

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

EDUCATION



TEACHER'S RESOURCE KIT
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Nutcracker – The Story of Clara

Contents

- 05/** Synopsis
- 08/** The Creatives
- 10/** Spotlight on *Nutcracker - The Story of Clara*
with Artistic Director David McAllister
- 11/** The Music
- 12/** Invitation to the Dance: Graeme Murphy
on the origins of his *Nutcracker*
- 15/** Curricular activities



Leanne Stojmenov. Photography Justin Ridler.

Nutcracker - The Story of Clara

Choreography Graeme Murphy
Creative associate Janet Vernon
Concept Graeme Murphy and Kristian Fredrikson
Music Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Set and costume design Kristian Fredrikson
Original lighting design John Drummond Montgomery
recreated by Francis Croese
Film collage Philippe Charluet



Leanne Stojmenov and Kevin Jackson. Photography Justin Ridler

Nutcracker – The Story of Clara



Amelia Soh, Natasha Kusen and artists of the Australian Ballet. Photography Daniel Boud

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

During a sweltering Christmas Eve in Melbourne in the late 1950s, the ageing Clara, once a famous Russian ballerina, struggles home through the scorching heat with her meagre shopping. All she can afford is a few provisions and a tiny Christmas tree, which she places on a table. The music of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* from her radio fills her with nostalgia.

Clara's Russian friends make their annual visit to pay homage to the goddess of their youth. Her young doctor arrives with a reel of archival film showing a young Clara as a ballerina with the Russian Imperial Ballet. Delicious memories fill the room and Clara attempts to dance. Her frail body weakens and the doctor, much concerned, requests the guests leave while he keeps vigil.

During a troubled sleep Clara descends into hallucination. She dreams that she encounters herself as a child and once again is terrified by shadows in the night. Then, as the clock strikes midnight on this final Christmas, she witnesses the death of the man she loved and is caught in the destructive chaos of the Russian Revolution.

Refusing to accept the memory of tragedy, Clara compels her dream self to grow young and strong. She rises up and reunites with her beloved officer. The two lovers reaffirm their eternal passion.

Snow falls from the summer sky and the beloved leads her back into childhood and the long-lost snow lands of Russia, where her mother waits to lead her towards her destiny.



Joseph Chapman and Amy Harris



Amy Harris

Photography Daniel Boud



Amy Harris



Nutcracker – The Story of Clara



Amy Harris. Photography Daniel Boud

ACT II

Clara's childhood finds her striving for perfection at the Imperial Conservatoire. Years of training are rewarded by graduation and acceptance into the ranks of the Imperial Ballet at the Mariinsky Theatre.

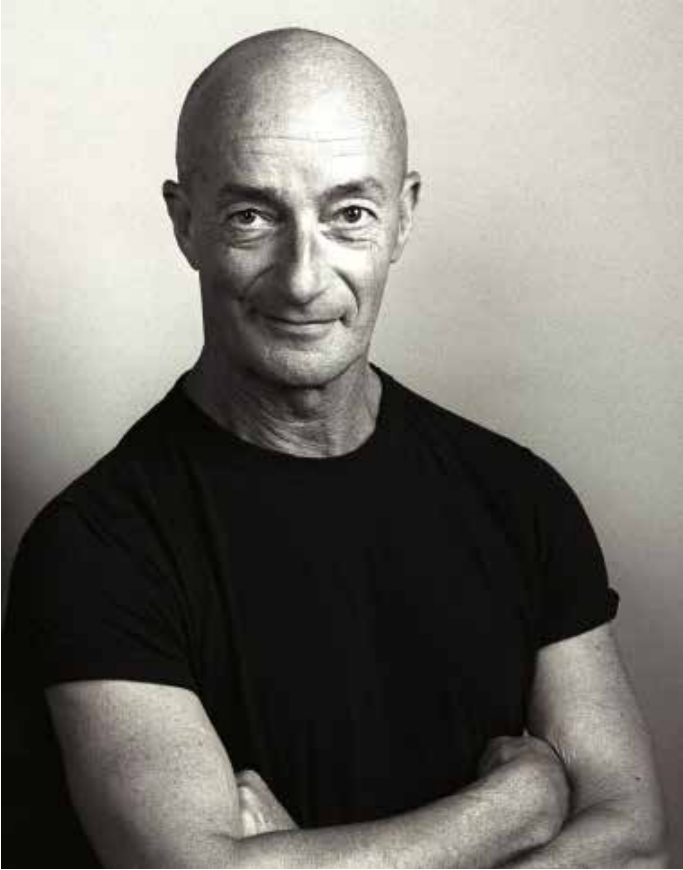
She falls deeply in love with a young officer. They enjoy a picnic excursion with friends in the country. Already famous as a ballerina, Clara is presented to the Tsar and Tsarina at an imperial ball. As prima ballerina, she makes a triumphant debut as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*.

