

NEW/ADVENTURES RE;BOURNE



SPOTLIGHT – Seren Williams, Pamela & Beryl in The Red Shoes

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Tell us a bit about your role in Matthew Bourne's production of The Red Shoes:

I have played three different roles in *The Red Shoes*, each of which are very different as characters. I've played Beryl, Pamela and cover Svetlana who are all dancers in the Ballet Lermontov. Beryl is one of the more dedicated dancers in the company; she is someone whose life revolves around dance. Pamela however, is the polar opposite, she has other priorities, like catching the attention of the men in the company or smoking a cigarette during rehearsals. Lastly, Svetlana can

only be described as a worried one. She gets nervous interacting with other people in the company and often finds herself in difficult situations, such as getting the steps wrong during Les Sylphides or accidentally kicking the principal dancer, Ivan, during a grand battement exercise.

What is your favourite moment in The Red Shoes for your character?

My favourite moment for all my characters is probably in the Les Sylphides rehearsal scene. This is the prime opportunity for the girls' characters to truly unveil and I've found that something new develops every time we perform it. Pamela ends up flirting with the set designer, Ratov, Beryl becomes envious of Vicky's talent and Svetlana spends half the time worrying about whether she's got lipstick on her teeth!

What has inspired how you created and play your character?

Before the rehearsal process, we carried out character research based on the real people that our characters are inspired by, ballerinas of the 1940s - in my case, Dame Beryl Grey, Pamela May and Svetlana Beriosova. From this research, we found anecdotal information regarding the dancer's individual personalities and created character profiles. It should probably be made clear that our interpretations are not identical to what the real-life dancers that we researched, were like. However, we have chosen certain personality traits to heighten and play with. For example, in our research, we discovered Pamela May was always seen in class wearing red nail varnish, red lipstick, with a cigarette in hand. She even played strip poker with the men in the company! We decided to play on this and have developed this to create the role of Pamela that we use in the show - a strong, confident, out-going, opinionated and flirtatious woman. We tried to make each dancer of the Ballet Lermontov individual and unique.

As this is your first New Adventures show, were you taken aback at all by how the company creates a new production? What has been a highlight with the company so far?

I think what I was most taken aback by was the enormity of the entire production. The set design, music and choreography are just incredible! Having just graduated from school, I haven't performed in a production of this calibre so the entire creative process was a new experience for me. What I loved about the creative process was how involved we were as dancers. We were encouraged to contribute ideas towards both choreography and characterisation.

I was also amazed at how the company works with a new musical score. Matthew creates dancer score sheets to translate the music into dancer's counts and illustrate what events occur on which count. However, with a score as complex as Bernard Herrmann's, the music is not set to dancer's traditional counts of 8. For example, the Covent Garden scene is a random series of counts: 3 sets of 6 counts, then 3

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sets of 8 counts, then 2 counts etc. - very confusing! Therefore, the sheets of paper make it clear what order the counts occur. I'll admit at first, it was complete gobbledygook and it was a completely new way of working for me but, when I came to understand it, it made remembering the counts and choreography a lot easier.

I'd say that one of the many highlights with the company was opening night in Plymouth. It was very special for me as it was my debut as a professional dancer, and it was the first time that we had run the entire production start to finish!

If your role is played by someone else also how has this informed how you develop/play the character yourself?

It's been lovely to share these roles with other dancers in the company. They have a lot of experience from previous productions, which they have used to help me develop my sense of character and movement. There is a constant dialogue between dancers about characterisation choices and how we can push these further so the roles are constantly changing and improving. I like to watch the other dancer's interpretations of the characters and take aspects of each and combine them with my own ideas. What is lovely about each dancer is that they bring something new and individual to the performance, so virtually everyone's interpretation of each character is different.

You can follow Seren on Twitter (@serenwilliamss) for a further insight into her world.



Seren with Katie Webb who plays Svetlana, Victoria Page (Cover), Beryl (Cover), Lady Neston/Joyce/Edith (Cover)