

**Review: Matthew Bourne's Nutcracker!**

**By Sara Lamerton**

## ***Matthew Bourne's Nutcracker!*, Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Matthew Bourne's sumptuously indulgent *Nutcracker!* began its national tour this week at Theatre Royal Plymouth. A firm favourite with both critics and audiences alike, the buzz surrounding Bourne's production of this classic winter tale has been palpable. And, for all those who do make an effort to venture out and wear something other than Pyjamas after 5pm one evening this week, you certainly won't be disappointed.

With all the components of vintage Christmas storytelling: the Victorian style orphanage, over privileged, self-indulgent bad guys, one rebellious down-and-out, the hope of something more, and a crash back to reality upon realising the world is a cold and cruel place, which then perfectly sets the scene for magical happily-ever-afters, *Nutcracker!* delivers on every level.

Visually a tale of two halves, the monochrome, minimal set designs of Act 1 and 2 are a stark contrast to the sickly sweet world we're transported to after the interval. Off the back of a memorable, yet disheartening Christmas Eve at Dr. Dross' Orphanage, we see our protagonist, Clara, rebel, as she follows her inner voice; only to discover the unexpected lurks just out of sight. And, as the world she knows suddenly crumbles down around her, we're ushered from the doldrums to a dreamy, snowy winter wonderland, yet still blissfully unaware of what awaits around the next corner.

Wild and unrelenting, the sheer brilliance and complexity of Anthony Ward's costume and set design is revealed in Act 3 as we continue to follow Clara's crazy, head spinning pursuit of the man of her dreams. But, just as we fear our hopes are dashed, we see *Nutcracker!* ending as it began - simply and understated, with tonnes of impact, and the promise of a better tomorrow for Clara and her true love.

After 6 weeks of intense rehearsals, the cast make Matthew Bourne's dazzlingly modern, graceful choreography to Tchaikovsky's unmistakable score, as natural as breathing. They glide, slide, and twirl their way across set and stage, teasing the audience from one scene to the next with ease and poise. All whilst looking as though they're discovering this kingdom for the first time with us.

I must confess, as a firm believer that Christmas should be restricted to December, I have officially been converted by this heartwarming and memorable production. It's the perfect remedy to the drawing in of the dark, dreary, winter nights.

*Nutcracker!* is at TRP until Saturday 20th November. If you're looking for escapism, and perhaps some inspiration to kick off the 2021 festive season, look no further. It really is delectable.



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