowed to do at the orphanage. To reflect this, visually the orphanage is quite grey and dark and dingy; and not a happy place.

It is a huge contrast to the frozen landscape that the children get to at the end of Act One (A Frozen Lake) when suddenly you see a bright, snow-covered world that is a thing of great beauty. It's that intense variation between the two places, within the first half of the show that helps convey that initial transition in Clara's experience. Then, when Sweetieland appears in Act Two, it's that same contrast but with bells on top (!) because it is a totally fantastical world.



From the perspective of the lighting design, how is colour used within the show?

Conveying the story to the audience from a lighting perspective has a lot to do with colour and intensity. There is the drabness of the orphanage where the colours are quite cold and murky and muted and then the vibrancy of everything else within the other places that Clara visits in the show. For example, when the Allsorts Trio and the other characters appears in Sweetieland in Act Two it's an explosion of pinks and blues and oranges and reds and it's like a release from that slightly grey world that we see at the start of the show.

When we very first did *Nutcracker!* technology was a lot different and lighting capabilities have changed phenomenally in the theatre... There is really an infinite choice now with lighting colours and that's a wonderful thing – although having so many options can be mind-boggling! However, now when you have an idea you can pretty much fulfil it, whereas years ago if you wanted to change the colour of a light someone had to physically climb a ladder to do that – whereas now that's not the case. That freedom and flexibility gives you the opportunity to experiment more and find something that really, really works.



ACTIVITY: DESIGN

In *Nutcracker!* the main protagonist, Clara, is desperate for a different life. As an orphan within an institution run by a cruel and uncaring owner, Dr Dross, she dreams of escaping to better things. Research at least two other fictional narratives that have this theme of escapism at their heart. Why do you think this is such a relatable and compelling tale to tale? From absent-minded daydreams whilst at school or work, to big impassioned ambitions about changes we want to make in our own lives, we are constantly moving between reality and fantasy in our mind...something that is represented in Act Two by Sweetieland, the dazzling multi-colour kingdom of confectionery where everything tastes good! Design your own ultimate fantasy land as an alternate destination for Clara to arrive at instead of Sweetieland. Create designs for the set and costumes and give your imagined world a name and a theme.



6. PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

MUSIC: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRETT MORRIS



***Nutcracker!* is accompanied by Tchaikovsky's score which was originally written in 1892. How complex is the score to work with and what are the challenges of working with a score that is as iconic as this one?**

It's actually a very difficult score and even though people know the highlights very well, like the 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' or the 'Waltz of the Flowers' which are probably in the top 10 best-known dance pieces, it's a very, very demanding score to play... Act One is a broad sweep lasting about 47 minutes and then Act Two is quite different to that and quite episodic... From the conductor's point of view Act Two is about knowing what the variations are, knowing what the tempos are that are required by the dancers and propelling the production through to its conclusion. Whereas Act One is more about setting the scene and trying to make the music speak dramatically so that it's absolutely in line with what the choreography is and what the choreographer's intention is.

Matthew has said that he feels that iconic, much-revered scores, such as Tchaikovsky's, are "there to be rethought every so often, and given a new lease of life" – can you explain how that works in practice and tell us a little about the journey you and Matthew go on together, in order to re-think and re-interpret something of this scale?

It depends very much on what the production is and what the piece is and whether it is a new piece or it is a revival. Obviously with a revival, even though we are going to bring new things to it, it is a bit of a known quantity already as we are revisiting something. With a new piece it's a completely different process and will often involve me working quite closely with either the composer or arranger on the piece.

For this production, it is a revival of *Nutcracker!*, but we have a new performing edition of the score for the orchestra so that's involved me having quite a number of conversations with the arranger, Rowland Lee, who has done a beautiful arrangement which we're playing – also proofreading orchestral parts, proofreading the score, conversations with Matthew about his vision for the piece, talking to dancers and getting to know where they might need more support and talking about where they need to know what I need... It's an iterative process of talking about things and trying them out.