At the height of her joyous existence, the 1917 revolution breaks out and her beloved must leave for war. His death shatters her world. The dance is her only companion and she leaves forever to join Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes.

Years of touring around the globe enrich her understanding and enhance her artistry, till at last in 1940 she arrives in Australia as a glamorous star with Colonel de Basil's Ballets Russes. World war rages again and she is forced to remain in this new land. At war's end she dances her farewell performance with the newly formed Borovansky Ballet.

As an adoring audience applauds, age speedily reclaims her. The hallucinations of a Christmas Eve fade into darkness, but Clara's past and present are complete and her dream is now eternal.

The Creatives



GRAEME MURPHY

Choreographer

Graeme Murphy was born in Melbourne and studied at The Australian Ballet School. He has danced with The Australian Ballet, Sadler's Wells Ballet (London) and Ballets Félix Blaska (France). In 1971, he received an Australia Council Grant to study overseas. He returned to Australia in 1975 as a freelance choreographer. The following year, he was appointed artistic director of Sydney Dance Company (then known as The Dance Company NSW), a position he held until 2007. During his 31-year tenure, he created more than 50 works, including 30 full-length productions.

Graeme is the recipient of an AO (2012) for distinguished service to the performing arts (having received an AM in 1982) and three honorary doctorates: Hon. D. Lit. Tas (1990), Hon. D. Phil. Qld (1992) and Hon. D. Lit. UNSW (1999). He was honoured at the Inaugural Sydney Opera House Honours (1993) and named a National Living Treasure (1999) by the National Trust of Australia. He received a Helpmann Award for Best Choreography, *Body of Work - a Retrospective* (2001); the prestigious James Cassius Award (2002); the Green Room Award for Concept and Realisation, *Swan Lake* (2003) and the Centenary Medal for Services to Society and Dance (2003). He was named Cultural Leader of the Year by the Australian Business Arts Foundation, receiving the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award (2004); was listed among Australia's 50 Most Glamorous Exports at a special celebration hosted by the Australian Government and Austrade (2005); and received the Australian Dance Award for Lifetime Achievement (2006). He received the Award for Contribution to Cultural Exchange from the Ministry of Culture, the People's Republic of China (2008) and the Fred & Adele Astaire Award for Excellence in Choreography in Film for *Mao's Last Dancer* (New York, 2011).

Graeme's directing and choreographic credits include *Metamorphosis*, *Turandot*, *Salome*, *The Trojans* and *Aïda* (Opera Australia); *Ainadamar* (Adelaide Festival); *Beyond Twelve*, *Nutcracker - The Story of Clara*, *Swan Lake*, *Firebird*, *The Silver Rose*, *Romeo & Juliet* and *The Narrative of Nothing* (The Australian Ballet); *Tivoli* (a co-production of Sydney Dance Company and The Australian Ballet); *VAST* (The Australian Bicentennial Authority); *Hua Mulan* (a Sydney Dance Company and Shanghai Song and Dance Ensemble co-production); *Die Silberne Rose* (Bayerisches Staatsballett, Munich); *Giselle* (Universal Ballet, Seoul); *Water* (Shanghai Ballet); *Forty Miles - A River of Dreams* and *The Time Together* (Tasdance); *The Frock* (MADE); *Embodied* (Mikhail Baryshnikov) and The Torvill and Dean World Tour Company. He also choreographed *Death in Venice* (Canadian Opera Company); *Samson et Dalila* (The Metropolitan Opera, New York); the film *Mao's Last Dancer* and the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Love Never Dies*.

