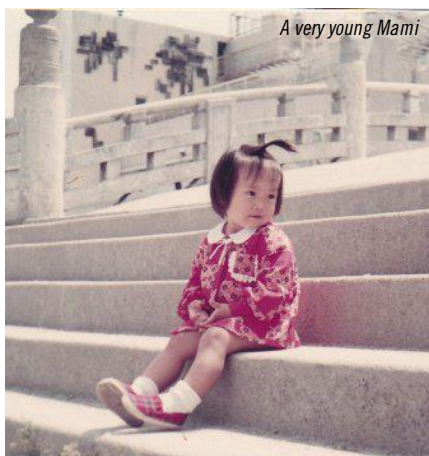


DANCER OF THE WEEK – Mami Tomotani *Fri 19 August*

Matthew Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty* is now in Shanghai, China at the Culture Square until 28 August. Nick Kyprianou, our Audience Engagement Coordinator spoke to Mami this week who joined the *Sleeping Beauty* cast especially for the Asia Tour, reprising the role of Miss Maddox, which she helped to create in the 2012/13 tour.

Mami has been with the Company since 1999 and has performed many different roles in most of the Company's productions.



A very young Mami

When did you start taking dance classes?

At the end of year in

Japan we all watch NHK's Kōhaku Uta Gassen song contest, which is an annual contest between popular singers on New Year's Eve. At the age of 3 I was dancing to the music in front of the TV for 3 solid hours, so my mother decided to take me to a local ballet studio in Fukuoka. This is where my story began! I don't remember much from these early classes but my teacher, Ms. Mayumi Minokami, told me that sometimes she used to find me sleeping whilst standing.

Where did your formal training take place?

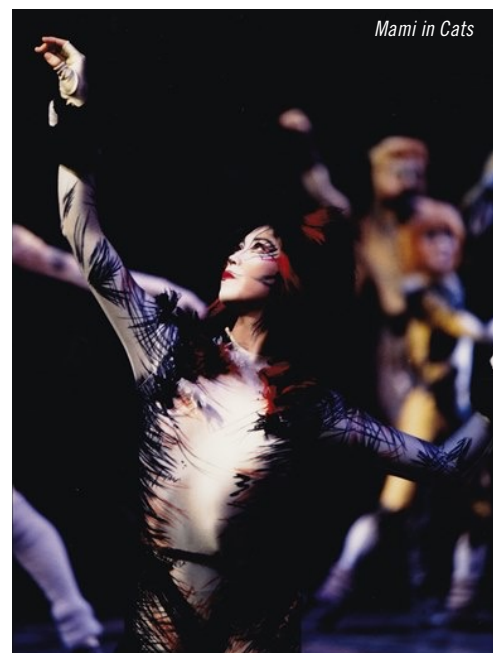
In Japan, we didn't have a formal training school at that time so I learnt Modern dance at Kuroda Ballet School. At 8 years old I received an award for ballet at the Tokyo Ballet Contest. I was over the moon! I then went on to learn Ballet at Kawazoe Ballet Academy in Fukuoka and then passed an audition to join the Shiki Musical Theatre Company when I was just 15 years old, which was very unusual because normally they only take performers from 18 years.

My first company class was with *West Side Story*, which was incredible and from that moment on I made up my mind to join the Shiki Musical Theatre programme for a year. After that I joined the Company while completing a 4-year correspondence course, to completed my high school studies, I remember studying in the changing room while performing in such shows as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats* and *West Side Story*.

What drew you to the Company?

I didn't know about Matthews Bourne's Company at all when I was in London. I was taking open classes at The Place and a woman who was taking a class said to me, "There is a private audition. You should take it. Go upstairs and find Etta Murfitt and tell her you would like to take the audition." I took her advice and before I knew it I was in the audition! There were about 8/10 male dancers and 4 female dancers, including me. We did the all-male section from *Swan Lake* but I didn't know the movement was for men because I'd never seen any of Matt's work!

I called my mother that evening and she was so excited (more so than me), as she'd seen his *Swan Lake* on the TV in Japan.



Mami in Cats

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She explained that only the male dancers dance the Swan movement and their faces are all white, it's modern dance, with a Ballet score and no Pointe shoes in sight! It's a little like a musical with no vocals but full of fun, wit, sexiness and beautiful dancing... So I was imagining a mix of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo and Sankai Juku (a Japanese Butoh dance company that paint their bodies and faces all white).

Anyway they called me back for another audition and I didn't understand English at all then so I had to read Etta and Scott Ambler's eyes, face, body and energy! I remember Matt giving some notes and all I could pick out was "elegant" and "Grace Kelly". The second note was somewhat different and I couldn't understand it but everybody in the studio was laughing. I thought perhaps this was a comedic phrase of movement that we were doing but looking around the room this was not the case, as everyone was dancing very seriously and with lots of dynamic! I changed my tactics and it worked, joining the company in 1999! It was for the LA tour of *Cinderella* but unfortunately my Visa wasn't ready in time so I had to wait a little longer before I joined the cast of *Swan Lake*.