Can you give an example of how the music is used in the show to help convey the dramatic intention, storyline and/or emotion to the audience?

It's hard to pick one out because most of Act One is like that, but if I have to choose one example, then a lovely one, would be the moment, after the visit by the governors, where the poor orphans within the orphanage have given their best and then the governors leave the orphanage and it is back to its



most miserable and all their Christmas presents are taken away and they are put to bed and the lights go out. This is the start of the sequence that leads to Clara's dream on which the rest of the emotional journey of the story will take place and there is a short section in the music, that probably lasts about 45 seconds, that is completely magical. It's very transporting and the music is full of very interesting orchestration.

To watch a short film of Brett Morris discussing *Nutcracker!* [CLICK HERE](#)



To listen to Brett Morris being interviewed on *Bourne To Dance*, the New Adventures podcast, [CLICK HERE](#)



ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION

Towards the end of Act Two a large ensemble dance takes place 'upon' the Frozen Lake. This section is inspired by [Sonja Henie](#) – a Norwegian figure-skater who was a three-time Olympic medal-winner in 1928, 1932 and 1936. Consider what devices have been used – both in terms of choreography and design – to give the illusion that the dancers are skating on ice. Now think about an alternative Olympic sport, such as swimming, skateboarding, horse-jumping or cycling – and discuss how you could adapt movements and use choreographic and/or production techniques to give the illusion that you are on water, on wheels or on a horse, or whatever else you decide.

7. CREATIVE MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES

In this section of the resource, you will find practical creative movement exercises and activities that suggest ways to capture some of Matthew Bourne's choreographic style and some methods used in the devising and rehearsal process for *Nutcracker!*

For some of the tasks you may wish to refer to our *Nutcracker!* Sweetieland Spotify playlist to source music for the exercises and activities.

To listen to our playlist [CLICK HERE](#)



For visual examples of these activities and creative tasks [CLICK HERE](#)



TASK 1 – TOYS/GAMES TOP AND TAIL

Purpose: This creative task is inspired by a scene in Act 1 where the governors bring a basket of toys for the orphans. It explores various physical and emotional ideas relating to Victorian games and toys. For example, the joy the orphans feel when playing with a toy they've never seen before. This task helps to develop skills such as coordination and collaboration and is a fantastic way to create unique movement phrases.

Before you begin: Get yourself into pairs. Then identify who is going to be the top and who is going to be the tail.

- The Top will be creating movement for the upper half of the body.
- The Tail will be creating movement for the lower half of the body.

Phase 1:

If you are a Top:

- Choose 4 Victorian games or toys. You can use any of the following examples to help you or do your own research of games from the era and choose your own:
 - Marbles
 - Hula Hoop
 - Yoyo
 - Skipping
 - Jacks
 - Pattacake
 - Hide and Seek
 - Catapult
 - Ball
 - Tennis

Now create 2 movements for each of the 4 games you have chosen (8 movements in total) using only the upper body. This movement phrase should equal 4 bars of 8 counts.

If you are a Tail:

- Create a moving pattern that shifts around the space in any direction, using only the lower body.
- This should include a crouch, a bounce, a march and a jog
- This phrase should equal 4 bars of 8 counts.

Phase 2:

- We now put the tops on the tails! The 'tops' will teach the 'tails' their movement phrase and vice versa, so that each person in the pair now knows a combined sequence of movements (upper and lower body), lasting for 4 bars of 8 counts

Phase 3:

- Now try the phrase to the music. Try to think about the intention of the sequence – about the toys, the game, playing and imagining what it feels like to play with a toy you've never had before. Bring this intention into the sequence

Notes:

1. Keep the movements that are created in phase 1 simple, so that you can easily add the different layers in phase 2
2. To help the 'tail' use only the lower body, try keeping their hands behind their back.
3. Think about the rhythm and musicality of the piece and try to incorporate this into your phrases
4. If you have several sets of pairs working together; try performing your duets altogether at the same time. Just be aware of the space around you, and be vigilant to avoid bumping into one another
5. A further extension would be for different sets of pairs to join together and teach one another their 4X8 counts of movement. These could then be performed in succession to create a longer phrase of movement that could be done in 'unison' (all together at the same time)

TASK 2 – SKATING SOLOS + DUETS

Purpose: This creative task is inspired by a scene in Act 1, 'Snow', where the characters are ice skating on the Frozen Lake. It explores different choreographic techniques, and has multiple phases that can be developed, depending on ability level.