The Creatives



JANET VERNON
Creative Associate

Adelaide-born Janet Vernon studied at The Australian Ballet School and has danced with The Australian Ballet, Ballets Félix Blaska (France) and Sydney Dance Company. In 1976 she was appointed, along with Graeme Murphy, to the artistic helm of Sydney Dance Company, where they remained for 31 years. Graeme has created numerous roles on Janet including *Shéhérazade*, *Daphnis and Chloé* (Lykanion), *Some Rooms* (The Bathroom), *After Venice*, *Nearly Beloved*, *King Roger* (Queen Roxanna), *Berlin*, *The Protecting Veil*, *Salome* (Herodias) and *The Trojans* (Andromaque), a collaboration with Opera Australia.

Creative associate credits include *Swan Lake*, *Nutcracker - The Story of Clara*, *Firebird*, *The Silver Rose*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Narrative of Nothing* (The Australian Ballet); *Tivoli* (A Sydney Dance company and The Australian Ballet co-production); *Hua Mulan* (a Sydney Dance Company and Shanghai Song & Dance Ensemble co-production); *Die Silberne Rose* (Bayerisches Staatsballet, Munich); *Giselle* (Universal Ballet, Seoul); *Water* (Shanghai Ballet); *Forty Miles - A River of Dreams* and *The Time Together* (Tasdance); *The Frock* (MADE); *Ainadamar* (Adelaide Festival); *Aïda* (Opera Australia); the film *Mao's Last Dancer* and the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Love Never Dies*.

Janet's awards include an AM for Services to Dance (1989); Sydney Opera House Honours (1993); a Green Room Award for Concept and Realisation, *Swan Lake* (2003); Centenary Medal for Services to Society and Dance (2003); Lifetime Achievement, Australian Dance Awards (2006); Green Room Award, Outstanding Contribution to Dance (2006) and the Fred & Adele Astaire Award for Excellence in Choreography in Film for *Mao's Last Dancer* (New York, 2011). Dance Australia named her 'One of Australia's Five Best Female Dancers Ever'.

KRISTIAN FREDRIKSON
Set and costume design

A former graphic artist and newspaper journalist, Kristian Fredrikson studied design in Wellington and won numerous awards for his work. Kristian left New Zealand in the early 1960s and became one of Australia's most experienced and sought-after designers.

Upon his arrival in Australia, Kristian was resident designer for the Melbourne Theatre Company for eight years. He would go on to design a large number of productions for a variety of Australian and New Zealand opera, theatre, and ballet companies including The Australian Ballet (*Cinderella*, *Coppélia*, and *Nutcracker - The Story of Clara*), Opera Australia, Royal New Zealand Ballet, Sydney Dance Company and Sydney Theatre Company, as well as State Opera of South Australia and West Australian Opera. He was one of a specialised team of designers working on the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games opening ceremony.

Kristian created the costume designs and scenario with Graeme Murphy for The Australian Ballet/ Sydney Dance Company co-production *Tivoli* and in 2002 he designed and co-conceived Graeme Murphy's *Swan Lake* for The Australian Ballet, which earned him a 2003 Green Room Award for Concept and Realisation, and a 2003 Helpmann Award for Best Scenic Design. Kristian was a recipient of four Erik Design Awards and Green Room Awards, as well as an AFI award. In 1999 he received the prestigious Australian Dance Award for Services to Dance.

Kristian Fredrikson's brilliant career spanned over four decades, including a 42-year association with The Australian Ballet. In 2005, Kristian Fredrikson passed away. Those who worked with him closely remember him as a passionate designer with an incredible eye for detail and colour, a voracious researcher and a lover of history and myth.

Spotlight on Nutcracker – The Story of Clara

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTIC DIRECTOR DAVID McALLISTER

What were the artistic or technical challenges faced by the artists who produced *Nutcracker – The Story of Clara*?

This ballet spans the period from the 1890s to the 1950s, and covers some of the most tumultuous events in the world at that time. The main character of Clara is played by three dancers, who portray Clara the Child, Clara the Ballerina and Clara the Elder. When you are casting these dancers, there needs to be a link between them both visually and physically to ensure the storytelling is seamless. All of the dancers need to have the stage presence and artistry to tell the story of their shared life.

Nutcracker – The Story of Clara is a ballet filled with great ensemble dancing for the whole cast and some very moving and physically demanding pas de deux for the three leading dancers: Clara the Ballerina, the Beloved Officer and the *Nutcracker* Prince. As in all Graeme Murphy's ballets, the partnering is spectacular and there are a lot of complicated and demanding lifts, requiring great strength and daring from both the women and men.

How does this production differ from other versions of *The Nutcracker* that the company has done?

