

Welcome to this introduction for the audio described performance of *The Nutcracker*, this year's Christmas show at Bristol Old Vic, directed by Lee Lyford and written by Tom Morris.

The show is on Saturday January 7th at 2pm, with a touch tour of the stage and set at 12pm. Before the performance there will be a recap of these introductory notes at 1.45pm. *The Nutcracker* lasts for approximately 2 hours, including a 20-minute interval. The performance will be described by Rachel Bell and Megan Brooks.

The following recording lasts around 14 minutes and includes information about the set, characters and costumes followed by access information, content warnings and contact details for the venue.

## **SET**

The space's floor is made up of wooden floorboards. There are curved entrances on either side, with the words 'Mouse Hole' written above them in gold lettering. Two metres back, there is a step up to a raised level, which curves outwards to the centre. The circular centre is painted as a huge clock face with Roman numerals around the edges, but only the bottom half of it is revealed at first.

At the beginning, the musical director and two musicians sit in one of the upper level audience boxes to the right of the stage. They play a keyboard, guitar and cello from there.

The story starts in the new family home of Claire, Eddie and their mum and dad, on Christmas Eve. Cardboard moving boxes of various sizes are scattered around the space, some opened up to reveal their contents. There is a white plastic Christmas tree on the raised level, decorated with red striped baubles. A small white metal step ladder stands next to the tree.

The backdrop is a large black cloth, filled with children's drawings, as if drawn onto a chalkboard. At the centre of the cloth is a drawing of a house with a circular attic window and a chimney puffing out smoke. Surrounding the house are drawings of all Claire's toys – Baboon, Lemur & the Nutcracker stand on the left, and Dog, Bear & Action Man stand on the right. A smiling mouse figure is also included, standing to one side, Charley, Claire's imaginary unicorn, is drawn flying overhead, and the sun & moon are drawn like clock faces. In the distance, there is a drawing of a fairy-tale castle, where the towering spires all look like grandfather clocks.

Later on Christmas Eve, we enter a topsy turvy world with Claire. The black cloth disappears to uncover a magical, multi-coloured space. The rest of the clock face on the floor is revealed, showing that the clock hands are stuck at 15 minutes to midnight. Seven spiralling golden pillars reach up from numbers around the top of the clock face, from nine around to three. The pillars support the outer edge of another clock face, which is angled upwards so that Roman numerals from ten to two are revealed. The overhead clock is festooned with light bulbs, which light up throughout the show. At the back of the space, there is a cloth with wide red and white stripes, almost like the side of a circus tent.

Dominating the right half of the space, there is a balcony section where the cast's instruments are located. It is about two metres off the ground, so the cast can walk underneath it, and it is accessed by a set of rickety stairs at the front. The entire structure is painted gold and is decorated with clockwork cogs of various sizes and styles, which are also festooned with light bulbs. Some of the instruments on the balcony are a keyboard, a drum kit, an accordion, a cello, a guitar and two trumpets.

The third world we experience is a fairy-tale world. The red and white cloth at the back is actually a curtain, which pulls back to reveal a multitude of white grandfather clocks on the left side of the space, placed together to suggest the towers of a castle. Their clock faces are illuminated and the clock hands are also stuck at 15 minutes to midnight.

Even items within the castle are clock themed. In the kitchen, there is a two-metre-long table with six legs shaped like the hands of a clock. There is also a tall throne, whose back resembles another grandfather clock.

We also visit a small cottage near the castle, and a 2D version of the cottage, slightly smaller than life-size, descends from overhead to sit on the floor so that the cast can move around and through it. The walls are moss green and the roof is red. Just like the drawing on the black cloth, it has a circular attic window painted red, however, it also has a large doorway which is a large clock face. A dark green fir tree grows beside it on the left.

In the second half of the play, the clock-themed castle on the left of the space is replaced with one oversized illuminated clock face and many smaller clock faces dotted around the back wall, all with their hands stuck in the same position of 11:45pm.