Phase 1: Sign and describe

- Choose 3 different items of clothing that you would wear if you were going out into the snow, or going ice skating
- Create a movement for each item of clothing that you have chosen, that shows how you would put them on. Make sure the movements are big, and try to make it clear to an audience what you are doing – this is called 'sign and describe'
- Add a fourth movement to the phrase – a 'gesture' that indicates how cold it is when you step outside
- Now add different levels (high and low) to your phrase, and changes of direction to face different ways

Phase 2: Using Photographs as stimuli

- Pick 4 photographs of people ice skating. These can be chosen from the selection of pictures you can download [here](#), or you can find photographs from your own independent research
- Try and recreate each of the photos you have chosen with your body, creating 4 different 'freezes' (held positions)
- Add these freezes to the end of the sequence created in phase 1.
- Add musicality to the piece by using 8 counts to show your 'sign and describe', 6 counts to show your 'gesture', and then hold and move into your 4 different freezes in your own time.

How might you perform your phrase? Think about the wonder of snow and how fun it is to be out playing or skating in the cold. Can you show this wonder and joy to the audience...

Phase 3: Development of a solo

Begin to develop your phrase further, by adding different transitions to your ice skating freezes

- Travel gracefully into freeze 1
- Turn into freeze 2, or you can turn whilst in this position
- Fall off balance like you are slipping on the ice, and catch yourself into freeze 3
- Speed-skate around using the space, into freeze 4

Now practice your solo to find a flow. Introduce the music and try to be consistent with the musicality and phrasing of your phrase. Lastly, think about the performance quality of the solo.

Phase 4: Developing into a duet

- You will need to work in pairs, ready to develop your solos into duets
- Keep the beginning of the solos the same, putting on your snow clothes and feeling the cold outside and Skate gracefully around the space,
- Find a way to incorporate contact into your first freezes, thinking about the different body parts you could use for this contact
- Use your turns into the second freeze position, to turn around each other before you hold your position. Try to find a way to incorporate contact into the transition or freeze 2.
- Choose one person in the pair to fall, and the other person to catch or support the person falling. After this, the pairs will make their way into their third frozen position, incorporating contact
- For the speed-skating transition, pairs can either move together or separately into their fourth frozen position, again finding a way to incorporate contact

Notes:

1. When thinking of ways to incorporate contact with your partner, think of different parts of the body that you can use to make it interesting
2. Try to show the intention when doing your phrase – i.e., show the audience how cold it is, the wonder of ice skating for the first time, the fear of slipping etc
3. How do you connect to your duet partner? Think about the use of your focus, where you are looking at each moment and how that can add to the storytelling and performance
4. Practice you duet so that you are confident with the connections, and it feels smooth and flows



TASK 3 – CREATING A SWEETIE CHARACTER

Purpose: This task is based on the characters of Sweetie Land in Act 2, and students will develop their own sweetie character. This task helps to embody and develop characterisation.