It's very different from traditional versions of *The Nutcracker*. It was created for our 30th anniversary in 1992 (which was also the 100th anniversary of the original production), and it draws inspiration from the Imperial Ballet of St Petersburg, the rise of the Ballets Russes, and Ballet Russes tours to Australia in the late 1930s. Dancers from these companies stayed in Australia and nurtured a great love for ballet, opening schools and founding companies laid the ground for the establishment of The Australian Ballet.

Murphy's *Nutcracker* has themes that anyone can relate to – growing older, travelling, looking back on your life. How do you think his version uses these themes to appeal to or relate to a youth audience?

As young people, we sometimes don't really understand the ageing process or take into consideration the breadth of experience and knowledge that older people have gained through their lives. This production follows Clara's long and interesting life. We see her as a young girl aspiring to be a dancer, as a ballerina at the peak of her artistic life and then as an older woman looking back and confronting her future. Seeing the three stages of Clara's life so clearly portrayed gives us a greater understanding of the ageing process.

Is the style of the ballet vocabulary more contemporary or is it a mix of contemporary and classical?

While the production is based in classical ballet vocabulary, Murphy also dips into more contemporary partnering. There's a lot of floor work, as well as off-balance and counterbalanced moves. The corps de ballet (group) dances have quite a bit more pas de deux in them than in the more traditional ballets,



although there are sections like the beginning of Act II, set in the Imperial Conservatoire, which use very traditional ballet choreography.

How do you think choreographers like Murphy are evolving the ballet genre?

Choreographers like Graeme Murphy, Matthew Bourne and Christopher Wheeldon are reimagining the 19th-century classics to give these classic stories more relevance to 21st-century audiences. While there are purists who see this as a step too far, I think these works are a valuable way of introducing the classical repertoire to new audiences, and exposing them to an art form that they may not have previously been interested in.

Who is your favourite character in the ballet and how does their costume design denote who they are?

When I was a principal artist with The Australian Ballet, I loved dancing the Prince who partners Clara in the Grand Pas de deux in Act II of the ballet. He has a very opulent costume that always reminded me of the famous portraits of Vaslav Nijinsky. You can see by the lavish costume that he has one of the leading roles, and the shape and design of the costume is very much of that late 19th century, in a period when the male dancers did less dancing and wore more structured and ornate costumes.

The Music

MUSIC DIRECTOR & CHIEF CONDUCTOR NICOLETTE FRAILLON TALKS TO GRAEME MURPHY ABOUT FINDING THE SHAPE OF HIS NUTCRACKER IN TCHAIKOVSKY'S SCORE

Nicolette: You've tackled two of the big Tchaikovsky ballets so far. Is there a particular affinity for Tchaikovsky?

Graeme: I really just lucked out. I would have liked to have done the trifecta and added *The Sleeping Beauty* to the mix but doing two is just a joy. From a point of view of music, it's like the dream come true – those two works, for me, spell out dance; spell out movement.

***Nutcracker*, as we know, was written to a very specific brief. So how do you then approach something that – brilliant though it is – was quite a proscription work from a music point of view?**

It's strange, because with *Swan Lake* I thought the story was very much something that was written into the score, likewise with *Nutcracker*. But *Nutcracker* is sort of a no-story. There isn't a real development of character. It's quite abstract; almost like the journey through adolescence, which is the Hoffmann concept. So I really didn't feel daunted too much by *Nutcracker* because it's thin. I know it makes sense in terms of how it was conceived, but to me it makes no sense in terms of story.

It's true that Tchaikovsky was heading towards abstract ballet and the study of the psychological where a story wasn't important. But there are the really strong associations of things like the Sugar Plum Fairy; those fairytale elements – was it easy to let all of that go, or do you think about the public who expect a certain kind of *Nutcracker*?

It's always terrifying, and *Nutcracker* more than any other work because there's a whole audience who are wedded to a type of *Nutcracker*, which is children, escapism, a candy-cane world, that incredible ethnic journey. I did get a bit of hate mail out of *Nutcracker*.

Then you've done your job well.

It was inevitable. But then again, as with *Swan Lake*, I really tried to retain some of the magic that it was meant to conjure. It was harder with *Nutcracker* because I had a really strong concept of where I wanted to take it.

Did that come first?

I think what came first was my real desire to make it relevant to Australians. We've lived in the world of postcards with Christmas trees and lots of snow; Santa all rugged up. The minute I thought *Nutcracker* should be Christmas in Australia, something started happening. I started remembering some early Christmases in my childhood in Melbourne, and how steamy it was.