Once we enter the topsy turvy imaginary worlds, the lighting becomes less natural and more exaggerated. The space can be flooded with intense bursts of primary colours, especially red or green, and the light bulbs scattered around the space can pulsate or flicker.

At various moments through the story, some of the cast come out into the audience, either down a winding set of steps at the front of the stage on the left, or into the upper level of audience seats on the right. They interact with both us and those on stage. In keeping with the themes of children's imaginary worlds, the cast sometimes mime opening or closing doors or entrances around the space, and their movements are always accompanied with a corresponding sound effect.

## **CHARACTERS**

**Claire** is a mixed race young girl, with thick, shoulder length curly black hair that bounces as she moves. She has an oval face from which stare deep brown eyes framed by thick, arching eyebrows. She wears red tartan pyjamas and red slippers, and moves with the fast and certain energy of an eight-year-old.

**Eddie** is Claire's ten-year-old brother. He is tall and slim with short brown tousled hair, pale skin and brown, inquisitive eyes. He wears green camouflage pyjamas and blue slippers. His movements are quietly contained when around his parents but when they aren't there, he looms over his little sister to boss her about.

**Martin**, Claire and Eddie's dad, is a large built black man with brown eyes set in a cheery, round face, with short black afro hair and a beard trimmed close to his skin. His face lights up with excitement whenever a new idea comes into his head. Martin wears brown trousers, an oatmeal, buttoned up cardigan and brown shoes. He takes large steps when he walks, and his movements are that of a gentle giant.

**Nina** is Claire and Eddie's mum. She is a slender white woman with short, bleach blond hair and a fringe swept across her forehead. She has a heart-shaped face with delicate, expressive features and bright, hazel eyes. She wears a white shirt with dashes of colour over it and the sleeves rolled up, skinny blue jeans and black shoes. Her movements are direct and business-like.

**Mr Choke** turns up unexpectedly with gifts for the family, including a nutcracker. He is a middle-aged white man with floppy, greying hair and a slicked back fringe. Large-framed brown glasses sit on a long face with

a sharp nose and slim lips. He wears a brown checked suit with slightly flared trousers, a brown checked waistcoat and tan coloured shoes. He feels very 1970's in appearance. He moves nimbly, but becomes slow and heavy when sadness grips him.

**The Nutcracker** has short black Afro hair that sticks up from the top of his head, the sides of which are shaved short. He has deep-set, brown eyes that sparkle when he first appears, and a full mouth that smiles with ease. Later, his facial expressions become more fixed and rigid. His outfit holds elements of a Pierrot clown - a white waistcoat with gold braided fasteners, a huge white ruff around his neck, black baggy trousers that are cinched tight mid-calf, white gloves and white trainers. His arms are bare. On top of his head is a tall, cone-shaped gold hat. It has small cogs all over it. Across his left eye is a gold nutcracker. The jaws of the cracker are a cog, through which his eye peers through. The long, slender handles stick out horizontally into the space at the side of his head. Nutcracker's movements are robotic, slow and angular.

**Curly Pearly** is the princess in a story Mr Choke tells. She is very tall and slender and wears a long floaty white dress that swishes on the floor as she walks. She has a tall white cone hat, or hennin, like that of the nobility in the late middle-ages.

**King Sausage** is Curly Pearly's father. He is a large man whose extensive crown is made of red saveloy sausages that stand upright. His huge white cloak cascades over his shoulders and brushes the floor. It has a gold stripe and is trimmed with thick white fur speckled with black dots along the bottom edge and across the shoulders.

**Queen Spoon** is Curly Pearly's mother. She wears a matching regal cloak to her husband, only hers has a silver stripe. Her crown is made of upright silver spoons. She swishes around the palace, her heavy cloak swinging around her body.