Before you begin: Make sure you have some paper to write on, and a pen or pencil for later in the task

Phase 1:

- Close your eyes and imagine that you are walking into a sweet shop. Choose your favourite sweetie. You are going to use this as your character
- Start to think about the way your sweetie looks – consider the sweetie’s size, shape, and texture
- Think about your sweetie’s taste – this will be used as your character’s personality. Is it chewy, sweet, airy, tough, light, or fluffy?
- Think about what you can do physically to show you are that sweetie and create a shape that embodies your character. You might need to make yourself smaller, bigger, taller etc
- Once you’ve got your sweetie’s shape, start to move around as your sweetie. Is your sweetie slow, fast, twirly, strong? Think about how your character interacts with other sweeties. Try to show your character’s personality
- Begin to move around the room as your sweetie in different scenarios. How does your sweetie move when it is late for school or work? Scared? At a party?
- Use role play to pretend that the sweeties are walking down a red carpet at an event and stop to pose for the camera in the middle of the carpet. Is your sweetie confident, shy, excited, scared? Think about what your sweetie’s pose and movements would look like

Phase 2:

- Write down 3 words that describe what your sweetie looks like
- Write down another 3 words that describe what your sweet tastes like, or it’s texture
- Looking at the 6 words you have written down, create a nugget of movement to show each different word. You can put the words in any order you like
- Add one of each ‘choreographic devices’ listed below to your 6 nuggets of movements
 - Travel
 - Levels
 - Change direction
 - Elevation
 - Slow down
 - Speed up
- Find 2 moments within your sequence for your sweetie character to either taste themselves, or something around them

Phase 4:

- Take 2 bars of 8 counts to enter to the music, in character as your sweetie
- Perform your character’s movement sequence, and then exit – staying in character
- If you are working in a group, you can build a scene with all the sweetie characters entering the party, interacting, and exiting

Notes:

1. Remember to show your sweetie’s personality as you perform your sequences
2. Think about how your sweetie interacts with other sweeties in the space

TASK 4 – GETTING READY MIRROR TASK

Purpose: This task is based on the mirror dance in Act 2, where the Marshmallows are helping Princess Sugar get ready for her wedding. This is a group task that helps develop skills in characterisation, collaboration and spatial awareness.

Phase 1:

- From the list below, choose 6 words that you will use as your 'stimulus'
 - Brushing Teeth
 - Putting on deodorant
 - Brushing Hair
 - Washing face
 - Spraying perfume
 - Looking at spots
 - Smoothing/styling hair
 - Putting on mascara
 - Putting on blusher
 - Putting on moisturiser
 - Flossing teeth
 - Checking clothes
 - Putting on tie
 - Zipping up clothes
 - Doing up buttons
 - Putting on earrings
 - Putting on lipstick
 - Putting on necklace/Bracelet
 - Putting on cufflinks
 - Putting in contact lenses
 - Putting in eye drops
 - Looking at watch
- For each of your 6 words, create a gesture that clearly shows your word
- Out of your 6 gestures, pick your 2 favourites. These will be repeated at the end of your sequence of 6 moves – leaving you with a total of 8 movements

Phase 2:

- Set your sequence to a rhythm. Your 8 different gestures should be performed and then held, in order of the following counts (each 'bar' has 8 counts):
 - Bar 1: move on count 1
 - Bar 2: move on counts 1, 5, and 7
 - Bar 3: move on counts 1, 7 and 8
 - Bar 4: move on counts 5

Phase 3:

- Once you have set your sequence to a rhythm, get into a line one behind the other.
- Perform your sequences to the rhythm, pretending that the mirror is at the front of the line. You will have to think about different levels and directions to try and make sure each person can see in the 'mirror' whilst staying in the line

Phase 4:

- To develop the piece further, add some movements between each gesture. The intention of these movements should be to move out of the line and get to the front of the mirror
- Movements you can use are turns, shifts, jumps, contact
- Work together in your group to coordinate these movements. The set rhythm from phase 2 and 3 can be a little looser for this step

Notes:

1. Think about your intentions when performing your movements – in phase 4 the intention is to get to the front of the mirror
2. Also, think about your relationships with other people, are you fighting to get to the front, are they annoying you and in your way, are you working together to get to the front? Consider your focus and where and who you are looking at and how this can add to the storytelling of the dance.

