

NEW/ADVENTURES RE; BOURNE



SPOTLIGHT – Stephanie Billers, Beryl in The Red Shoes Tues 28 February 2017

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

I predominantly play the role of Beryl, who is a company member of the Ballet Lermontov. Within this track I also play a guest at Lady Neston's soiree and a showgirl in the London Music Hall scene.

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

I really enjoy the backstage and rehearsal scenes as this gives us the opportunity to really show our character's personality. The interaction our characters have amongst each other in these scenes is always fun to play and finding new moments and reactions keeps the scene interesting and alive. One of my other favourite sections is performing 'The Red Shoes Ballet' (the show within the show), as it is a fast-paced continuous section that includes a variety of dance styles and qualities within its own story.

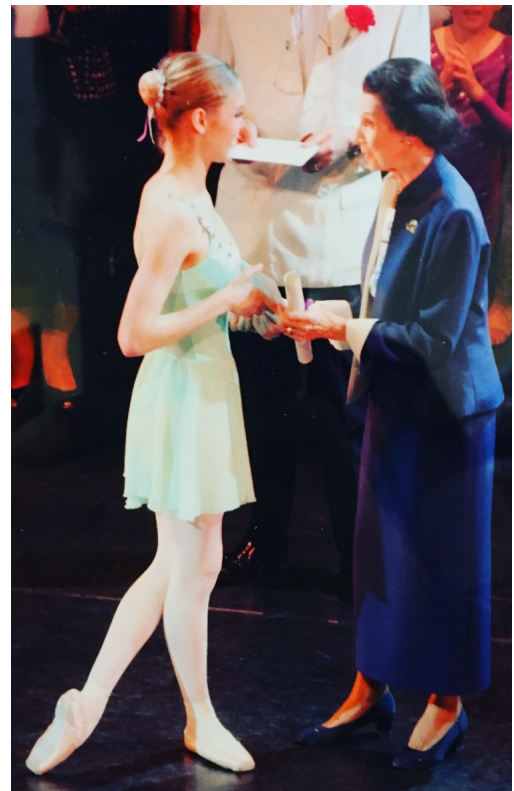
What has inspired how you created and play your character?

The role of Beryl is based on retired prima ballerina Dame Beryl Grey. I spent time researching her career and the qualities in her dancing for which she was well known. Considering her background and personal life helped me to get a feel for her characteristics and personality. I then built upon this to create my version of 'Beryl', from her elegant movement style to her hard-working approach to life in the company and deep love for the art.

When you truly know your character's background inside out you can really become that person on stage and know instantly how they would react in every moment. Amazingly I met Dame Beryl when I was 16 when she presented me with an award (pictured right). 10 years later and she has been my inspiration!

If you've been in a New Adventures show other than The Red Shoes, how does this new work differ in terms of what may have been asked from you thematically?

I have previously performed in *Swan Lake* but this is the first time I have been involved in the creation period of a new production.



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It was very important to research the period of the piece. Matthew suggested that we read a book called *A Dancer in Wartime* by Gillian Lynne. It tells the story of her journey during the Blitz from childhood through to joining and touring with Sadler's Wells Ballet. This book really helped immerse me in the era.

It was also essential to get the style of ballet right. Watching videos and finding images of the ballerinas and choreographers during this time was very helpful. However, I don't think this differs from working on any other New Adventures show as researching the piece and the inspiration for the roles is an important part of the process for you to be able to deliver it well.

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

It's always interesting to see others playing the same role as you, as even though we all base the character on the same guidelines, there is no right or wrong when it comes to interpretation. Seeing somebody else doing something slightly different helps open your mind to explore new choices your character might make. It also helps you see which moments stand out and do or don't work so you can strengthen them to engage with the audience.

How do you reflect on your performance after the show other than receiving notes from other company members/resident director etc?

When reflecting on a performance you naturally self-note yourself on how things went, from your technique, to your relationships onstage with everyone, and how the audience reacted. It's also good to communicate with each other continuously on things that did and didn't go well. This helps the piece continue to grow and move smoothly between all cast changes.

You can follow Stephanie on Twitter and Instagram (@StephBillers) for a further insight into her world.