Do you have any hobbies/interests outside of dance?

I really enjoy cooking Italian, Indian Curry (whilst dressed in Sari and bindi) and of course Japanese food. I love drinking beer or a glass of good wine and traveling. I enjoy going to the movies and watching documentaries and sports. Recently I've found myself liking a survival programme or two!

What's it like being on tour and in a different place every week?

It's very interesting to see how each audience reacts to the show in different parts of the UK and the world. I always try to watch the show once a week during my show off as I enjoy the atmosphere and soaking up the architecture of the theatre, I also love finding good restaurants and spa's which I can relax in! I have been touring since I was 16 years old and have been lucky enough to see most of the world - it's a perk of the job and really like touring internationally. Italy is definitely a favourite of mine!

The Company book our hotels during our international tours, unlike in the UK when we have to find our own digs which can be stressful! You have to get in quick to get the best places (some people book 6 months ahead... crazy).

I am living in New York with my husband now so it is hard to do lengthy tours. I am lucky because during the last few years some of the older members of the company now have children so we are able to share the tour schedule.

Do you have a favourite venue to perform at?

I love the Wales Millennium Center in Cardiff, yes where Doctor Who is filmed! Sadler's Wells theatre in London is where I spent most of my UK life so I have many wonderful memories there too, and not forgetting the Sydney Opera House, which is fantastic! Oh, and of course any theatre in Japan – not that I'm biased...

In many of Matthew Bourne's shows the dancers have to learn more than one role, performing several tracks in one show and *Sleeping Beauty* is no exception. How do you remember more than one role?

Well, this isn't a problem at the moment as I only do one role in *Sleeping Beauty*. However, this is rare as usually we all have to learn 2 or even 3 roles for each show as you can see from the rest of my story! Personally I find that the music always tells me what to do and say next. All we have to do is really listen to the music and the story is there.

Do you have a favourite costume you've worn during your time with New Adventures so far?

I loved dancing in my Pajama's as a Cupid in *Nutcracker!*, they were so comfy. Peg Bogg's blue and white opening dress, in *Edward Scissorhands*, was also beautiful! I loved the 1950's style and it was so lady like. Although Miss Maddox's costume (*Sleeping Beauty*) is corseted and rather tight it really helps me get in to character and step back to that time.

Lez Brotherston always designs us such gorgeous costumes and sets which enhance our characters. We are very lucky!

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What's your favourite role that you have performed as so far, in the Company, and is there another New Adventures production that you would love to take part in?

This question for me is like a "Which member of my family is your favorite?" because I have a special place in my heart for the all of the roles that I have played!

So my answer is long! Here we go...

Performing as Monica in *The Car Man* was a fantastic experience, I just loved playing her and all of her movement. Delores/Shirley - I did just 1 performance but I enjoyed playing Shirley's dark part and my partner was Big D (Dan Wright), he is so tall so my legs didn't touch the floor while dancing with him!

I played Clara when I was 38/39 years old in *Nutcracker!* and I really enjoyed telling her story. I thank my parents because my body and face were still young enough to be able to do this (good genes!) At the same time, I played Mrs. Dross and it was great to perform with Scott.

I also performed Cupid, Liquorice Lady and Marshmallow in *Nutcracker!* I was very lucky to play so many different characters. The only one I haven't done is Sugar.

In *Edward Scissorhands* I enjoyed playing Peg which I learnt from the Company's legend that is Etta Murfitt. Gloria Grubb was fun too - The Grubb parents had to wear fat suits and were labeled "Trailer Trash", a phrase that I'd never heard. Darlene Upton was also super cool to play and very sexy in total contrast to Gloria!

Madge from *Highland Fling* was an amazing experience too as I had such a good storyline from beginning to end. Morag was funny to play too as she was so gawky and ditsy. *Highland Fling* was one of my favorite times and we were like a family! I hold some very special memories with that particular show!

In *Swan Lake* I danced as the Spanish, Romanian and Italian Princesses. Of course this was my first experience of a Matthew Bourne show and it opened my eyes to his vision of telling a story through dance and to Tchaikovsky's score. And finally to *Sleeping Beauty* - Miss Maddox is a challenging role to play as it's full of old fashioned English etiquette!

It is rather difficult to say which role I would like to do in the future as I have been lucky to play so many already! However, I would love to create a new piece of work alongside other older members of the company. It would be fun to put all that experience in one big pot!



Mami as Cupid in Nutcracker!

You are able to follow Mami on Twitter (@mamimotani) for a further insight into her world!