

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## The Nutcracker

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

Saint Petersburg Classic Ballet

Sheffield Lyceum

5–9 January 2016

The Saint Petersburg Classic Ballet was formed in 1996 by its Artistic Director, former Prima Ballerina Marina Medvetskaya. The company is currently on an extended tour of the British Isles, which provides audiences with an opportunity to appreciate the distinctive style and remarkable expertise of classical Russian ballet.

*The Nutcracker*, based on a libretto by E T A Hoffman, was first performed in 1882 to music by Tchaikovsky and is traditionally a Christmas piece concerned as it is with a family party, the animation of Christmas toys and a child's Christmas dream.

The current production is dominated by a superb performance by Prima Ballerina Natalya Romanova in the central role of the child Clara and additionally in the popular and familiar Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. Romanova communicates youthful excitement and is effortlessly graceful in the most demanding of dance sequences.

The predominant traditionalism of the staging, choreography and dance style provides an interesting point of comparison with the work of more experimental and innovatory contemporary dance companies seen in this country. The overwhelming emphasis here is on the perfection of technique, which is reflected in the quality and artistry of the principal dancers and mirrored by the corps de ballet. This control is admirable but occasionally suppresses individuality and vitality.

After a slightly lacklustre opening, the ballet springs to life with the animation of the toys and an impressively athletic performance by the Nutcracker itself. Vadim Lolenko is an accomplished Nutcracker Prince, particularly in his second act solo, and Evgeniy Slakov as the Drosselmeier holds the first half together. As the Mouse King, Dmitry Popov looks terrifying, but the invasion of the mice is essentially unthreatening and loses the opportunity for greater dramatic tension.

In forming the ballet company, Medvetskaya apparently acquired "costumes and decorations (set pieces) made by the craftsmen of the legendary Mariinsky Theatre Workshops". Certainly the artwork on the set and the use of suspended painted wing curtains do seem to belong to another era and the overall effect, though interesting historically, is a dull rather than stimulating backdrop to the on-stage Christmas festivities.

There are three shows in the company's current touring repertoire, each of which requires sets and many costume changes. The costumes in this production are mainly traditional tights and tutus, but the brightly coloured costumes for the act 2 celebration dance sequence add a touch of the exotic while providing a strong contrast to the sparkly white tutus of the corps de ballet in the immaculately performed snowflake dance.

There are notable performances from many members of the cast. The Spanish and Russian dances are bursting with energy, Fujise Kana's Eastern Dance is eloquent and charming, the Chinese Dance is good fun and Romanova's Sugar Plum Fairy an inspiration to any would-be future ballet dancer.

This production will be a treat for audiences well versed in classical ballet techniques and familiar with the story, but also accessible to young theatregoers or anyone who enjoys Tchaikovsky's music interpreted through dance.

The production continues on tour until 30 January.

**Reviewer:** [Velda Harris](#)