

NEWS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

For immediate release Tuesday 11 April 2017



The Australian Ballet's *Nutcracker – The Story of Clara*. Photo Justin Ridler

***Nutcracker – The Story of Clara*: An epic contemporary vision of ballet's favourite tale**

A joyful celebration of ballet, a deeply moving life story, and an affectionately humorous depiction of the migrant experience are masterfully interwoven in **Graeme Murphy's *Nutcracker – The Story of Clara***. Created in 1992 for The Australian Ballet by one of the country's most audacious and prolific choreographers, this ballet has become a modern Australian classic. The company celebrates the 25th anniversary of this acclaimed production with seasons at the **Sydney Opera House, Joan Sutherland Theatre** from **2 to 20 May 2017**, and at **Arts Centre Melbourne, State Theatre** from **2 to 10 June**.

Nutcracker – The Story of Clara departs from the whimsical original to tell a story grounded in real-world events and the history of ballet in Australia. In Murphy's radical retelling, Clara is an elderly Russian emigrant and former prima ballerina, dreaming of her earlier days with love and sadness one feverishly hot Australian Christmas Eve in the late 1950s. Her story encompasses romance and loss, worldwide fame, war and revolution, and a journey to Australia which leads to her joining the nation's earliest professional ballet company, sowing the seeds of The Australian Ballet.

In this two-act story ballet, the character of Clara is performed by three different dancers spanning the generations, seamlessly coming together and parting ways over the course of Clara's recollections. Nuanced set and costume designs by **Kristian Fredrikson** evoke the formative places in her life, from her Russian childhood to her retirement in sunburnt Australia. The world of Clara's youth is rich in dreamlike details, with snowflakes whirling about the stage in fluttering white head-dresses, and giant

golden blooms adorning the walls of the Tsar's lavish ballroom.

The much-loved score by **Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** is at the very centre of this production as the catalyst for Clara's nostalgic recollections, and the accompaniment to her fondest memories of performing.

Colin Peasley and Audrey Nicholls are among ten special guest artists joining The Australian Ballet's 2017 season of *Nutcracker – The Story of Clara*. Peasley is a founding member of The Australian Ballet and has been its ballet master, one of its principal artists and a driving force of its Education program. Peasley retired from The Australian Ballet in 2012 after 50 years with the company. Nicholls boasts a dance career spanning more than 60 years, and along with Peasley's, is one of the longest in Australia. She joined The Australian Ballet in 1950 aged 16 and has since graced some of the world's great stages. The Australian Ballet is also delighted to welcome guest artists Franco Leo, Joseph Janusaitis, Christine Howard, Terese Power, Graeme Hudson, Patrick Harding-Irmer, Shane Carroll and Olga Tamara to the 2017 season of *Nutcracker – The Story of Clara*.

Nutcracker – The Story of Clara

During a sweltering Christmas Eve in Melbourne in the late 1950s, the ageing Clara, once a famous Russian ballerina, is filled with nostalgia as Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* emanates from her radio. Clara enjoys an evening of reminiscing and dancing with her Russian friends, then, exhausted, she falls into a dream-filled sleep under the watchful eye of her doctor.

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In her dreams, Clara's story unfolds, from her childhood ballet training at the Imperial Conservatoire in Russia, to an eventual acceptance into the ranks of the Imperial Ballet at the Mariinsky Theatre, where she becomes a famous prima ballerina. She makes a triumphant debut as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker* before the Tsar and Tsarina at an Imperial Ball. Tragedy strikes when in 1917 revolution breaks out, and the young officer with whom she is deeply in love must leave for war. His death shatters her world.

In the years that follow, Clara departs Russia to join Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. She grows as an artist as she tours the world, and in 1940 she arrives in Australia as a glamorous star with the de Basil Ballets Russes. As the Second World War draws to a close, Clara dances her farewell performance with the newly formed Borovansky Ballet before an adoring audience. As her dreams fade into darkness, Clara falls into a deeper, and peaceful, final sleep.

SYDNEY

2 MAY – 20 MAY

Sydney Opera House, Joan Sutherland Theatre

MELBOURNE

2 JUNE – 10 JUNE

Arts Centre Melbourne, State Theatre

Tickets and more information

australianballet.com.au/nutcracker

Choreography Graeme Murphy

Creative Associate Janet Vernon

Concept Graeme Murphy and Kristian Fredrikson

Guest répétiteur Mark Kay

Music Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Costume and set design Kristian Fredrikson

Original lighting design John Drummond Montgomery

Recreated by Francis Croese

With Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra in Sydney

With Orchestra Victoria in Melbourne

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