8. ESSAY QUESTIONS

[Marius Petipa](#) and [Lev Ivanov](#) based their original (1892) production of [The Nutcracker](#) on [E.T.A Hoffmann's](#) short story, '[The Nutcracker and the Mouse King](#)'. Choose one or more well-known ballets that are also based on a short story or a fairytale or piece of folklore and decide what you think the opportunities and challenges are of producing a piece of dance-theatre based on a piece of writing. Think about:

- The staging
 - The characters
 - The plot synopsis
 - The production elements (set, costume, lighting)
 - The audience's understanding and interpretation
-

Explain how the theme of 'power and control' is established in *Nutcracker!* and how this impacts different characters within the story and specific moments within the plot. Also explain how the tension created by the struggle for power and control that plays out between some of the key characters is portrayed to the audience. Some things to explore include:

- The relationship between Dr Dross, Mrs Dross and the orphans
 - The relationship between Sugar and Fritz (Dr and Mrs Dross's two children) and the orphans
 - The role that class and wealth plays in creating gulfs – both between the orphans and those people, including the governors, that play a role in their upbringing in Act One; as well as within Sweetieland and the 'Royal Family' (King Sherbet, Queen Candy, Princess Sugar and Prince Bon-Bon)
 - The Humbug Bouncer in Sweetieland and his role as gatekeeper
 - The tension between Clara's real-life and the life she craves
-

Analyse the connection between Tchaikovsky's score and Bourne's choreography in *Nutcracker!* You should provide clear examples from specific sections of the score to exemplify how this connection enhances the choreographic presentation and intention. Consider how the music enhances the storyline and the intention of the characters actions within it. Identify some key moments within which you feel there is the greatest connection between the music and the movement and explain why you have chosen those sections. Also think about how it conveys emotion and atmosphere.

Analyse the use of different movement and dance styles in the choreography of *Nutcracker!* You should provide clear examples from the work to show how the different styles enhance the choreographic presentation and intention; and help convey the story to the audience. Compare and contrast different sections within the piece and identify some key moments in which different dance styles have been used and suggest why you feel these particular styles have been used to form those specific sections of the piece.

Explore the role of artistic license within *Nutcracker!* and identify different ways in which Matthew Bourne uses it to enhance an aspect of the storyline and/or make a key theme of the piece more relevant to a modern-day audience. Look for similarities and differences between the classical version of the same story too, in order to provide comparison and examples.

Among other things your analysis could include:

- The transition and development of characters from Act One into Act Two
- The oscillation between real and imagined worlds, fantasy and reality
- His decision to set a well-known piece in a different era and location

For further development apply this same scrutiny and exploration to other works by Matthew Bourne and New Adventures, such as:

- [Swan Lake](#)
- [The Red Shoes](#)
- [Cinderella](#)
- [Romeo & Juliet](#)
- [The Car Man](#)

9. REFLECTING & REVIEWING



A key skill for all dance students, or indeed anyone with a keen interest in dance, is to be able to deepen their understanding through critical thinking.

Through reflecting and reviewing work that you have seen, you will also develop the ability to be more successful in your own self-reflection too.

The following questions and instructions may be useful starting points for you to begin understanding how much you know about *Nutcracker!* and, where relevant, what you feel about it.

Each response should be backed up by detailed descriptions and where required clear evidence and/or examples.

Remember that when you are reviewing a piece of work it is important to demonstrate not just what you think; but why you have come to that particular conclusion.

THE PLOT/NARRATIVE

- What theatrical devices and conventions were used to help convey the storyline to the audience?
- What devices are used, (visual, aural and choreographic), to help the audience understand that the Act One is set in a Victorian orphanage? Which of these do you find most effective?

THE CHARACTERS

- What differences are there between the 6 main characters, Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!* and those from other traditional versions of this well-known tale? In Matthew's version these are: Clara, Nutcracker, Dr Dross – who becomes King Sherbet in Act Two, Mrs Dross – who becomes Queen Candy in Act Two, Sugar – who becomes Princess Sugar in Act Two, and Fritz – who becomes Prince Bon-Bon in Act Two.
- Now select one of these characters and explore their development throughout the show and how this is evidenced/made clear to the audience.