When I look at your works and think about them as a conductor, it's as if there are three different elements. There are the moments when there are the bars or the steps to the rhythmic patterns, or what I

would call a literal translation of the music. There is the narrative where it seems to me that you have got right inside of the music, in which it's about emotional as well as dramatic development. And there are the bits in between which are more of an abstract, conceptual exploration. Is that reasonable?

I think that's really spot on. Above all, I belong to the old school where the music is the floor on which we dance. Understanding the music is the first crucial step. I often say to people that when I listen to music I actually see movement. And I don't mean specifically. It's an abstraction of physical movement that I see. I go to a concert, and I see the concert, I don't hear it.

Are you then conscious – particularly when you're constructing a big work – of where you're using different elements to help create the dramatic flow of the story, or is it just something that comes naturally?

That's the million-dollar question, really. You have a concept. It's like how life is not a series of small events – everything gets mixed up and recreated. Past things have to make their echo into the future. When you're doing a full-length work, you have to remember the audience's span of concentration. If you include a motif, à la *Nutcracker*, you have to make sure that you either hit the audience immediately, or it's subconsciously snuck into their brain, so when they see it three times before the end of the ballet they are actually responding to that motif. The architecture of choreography is so important. Steps are not so important.

I'm always attempting not to cliché myself, although audiences actually love a cliché. They like a series of movement followed by an arabesque that relates back into the movement. It's a bit like a musician using a nice simple chord that always follows on.

It's that first act that often leaves me dissatisfied in the sugar-sweet versions. The stories are now legendary of Tchaikovsky having nightmares about what other people just see as a children's story. He actually really understood it – it is a psychological exploration of our darker side.

The darkest underlying threat is of course death in my production. Death is present. And I think an audience have to be a little patient with my version. You have to get that connotation of loyalty to Clara from her colleagues, her former dancing friends; that sense of Russian camaraderie. You get explosions of great beauty – that pas de deux – but also the strangeness of midnight, the fear of death, and the clock striking. For me it was all there – once the concept was firmly in my mind I found the answers firmly in the music. The only thing that really terrified me were the ethnic dances, because of their kitschness. But they are still

beautifully written, and making them work in context of Clara's voyage to Australia was the best solution possible.

Did *Nutcracker* take many months to create?

No, it was actually quite extraordinary. The period of choreography was three and a half weeks of incredibly intense work. I had really good slabs of all-day rehearsal and I remember one weekend I thought, "I have to get out, I have to go to back to Sydney". I sat on the aeroplane, ordered a scotch, drank two sips and got my first migraine. I must have let go of all that energy; the concentration of trying to do a work in such a short time, with the émigrés, with the kids, with the big pas de deux – all of that.

I didn't come into any rehearsals with a step. I never do. If you do that, you exclude the dancer from the process of collaboration. It's something about you, the dancer, the music in the room, that makes the chemistry and then you're on a roll, or you're not.

On that note, what kind of a role do the music staff – whether it's a pianist or the conductor – play for you? When you're recreating a work, is it hard working with different pianists and different conductors than you did originally?

It's really hard. You create something that is sometimes on the edge of impossible if it's one millisecond faster. Sometimes you're just dealing with the human ability to pass through that movement in that time. I have re-choreographed because I've originally choreographed to a version of the score that a conductor doesn't like.

This brings it back to you, Nicolette. You've probably had to play works in tempi that you totally disapprove of. Sometimes they're the great classics and sometimes you get a ballerina that says, [adopts Russian accent] "Darling, I must hold this phrase, I can balance here". So you're sitting there hanging in, waiting for them to come off pointe, lose their balance and move on.

Invitation to the Dance

TO MAKE A NEW PRODUCTION OF THE NUTCRACKER FOR THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET, GRAEME MURPHY HAD TO FIND REAL-LIFE EMOTION IN A SPUN-SUGAR FAIRYTALE. BY JANE ALBERT



The year was 1992 and Graeme Murphy had hatched a clever plan. He had an idea for a stunning overhaul of *The Nutcracker*, but that idea relied on convincing one of the great names in Australian dance to come out of retirement after a hiatus of 40 years. The plan involved pink champagne, smoked salmon and – as it turned out – one very convincing storyteller: Murphy.