**Queen Mouse** has short blond hair, a slender nose, high cheekbones and blue eyes. She has a flash of face paint over her right eye, reminiscent of David Bowie. Her black mouse ears are large and round on top of her head and sitting at a jaunty angle in front of them is her yellow crown, made from Swiss cheese. She is of medium build and dressed in a large-collared, long-sleeved jumpsuit that has flared legs. It is red with black and white spots. Her bendy black tail sweeps along the floor behind her. Her movements are punchy and energetic.

When she isn't part of the story, Queen Mouse sits on the musician's balcony to play the show's score, along with two other musicians who are dressed in red flared trousers, black frilled shirts, white braces and large gold bow ties. They wear mouse ears for most of the time, but also appear as two of Claire's toys. The rest of the cast also put on oversized mouse ears at one point to portray Queen Mouse's children.

Queen Mouse's son is the seven headed **Mouse King**. He appears as a puppet - at first a tiny bundle in his mother's arms, and later, when he has grown up, a towering spectre made of a T frame and sheer green fabric. His claws are clock hands and his main head, on top of the frame, has metal cog eyes and ears and a long metal pointy nose. The centre of the cog eyes glow with red light. His six other heads are held by cast members at the sides of his body. They are a smaller, flatter version of the main head which also have glowing red eyes. The cog head is worn as a mask for the final fight scene.

Claire's toys help fight the Mouse King. They are:

**Action Man**, who wears a green camouflage suit that has the bulges of a six pack on the chest and a camo hard hat on his head. He sports blue underpants that he pulls up to his chest when he needs to feel brave.

**Dog** has long and fat brown ears that hang from his faun-coloured head. They are very solid and have no movement. His front paws are brown boxing gloves and, unlike the other animals, he does not talk, only barks or howls.

**Baboon with Spoon** has a blue furry head with red nose and mouth and red gloves with blue fur cuffs. Baboon carries a large silver spoon the length of her torso and bounces and sways on bowed legs.

**Bear** has a very large, oval shaped, brown head with round ears and big black sunglasses on like a rock star. He glides around on long legs and carries his electric guitar strapped across his body.

**Lemur** has long fluffy pointy ears and a black and white striped tail. It is fat and furry and swishes behind him as he prances with his guitar.

Occasionally, members of the stage management team appear to provide or clear away items used in the story. They are dressed in black and wear oversized mouse ears and dark sunglasses.

## **CREDITS**

Mae Munuo plays Claire

Guy Hughes is Eddie, Action Man and Curly Pearly

Kirris Rivieré appears as Dad, King Sausage and Dog

Patrycja Kujawska is Mum, Baboon with Spoon and Queen Spoon

Tristan Sturrock plays Mr Choke

Denzel Baidoo is The Nutcracker

Gwyneth Herbert appears as Queen Mouse and is the onstage Musical Director

Harry Bird is Musician and Bear

and James Gow is Musician and Lemur

The creative team for *The Nutcracker* is as follows:

The writer is Tom Morris

The composer & lyricist is Gwyneth Herbert

It is directed by Lee Lyford

Set & costume design is by Tom Rogers

Anna Watson is the Lighting Designer

Adrienne Quartly is the Sound Designer

The choreographer is Laila Diallo

The casting director is Jatinder Chera

And Catherine Boot is the Assistant Director

## **ACCESS INFORMATION**

The Bristol Old Vic is accessible through the theatre's main entrance on King Street - please note that the street is cobbled and pedestrianised.

Full access information for the Bristol Old Vic can be found at

<https://bristololdvic.org.uk/your-visit/access/general-access-information>

If you need any further assistance, for example if a visit to the Theatre in advance of the show would help, then either contact the Box Office on 0117 987 7877 (open 1pm to 6pm Monday to Saturday) or email [access@bristololdvic.org.uk](mailto:access@bristololdvic.org.uk)

## **CONTENT WARNINGS**

This performance features loud noises and haze.

That is the end of this audio introduction.