THE AURAL SETTING (MUSIC & SOUND)

- How does Tchaikovsky's score impact the choreography? Consider how Bourne uses the music to influence, back-up or support the story that is being told and the characters that are being portrayed. As an example, think about the featured dancers in Act Two, and how in classic productions of *The Nutcracker* they would have each performed a traditional national dance; whereas in *Nutcracker!* these have been replaced by the Gobstoppers and the Knickerbocker Glory etc. Evidence the way in which you feel Bourne has been inspired by the musical qualities within each section to influence and inform the different sweetie characters and their personalities.

THE PHYSICAL SETTING (SET, COSTUME & LIGHTING)

- How is the set used to provide different spaces for the action to take place? For example; the use of the beds at the orphanage in Act One and the giant wedding cake in Act Two.
- Explain how the depressive feel of the orphanage is represented at the start of Act One in comparison to the uplifting feel of the Frozen Lake later on in Act One or the excitement and feeling of fun that is offered by the design for Sweetieland, in Act Two.
- Give examples of how the lighting is used to help convey different emotions within the piece.
- Consider how costume design captures the different physical elements of the sweets in Sweetieland and helps us to understand the personalities of each of those characters.

THE CHOREOGRAPHY

- Identify key movement motifs from one or more of the sweets from Act Two – the Allsorts Trio, the Gobstoppers, the Marshmallow Girls and the Knickerbocker Glory. What do these movements convey to us about the personalities of those characters?
- How does Matthew Bourne make use of ensemble work within *Nutcracker!*?
- Focussing on the quartet that takes place between Clara, Nutcracker, Princess Sugar and Prince Bon-Bon in Act Two; how does the choreography tell the story of the complex relationship between the four characters?

THE PERFORMERS

- Outline the different dance and performance styles that you see within the cast. You may wish to identify any specific training you feel they may have had.
- What was your personal response to *Nutcracker!* and why? Consider in what ways it may have resonated with you, what you enjoyed, what you found interesting and how the piece made you feel etc.
- How do you feel *Nutcracker!* compares to other New Adventures' productions you may have seen?
- What do you feel is the strongest theme or message within the storyline of *Nutcracker!*? Explain why you have chosen this and what it conveyed to you.
- Detail 4 scenes or moments within *Nutcracker!* that especially stand out for you and explain why they are particularly memorable.

10. REFERENCES

Reference Sources used by writer Hannah Osmond in the creation of this resource:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyotr_Ilyich_Tchaikovsky

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._T._A._Hoffmann

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Ivanov

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marius_Petipa

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/dec/16/matthew-bourne-nutcracker-review-sadlers-wells-london>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XJRccWoE64>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Nutcracker_and_the_Mouse_King

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonja_Henie

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_national_dances

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebenezer_Scrooge

<https://www.mgcfutures.com/careers/dance-captain/>

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/downstage>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technical_rehearsal

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zyr7fg8/revision/7#:~:text=Set%20means%20the%20scenery%20and,Theatre%20in%20London%20in%202012.>

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/dress-rehearsal>

https://rugrats.fandom.com/wiki/Angelica_Pickles

https://charlieandthechocolatefactoryfilm.fandom.com/wiki/Veruca_Salt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOkyXyVQxk4>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETks4E_8KE

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trompe-l'œil>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer-aided_design

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elevator_pitch

Resource Pack written by [Hannah Osmond](#), with additional content from [New Adventures](#). Contributions from and with thanks to the entire Creative Team on *Nutcracker!*

Original designs by Anthony Ward
Nutcracker! production shots: Johan Persson
Nutcracker! rehearsal shots: Stephen Berkeley-White
Matthew Bourne headshot: Hugo Glendinning
Etta Murfitt headshot: Dan Wooller
Credits for other headshots tbc
Design: [Matt Hodges](#)

2022 © New Adventures
new-adventures.net

NEW/ADVENTURES



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**