An invitation duly went out to Dame Margaret Scott, the founding artistic director of The Australian Ballet School and Murphy's own former teacher and mentor. She was asked to brunch at the coastal apartment Murphy shares with his partner and creative associate, Janet Vernon. Dame Margaret and her husband Professor Derek 'Dick' Denton accepted, albeit a little sceptically, as Murphy had already hinted he wanted to discuss a role for her in his new production for The Australian Ballet.

"I'd had a fairly 'Oh, really, Graeme' response from her, because she saw it as simply being one of the old aunts in a traditional production," Murphy says today. What Dame Margaret couldn't have known was that Murphy was planning a radically new interpretation of the Christmas classic, one that focused on Clara, the little girl at the centre of this famous tale. Not only

that, but this Australian-based story would be told through the eyes of an ageing ballerina looking back at her life, with all the joy and painful nostalgia that evokes.

"We invited her and Dick up here and we had smoked salmon and I cracked a bottle of beautiful pink French champagne and moved the tables in place so she was trapped! Then I told them the story, like they were children. They listened with great intensity. And at the end of it she said, 'OK, I'll do it'."

Securing Dame Margaret was a major achievement, but it was by no means the only hurdle the new production faced. The first challenge for Murphy had been how to re-tell the traditional story. And why do it in the first place? In fact, when the then Artistic Director Maina Gielgud first approached Murphy about staging *The Nutcracker* for The Australian Ballet his inclination was to politely decline.

"I think Maina thought I would keep the original and I was almost going to say no, as the story was so flimsy. I'm always one to look for a meaningful story, and it would have been very hard for me to take the original story and concept when the music

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for me was screaming something else. I also needed to find something that didn't throw out the baby with the bathwater, because *Nutcracker* above all classical ballets is the one with the most expectation around it. So I had to keep a remnant, and wrap it around a story that at least made some sense."

Gielgud had long been supportive of Murphy, who was then the artistic director of Sydney Dance Company; she had staged a co-production between The Australian Ballet and Sydney Dance Company at London's Royal Opera House as part of Australia's Bicentenary celebrations in 1988. But this would be Murphy's first full-length work for The Australian Ballet. When he outlined his ideas for an Australian adaptation of this European classic, Gielgud listened carefully before giving him the green light.

But how to adapt this story, rich with Christmas snow and sugarplums, for an Australian audience more accustomed to sweltering summers and beachside celebrations? "You were thinking about Russian ballet and how so many Russian companies had toured to Australia, then the dancers were trapped here during the war, and they formed so much of what became our dance scene today. Then you got thinking: Clara!" Vernon reminds Murphy. (She oversaw Sydney Dance Company's European tour so Murphy could create his new work.) "It was a great departure point," says Murphy. "Suddenly it all made sense, because of the Russian influence on dance in Australia."

"When you take something that's inherently fanciful and weave some truths into it, that for me works..."

- Murphy

Far from being the simple tale of a young girl who falls asleep under a Christmas tree and has a fanciful dream of soldiers and rats and dancing sweets, Murphy's story would centre on a young ballerina forced to flee to Paris after her soldier lover is killed in the Russian Revolution. She would join Sergei Diaghilev's famed Ballets Russes and travel the world, before touring to Australia, where she would ultimately remain. One of a close-knit group of ageing Russian émigrés, she would forever cherish and be haunted by her memories of Russia, her lover, and her enduring love of dance. It was the story of Clara.

"When you take something that's inherently fanciful and weave some truths into it, that for me works," says Murphy. "And if you can find a context dancers relate to they will invest so much more."



Today, Murphy is regarded as one of Australia's most talented interpreters of the ballet classics, a choreographer who balances a respectful acknowledgment for tradition while keenly drawing out a contemporary relevance and meaning. His productions of *Swan Lake* and *Firebird* (The Australian Ballet) and *Giselle* (Universal Ballet Company of South Korea) are testament to his ability.

Back then, however, he was untested, and the process was challenging. "It was hard. It was intense," Murphy says of the astonishingly quick three-week choreographic window he gave himself, before flying to France to join his own dancers. "There were so many aspects to it: the theatrical aspect, the children's dialogue, trying to make the older dancers more interesting and meaningful in an opening section which usually isn't very interesting, just a bit of a kiddies' romp."

But Murphy had a trump card. He is the first to acknowledge that he couldn't have done it without the extraordinary talents and input of his designer and co-conceiver, the late Kristian Fredrikson. A theatre reviewer turned set and costume designer, Fredrikson was Murphy's regular collaborator at Sydney Dance Company, a man with prodigious talent whose partnership with Murphy would prove seminal.

"When you collaborate it's like ping pong, you throw ideas back and forwards," says Murphy. "And the ball goes everywhere, it's so fabulous," adds Vernon. "Kristian was a fierce opponent, he'd bounce things back," continues Murphy. "And he was so knowledgeable, he had that literary ability, he could take the abstract poetry of dance and turn it into poetic words. And his designs were exquisitely evocative."

Fredrikson revelled in the design possibilities their *Nutcracker* opened up, moving as it did from Russia and 1920s Paris to post-war Australia. "Kristian and I got very passionate about this one, very excited. And he loved putting in those turn-of-the-century costumes, we went straight back to the Russian Imperial

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Amelia Soh, Leanne Stojmenov, Ai-Gul Gaisina and Kevin Jackson. Photography Daniel Boud

Ballet and of course the fabulous 20s for the touring costumes. He was in fashion heaven. It covers 70 years: Clara's life," Murphy says.

If Murphy found the choreographic and technical process challenging, the same can certainly be said for the physical and artistic demands he placed on his dancers. Company members today speak in reverential, near-fearful tones of the 'Murphy choreography', which requires a whole new level of fitness and artistry.

Like the company dancers, Dame Margaret did not escape with mere mime. "She was so nervous," recalls Murphy. "I don't think she quite understood she'd be in every act and just how physical the role was going to be. She ended up doing much more than I had choreographed, because she wanted more. She is now, as she was then and always will be, a dancer. She's always welcome in my rehearsal room, because she brings gravitas just by being there."

Dame Margaret shared the role of Clara the Elder with another cherished luminary of Australian ballet, the late Valrene Tweedie. Scott would return to the show eight years later, before handing

over the role to others who would make their own indelible mark: Marilyn Jones and Ai-Gul Gaisina.

Nutcracker - The Story of Clara was ultimately a mutual gift. Murphy relates Dame Margaret's reaction in 1992, following opening night. "She said, 'When you were 14 I invited you into the dance. And when you were 40 you invited me back to the dance.' The magic of a great teacher is about teaching people to be curious. That show bonded us forever."

In reviewing the 2009 production, dance critic Michelle Potter referred to *Nutcracker - The Story of Clara* as "one of the great treasures of The Australian Ballet's repertoire" and "the closest thing we have in Australia to a dance masterpiece." For Murphy it was the ultimate satisfaction. "It felt like something had been achieved," he says. "There was an avalanche of journalistic approval. They said, 'This is Australian ballet'. There was something resonant about that work that made people feel we'd come of age."

Jane Albert is an author and freelance journalist specialising in the arts

Curricular Activities

RESPONDING

Nutcracker - The Story of Clara spans the period between the 1890s and the 1950s and covers some of the most tumultuous events in world history. Research the historical events that may have had an impact on Clara's life.

Create a timeline of events from 1892 to 1950 and add key notes to describe what happened. You might like to focus on a specific topic such as:

- Fashion
- Architecture
- Industry
- Society
- Country

In these tasks you are becoming a creative who is at the beginning of planning their input to the overall ballet.

MAKING

Taking your detailed event notes, choose one event to focus on.

As the choreographer, you are working with the other creatives in the team to tell the story of the ballet through movement.

Choose an event from your timeline that you wish to illustrate in movement.

Decide how you might tell this story. In ballet we use mime and the repetition and development of key movements called motifs. Motifs act like clues to the story.

PLAN OUT

- The storyline
- The number of dancers you need to tell the story
- Where they are on stage
- What they are doing and how they are making relationships to each other or the set, or, if it's a solo, how it is telling the story
- Develop a section of mime and four key motif movements that complement your story

DESIGNER

A designer begins planning through researching the styles and fashions of the period. They follow up with detailed sketches that guide the wardrobe specialists, who then work out how to make the costumes.

Take the research you have done and choose a character. Design a costume for your character with all of the elements you have discovered through your research. It may include shoes, wigs, socks or tights, as well as key garments.

You may keep your notes, fabric samples, and sketches in a small notebook like a designer - this is called a costume bible. Anyone should be able to pick this up and be able to see how this costume and character might look.

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